

# Margarita Village

## Meeting the Housing Needs of San Luis Obispo City: An Exercise in Interdisciplinary Learning

*As San Luis Obispo County becomes inundated with over a million new residents over the course of the next 20 years, existing communities will need to expand and develop new areas on their urban fringe to accommodate the growth. One possible area is the Margarita Ranch site, in southern San Luis Obispo City.*

This site, directly north of the Regional Airport and adjacent to the South Street Hills, was chosen by a joint City and Regional Planning/Landscape Architecture course (CRP 341/LA 452) in the fall of 2002 as a way for students in the two programs to interact and participate in an interdisciplinary learning environment.

One proposal for the Margarita Ranch site was a development titled Margarita Village. The proposal featured 628 apartments, 217 townhomes, and 274 single family homes. This plan was designed using a series of case studies, which included Laguna West, California; Bonita Springs, WaterColor and Seagrove Beach, Florida; Orenco Station, Portland, Oregon; and Deventer, The Netherlands. These case studies encouraged the concepts of compact urban form, human scale design, and a sense of place.

The challenge in designing Margarita Village was integrating it into the surrounding urban form. The site is bordered on the north by hills and on the south by an airport. The east and west sides, however, contain the natural expansion of the City of San Luis Obispo over the past few decades. The result has been a no-man's-land between the two areas of development. Additionally, high-capacity power lines from the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant run through the middle of the site. The City is also planning on extending a major east-west road (Prado Road) through the site in the near future, and the proposed development needed to take advantage of this feature.

Before designing the details of the proposal, the team created a set of objectives, program requirements, and design concepts that aided the developmental process. These objectives stressed the ideas of a vital community, and integrated context, providing unique housing opportunities for residents, providing parks and recreational services

to the residents, promoting economic opportunities, and utilizing the concepts of sustainability with respect to building design and siting.

The specific plan that was generated from these objectives created a unique, 400 acre community. The design utilized a modified grid system and built off of the existing system used in the neighboring development while maintaining a context to the geographic landforms of the site. Street design was a key element of the proposal, and all roads included some form of shading. Residential streets were limited to a right-of-way of only 48 feet, where only 23 feet was for vehicle travel.

In addition to the homes mentioned, a central commercial area was created with a community center as the main focal point of the project. Radiating out from this, in decreasing density, are the residential developments. Directly north of the community center is a proposed elementary school and park. In the south-east corner of the site, along a major north-south thoroughfare, is a proposed business park. On the south-west side is a regional park. Running throughout

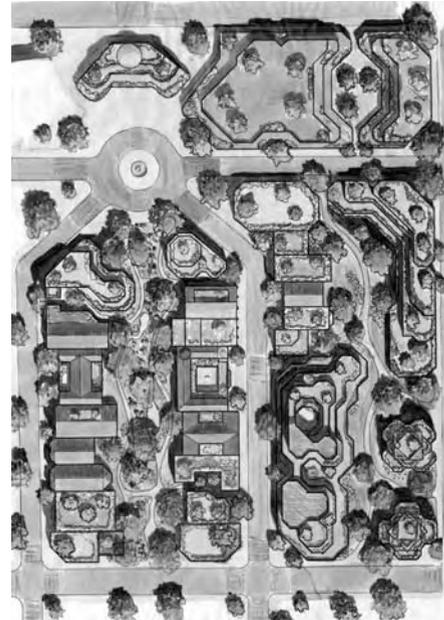


*Sketch of the central promenade in the commercial center of Margarita Ranch.*

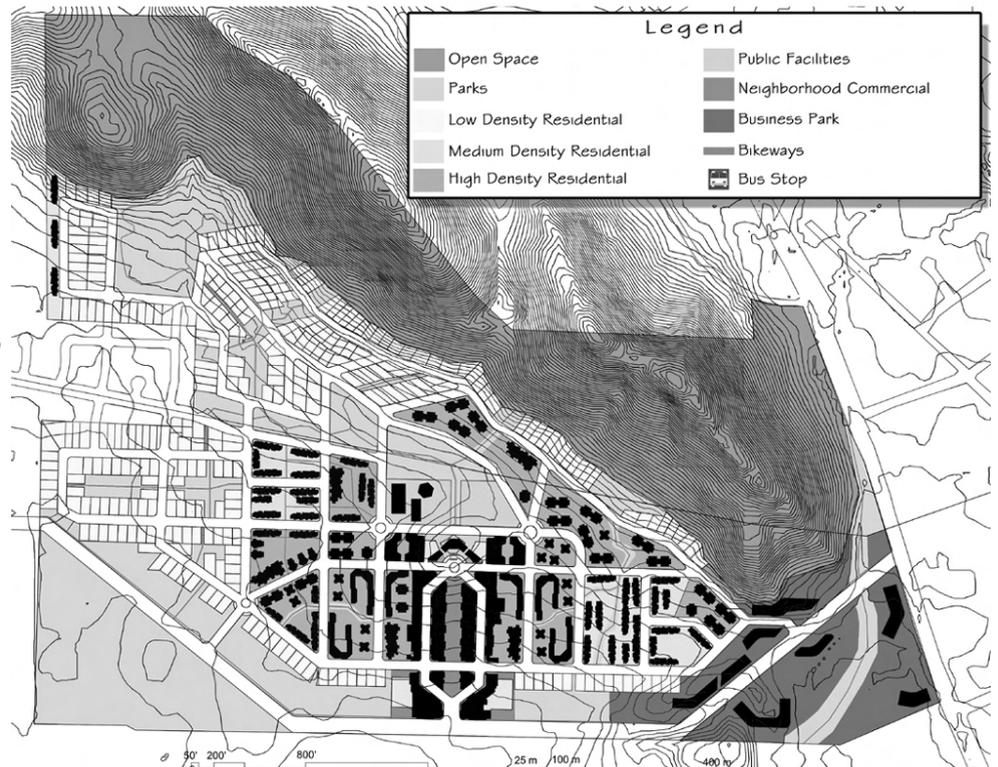
the site is a series of green-ways, with bike and walking trails. These green-ways connect all of the parks and provide a more direct connection between the residential and commercial portions of the site.

To meet the sustainability element of the proposal, most buildings utilized a terrace design, where each additional floor of development had a smaller floor area than the previous. This helps to increase the amount of solar light available to the lower floors of the buildings, as well as to the streets. Roof-top gardens were also created, which help to cool the buildings during the warm summer months. Several of the creeks present on the site were incorporated into the proposal as design elements, maintaining their natural course and features.

The opportunity to engage in joint work with City and Regional Planning and Landscape Architecture students was a valuable experience in building interdisciplinary coordination. Additionally, this proposal was presented to City staff, who welcomed the suggestions made by this design.



View of the commercial area and town center.



Margarita Specific Plan site map