

## 5.2.1 Old Town Historic District

### Setting

Established in 1987, the Old Town Historic District abuts the Railroad district on the southeast and is generally bounded by Pacific and Islay streets on the north and south, and by Santa Rosa and Beach streets on the east and west. As one of the City's oldest residential neighborhoods, Old Town was built up historically around the turn of the twentieth century, with older structures dating back to the 1880s. It consists of five subdivisions: the Mission Vineyard Tract recorded in March 1873, the Dallidet Tract recorded in 1876, the Murray Church Tract recorded in 1876, the Ingleside Homestead Tract, recorded in 1887, and the La Vina Homestead Tract, recorded in 1903. The District encompasses 86.1 acres, or 0.13 square miles.

The District's prominent location, located just south of and uphill from the Downtown commercial district, made it a desirable neighborhood for the City's emerging merchant class and leading citizens. Here, residents were close to businesses and commerce, but could avoid the flooding and mud that plagued the Downtown. Home sites were laid out in regular grid patterns, with relatively wide (60 foot right-of-way) streets and 60 foot wide lots. The resultant wide streets and lot frontages allowed deep (20+ feet) setbacks and ample landscaping, reinforcing the district's prosperous image. Today the high concentration of 100 year old or older residences establishes the District's predominant architectural and visual character.

### Site Features and Characteristics



*1060 Pismo Street, South Elevation*

Common site features and characteristics include:

- A. Prominent street yard setbacks of 20 feet or more
- B. Coach barn (garage) recessed into rear yard
- C. Finish floors raised 2 3 above finish grade
- D. Front entries oriented toward street, with prominent walk, stairs and porch
- E. Front building facades oriented parallel to street

## Architectural Character

In keeping with its peak period of development between 1880 and 1920, the Old Town District has many examples of High Victorian architecture, a style popular in California during that time period that reflected prosperity, power and discriminating taste. This included several style variations, such as Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick and Gothic Revival influences, especially along the top of the hill within the district roughly aligned with Buchon Street. Other, more modest structures with simpler styles abound in other areas of the district. These buildings were first home to the burgeoning merchant class in San Luis Obispo that emerged during the turn of the century. These styles include Neo-classic Row House, Folk Victorian, and Craftsman Bungalow, with many homes borrowing architectural details from several styles. Most of the houses in this district were designed and constructed by the homes' first occupants or by local builders and were influenced by architectural pattern books of the time period. The shared first story porches along Pismo Street are a good example of a common design feature linking buildings.

Predominant architectural features include:

- A. Two- and rarely three-story houses
- B. Mostly gable and hip roof types
- C. Highly ornamented roof features, including prominent fascias, bargeboards, gable end treatments, decorative shingles, prominent pediments or cornices
- D. Traditional fenestration, such as double-hung, wood sash windows, divided light windows, ornamental front doors, wood screen doors
- E. Painted wood surface material, including siding and decorative moldings



*1543 Morro Street, East Elevation*

Although many of the buildings were built at separate times, the pattern, rhythm and repetition of common design elements or detailing of historic building facades along Old Town streets creates a prevailing theme and character for the district.



*M.F. Avila House, 1443 Osos Street, East Elevation*

### Individually Contributing Elements in the Old Town District

Some buildings within the bounds of the Old Town District, constructed outside of the period of significance for the district, 1880-1920, do not share the elements outlined in the above description, but have achieved historical significance on their own and

therefore individually contribute to the historic character of San Luis Obispo.

The M.F. Avila House at 1443 Osos Street is an example of a Spanish Revival style building built in the late 1920s that has been placed on the City's Master List as a significant resource, in this case for its craftsmanship as well as its association with a historically significant local person. St. Stephens Episcopal Church at 1344 Nipomo Street built in 1873 is an example of Carpenter Gothic style. The first Episcopal church in San Luis Obispo County, St. Stephens is historically significant both its architecture and its association with the pioneer period of San Luis Obispo.

### **Non-Contributing Elements in the Old Town District**

Non-contributing buildings are those buildings that both do not meet the criteria outlined above and have not achieved historical significance. Most of the contemporary buildings in the district fall into this category.

Non-contributing architectural styles, materials or site features include:

- A. Contemporary stucco or other material exterior siding
- B. Flat or extremely low pitched roof
- C. Aluminum sliding windows
- D. Rectilinear, "boxy" shape or very horizontal massing
- E. Unarticulated wall surfaces



*The Vista Grande Apartments, 1415 Morro Street, East Elevation.*





*1059 Leff Street; Biddle House, 559 Pismo Street; 1624, 1636, 1642 Morro Street; and Pismo Buchon Alley from Santa Rosa Street*

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