

December 10, 2024

To: Members of the Citizens' Sales Tax Oversight Committee  
for the City of Atascadero, California  
Robert "Grigger" Jones, Atascadero Chamber of Commerce  
Geoff Auslen, Atascadero Kiwanis  
Ellen Beraud, Atascadero Land Preservation Society  
Gary Elliot, Atascadero Veterans Memorial Foundation  
Gaby Romo, Atascadero Rotary Club  
Sharon Turner, Friends of Atascadero Library  
Erik Rodriguez, At-large member appointed by Council  
Max Zappas, At-large member appointed by Council

From: Haley Landis, Atascadero Resident  
[REDACTED]

## INTRODUCTION

I've lived in San Luis Obispo County 48 years and in Atascadero for the last 24 of them.

The purpose for writing this letter to you is threefold:

1. to describe the condition of the road I live on;
2. to share my views about the decision-making process with regard to selection of road construction projects in Atascadero;
3. to offer ways in which this committee can have a more positive impact on the quality of life for all Atascadero citizens by expanding their sphere of influence.

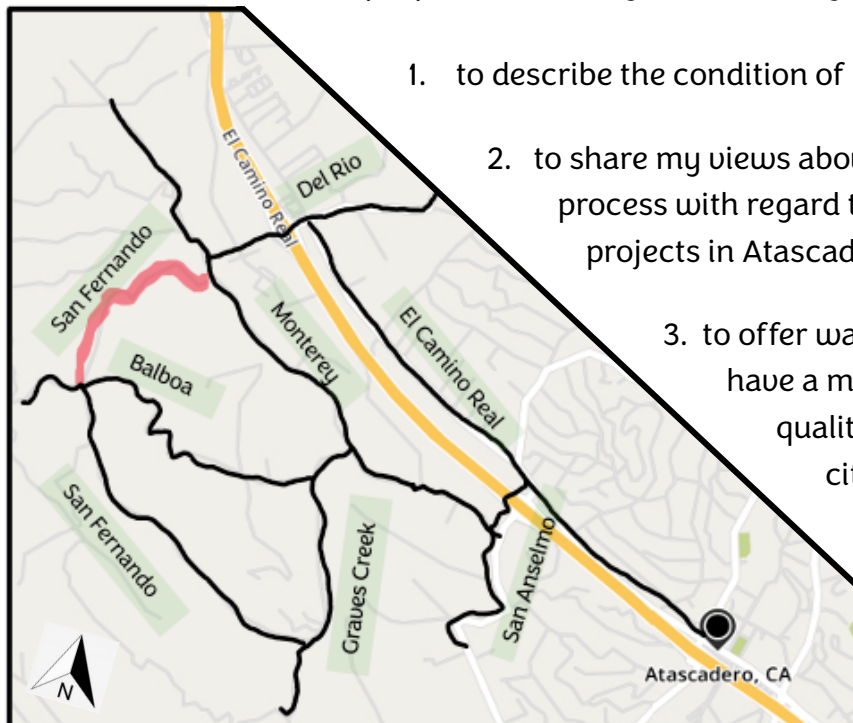


Figure 1.

The road I am referring to is San Fernando Road, specifically the segment between Monterey and Balboa, shown in pink in Figure 1. This .9-mile segment is within the city limits of Atascadero.

## SAN FERNANDO ROAD

This lower portion of San Fernando Road is marked by hazardous and deteriorating conditions. Encountering an approaching vehicle anywhere on this narrow road requires both drivers to maneuver carefully past one another, especially on the sharp S curve that is located along a precipitous drop-off on the passenger side of the vehicle heading up the hill. Many times I have been delayed or had to re-route my way home because a large truck or trailer is *stuck* on the S curve.

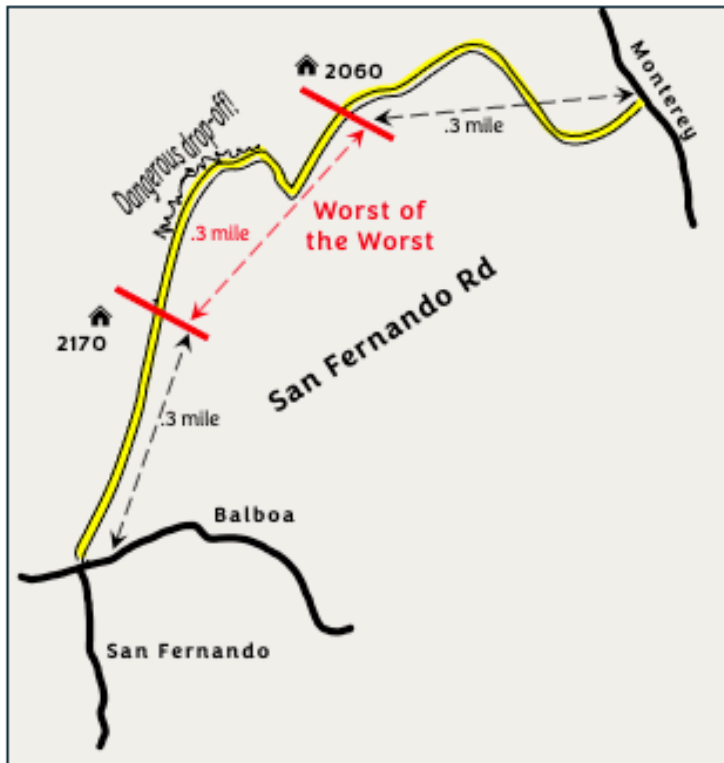


Figure 2

Signs at the top and bottom of the hill warn that trucks and cars with trailers are not recommended. These signs disappear regularly and are often ignored by many large vehicles, like those used by utility, construction, and maintenance companies, some also pulling trailers. To be frank, every time I'm on my road I encounter large, heavy vehicles being driven by contractors or delivery trucks heading to or from a job site that is not on the lower section of San Fernando Road.

During heavy rains, rivers form on the sides of the road, eroding to the point that pavement breaks off because there is nothing left under the road to hold it up.

If your destination is somewhere on the eastern slope of the Santa Lucia Range in northern Atascadero, looking on a map you will see that San Fernando Road appears to be the most direct and, therefore, most convenient route to or from the freeway (Figure 3). That is why residents and visitors of residents living on surrounding roads make use of this "shortcut".

Irony of all ironies, I heard reports that city road maintenance crews were seen driving their maintenance vehicles on lower San Fernando on their way to a job site somewhere past our road to perform road repairs on one of the city's maintained roads.

### Hillside Roads To & From Main Arteries and Freeway in Northern Atascadero City Limits

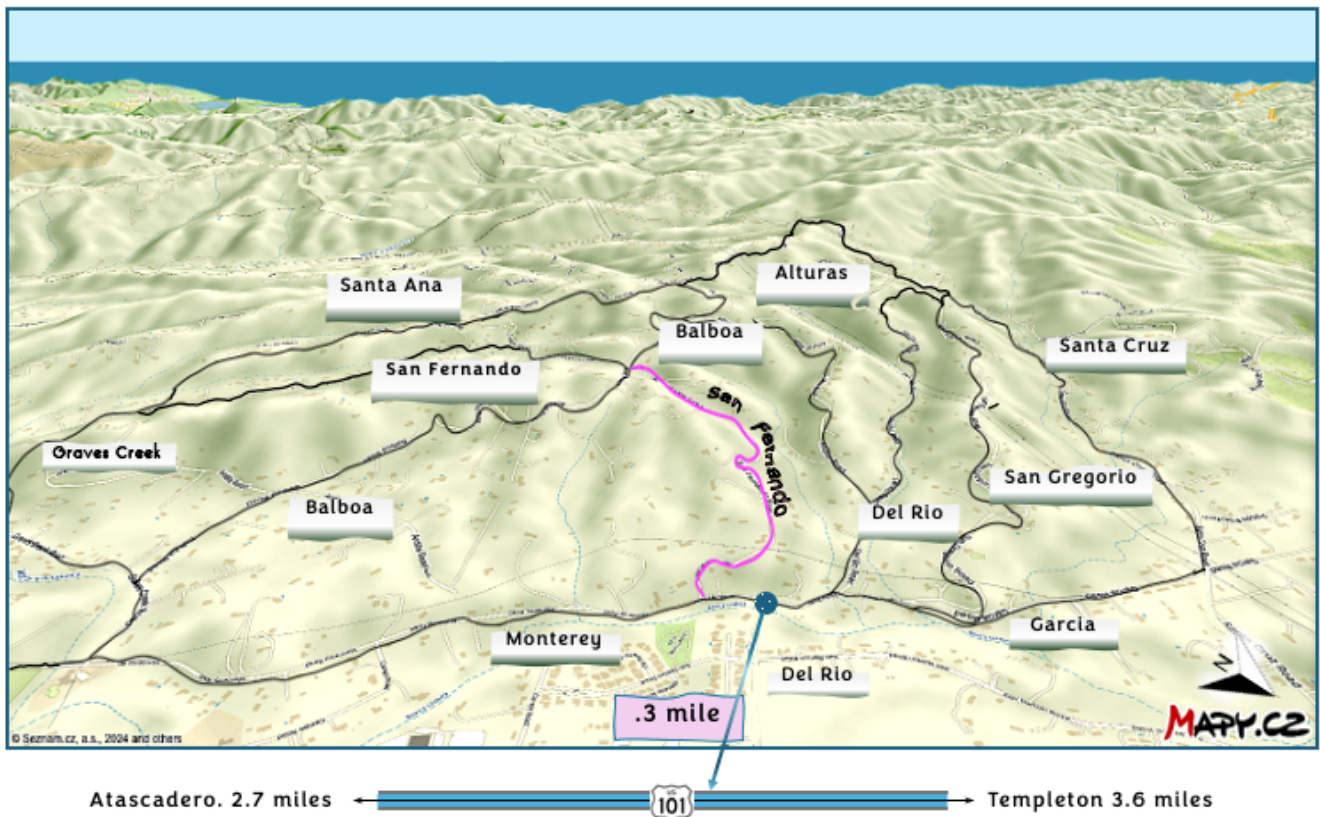


Figure 3.

This is particularly puzzling when you consider that, of the main arteries in north Atascadero that traverse the eastern slope of the Santa Lucia Range from top to bottom, this little, but well-traveled section of San Fernando Road is the only non-maintained road (Figure 4).

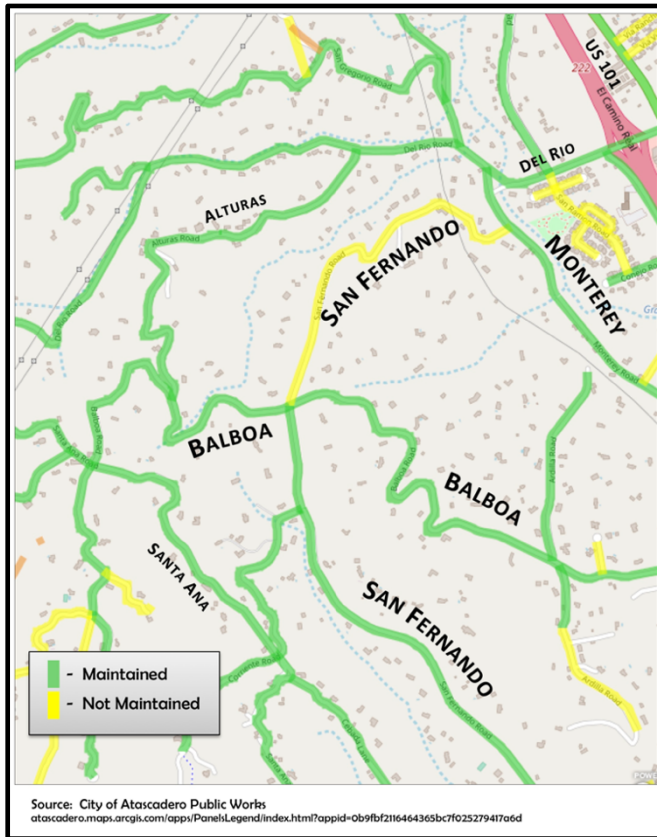


Figure 4.

When I inquired as to why all the surrounding roads were getting slick new pavement, including curbs, but mine wasn't, I was told it was because my road was non-maintained.

These two terms, maintained and non-maintained, are designations that do not need explanation to this committee, but I want to emphasize that the non-maintained designation is antithetical to the frequent use by large and heavy vehicles. It is these vehicles that are the primary cause of the road's deterioration.

We've all heard the advice that goes something like this: Don't complain about anything unless you're prepared to do something about it. I did complain about our road and listened to my friends complain about it for many years. Then it became time to learn what these terms meant.

#### THIS IS WHAT I LEARNED

- The designations maintained and non-maintained were given to the county's roads many years ago and were adopted by the City of Atascadero. For a road to get put on the maintained list from the non-maintained list, property owners must fork out money from their own pockets to have the road improved to county and city standards, and then apply to the City/County for the classification. I learned this talking to Nick DeBar, Engineer with the City of Atascadero's Public Works Department.

- This didn't sound fair to me, so I went to the County. I heard from Brian Uder, Engineer with the County of San Luis Obispo, and from Supervisor Debbie Arnold's Assistant that San Fernando Road is within the jurisdiction of the City of Atascadero. So the County cannot help.
- Mr. DeBar also told me about a special district that was set up to help mitigate the situation for the non-maintained among us. Between Monterey Road and Balboa there are approximately 28 homes on San Fernando. These property owners are part of the San Fernando Road District into which every property owner pays \$22 every tax bill to the County, who keeps \$2 and turns the rest over to the City of Atascadero to administer. The purpose of these funds is for filling potholes. If we call the City to report a pothole, the pothole fairies come out during the night and fix them. At least that's the way it seems - I never see the crew that comes out.
- Recently I noticed on the City's updated website that we residents on non-maintained roads will be provided access to the materials if we make an appointment to retrieve them. I guess this means that now we are the ones who have to fill the potholes - ? I'm here to tell you that potholes are a constant on this road; repairs literally last about a day and a half; the holes just keep getting deeper, wider, and closer together.
- Four years ago, when my patience was running thin, I wrote to the City of Atascadero's Public Works Department with these requests:
  - Install simple and inexpensive reflective stakes along the most hazardous section (.3 miles of narrow, curvy road along the steep drop-off).
  - Amend the maintained roads list to include San Fernando Road between Monterey and Balboa.
  - Make a recommendation to this committee to include San Fernando Road between Monterey and Balboa in their review and prioritization of neighborhood roads slated to receive funding generated by Measure F14. (It is, after all, within the city limits.)

I never received a response...
- I wanted to know how much the City has spent from the San Fernando Road District on repairing potholes. So I contacted the Finance Department. It happened to be a very busy time for City employees in that department, but

eventually heard back from Cindy Chavez, the Deputy Director of Administrative Services. Cindy dug around and told me that expenses paid out of our District fund for fixing potholes have amounted to approximately \$2,200 in the last two years. Then she told me a figure that about took my breath away. Our District's fund had a balance of \$20,370 at the end of June 2023.

What I did not learn was why this little .9-mile section of a road was left off the maintained roads list.

### MY TAKEAWAYS

Being labeled non-maintained turns out to be quite significant to those of us who happen to live on such a road. After doing my homework, these are my takeaways. These points of view are ones you probably haven't heard before.

When the maintained and non-maintained designations were initially assigned by the County and then adopted and implemented by the city of Atascadero, I don't think the people involved in those decisions realized that these designations would become a demarcation of classes of people. They didn't think about the fact that those of us who are "non-maintained" are property owners, citizens of this city living within the authority and administration of the City of Atascadero. We are consumers of the stores and services here, and so we pay the sales tax that feeds Measure F14 like everybody else. But unlike the "maintained" people, we are bound by a LIST that might as well be written in stone. It is outdated and no one wants to make changes to it; or they think they *can't* make changes to it.

I was told by both county and city employees that I spoke to that I should gather up all the people on lower San Fernando Road, meet together, form a committee, write a letter, sign a petition, vote, do all that. Well, yes, I have talked with neighbors. But only two. I'm of the opinion that no number of signatures on a piece of paper will change anything. It's the rigidity of the system and its inability to bend that is the limiting factor.

It is my opinion, therefore, that the initial basis for prioritizing road projects is faulty and inequitable to that group of Atascadero property owners who live in homes on non-maintained roads. The message is, "There's nothing that can be done; you and your neighbors must do our job for us (and pay for it) because the system can't help you."



## IN CONCLUSION

I realize that the designations maintained and non-maintained were assigned many years ago and that this committee is not involved in making or evaluating those classifications. So my third message to this committee concerns how you can have a positive impact on the quality of life for all Atascadero citizens by expanding your sphere of influence.

- Be open to the inclusion of all roads within the city limits of Atascadero into your plans and recommendations. All roads under one umbrella would demonstrate a fair treatment of all property owners in Atascadero (Figure 5).

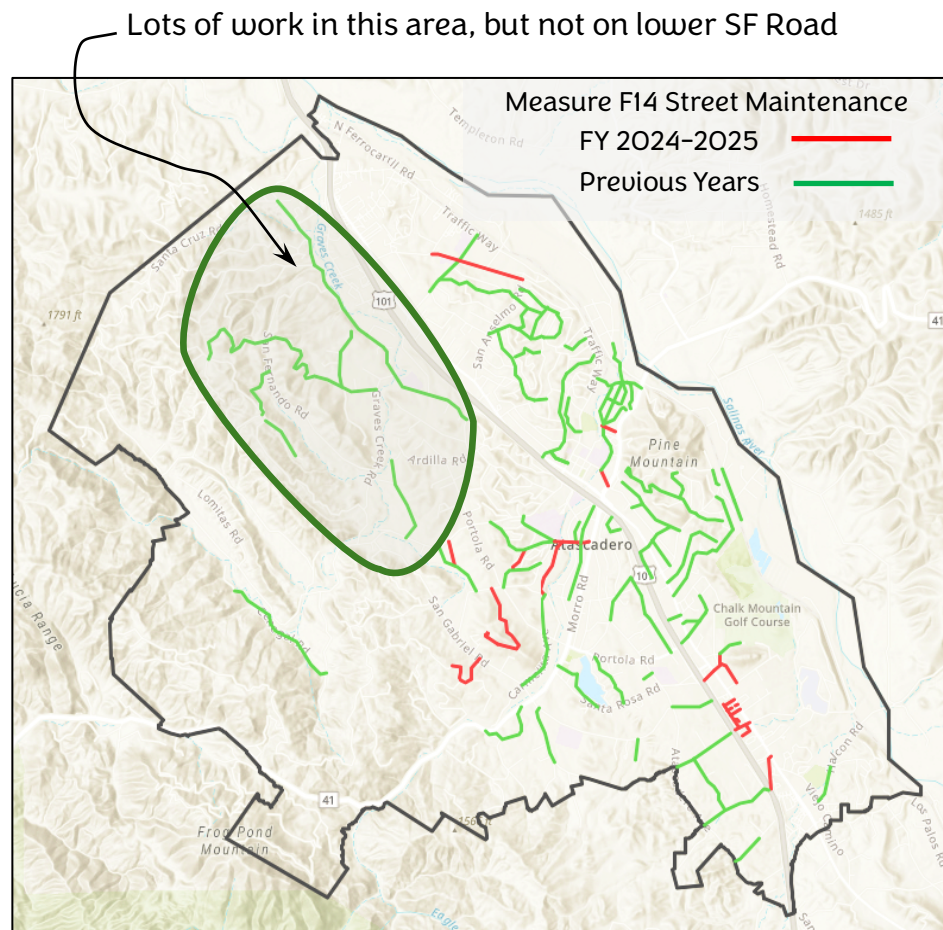


Figure 5.

- If members of this committee participate in discussions over how District funds are spent, this is another way to advocate for us. I'm pretty sure the \$20,000 (or whatever the current balance is) in San Fernando's District fund wouldn't go terribly far to repair and rebuild parts of .9 miles of road, but it is enough to make the road safer by installing a few reflective stakes, hiring a bulldozer to widen the road in a few places, and putting in a few gabion walls. These measures would go a long way toward making the road safer. This isn't the end of my wish list, but it would be a great start.

IN CLOSING

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions and concerns. I hope you will give them careful consideration.

  
Haley Landis