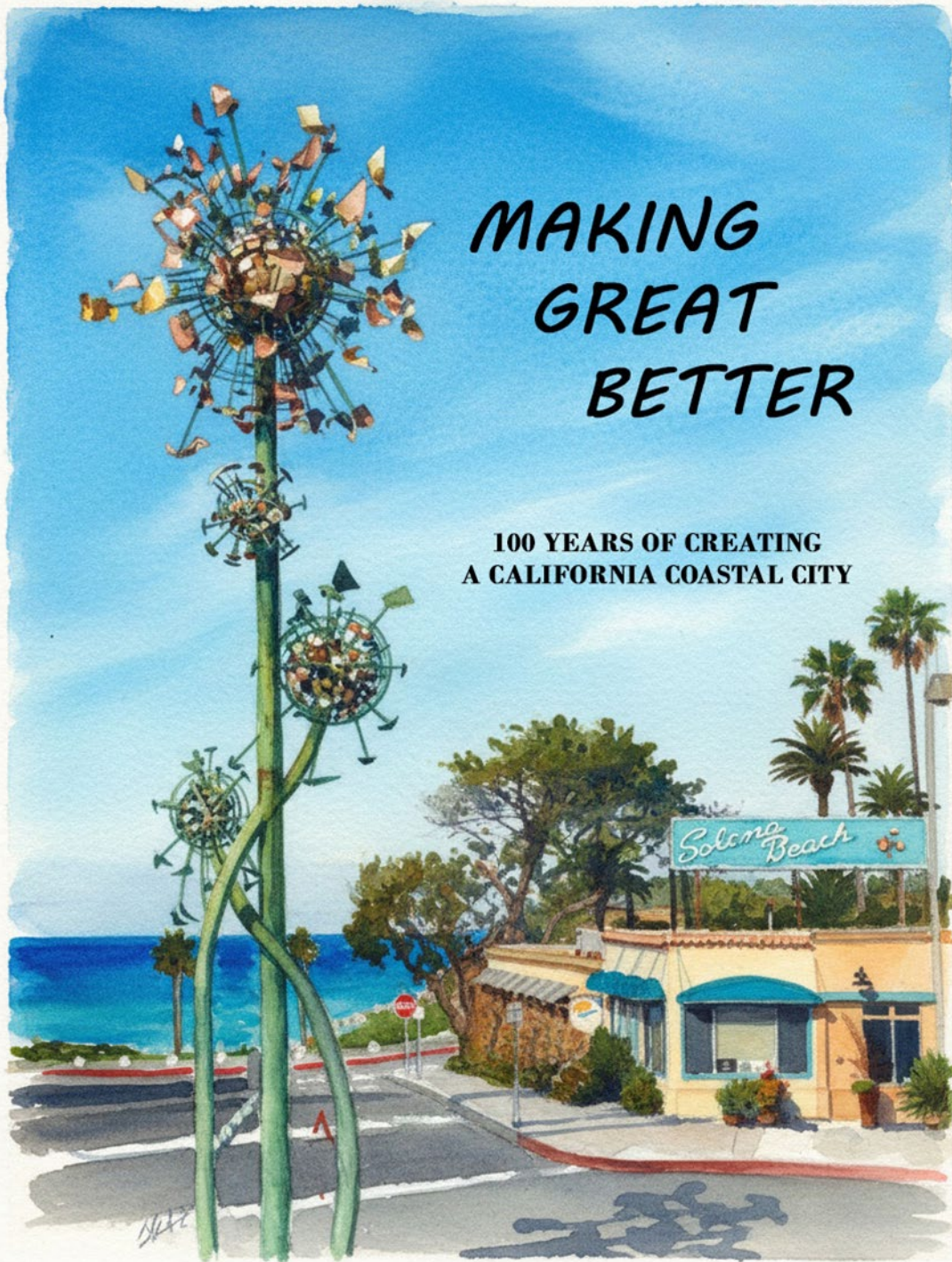




MAKING GREAT BETTER

100 YEARS OF CREATING A CALIFORNIA COASTAL CITY

A Narrative History of a California Beach Town

By **Peter House et al**

With contributions from:

David Ott, members of the Civic and Historical Society, Greg Petre, who served with me on both the Chamber of Commerce and 101 Merchants Association board, and other members of the business community, members of the City Councils, City Staffs, and others.

Features archival photographs, civic documents,
and contemporary perspectives on the evolution of the City of Solana Beach

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Solana Beach, California

For Carol,
Who came home and brought me with her.

And for the people of Solana Beach,
past, present, and future,
Who have kept faith with this small stretch of coast,
and made it not just a town,
But a community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been written without the help, knowledge, and generosity of many people who have given their time to preserve the story of Solana Beach and to share it with others.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the members of the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society, whose archives form the backbone of sections of this work, especially to Kathleen Drummond, its Historian, who granted me access to this trove of information. The late Jim Nelson, historian and author, provided not only two invaluable books but also a guiding example of how local history can be both personal and civic. His research, interviews, and dedication to preserving our shared past have benefited everyone who calls Solana Beach home.

I am also deeply grateful to David Ott, City Manager from 2006 to 2015, for his leadership and for allowing me an inside view of the City's growth and governance during a pivotal decade. His openness, professionalism, and encouragement helped bridge the worlds of civic administration and community engagement. He has contributed his knowledge and experience to this book, especially in the earlier sections.

To the City Council members and City Staff, past and present, who shared their experiences and supported the Historical Society, the Chamber of Commerce, and other civic organizations, thank you for your service and insights.

Many residents offered recollections, photographs, and first-hand accounts that added depth and authenticity to the narrative. Their memories turned dates and policies into living stories. I am especially appreciative of the longtime City residents who invited me to hear their recollections, walk their streets, and understand how neighborhoods took shape. These people read early drafts of this manuscript and offered helpful suggestions.

To my colleagues at the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce, the Highway 101 Merchants Association, the South Cedros Merchants Association, and the North Coast Repertory Theatre, I extend my sincere thanks for their collaboration and

commitment to the community. The partnerships formed through these organizations exemplify the cooperative spirit that defines Solana Beach.

Most of all, I thank Carol for her insight, her patience, and her unshakable sense of place. Her family's deep roots in Solana Beach provided both the foundation and inspiration for this work.

This is not a story built from a single person's recollections, nor an attempt to revisit the many debates that unfolded as Solana Beach transitioned from a lightly populated town with a modest commercial center into the community it is today. That is not to say those decisions were without passion; nearly every step in the City's evolution prompted discussion, and at times, spirited disagreement.

In the City's early years, a wide array of residents helped shape the community. The mention of individuals in this narrative has been deliberately limited, included when necessary to illuminate the story. The same approach applies to the disputes and deliberations that accompanied key decisions. Rather than revisiting each argument, this work focuses on the outcomes—how those choices, taken together, formed the building blocks that created the community of Solana Beach.

Finally, I acknowledge the contributions of technology and digital access. AI has evolved into an editorial tool that enables an author to present the research, structure, and storyline of a book into a consistent, smoothly flowing document. The ability to integrate archival material, contemporary photography, and video links has made this not only a printed history but also a living, connected record, one that continues to evolve as Solana Beach writes its next chapters.

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PREFACE

Solana Beach: An Overview

Solana Beach is a distinctive California coastal town where residents take pride in preserving the community's unique character. Unlike many other beach towns, Solana Beach has maintained a strong sense of identity, shaped both by its history and by the ongoing efforts of its engaged citizens.

Like many California seaside communities, Solana Beach began as a modest stop along Highway 101, serving travelers on the route between Los Angeles and San Diego. Its proximity to the Del Mar Fairgrounds made it a convenient rest point, and over time, the area grew into a small but vibrant town.

The city's formative years are well-documented in several key sources. *Forty Years of Progress*, a special 40th-anniversary edition of *The Citizen* newspaper (2026), provides a contemporary reflection on the City's incorporation and early growth. Two volumes by Jim Nelson, *The 1920s to 1930s: Early Solana Beach* (2002) and *La Colonia & Solana Beach* (2010), both published by the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society, offer complementary perspectives that draw on oral histories, archival materials, and extensive research.

The first book, *Early Solana Beach*, leans heavily on interviews and personal recollections, painting a vivid picture of the town's early development and the people who shaped its character. The second, *La Colonia & Solana Beach*, places the City within a broader historical context, tracing land ownership from Native American communities and the original land grants of the 1890s through about the 1940s. These works also explore the emergence of both public and private infrastructure companies, delving into the lives of the families and workers who helped lay the foundations of the community.

Together, these volumes, along with the Historical Society's archives, trace Solana Beach's transformation from farmland and ranchland into a township, preserving stories of its earliest days and the individuals who guided its evolution. The Society also launched a program to install historical plaques on significant

buildings. Each plaque is linked to an expanded online description, preserving the City's commercial and cultural history for future generations.

This Book

As Solana Beach continues to evolve, arguably at an accelerating pace, it becomes increasingly important to capture recent history in narrative form. This book, drawing heavily on previous works, including a first draft published in a limited edition, *The Tale of a City*, which focused on what the City had become and traced its growth through land-use changes. This book adds the story of how, by providing a comprehensive overview of the City's development, beginning with its origins in the 1920s and continuing with in-depth coverage of its nearly four decades of incorporated history since 1986.

Thanks to the Civic and Historical Society's archives, we can trace the evolution of Solana Beach from a town to a city. We relate the arguments for and against incorporation. As a City, we look at whether and how we achieved the goals we set for cityhood.

Later chapters highlight Solana Beach's original commercial corridors, Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue, whose influence helped shape the community's identity. Recollections, photographs, and stories anchor these sections, preserving details that might otherwise be lost. The chapters that follow unfold in a roughly chronological order, beginning with the early subdivisions and the founding of Highway 101's commercial corridor, then tracing the City's evolution through suburban expansion, incorporation, and the decades of self-governance that followed.

Along the way, familiar themes emerge: community activism, design debates, preservation efforts, and the tension between private property and public interest—each recurring in new forms as the City responds to changing times. These cycles shape Solana Beach's character as much as any building or boulevard. In exploring them, we gain a clearer understanding of how a small unincorporated town became a community with a distinct vision, a strong civic voice, and a continuing commitment to balancing growth, identity, and the coastal environment that defines it.

What ties these chapters together is the recognition that Solana Beach is not static. It is a small city that has repeatedly reinvented itself without losing its sense of place. By gathering archival sources, personal recollections, public records, and contemporary observations, this book aims to capture that ongoing story. It is not an exhaustive history, nor could it be. Instead, it is an attempt to place the City's past and present into a coherent narrative, offering readers a framework for understanding how Solana Beach became the community it is today—and how its choices will shape the decades ahead.

SURPRISING SOLANA

Few first-time visitors to Solana Beach realize how young it is. Incorporated only in 1986, the City remains a relative newcomer among California's coastal towns. Yet its story stretches much further back, and its character, defined by geography, community spirit, and civic self-determination, feels far older than its official age suggests.

From the bluffs that overlook the Pacific to the canyons that cut inland toward the San Dieguito River, Solana Beach occupies a remarkably varied landscape. Within its two and a half square miles are steep coastal cliffs, a sheltered beach, a compact commercial core, and hillside neighborhoods that descend toward Lomas Santa Fe Drive. The variety of its terrain has shaped nearly every aspect of its development, forcing residents and planners alike to adapt to nature's contours rather than impose upon them.

That natural diversity is part of what makes Solana Beach a surprising place. To drive its length along Highway 101 is to pass through a sequence of distinct identities: seaside cottages and surf shops, the artistic heart of the Cedros Design District, and a civic corridor framed by public art, restaurants, and boutique storefronts. Step only a few blocks east, and the rhythm changes; quiet residential streets lead toward schools, parks, and the suburban developments that grew in the postwar years. Even after a century of change, the City still feels more like a collection of neighborhoods than a single uniform place.

The origins of Solana Beach are humble. In the 1920s, Colonel Ed Fletcher and his business partners purchased 201 acres of coastal farmland and promoted it as *Solana Beach, The Gateway to the Sea*. The new community was marketed through advertisements that promised ocean breezes, affordable lots, and proximity to the coastal highway that would soon become U.S. 101. The town that emerged from that vision was modest yet intentional: characterized by small lots, modest homes, and a commercial district that served both residents and travelers.

Fletcher's early promotional materials, optimistic and boosterish, captured the spirit of California's interwar years, an era of automobiles, tourism, and the dream

of owning a piece of the coast. Yet what followed was less a boomtown than a slow, steady settlement. A few local families, farmers, builders, and entrepreneurs became the stewards of this fledgling community. They opened grocery stores, cafés, and service stations, gradually defining the small-town core that still anchors Solana Beach today.

By the late 1930s, the town had begun to acquire its own rhythm of life. The Great Depression slowed construction, but it also reinforced the self-reliant culture that would later define the City's civic independence. Families shared tools, neighbors helped with public projects, and the town's earliest institutions, the post office, the school, and the first church, grew from volunteer effort and community need.

World War II would bring the first major transformation. New residents arrived, drawn by defense work in San Diego and by the affordable coastal land just north of Del Mar. After the war, returning veterans and their families settled in what had once been open fields. Residential tracts appeared, and with them came the first signs of the suburban pattern that would characterize Solana Beach's inland neighborhoods. What had started as a roadside village was becoming a real town.

Still, throughout these decades, Solana Beach retained a sense of scale that set it apart from other communities. It was never grand, never ostentatious, just quietly confident, a community where people recognized one another on the street.

That quiet identity would prove both its greatest strength and its most persistent challenge. As growth accelerated up and down the California coast, Solana Beach's residents would face a question that continues to define their City today: how to welcome change without losing the character that made this place unique.

INVENTING A CALIFORNIA BEACH TOWN

Solana Beach began as a 201-acre plot in 1922 and, over the next century, grew into a 2,182-acre incorporated city. What started as mostly undeveloped farmland transformed into a distinctive coastal community, shaped by infrastructure investment and civic determination.

Following the construction of Lake Hodges Dam, a project led by Col. Fletcher, water became available to the area, allowing for the cultivation of farmland along the outskirts of what would become Solana Beach.



These agricultural lands produced avocados, flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Some of which were sold on roadside stands. Following World War II, the nationwide housing boom led to rapid expansion in the region, as single-family homes and small subdivisions

replaced farmland. The completion of Interstate 5 in the 1960s spurred even further development, helping extend Solana Beach eastward.

Early Development (1920s–1940s)

Colonel Ed Fletcher, a prominent San Diego land developer, played a central role in the town's creation. In 1922, Fletcher and his partners purchased land for a seaside development that would later be named *Solana Beach*. Two years later, they formed the Santa Fe Land & Water Company to sell lots and build basic infrastructure.

Fletcher's key early contribution was water. Following the construction of Lake Hodges Dam, which he championed, water reached the coast. In 1924, he engineered the lowering of a section of bluff at what would become Fletcher Cove, providing the public with rare direct beach access. He donated the cove land as a park, making it the civic heart of the new town.

Highway 101 and the **Santa Fe Railroad's Surf Line**, which had run along the coast since the 1880s, provided regional access. Fletcher laid out streets east–west from the highway, with north–south residential streets oriented to maximize ocean

views. This emphasis on “view lots” became a defining feature of real estate and eventually influenced the City’s current View Assessment Ordinance.

In addition to road access and the running water that Lake Hodges provided, the town required sewer infrastructure. Early single-family homes and businesses relied on septic systems, while wells provided water. Over time, sewer pipelines and pump stations were installed, beginning with the Solana Beach Pump Station adjacent to Highway 101 in the San Elijo Lagoon, which moved waste to treatment facilities in Encinitas. Today, several newly constructed pumping stations, now located outside the lagoon, serve the City.

The expansion of electricity and telecommunications also played a crucial role in early development. By the 1920s and 1930s, **San Diego Consolidated Gas & Electric Company** extended power lines northward from San Diego, supplying homes and businesses with electricity. Telephone poles carried electrical and communication lines, which remained in place until electrical undergrounding efforts, particularly in the downtown area, modernized these services.

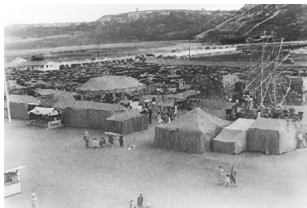
Managing stormwater runoff presented another challenge due to Solana Beach’s naturally sloping terrain. Early drainage systems relied on culverts and natural channels. Local children once rafted on Stevens Creek, one such natural channel, which was later partly covered to create **La Colonia Park**. One flood-prone area along Cedros Avenue persisted even after commercial development had taken place. Solana Beach’s connectivity improved with the establishment of the **Santa Fe Railroad Station**, now the **Solana Beach Amtrak Station** site. This rail link supported commerce and real estate development, while businesses such as small markets, cafes, and service stations along Highway 101 catered to both travelers and locals.

The new town quickly took on a commercial life. A small **Santa Fe Depot** served commuters and freight. Along Highway 101, travelers found cafes, markets, and service stations. Fletcher also influenced the location of the **22nd District Agricultural Association** in nearby Del Mar and established the **San Diego County Fair** on the site, which soon boosted businesses along Highway 101 in Solana Beach.

Growth as a Coastal Community (1940s–1960s)

After World War II, Solana Beach attracted veterans and young families seeking an affordable coastal lifestyle. As residential neighborhoods expanded, new businesses emerged along Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue, including hardware stores, grocery stores, and gas stations, some of which became local icons. The expansion of the former Skyline Drive, now called Lomas Santa Fe Drive, improved access to inland areas, encouraging further growth.

Establishing a Town Identity (1960s–1980s)



By the 1960s, Solana Beach had a well-established business district and a growing residential population. While not incorporated until 1986, the locals referred to it as a "town." The **Del**



Mar Fairgrounds and Racetrack brought tourism and commerce to the area. Cedros Avenue gained recognition as an artistic community, setting the stage for what would later become the Cedros Design District.

The earlier *Tale of a City* book captured the spirit and transformation of Solana Beach, but did not fully explain *how* and *why* we became a City. The Solana Beach that emerged after incorporation was forged by a specific set of beliefs, desires, and circumstances, each reflecting what residents thought they wanted from self-government.

The Archives of the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society documented the events leading to incorporation. This expanded account begins with the post-war community studies of the 1950s and traces the decadal march toward cityhood in 1986. It tells that story through a series of case studies, each revealing how the community's expectations for incorporation were tested, and whether those expectations were fulfilled once Solana Beach became a city.

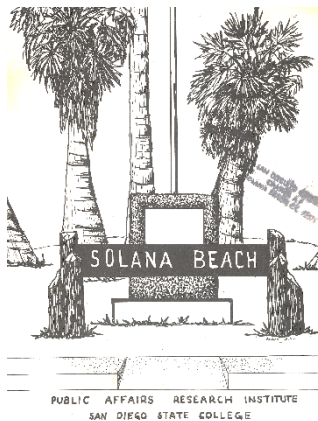
The Journey to Cityhood

World War II ended in 1945, and in the decades that followed, Americans left the cities for new suburban communities created by a growing highway system. Along San Diego County's northern coast, this movement turned the once-rural shoreline into a continuous chain of communities. Solana Beach was one of them.

The postwar population of Solana Beach was probably near 1,000, but it grew rapidly as returning service members and their families sought affordable homes near the coast. The revival of the Del Mar Fairgrounds and Racetrack after wartime closure also added employment and visitors, accelerating growth. The town of Solana Beach began to look toward its own future.

Officially, before incorporation, Solana Beach was similar to a private club in the sense that it was legally and administratively under the jurisdiction of the County of San Diego and the State of California. It could do whatever it wanted as long as it did so within the rules set by the State and County. On the plus side, the County provided the necessary services for its existence (fire, police protection, water, sewers, and roads. The County or State collected the taxes to pay for these services.

This system was typical of growing unincorporated communities in mid-century



California: efficient during the small-town stage but increasingly inadequate as populations grew. Residents had limited influence over planning and taxation and often felt detached from decisions that affected them.

The Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1944, played a central role in shaping Solana Beach. It promoted balanced development, encouraged new businesses, and advocated for local services. In pursuit of a clearer path forward and possibly influenced by the incorporation of Del

Mar, its neighbor to the south (which incorporated to prevent a perceived concern of being annexed by the City of San Diego), the Chamber encouraged a study entitled *Solana Beach, 1959* from the Public Affairs Research Institute at San Diego State College. The report portrayed a thriving small town poised for transformation:

“There is a new bank, a one-year-old supermarket and another under construction.

Additionally, the community is well-served by a diverse range of retail businesses. Professional services are available for medical and dental needs. All the usual household service and general repair businesses are established. A hotel and a theatre are in the downtown district, and, at the last count, eight motels are available for visitors in Solana Beach.

The community has five places of worship, two fine beaches within walking distance from the Plaza, and two excellent county parks within a few minutes’ drive. A pleasant, moderate climate further contributes

to a comfortable living experience. Recent developmental trends indicate that Solana Beach will consolidate its position as a middle- and upper-middle-class residential area.”

This Study noted that San Diego County governed unincorporated Solana Beach and a collection of special districts:

“The County provides such services as police protection, road maintenance, animal control, planning and zoning, building inspection, library, beach cleaning and lifeguard service, and public health protection. The State of California furnishes traffic control and maintenance of Highway 101. The Solana Beach Sanitation District has extended sewer service to a portion of the area... Water is provided by the Santa Fe Irrigation District, and fire protection by the Solana Local Fire District... The Solana Beach Public Highway Lighting District contains 16 streetlights, and the Eden Gardens Lighting District has 12. Schools are administered by the Solana Beach Elementary and San Dieguito Union High School Districts.”

The Study predicted that Solana Beach’s population would nearly double by 1965 and double again by 1975, reaching levels above the City's actual population as of 2025. It anticipated the problems that rapid growth would bring and concluded with a striking observation:

“At present the services provided by the County of San Diego and by the special districts currently operating appear adequate. It is not likely that this will remain so for long, for the situation is too dynamic.

Additional functions and higher levels of service will be required, as well as stricter control over planning and zoning. Some definite action by the citizens of Solana Beach within the next three years is indicated. This is the time for decision.

Of all the alternatives available at the present writing, the following appear to be most feasible: (1) annexation to the City of San Diego; (2) incorporation; (3) incorporation using the ‘Lakewood Plan’; and (4) incorporation of Solana Beach and Del Mar as a single entity.”

Although the recommendations were advisory, the Study marked the first formal discussion of cityhood for Solana Beach. The 1959 study represents the community’s first systematic effort to assess its governance and future. It demonstrated both economic confidence and political maturity, signs that the town was moving beyond dependence on the County and was beginning to imagine itself as an independent entity.

What is significant is that Solana Beach had already been considering cityhood more than a quarter-century before incorporation became a reality in 1986, and that

the 1959 Study captured both the confidence and foresight of a town on the brink of defining itself.

Even so, the road was long and rocky.

The unincorporated areas of San Diego County were designated as such within the County and therefore required permission to become a legal entity. A defined process (set by State law and administered by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)) outlined the steps that had to be taken to incorporate.

First, the town had to form a citizens' committee to compile a petition and gather signatures. Once they had gathered enough signatures (25% of the registered voters), they could submit a formal application to the LAFCO. This application had to show the proposed boundaries of the incorporated area and specify who would provide the necessary public services within it. Based on this information, LAFCO then determined whether the proposal made sense – **and then**, – if it “made sense,” LAFCO commissions a Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis (can they afford it) and an environmental review (CEQA) – **and then**, – after it reviews the studies, it holds public hearings, – **and then**, – if approved by LAFCO to proceed – **and then**, – the County Board of Supervisors will schedule a referendum. – **and then**, if the majority votes yes, the incorporation passes, and the City would be established. This system was designed to prevent hasty or ill-considered incorporations, but it also made the process long and politically demanding.

This same process had to be followed for every one of Solana Beach's incorporation attempts.

The first significant movement toward cityhood came in the form of a regional coalition. In the early 1970s, as coastal development pressures intensified, residents from Encinitas, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Leucadia, Olivenhain, and Solana Beach proposed forming a single city to be called San Dieguito. The proposal reflected the growing sentiment that coastal residents should manage their own destiny rather than be directed by the County Board of Supervisors, whose decisions were often viewed as favoring developers. Residents in the Towns along the stretch of Highway 101 shared beaches, schools, and lifestyle. Some residents felt that, with incorporation, they could better protect the lagoons, bluffs, and open

space from overdevelopment and would get their fair share of property and sales taxes.

The proposed City of San Dieguito appeared on the ballot in 1974. Supporters argued that the region's communities shared schools, beaches, and a way of life that made self-government a logical choice. The ballot literature argued that local control would lead to better planning, more consistent environmental protection, and a fairer return on the taxes residents pay.

Opponents, however, warned that incorporation would actually mean higher taxes, bureaucratic duplication, and the loss of County services that had worked efficiently for decades. They doubted that a single city government could effectively represent such diverse communities, ranging from rural Olivenhain to the beachside villages. They questioned whether the tax base could sustain the administrative costs. In 1974, the measure failed decisively and did not even pass LAFCO in 1976. But those defeats had an unexpected effect: they awakened a greater sense of coastal identity. They planted the seed of local independence that would later bear fruit in Solana Beach and Encinitas.

In 1982, although Solana Beach was a member of the proposed San Dieguito incorporation proposal, the City also quietly submitted its own proposal. Even at this juncture, Solana Beach recognized that, although they were similar as beach communities united in seeking freedom from County land-use decision-making, they were fundamentally different from their partners in the coalition.

LAFCO ok'd the coalition proposal. Solana Beach's proposal was not approved to proceed.

In the years that followed, the idea of incorporation went quiet but not extinct. From 1976 to the early 1980s, civic groups in Solana Beach kept the conversation alive in more subtle ways. The Solana Beach Town Council, citizens' committees, and the Chamber of Commerce began taking positions on zoning, traffic, and development issues, essentially acting as if the town already had its own government. During those years, the County had approved a series of large bluff-top condominium projects, including the notorious "China Wall" on Sierra Avenue, which many residents saw as a symbol of unchecked growth and County indifference. That controversy, more than any other, reignited the push for local

control. Two other developments, Diego's nightclub, which was permitted by the county despite having only a quarter of the required parking spaces, had recently requested permission to use property on the railroad right-of-way across the street on Highway 101 for additional parking. The Club was very unpopular with the neighbors. Additionally, another property, Inn Suites, was permitted by the County and the Coastal Commission to build a large hotel project on the edge of the San Elijo Lagoon. Both properties were examples of permits granted by the County that conflicted with the locals' interests.

Opponents countered that the town was too small to sustain itself financially, that the County's fire and sheriff services were more reliable than any new local department could be, and that creating a city bureaucracy would be costly. They warned that fragmentation would weaken regional cooperation and that limited land for future growth could leave the new city dependent on redevelopment and tourism.

These arguments fueled both the 1981 and 1986 Solana Beach-only incorporation referendums.

In 1981, voters narrowly rejected the incorporation measure, with about 48 percent favoring cityhood, just short of a majority.

On the surface, these arguments could be categorized as a variant of a growth-versus-no-growth scenario, with business taking the side of growth. At this time, the Chamber of Commerce played a central role in Solana Beach and, as discussed, was significant in the aforementioned 1959 Solana Beach study.

Throughout these decades, the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce had a complex and evolving role. Established long before the town's incorporation, it had been the town's principal civic organization, with links to the County. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Chamber promoted the business district, organized community events, and, with the Women's Civic Club, lobbied for beautification projects along Highway 101. During the 1970s, when the San Dieguito incorporation movement arose, the Chamber was cautious, even opposing the idea. Many merchants feared new taxes and regulations, preferring their existing relationship with the County, which they felt provided necessary services without added bureaucracy and taxes.

Chamber members at the time saw the cityhood movement as driven by residents rather than businesses and worried it might limit development.

As the decade progressed, however, attitudes began to shift. County government proved less responsive to local needs, and as the town grew, the limitations of being unincorporated became increasingly apparent. By the early 1980s, talk of incorporation had returned, this time focused solely on Solana Beach. The mood had shifted. The community had matured, and many residents now believed that a small, independent city could protect the town's character and coastal environment better than the County could. Supporters argued that cityhood would give residents control over zoning and bluff protection, provide a more responsive local government, and enable Solana Beach to manage its own revenues from property, sales, and transient occupancy taxes (TOT). They also pointed to the opportunity to create a Local Coastal Program, which would allow the city to work directly with the California Coastal Commission rather than through the County. By the early 1980s, a younger generation of Chamber leaders saw incorporation not as a threat but as an opportunity to promote community identity and tourism. When studies confirmed that Solana Beach could support itself financially, the Chamber moved from neutrality to cautious endorsement. Over the next few years, new leadership and improved fiscal studies revived the effort. By 1985, the Chamber was collaborating with civic groups to prepare for the impending transition.

When the measure returned to the ballot in 1986 as Proposition N, it passed with 57 percent of the vote.

On July 1, 1986, Solana Beach officially became the newest City in San Diego County, joining Del Mar, Encinitas, and Carlsbad as self-governing coastal municipalities.

The road to that moment had taken 12 years of discussion, two failed San Dieguito efforts, 1 one failed Solana Beach-only vote, and, finally, a successful campaign built on local confidence. The town that had once relied entirely on the County now had its own mayor, council, and City staff.

In retrospect, incorporation was more than a legal or administrative change. It was the culmination of decades of self-education and civic evolution. Solana Beach had learned, slowly and deliberately, to take responsibility for its own affairs – to tie its

own shoes. Cityhood was not the beginning of that process but its visible expression, the moment when a maturing community made official what it believed it had become: a town ready to govern itself and to shape its own future along the California coast.

Like the proverbial dog chasing the car, it had caught it. Now it had to figure out what to do with it.

The Creation

The first meeting of the new Solana Beach City Council was an all-day affair.

At sunrise on July 1, 1986, the Council gathered at Fletcher Cove. Members had been told that a large number of building permits were being rushed through the County Planning



Department before the evening's official swearing-in. The newly elected officials acted quickly. Before an early-morning crowd of about seventy-five residents, they were sworn in. They



immediately passed an emergency moratorium, drafted by the interim City attorney, that placed a 45-day freeze on all new construction within the City. That evening, the first formal City Council meeting convened in a classroom at the Solana Beach Elementary School District. The session lasted four hours and drew a large and expectant audience. Though the moratorium dominated the discussion, the Council also affirmed that all existing



County laws would remain in effect, ensuring a smooth transition while allowing Solana Beach to collect its share of local tax revenues. The Council established itself as the City's official planning agency and adopted the first Official Seal of the City of Solana Beach. The resolutions passed at the morning meeting were ratified, confirming several appointments and contracts necessary for the City to

function. Margaret Schlessinger, a longtime advocate for incorporation, received the most votes and was appointed Mayor.

For many residents, the day symbolized liberation, the moment Solana Beach took control of its own destiny after decades of oversight by the County. Yet, the new freedom came with limits. Solana Beach was not an uncharted frontier but a functioning coastal community. Nearly three-quarters of its developable land was already built out, with most residential areas consisting of single-family homes, many of which were governed by homeowners' associations and covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs). Commercial activity was concentrated along established corridors, Highway 101, Lomas Santa Fe Drive, and Cedros Avenue, where businesses had long operated under County zoning. Essential services, including fire, law enforcement, sewer, and water, were provided by the County through special districts. The County also managed roads, finances, legal affairs, and land-use planning. The challenge for the new City was to replace this extensive governance infrastructure with one of its own.

The tension between the community and the County was not new. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Solana Beach residents had protested the County's permissive approach to development. One of the earliest flashpoints was the dense stretch of condominiums built along the bluff, dubbed the "China Wall", which packed roughly 1,000 units and 3,000 residents into less than a mile. To locals, it symbolized the County's broken promise to protect the coastal environment. By the early 1980s, two other properties had come to embody the same frustration: Diego's, a noisy nightclub located at the corner of Highway 101 and Lomas Santa Fe Drive, and the triangular "Gateway" parcel at the southern entrance to town, proposed for a large hotel complex by Inn Suites International.

Diego's was a noisy and popular late-night venue that drew large crowds and regular complaints from nearby residents. Because Solana Beach was still under County jurisdiction, enforcement fell to the Sheriff's Department and County officials downtown. Calls about noise, parking, and alcohol violations were handled by agencies far removed from the Solana Beach community. The inability to control a single nuisance property became a symbol of the town's impotence. For those who had favored cityhood, Diego's stood for everything the County ignored. They argued that if Solana Beach were a City, it could set its own

ordinances, regulate operating hours, and enforce them with a locally directed police contract. Opponents dismissed that argument as emotional, saying that one nightclub hardly justified creating a new layer of government.

Still, Diego lingered in the public imagination as visible evidence of why local control mattered.

The Gateway property and the Inn Suites hotel proposal were an even larger issue. The site, sitting just north of the San Elijo Lagoon, was the first thing visitors saw when entering Solana Beach from the north. In the early 1980s, a developer attempted to construct a large hotel and commercial complex on the site. Residents feared it would overwhelm the small coastal town, block views, worsen traffic, and set a precedent for high-intensity development along Highway 101. Once again, the decision rested with the County, not the people who lived nearby. To those who pushed for incorporation, the project proved that Solana Beach needed its own City Council. Without one, they said, the community would continue to be shaped by decisions made downtown by people who did not live there.

Remember, opponents of incorporation argued that forming a city would not halt development, as projects like Inn Suites still had to pass through the Coastal Commission. They argued that creating a city would introduce bureaucracy and increase costs without improving outcomes. But for residents who supported incorporation, it was not just about the specific projects. It was about where decisions were made and whose values guided them.

When the 1982 incorporation effort failed, many blamed fear of higher taxes or doubts about financial stability; however, the underlying frustrations did not subside. By the time the movement revived for the successful 1986 vote, the same examples, Diego's, the Gateway, and the condos, were again at the center of public discussion. They had become shorthand for everything that felt wrong with being governed from outside.

After incorporation, the symbolism came full circle. The City bought the old Diego's property and converted it into City Hall. What had once been the loudest reminder of County neglect became the factual seat of local government. The Gateway site, meanwhile, remained contested for decades. Various developers

reworked the plans, and successive City Councils evaluated them under the very powers that residents had sought for so long.

In retrospect, both controversies and the condos were more than planning disputes. They were civic turning points that forced residents to decide what kind of place Solana Beach would be: a coastal neighborhood managed by the County or an independent city capable of governing itself. These formative years defined Solana Beach's character, its style of government, and its approach to development for decades to come.

On July 1, 1986, Solana Beach officially became San Diego County's eighteenth incorporated city, following the June vote for cityhood. The celebration was modest but deeply emotional, the culmination of nearly a decade of organizing, study, and persistence. The new City began with approximately twelve thousand residents within a three-and-a-half-square-mile area bounded by Del Mar, Encinitas, and the Pacific Ocean. It started with no city hall, no permanent staff, and no debt, but with a powerful desire for self-governance.

The first City Council, composed of local activists who had championed incorporation, moved quickly to appoint a City Manager, City Attorney, and City Clerk. They adopted the council-manager form of government to separate political leadership from day-to-day administration. The County lent personnel to help with the transition, including Steve Apple, who became Solana Beach's first Planning Director and later led the department for two decades, and a member of the County's Public Works staff served as interim City Engineer. It was Apple who physically delivered the City's building moratorium to the County offices on the morning of July 1, marking the end of County jurisdiction and the beginning of local authority.

Much of the remaining tasks of running the new City were done on a volunteer basis.

The new City Hall offices were located at Suite #120, 380 Stevens Ave. The furnishings were half a dozen cafeteria tables borrowed from the Solana Beach School District, folding metal chairs, and a single file cabinet. The 12 office spaces will get regular office furniture in a month or so. A search was on for the new City

Manager. It held its early meetings in temporary quarters until it repurposed the old Diego's Nightclub on Highway 101 as City Hall.

During its first couple of years, Solana Beach focused on establishing stability and legitimacy. The Council adopted interim zoning and building codes to prevent uncontrolled development and negotiated contracts for police and fire protection. It established its first commissions: Planning, Parks and Recreation, and later Public Arts, to involve residents in civic life directly. Early ordinances addressed practical matters such as signage, parking, and noise, but they also reflected the community's aspiration to remain small, scenic, and distinctly local. Solana Beach wanted to be a real beach town, not just another strip of coastal commerce.

Public Art in Solana Beach

From its earliest days, Solana Beach has prioritized public art as a vital part of the community. One of the first citizen advisory groups formed by the original City Council was the Public Arts Commission, tasked with expanding public art in the City, from murals and sculptures to creative installations that enhance public spaces. The Commission served as a liaison among residents, artists, and City leaders, advising the City Council and City Manager on all art-related matters and ensuring that Solana Beach remains a vibrant and creative community.

Supporting local artists has been a priority, and preference is given to those who live or work in Solana Beach when opportunities arise to participate in City art projects. The Commission is the organization that supports this initiative. Additionally, the Commission organizes and supports City-sponsored cultural events and art programs.

The Commission selects, places, and maintains artwork in public areas. This includes acquiring new pieces, relocating existing ones, and ensuring current installations remain in good condition. In 2008, however, the Commission shifted

its focus from permanent installations to a temporary art program,



which allows artists to apply to showcase their work in designated locations. Entryway markers at City boundaries are permanent installations.

One notable initiative was "Arts Alive," which took various forms over the years. The program included an annual banner contest in which artists and students designed banners for display on City lampposts along Highway 101. After several months of public display, the banners were auctioned to help fund Arts Commission programs, originally at Fiesta Del Sol. Another version of the initiative was an art walk, such as one held along the Rail Trail, where artists exhibited their work, met the public, and engaged with the community through an event enhanced by live music and performances, including stilt walkers and other street performers. The Commission also reserved the first floor of City Hall for rotating art exhibitions, allowing artists to display and sell their work while providing residents with a dedicated space to enjoy local art.

The Commission was even tasked with holding a competition for an official City song. In 2006, the Commission chose *Solana Beach, Our City Proud* as the winner.

Above all, the Public Arts Commission is committed to preserving and celebrating Solana Beach's artistic and cultural identity. Through thoughtful curation, innovative programs, and community engagement, they ensure that public art remains an essential part of the City's landscape, honoring its history, character, and creative spirit.

Land Use Plan

To gain permanent control over its land-use decisions, the City was required by law to produce a General Plan within thirty months. The Council appointed a General Plan Committee, the first official citizens' committee of the new City. Initially comprising seven members, it expanded to thirty as public participation increased. The City was divided into seven study areas, each responsible for conducting local hearings and drafting recommendations. These were later synthesized into a single citywide plan.

By 1989, Solana Beach completed its first General Plan, a milestone that codified the City's coastal vision. The plan modified the County's earlier framework to preserve neighborhood character and limit density. It emphasized pedestrian corridors, coastal access, and the protection of Highway 101, the bluffs, and

Fletcher Cove. Once the California Coastal Commission certified the plan, Solana Beach achieved a long-sought goal: legal authority over land-use decisions within its coastal zone. The Coastal Commission retained jurisdiction over the beach and bluff areas until the City's Local Coastal Program was approved. At that point, Solana Beach would gain the right to issue its own coastal development permits, subject only to appeal.

A key objective was maintaining Solana Beach's small-town, coastal village atmosphere by ensuring that new development complemented the City's natural environment. The plan emphasized protecting beaches, bluffs, and environmentally sensitive areas while promoting coastal access and conservation efforts. The General Plan encouraged a mix of residential, commercial, and open spaces, recognizing that a strong local economy depended on visitor-serving businesses and tourism. Improving traffic circulation while maintaining a pedestrian-friendly environment was another priority, with a focus on alternative transportation options, such as biking and public transit. Housing policies aimed to provide a variety of housing types to accommodate different income levels. At the same time, parks, trails, and recreational areas were preserved to ensure public access to the City's natural amenities. Community engagement was central to the City's vision, emphasizing public input, transparency, and local involvement in shaping policies. Over time, Solana Beach's General Plan has evolved to address new challenges, such as environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, and infrastructure modernization.

Specifically, the Plan tightened zoning regulations, established blufftop setbacks, and emphasized the preservation of small-town character. Bluff erosion and seawall construction became defining issues, with Solana Beach emerging as a statewide test case for coastal policy. In La Colonia, grassroots groups collaborated with the City to construct a park, community center, and sheriff's substation, thereby strengthening neighborhood resilience.

Land Use Plan Update

The Solana Beach Land Use Plan (LUP) was designed to guide the City's development, conservation efforts, and long-term growth strategies. It designates land-use categories, with residential areas accounting for 56% of the City, commercial zones for 4%, recreation and open spaces for 13%, public or

institutional uses for 5%, and so on. Commercial activity is concentrated along Highway 101, Cedros Avenue, and Lomas Santa Fe Drive, while parks, beaches, and golf courses preserve natural spaces.

The LUP plan emphasizes smart growth, encouraging pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use developments while supporting economic vitality. It prioritizes environmental protection through policies that preserve coastal resources, manage the impacts of predicted sea-level rise, and maintain open spaces. Transportation strategies focus on improving mobility through biking, walking, and public transit. The City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) aligns with the California Coastal Act, ensuring that development in the coastal zone remains sustainable and environmentally responsible. Policies address shoreline management, wetland buffers, and climate adaptation to protect Solana Beach's coastal environment. The overarching goal was to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental concerns while preserving the City's small-town charm and high quality of life.



The City commissioned this photo as the cover for the Land Use Plan. It was captured by helicopter, and a series of images were stitched together to create the panoramic view of Solana Beach. The photo was enlarged and placed above the Council table in the Council Meeting Chambers.

Meanwhile, Cedros Avenue began its transformation from an industrial strip into the Cedros Design District. A pioneering public art ordinance filled the city with murals, mosaics, and sculpture. Fletcher Cove Park was renovated. Highway 101 was completely redesigned and constructed. By its 25th anniversary in 2011, Solana Beach had established itself as a progressive, art-filled coastal city with strong civic pride.

In the years that followed, the Council established additional citizen commissions to guide its policies, among them Budget and Finance, Public Arts, and Parks and Recreation, with View Assessment and Climate & Resiliency added later. Despite the many administrative challenges of incorporation, the early Council made a deliberate decision to continue to emphasize the arts, believing that the City's character and beauty were as vital to its future as its infrastructure.

Each commission met publicly, inviting residents to speak, while staff members recorded the proceedings and prepared reports to the Council. When specific projects, such as park designs or planning studies, required technical expertise, the City hired consulting firms that organized community workshops before submitting recommendations for Council approval. This inclusive, citizen-driven approach became the hallmark of Solana Beach's governance, helping to sustain the civic spirit that had made cityhood possible.

Through these formative years, Solana Beach forged its own identity independently, in a participatory manner, and was intensely protective of its character. What began as a protest against distant decision-making matured into a functioning City that would, for decades to come, define its own vision of what a California beach town could be.

But this control was far from absolute.

The City became a contract-city by design, but with expanded in-house planning, engineering, and public works capabilities, and long-term professional service agreements that gave the City more control over quality and policy. In the service areas, they contracted for police. In the service areas, they contracted for police services. Fire protection and emergency services also became the City's responsibility, leading to the establishment of the Solana Beach Fire Department. This function created continuity challenges for the City. From 1948 until Chief David Ott's appointment in 2003, the City had twelve different fire chiefs. In 2005, Ott became Assistant City Manager and was subsequently promoted to City Manager in 2006 while continuing to serve as Fire Chief for a brief period. He served until 2014, helping facilitate Solana Beach's continued transformation into a highly desirable place to live and work. Under his direction, the City entered into cooperative agreements with neighboring cities to combine departments and management staff into a single, enhanced fire and emergency medical services

organization. In the areas of utilities and infrastructure, these included water, sewer, solid waste, animal control, and street maintenance (later transitioned to in-house management), as well as street lighting (later replaced by automatic maintenance). In the areas of utilities and infrastructure, these included water, sewer, solid waste, animal control, and street maintenance (later transitioned to in-house management), as well as street lighting (later replaced by automatic maintenance).

The Layers of Control in Solana Beach

City ordinances have affected the various parts of Solana Beach differently. The City is composed primarily of subdivisions, many of which have Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs) that define, by private contract, the appearance, scale, and upkeep of individual homes. These private covenants, administered through homeowners' associations (HOAs), shape everything from architectural style and roof material to fencing and landscaping, giving much of Solana Beach its cohesive but highly localized character.

At the same time, the entire City lies within California's Coastal Zone and is therefore subject to oversight by the Coastal Commission. For any new construction or major renovation, a property owner must first satisfy Coastal regulations, then meet City standards, and, where applicable, comply with HOA restrictions. In effect, development in Solana Beach still passes through two of the same three hurdles that existed when the County governed the area: state-level coastal review and local zoning control. The difference is that after incorporation, the local authority became the City itself, not distant County planners.

From County Oversight to City Control

Before its incorporation in 1986, Solana Beach fell under the jurisdiction of San Diego County, which applied uniform regulations across vast unincorporated regions. Residents had little influence over zoning decisions that profoundly affected their neighborhoods, particularly along the coastal bluffs, Highway 101, and Lomas Santa Fe Drive. Development proposals were reviewed in County offices miles away, often without meaningful community input.

The movement for cityhood emerged from that frustration. Residents sought local control over growth, design, and scale, particularly in response to projects they

perceived as overly dense, too tall, or out of character with the surrounding area. Once incorporated, the City immediately adopted its own General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, followed soon after by a Local Coastal Program (LCP), a requirement under the California Coastal Act that ensures local zoning remains consistent with statewide coastal policies.

Rather than establishing a separate Design Review Board, Solana Beach assigned those responsibilities to City staff and the Planning Commission, with final discretionary authority resting with the City Council. This allowed local decision-making to be both responsive and transparent, ensuring that land-use and design issues were debated in open public forums rather than remote County hearings.

The resulting framework produced a new hierarchy of authority:

- The City replaced the County as the primary land-use regulator.
- The Planning Commission and City Council oversaw design compatibility, variances, and coastal development permits.
- The Local Coastal Program integrated the City's ordinances with Coastal Commission requirements for shoreline protection, public access, and scenic preservation.

Together, these reforms created the enduring three-tier system that continues to define Solana Beach: Coastal, City, and HOA.

The reach of this layered system varies widely across Solana Beach. In the older west-side neighborhoods, Cedros, La Colonia, and the blocks between Highway 101 and the railroad, homeowners deal primarily with City zoning and Coastal permitting. The lots are smaller, the houses older, and most work involves remodels rather than new construction. In these districts, the City Ordinances, the Council, and the Coastal Commission rules provide the main oversight.

By contrast, in the planned subdivisions east of I-5, including Lomas Santa Fe Estates, Isla Verde, Santa Helena, and Brisas del Mar, residents face an additional layer of private regulation. HOAs in these communities maintain architectural review committees that must approve design changes before City permits are even considered. These covenants can restrict building height, exterior finishes, or even solar placement, ensuring uniform appearance but adding complexity to the approval process.

Thus, while incorporation brought decisions closer to home, it also entrenched a mosaic of overlapping jurisdictions. A project that proceeds quickly in La Colonia might take months in Isla Verde, even if the work is similar. Yet this very complexity, Coastal, City, and HOA together, has preserved the distinctive character of Solana Beach's neighborhoods, from its historic seaside cottages to its manicured hillside estates.

Diego's Nightclub, Symbol of "What We Don't Control"

In the early 1980s, the site at Highway 101 where Solana Beach City Hall now stands was home to a lively, controversial nightclub later known as Diego's on 101. It drew crowds from across North County and beyond, but for nearby residents, it came to represent everything they disliked about being governed from afar. Late-night music, jammed parking, and noisy patrons spilled into residential streets, yet complaints had to be routed through County sheriff's deputies and planners in Kearny Mesa. The process was slow, impersonal, and often fruitless. To many locals, Diego's became shorthand for "what we don't control."

By the time residents debated incorporation in 1982, Diego's had become a potent talking point. Cityhood advocates used it as a vivid example of why Solana Beach needed self-rule: "If we were a city," they argued, "we could set our own noise ordinances, regulate hours, and enforce them." Opponents countered that no community should form a city over a single nightclub, dismissing the issue as exaggerated. But Diego's symbolized a broader frustration, that decisions affecting Solana Beach were being made miles away by a County bureaucracy unfamiliar with the town's character or scale.

When Solana Beach finally achieved cityhood on July 1, 1986, the controversy flared again almost immediately. A newly opened version of Diego's, larger, louder, and permitted by the County just before incorporation, ignited battles over crowd limits, parking, and safety. The most critical problem was parking. Most nights, club patrons quickly filled the 97 parking spaces in Diego's lot, spilling onto streets once used only by residents and monopolizing private lots reserved for surrounding businesses. Nearby residents shared the frustration. Those living behind the club complained of sleepless nights, patrons shouting in the streets, and driveways blocked by cars searching for scarce parking.

Noise was another concern. Although only faint strains of music emanate from the thick-walled club--sister of the legendary Pacific Beach disco, "some patrons cause quite a racket while returning to their cars late at night", residents living directly behind the club complain. By 1991, the City had codified its response with Ordinance 147, the Noise Abatement and Control Ordinance, which set measurable decibel and time limits, required sound-amplification permits, and empowered local deputies to enforce them.

Within a few years, persistent violations and pressure from the neighborhood led to the Club's closure. Meanwhile, both code enforcement officials and the local fire marshal say the crowd repeatedly exceeded the Club's maximum allowable capacity. The occupancy permit limited occupancy in both the club and the restaurant to 300 patrons. Council members prevented Club owners from constructing an additional parking lot alongside the railroad tracks across Old Highway 101 from the disco. The lot, which had 231 spaces, had been approved by the county. The City opposed issuing a building permit for the project due to its location, the safety hazard to patrons who would have to cross the busy roadway, and its inconsistency with the City's vision for a pedestrian-friendly coastal corridor. Without more parking, the Club could not legally accommodate the crowds it drew, making profitability harder to sustain.

By the early 1990s, the fate of Diego's was sealed by a mix of economic reality, neighborhood fatigue, and political resolve. From the moment it opened in August 1986, the nightclub had been beset by safety and code violations. Within weeks of incorporation, the new City found itself testing its authority. In September 1986, inspectors discovered the club exceeded its occupancy limits by hundreds. The City Council suspended its dance license, warning that its newly issued primary use permit could be revoked if violations continued. The Fire Marshals repeatedly



cited it for exceeding its 300-person occupancy limit, sometimes finding twice that number inside. The City's new code enforcement officers issued violation after violation, and the City Council, still defining its authority in those first years after incorporation, threatened to revoke its operational permit altogether. What

began as a glamorous new entertainment venue had become a chronic headache for law enforcement.

For a small, newly incorporated city trying to cultivate a peaceful, village-like image, the ongoing controversy was an unwelcome distraction. As enforcement tightened and community patience waned, Diego's fortunes began to decline. The operators attempted to rebrand it as "Surfside" and hosted live shows to project a calmer image. Still, the club's notoriety and frequent police calls made it difficult to maintain insurance and attract high-end clientele. By 1991, even its defenders acknowledged that the rebranded venture could not survive under constant scrutiny.

When the City began searching for a permanent



municipal headquarters, the solution became obvious. The building, centrally located, highly visible, and with its own parking, offered exactly what the young city needed. In a

poetic turn, the City purchased the property in the early 1990s and converted it into City Hall. The transformation of a once-unruly disco into the seat of local government perfectly embodied the purpose of incorporation: to bring order, accountability, and community values under local control.



The Inn Suites and Gateway Controversy

The Inn Suites and Gateway controversy was one of the most important and emotionally charged development battles in Solana Beach's modern history. It began in the early 1980s, when a Phoenix-based hotel chain, Inn Suites International, proposed building a large, multi-story hotel complex at the City's northern entrance, on a triangular parcel of land along Highway 101 near North Rios Avenue, overlooking the San Elijo Lagoon. The site, later known as the Gateway property, rose above the wetlands and ocean and formed the first view most travelers from the North encountered upon entering Solana Beach. Whatever was built there would announce what kind of community Solana Beach intended to be.

The Gas Station Years

Before any discussion of hotels or mixed-use projects, the Gateway parcel was home to a Union 76 gas station, later replaced by a smaller independent station, and an auto service garage, also later replaced. For decades, it served motorists along old Highway 101 as part of what was known as “Gas Station Alley,” with four gas and service stations, before the Fairgrounds, when the coastal route carried nearly all north–south traffic through San Diego County. After Interstate 5 opened in the 1960s, traffic through Solana Beach declined, and the gas station closed. The lagoon-edged lot, cracked pavement sloping toward the lagoon, became a neglected remnant of the highway era, visible to every passing car. Its prominence at the City’s northern boundary soon earned it the name “Gateway,” reflecting both geography and symbolism.



The Inn Suites Proposal

In 1981-82, Inn Suites International proposed a large hotel and conference complex for the site, featuring several stories of rooms, parking structures, and landscaped courtyards. County planners supported the idea due to its potential to attract visitors and generate transient-occupancy-tax revenue, but residents were alarmed. The project’s height and mass threatened to block ocean views, intensify traffic at the intersection of Highway 101 and Lomas Santa Fe Drive, and alter the character of the land overlooking the San Elijo Lagoon.

When grading began, bulldozers pushed soil perilously close to the lagoon. Inspectors from the newly strengthened California Coastal Commission determined that the work had extended into the protected buffer zone without proper authorization. The Commission issued a stop-work order, halting all construction pending investigation. The disturbance of coastal vegetation and the risk of sediment runoff into the lagoon violated the Coastal Act’s protections for environmentally sensitive habitat. The scarred slope and idle machinery above the lagoon became a rallying image for residents who felt powerless under county rule.

The Inn Suites controversy quickly became a catalyst for the cityhood movement. Along with frustration over Diego's Nightclub, the hated hotel project convinced many that Solana Beach needed its own government. Flyers circulated with the slogan "*If we don't control it, someone else will.*" When voters approved incorporation in 1986, the half-graded Gateway bluff stood as physical proof of why local control mattered.

After Incorporation: Reclaiming Control

Once Solana Beach became a City, the new Council acted swiftly to assert authority over the Gateway site. The 1989 General Plan reclassified the parcel for limited commercial use, imposing strict height, setback, and environmental standards. The County-approved hotel was nullified, yet developers continued to view the property as prime real estate. During the 1990s and early 2000s, new proposals arrived, each smaller than the last, each claiming to harmonize with community expectations, and each meeting the same resistance.

The Magellan Proposal

The most serious of these came from Magellan Associates, which purchased the land in the late 1990s. Magellan envisioned a "boutique" or executive-style hotel with ground-floor shops and restaurants, open courtyards, and a pedestrian promenade overlooking the lagoon. It was marketed as a more elegant and environmentally sensitive design that would enhance the City's northern approach. Supporters pointed to the potential for new tax revenue and a refined architectural statement. Yet residents and environmental groups, including the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy (now Nature Collective), warned that the plan still sat too close to the lagoon's bluff edge. They feared erosion, runoff, and a permanent visual intrusion on the restored wetlands. After years of environmental review and public hearings, Magellan withdrew from the project.

From Development Site to Open Space

Subsequent developers proposed scaled-down commercial or residential uses, but none could satisfy both the City's design guidelines and the Coastal Commission's

environmental conditions. By the early 2010s, many residents argued that leaving the property undeveloped had become a matter of principle. The City adopted the

Gateway and Highway 101 Design Guidelines, which protect view corridors and reinforce height limits to preserve the coastal village atmosphere.

A breakthrough came when the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy and the Harbaugh Foundation, a philanthropic trust based in Rancho Santa Fe, stepped forward with a plan to acquire the land for permanent preservation. In partnership with the City of Solana Beach, the County of San Diego, and the California Coastal Conservancy, the property was purchased, remediated, and restored as public open space, thereby ending a four-decade dispute.

Harbaugh Seaside Trails Park



In 2020, the site officially reopened as Harbaugh Seaside Trails Park, a network of trails, native plants, and scenic overlooks above the San Elijo Lagoon. The park features interpretive signs, ocean-view benches, and accessible paths that invite visitors to pause between the coastal lagoons to

the north and south. It is not a connector trail but a scenic pause point, offering panoramic views of the lagoon, rail corridor, and Pacific horizon.

Legacy and Meaning

The story of the Gateway property, from gas station to the hated and halted hotel, from litigation to landscape restoration, captures the evolution of Solana Beach itself. The Inn Suites and Magellan battles revealed a young City's determination to control its future; the creation of Harbaugh Seaside Trails Park demonstrated its maturity. In the end, the site became not a monument to growth but a symbol of

restraint and stewardship, a place that welcomes visitors with open space rather than walls, and with views of the San Elijo Lagoon rather than a concrete façade.

Controlling “Mansionization”: The Ongoing Balancing Act

The early development controls adopted after incorporation laid the groundwork for preserving Solana Beach’s small-scale coastal character, even before “Mansionization” became a recognized issue. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the new City established its first zoning ordinances, introducing height limits, setback rules, and limits on floor-area and lot coverage to keep new construction in proportion with existing neighborhoods. These early measures were aimed at maintaining light, air, and view corridors rather than curbing “mansions” per se. Still, they effectively prevented out-of-scale building during the City’s formative years.

By the early 2000s, as property values climbed and older cottages began to be replaced with much larger homes, the term “Mansionization” entered the local vocabulary. The earlier zoning framework provided a foundation for addressing the trend. Still, the City now faced the challenge of updating its rules to accommodate modern design styles, multi-story rebuilds, and the growing pressure for expanded living space. What had started as a quiet technical matter of height and setbacks evolved into one of the most visible political and cultural debates in Solana Beach’s maturing years.



Proposition A.

A special election that was won by 67 votes.

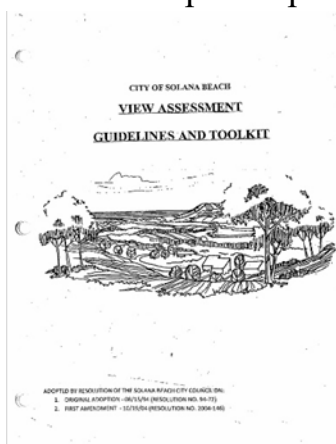
From the outset, the City Council made a conscious decision that Solana Beach would not establish a Planning Commission or a Design Review Board, unlike neighboring Del Mar. Instead, the City vested design and land-use oversight directly in its Development Review Permit (DRP) process, administered by City staff and decided by the City Council itself. By combining zoning review, design evaluation, and discretionary decision-making into a single public process, the City ensured that aesthetic judgments and land-use issues were resolved in one transparent forum, directly accountable to voters.

This streamlined structure eliminated the additional bureaucracy of an appointed review body. It reflected the City’s practical style of governance: limited staff, straightforward processes, and direct public access to elected officials. In Solana Beach, design discussions and land-use decisions were deliberately kept close to the Council, avoiding insulation between residents and the people ultimately responsible for shaping the community’s built environment.

As new, larger homes began appearing across the city, particularly along the bluffs and in older beach neighborhoods, residents grew increasingly vocal about their impact. Some viewed the new construction as architectural progress; others saw it as a threat to the City’s established rhythm of cottages and small lots. The tension prompted the City to formalize procedures for evaluating the impacts of size, scale, and views.

The City also rewrote the existing View Assessment Ordinance, which defined a structured process to protect both public and private ocean views. Homeowners proposing major additions or rebuilds had to install story poles outlining and marking the height of their projects, giving neighbors a chance to see the effect before construction began. Disputes often led to mediation and, in some cases, appeals before the City Council. The process added time and cost, but also transparency, acknowledging that the City’s most precious resource, its coastal views, belonged to everyone.

As redevelopment pressures continued, the City expanded its toolbox with the



Neighborhood Design Guidelines, an illustrated handbook that outlined preferred architectural massing, roof forms, and design relationships among neighboring homes. The intent was to reduce subjectivity and help applicants design with context in mind. Even so, debates persisted over what “compatibility” meant in practice. A flat-roofed contemporary home might fit comfortably on one block but appear intrusive on another.

City ordinances affect Solana Beach’s neighborhoods unevenly because the City is primarily composed of subdivisions, many of which, as we discussed, are governed by private covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) administered by homeowners’ associations (HOAs). These private rules

often go beyond City ordinances in prescribing architectural styles, building heights, roof materials, fencing, and landscaping. Together, they create an overlapping set of controls that define the “look and feel” of much of residential Solana Beach.

Compounding this complexity, the entire City lies within California’s Coastal Zone, meaning that all significant development is also subject to the California Coastal Act and the policies of the California Coastal Commission. The City’s Local Coastal Program (LCP), certified in the early 1990s, functions as the implementing arm of those state regulations.

As a result, any new construction or substantial renovation within Solana Beach must typically clear three layers of review:

1. Coastal Review, compliance with state coastal policies (public access, visual impacts, and bluff protection).
2. Municipal Review, conformity with Solana Beach’s zoning code, design review standards, and municipal ordinances.
3. Private HOA Review, adherence to CC&Rs that may impose stricter limits than City law, particularly in planned communities such as Lomas Santa Fe Estates, Isla Verde, and Brisas del Mar.

In effect, a property owner today still faces two of the same three hurdles that existed before incorporation, when Solana Beach was under County jurisdiction: state (now administered by the Coastal Commission) and local (now handled by the City rather than the County). The difference is that local control now resides within the City, which can tailor its ordinances to neighborhood concerns, while the Coastal Commission retains oversight for shoreline, view, and access issues.

By the late 2000s, Solana Beach’s approach, relying on its Planning Commission, height and floor-area controls, and the View Assessment Ordinance, was widely recognized as one of the most disciplined frameworks among coastal cities. While the process could be slow and contentious, it reflected the community’s enduring belief that local character and scale were worth defending.

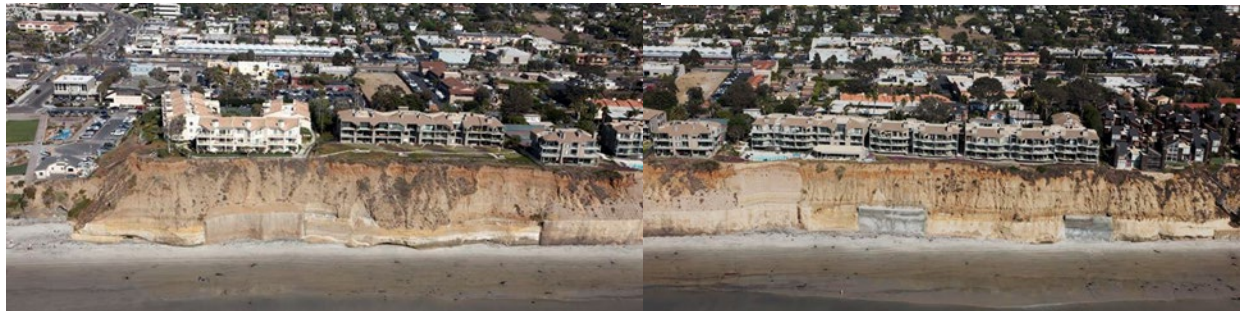
Ultimately, the “Mansionization” debate shifted its focus from architecture to local control itself. Solana Beach had chosen a middle path, eschewing Del Mar’s formal

design board but maintaining strict, enforceable standards through its Planning Commission. Each zoning amendment, view hearing, and appeal reaffirmed the principle that had inspired incorporation: that the shape and character of Solana Beach would be determined by those who lived within its boundaries, not by developers or remote county planners.

The Bluff-Top Condominiums and the Coastal Policy Battles



Oceanfront properties have always been prime real estate. Typically, the location of estates. San Diego County's bluff property was no exception. As suburbanization fueled housing growth in San Diego, bluff property was among the first areas to be developed. This was an era where such properties were situated as close to the rim of a bluff as possible. Bluff stability and erosion were not an issue, but the view was.



But the crowding of structures to maximize the use of this most valuable land created resentment among the population that wanted to see and access the beach. At the same time, by the late 1980s to early 1990s, the coastline was eroding at the rate of .3 feet per year. The *El Niño* cycle brought record storm surges, with sea levels rising to 10 times the levels seen earlier. Bluff collapses were becoming more frequent. The homeowners sought measures to protect their investments.

Two camps were forming.

For a decade since the early Fifties, the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce lobbied to have Sierra Street designated for development.

Highway 101: The First Commercial Spine

In the years after World War II, Solana Beach's life and rhythm revolved around a single road. U.S. Highway 101, known locally as Coast Highway, ran straight through the young beach town, hugging the edge of the bluff before curving toward Cardiff. It was the City's showcase and its front porch, where every traveler between Los Angeles and San Diego passed by its gas stations, grocery markets, and motor courts. The glow of neon motel signs and the scent of frying hamburgers defined the town's public image as surely as its beach did.

In the 1950s, 101 was still a two-lane road that carried both long-distance drivers and locals who treated it as their Main Street. Businesses were small, family-run, and directly accessible from the highway; cars parked at the curb, and tourists might see the ocean between rooftops. The Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce saw its task as keeping that corridor alive, painting curbs, planting palms, and printing maps to draw the traveler's eye. For three decades, the town's fortunes quite literally flowed along the line of the old Coast Highway.

Sierra and 101

The center of town was the Plaza, and with Highway 101, the commercial core. By the 1950s, the bluff properties from the Plaza northward were largely built out with houses and beach cottages. To the south of the Plaza, however, particularly south of Dahlia, much of the bluff remained vacant or underused. The land to the east of the Plaza was filled with lumberyards, warehouses, machine shops, and storage yards, all served by the nearby rail line. If the commercial district were ever to expand, Sierra Street appeared to be the logical place for it to grow.

In the early 1950s, the Chamber of Commerce, as recalled in the *Solana Beach Citizen* ("Glimpses of the Past," Oct. 15, 1977), launched a campaign to extend and improve Sierra Street, envisioning it as a secondary business corridor parallel to Highway 101. Under nearly a dozen Chamber presidents, volunteers petitioned property owners, lobbied the County Board of Supervisors, and pushed for sidewalks, curb improvements, and basic infrastructure.

It was an ambitious idea for an unincorporated community still governed from downtown San Diego. Chamber leaders could advocate, but without zoning authority or redevelopment tools, much depended on the County's willingness to support their vision. County engineers focused primarily on regional traffic circulation, not on the small-town urban form the Chamber imagined. And while Highway 101 was still the main coastal route, the looming construction of Interstate 5 would soon divert travelers, leaving the land between 101 and Sierra uncertain and ripe for speculation.

Whatever the Chamber hoped Sierra Avenue might become, it never materialized. Instead of storefronts and professional offices, the street and its surroundings were filled with something entirely different: condominiums.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, regional market forces had shifted. Where the Chamber had once pictured a commercial street, developers saw an opportunity for high-value residential construction. The coast was nearly built out, older beach cottages were aging, and a new generation of buyers wanted ocean views, low maintenance, and close access to the highway. The County, still the land-use authority before Solana Beach incorporated, saw no compelling reason to oppose residential zoning. Multi-story condos began rising where Chamber sketches had once pictured shopfronts.

For long-time residents, the change was jarring. Where merchants had hoped for tree-lined sidewalks and a lively extension of the business district, they instead saw blank walls, gated courtyards, and private drives. Sierra Avenue's chance of becoming a local "Main Street" gave way to a denser neighborhood largely without commerce—an enclave whose buildings turned inward, altering the skyline, blocking views, and increasing traffic on narrow streets. The concerns voiced then would echo decades later in debates over new development.

For the Chamber, it became a sobering lesson: Solana Beach could not shape its commercial future on optimism alone. Land values, County zoning, and coastal demand—not local aspirations—would define the destiny of Sierra Avenue and the town's southern gateway.

From Condos to Cityhood: Taking Back Control

The condominium boom of the 1970s did more than change the skyline; it changed Solana Beach's sense of itself. What had begun as a hopeful effort to build a self-sustaining business center became a cautionary tale about what happens when decisions are made from afar. Each new project, taller, denser, more walled-off than the last, was approved not by people who lived in Solana Beach, but by planners and supervisors in the County of San Diego. The community watched as its coastline and streetscape were transformed by outside hands.

Residents began to connect the dots. Suppose the County could allow entire neighborhoods of condos where the Chamber had envisioned shops and sidewalks. What would stop it from approving even larger developments along the bluffs or anywhere else in the City? The issue was no longer just aesthetics; it was self-determination. The cry that had once been about traffic and noise grew into something more profound: "Who gets to decide what Solana Beach will be?"

By the early 1980s, that question had become a rallying point for incorporation. Meetings filled church halls and living rooms, with long-term residents recalling how forces had reshaped their once-sleepy town, which they couldn't influence. The Sierra Avenue experience, once a simple planning disappointment, became a poignant object lesson in what happens when a community lacks its own government. Out of that frustration grew a movement determined to chart its own future, to write its own zoning code, and to preserve the character that had drawn people there in the first place.

When Solana Beach finally voted to incorporate in 1986, the victory carried more than the symbolism of independence. It was a turning point in a story that had begun three decades earlier, when the Chamber of Commerce first tried to plan for a commercial district and found itself overrun by condos instead. Cityhood was, in a sense, the community's second attempt at designing its own destiny, and this time, it would not leave the outcome to someone else's vision.

However, even before incorporation, residents of Solana Beach had worried that the City's most fragile and scenic resource, the ocean bluffs, were being consumed by condominium development. Under the County of San Diego's control, building approvals were routinely granted for large bluff-top projects that maximized density to the edge of the cliff. County planners, far removed from the daily reality

of erosion and wave action, appeared more responsive to developers than to residents who watched the coastline recede every winter. The result was a line of bluff-top condominiums, many built in the 1970s and early 1980s, that alarmed homeowners and galvanized support for incorporation. The community's vision for cityhood was, in part, a promise to prevent another disaster like "the China Wall."

Erosion and the Sea Wall Dilemma



By the mid-1990s, the issue had shifted from building new structures to protecting the ones that already existed. Erosion continued to threaten the condominium complexes constructed close to the edge under earlier rules.



Bluff-top homeowners began petitioning the City for permission to install sea walls, soldier piles, and tie-back systems to prevent catastrophic loss.

The requests ignited one of Solana Beach's most divisive public discussions. For the bluff-top owners, their position was deeply personal. Many had purchased homes or condos decades earlier under County-issued permits and believed they had a right to defend those properties from natural erosion. They viewed the denial of protective structures as an unfair taking of legally established property rights. Their argument was rooted in both practicality and emotion: erosion was not an abstraction; it was a daily, visible advance of the ocean toward their foundations. Homeowners warned that, without adequate stabilization, they would lose everything, and that the City's refusal to allow armoring might expose it to liability for unsafe conditions.

Behind them stood well-organized homeowners' associations, especially those from Seascape Surf, Del Mar Shores Terrace, and Solana Beach & Tennis Club, as well as homeowners on the northern bluffs, who pooled funds for lawyers, engineers, and geotechnical consultants. Their message was simple: the right to protect one's home should not vanish with the tide.

Opposition: The Public Trust and the Natural Bluff

The opposition saw the issue quite differently. For many residents, surfers, and environmental groups, the bluffs were part of the public trust, a natural landscape

belonging to everyone, not a fortress wall for the few who could afford oceanfront property. The Surfrider Foundation, California Coastal Commission staff, and local activists argued that every new seawall disrupted the natural cycle of bluff retreat and sand replenishment. When the bluff no longer eroded, it ceased producing sand, and over time, the public beach would disappear beneath the walls.

To them, armoring was not protection but privatization, turning a natural shoreline into a concrete corridor. They objected to the industrial appearance of shotcrete facades and the long-term effect of replacing living bluffs with artificial ones. The moral dimension was equally powerful: residents of inland communities, many of whom were already upset by the very existence of the condos, asked why the public should subsidize or tolerate walls that benefited only a handful of wealthy property owners while degrading a resource shared by all. The Coastal Commission took up their cause, framing the debate not as a local dispute but as part of California's broader struggle to preserve public access and coastal integrity.

The Local Coastal Plan: A New Framework for Control

Once incorporated in 1986, one of the new City's first major responsibilities was the preparation of a Local Coastal Program (LCP), as required by the California Coastal Act of 1976. The LCP was intended to translate statewide coastal protection policies into local land-use law, giving cities the authority to issue coastal development permits upon certification by the California Coastal Commission.

For Solana Beach, the LCP was both a planning document and a moral statement. It represented an opportunity to correct what many residents saw as years of unchecked bluff-top construction under County jurisdiction. Early drafts introduced stricter setback standards, rigorous geotechnical review requirements, and new measures to preserve scenic views, public access, and the natural character of the coastline. In a sense, this was the very reason the City had formed: to bring local judgment and restraint to coastal development.

The City's Middle Ground

Caught between these opposing visions, the City of Solana Beach sought to strike a balance between private rights and public responsibility. Its approach was

pragmatic and procedural, designed to defuse the conflict through policy rather than ideology.

The City required that any request for a bluff-retention device be backed by independent geotechnical studies demonstrating a genuine structural threat, not just precaution. It developed a sand mitigation program, under which each approved seawall generated a compensatory payment to replace lost sand volume through replenishment projects elsewhere along the coast. And, crucially, every permit came with a 20-year expiration date, a condition first championed by the Coastal Commission to ensure that future generations could reevaluate whether the wall was still necessary or compatible with new coastal conditions.

This balancing act, scientific justification, economic mitigation, and temporal limitation became Solana Beach's signature contribution to coastal policy. It did not satisfy everyone, but it allowed the City to issue permits, manage liability, and remain in good standing with the Commission.

Today, if you consider the City's intentional desire to maintain vertical beach access and visual breaks, Solana Beach's coastline has become a patchwork of armoring interspersed with public corridors (with roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of them now fronted by some form of shoreline protection), a deliberate planning compromise between erosion control and beach accessibility.

The Bluff Park Plan: Preservation Meets Access

While debates over seawalls continued, another conflict was being addressed. Two bluff-top condominium complexes, Surfsong and Las Brisas, had agreed, as a condition of their permits, to dedicate roughly an acre of land for a public park. Yet "what kind of park?" would become a point of contention. Homeowners sought privacy and minimal intrusion; others in the City argued for full coastal access and a continuous bluff-top trail.

Out of those arguments grew a broader vision. Residents and planners realized that much of the bluff, especially the narrow strips west of the former Pacific Avenue alignment, was already publicly owned, had been dedicated in earlier subdivisions, or could be acquired through future dedications. Rather than allowing those parcels to erode or sit idle, the City conceived of them as part of a unified public realm.

By the early 2000s, the **Bluff Park Master Plan** had taken shape, proposing a linked series of trails, overlooks, and landscaped viewing areas stretching from Fletcher Cove to Tide Park. The plan balanced recreation with protection by fencing unstable edges, utilizing native and drought-tolerant vegetation to stabilize soils, and installing interpretive signs to explain coastal geology and erosion.

One additional issue remained. Our beaches were shrinking. The normal rise and fall of the beaches with the seasons was not in the same balance as it had traditionally been. We were losing beach sand at a noticeable rate. Climate change and rising sea levels were shrinking beaches faster than the lagoons' runoff and other traditional sources could mitigate. The opponents of seawalls blamed the phenomenon, at least in part, on the bluffs' armoring.

The argument in response is that in Solana Beach, a small percentage of sand replenishment comes from natural bluff erosion.

Unlike many older California beach towns that once drew sand from nearby rivers or dune fields, Solana Beach never possessed a natural inland source of beach-quality material. The City's only significant on-shore contribution came during the late-1990s "*Big Dig*," when excavation of the railroad trench yielded tens of thousands of cubic yards of terrace sand. A small portion of this was screened and placed on the beach, but the remainder was too silty for coastal use. Since then,



virtually all beach nourishment had relied on offshore borrow sites. Minor quantities from river-mouth dredging have occasionally supplemented these efforts, but no continuing land-based supply exists. As a result, Solana Beach's shoreline maintenance and bluff protection depend on periodic, federally and state-sponsored sand

replenishment. This engineered lifeline underscores the City's vulnerability to erosion and sea-level rise.

Legacy of the Bluff Controversies

The debates over bluff-top condominiums, sea walls, and coastal access defined Solana Beach's formative years, and, in many ways, its enduring ethos. The tension between protecting private property and preserving the natural shoreline has never been fully resolved; it is a dynamic equilibrium, revisited with every new permit, lawsuit, and storm season. Yet the outcome has been distinctive: Solana Beach developed one of California's most comprehensive, science-based coastal management programs, weaving mitigation, monitoring, and adaptation into a single community framework.

The antipathy toward County rule that the condominium battles had dredged up ended with the buildings remaining in place, along with their view-blocking silhouettes. The dream of a continuous rim park gave way to a modest acre of public bluff park at the far northern edge of the condo row. On the other hand, the long-disputed question of beach access through the private developments found an elegant resolution: the City accepted ownership and maintenance of the Seascape Sur, Surfsong, and Las Brisas stairways, transforming former private amenities into public gateways to the shore.

What began as a fear of "condos on the edge" evolved into a decades-long civic dialogue about what kind of coastline Solana Beach wished to bequeath to the future, one armored by concrete or one open to both nature and people. The City's answer, imperfect yet enduring, lies somewhere between the two.

Gluing it together

As the City moved into the late 1980s and early 1990s, it inherited several major issues that would shape its early agenda and define its identity. Along Highway 101, the new government established a Property Owners Advisory Committee (which became the Highway 101 Merchants Association) to guide improvements, including landscaping, medians, parking, and signage, laying the groundwork for what would later become the Highway 101 Revitalization Plan. The Cedros Design District, the other major shopping district in the City, established its own revitalization district, comprising the owners of commercial properties along South Cedros, and collaborated with the City to create the Cedros Design District. Along the coastal bluffs, City leaders began drafting policies to manage bluff stabilization

and protect coastal views, responding to long-standing anger over the massive County-approved condominiums known locally as the “China Wall.” Early bluff studies from this period evolved into the strict bluff and seawall ordinances that would later define the City’s coastal management program.

At the same time, Solana Beach collaborated with the North County Transit District and Caltrans on plans to lower the railroad grade and construct a modern train station. This project, completed in the 1990s, became a regional success story for the small city.

Other efforts focused on Fletcher Cove and public access to the beach, where modest improvements, new stairs, lifeguard facilities, and parking reinforced the community’s image as a genuine coastal town rather than a commuter suburb.

Financially, the City had to be disciplined. With limited property-tax revenue locked in by the post–Proposition 13 formulas of 1979, Solana Beach depended largely on sales taxes from businesses along Highway 101, hotel occupancy taxes from its hotels, and franchise and development impact fees. To stay solvent, the City avoided debt, relied on service contracts rather than large departments, and emphasized partnerships, a model that became the hallmark of its “contract city” approach.

By the early 1990s, Solana Beach had demonstrated that a small, citizen-driven coastal city could govern itself efficiently. It had a professional staff, a certified General Plan and Local Coastal Program, and a recognizable identity as an arts-friendly, environmentally conscious beach town. What began as a protest against County control evolved into a model of balanced local governance, cautious about growth, proud of its community character, and firmly rooted in coastal stewardship.

By the mid-1990s, Solana Beach had found its footing as a confident young city. The groundwork laid in its first decade, careful planning, fiscal restraint, and a commitment to coastal character, was beginning to pay off in visible ways. Projects that had once been aspirations were now taking shape, and the City’s sense of identity was maturing.

One of the most transformative efforts was the completion of the Solana Beach train station and the accompanying rail grade-separation project. For decades, the

tracks that ran through the center of town had divided the community and created traffic hazards at every crossing. Working with the North County Transit District and Caltrans, the City helped secure funding and approvals for the ambitious plan to lower the tracks below street level and build a modern, pedestrian-friendly station. When the new station opened in 1994, it instantly became a regional model, proof that even a small coastal city could execute major infrastructure projects with precision and vision. The station unified the community, made rail travel more accessible, and reinforced Solana Beach's identity as a walkable, connected town.

At the same time, the City's attention turned to Highway 101, its historic main street and economic backbone. The corridor had long been a patchwork of businesses and signs reflecting County-era neglect. Under City direction, a series of planning studies and design workshops led to a comprehensive revitalization plan. Property owners and business leaders worked with City staff and the Highway 101 Merchants Association to improve medians, sidewalks, lighting, and landscaping. The effort transformed the old highway into a landscaped boulevard lined with palms and flowers, and featuring pedestrian crossings. The changes not only improved traffic flow and safety but also established the visual language that still defines the Solana Beach streetscape today, human-scaled, inviting, and distinctly local.

Just a block east, Cedros Avenue was emerging as the city's cultural heart. Once an unremarkable street of Quonset huts and industrial warehouses, Cedros began to attract designers, artists, and independent retailers drawn by its bohemian charm and affordable spaces. The City encouraged this evolution through flexible zoning and streetscape improvements. By the late 1990s, Cedros had evolved into the Cedros Design District, renowned throughout the region as a haven for art, furniture, music, and coastal style. When the **Belly Up Tavern** and other creative venues established themselves in the area, they brought the district both cultural energy and economic vitality. The city's early faith in small-scale, locally owned businesses proved well-placed.

The same philosophy guided efforts along the coast. Fletcher Cove, the City's defining natural landmark, continued to receive attention as both a recreational hub and civic gathering place. Modest yet thoughtful improvements, such as enhanced

beach access, reorganized parking, and improved lifeguard facilities, kept the area accessible and welcoming. Over time, the park became the symbolic front porch of Solana Beach, where civic events, art installations, and public celebrations reinforced a shared sense of belonging.

Fiscal discipline remained central to everything the City did. Revenues grew slowly but steadily through sales and transient occupancy taxes, while the City resisted the temptation to expand government. The contract-city model, which outsources key services while keeping decision-making local, remained efficient and flexible. As other small municipalities struggled with the financial constraints of Proposition 13, Solana Beach quietly built reserves and maintained balanced budgets. Its reputation as a “small city that lives within its means” became part of its civic identity.

By the end of the 1990s, the transformation was unmistakable. Solana Beach had matured from a restless unincorporated community into a cohesive coastal city with a clear vision of itself. The train station and Highway 101 improvements gave it structure; Cedros Avenue gave it soul. A City that had once fought to make its own decisions now had a distinct voice, creative, careful, and independent. It was no longer defined by what it was against but by what it had built: a community that valued design, stewardship, and the quiet confidence of local control.

The 2000s: Maturity and the Geography of Balance

By the turn of the century, Solana Beach was no longer defining itself against the County; it was learning to live within its own boundaries, boundaries that contained striking contrasts. To the west, the Pacific and its bluffs remained the emotional core of the City. To the east rose the manicured lawns of the Lomas Santa Fe Country Club and the suburban neighborhoods that had developed around it in the 1970s and 1980s. North and south, the San Elijo and San Dieguito lagoons framed the community with wetlands that linked it to a larger coastal ecosystem. Each of these landscapes required a different kind of governance, and the early-2000s City Council learned to move among them.

Bluff stabilization and shoreline policy consumed much of the decade’s public debate. At the same time, residents east of the freeway raised quieter but equally important concerns: traffic on Lomas Santa Fe Drive, stormwater runoff from golf course irrigation, and protection of hillside views. City planners began to think in

terms of layers: coastal, suburban, and ecological. The General Plan was updated to knit these zones together, acknowledging that Solana Beach's future depended as much on the health of its lagoons and neighborhoods as on the drama of its cliffs.

The San Elijo Lagoon restoration, coordinated with regional and state partners, became a model of environmental cooperation. Trails and interpretive signage transformed the wetlands into both a habitat and a classroom. At the same time, the San Dieguito Lagoon to the south underwent its own revival, opening new trails that connected Solana Beach to Del Mar and the broader San Dieguito River Park system. The City's small planning staff found itself working at the scale of the watershed, an evolution few could have imagined at incorporation.

Meanwhile, the Lomas Santa Fe Country Club and suburban east side matured into a stable civic base. Homeowners' associations functioned almost as neighborhood parliaments, bringing a suburban pragmatism to City Hall's coastal idealism. Their concerns, traffic circulation, landscaping, and neighborhood compatibility, tempered the city's policies with everyday realism. The east-west balance between bluffs and hills, beach and fairway, became the hidden engine of Solana Beach's stability.

The 2010s: Integration and Identity

In the next decade, the City refined the balance between its four natural edges: the ocean, the two lagoons, and the inland rise of Lomas Santa Fe. Climate adaptation on the coast ran in parallel with water conservation and runoff control programs in inland areas. Suburban drainage improvements were linked to lagoon restoration, demonstrating that even manicured neighborhoods contribute to coastal health.

As housing pressures mounted, planners looked again to the east side for potential infill while protecting the country-club open space as a green lung for the City. Mixed-use zoning along Highway 101 and around the train station carried some of the growth load. Still, the suburbs remained crucial for balance, offering quiet residential life within minutes of the coast, a rarity in Southern California.

The lagoons, once boundaries, became gateways. The San Elijo restoration was completed, and the southern trails at San Dieguito were linked with Solana Beach's network of bike paths, providing the City with a literal and symbolic circulation

system. The natural corridors complemented the cultural ones, Cedros Avenue, the 101, and Lomas Santa Fe, so that movement across town reflected the diversity of its terrain.

The 2020s: Technology, Resilience, and Renewal

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, these varied landscapes gave the City resilience. The wide fairways of the country club, the greenbelts of the suburbs, and the open trails along both lagoons became sanctuaries when indoor life paused. Residents walked, cycled, and rediscovered the topography that had defined their City's health all along.

City Hall and the Chamber of Commerce turned to technology to preserve connections. Council meetings streamed from City Hall to living rooms on Lomas Santa Fe; digital permitting and QR-coded business directories united merchants from Cedros to the Country Club. Even as social distance reshaped daily life, the City's physical layout, a compact ridge between two lagoons, helped people remain outdoors and together.

Environmental management, too, entered a digital phase. Aerial surveys tracked bluff retreat; GIS mapping integrated lagoon hydrology with inland drainage; and climate adaptation became a citywide discipline rather than a coastal niche. The Shoreline Management and Climate Adaptation Plan tied together data from beaches, bluffs, lagoons, and uplands, finally giving scientific form to the intuition that residents had long shared: that the City's health is one interconnected system.

The business revival of the mid-2020s carried that same holistic tone. The Cedros Design District regained its rhythm with hybrid markets and online storefronts, while Highway 101 welcomed visitors again to outdoor cafés and boutiques. The suburban east side modernized its retail plazas and added electric-vehicle infrastructure, showing that innovation need not erase tradition.

By its fortieth anniversary, Solana Beach stood as a city whose geography had become philosophy. The bluffs still defined its silhouette, but the lagoons defined its conscience, and the country-club neighborhoods defined its steadiness. Across four decades, the city had learned that independence was not a wall around its boundaries but a way of taking responsibility for all that lay within them.

Epilogue: The Shape of a Small City

When Solana Beach incorporated in 1986, it did so as more than a coastal strip; it was a mosaic of landscapes that together formed a single community. The bluffs and beaches added drama, but the suburbs east of Highway 5, including the San Dieguito and San Elijo lagoons, as well as the Lomas Santa Fe Country Club, provided depth, rhythm, and a sense of daily life. Each of these areas, in its own way, reflected the City's central theme: balancing independence with interconnection.

The country club and master-planned neighborhoods that rose east of the freeway in the 1970s and early 1980s represented Solana Beach's suburban side, with orderly streets, landscaped slopes, and golf-course greens designed for families seeking space and security. Although physically separate from the old coastal core, these tracts were vital to the incorporation process. Their residents, many of whom are young professionals and retirees, brought stability, a tax base, and civic experience. The Country Club area provided the new City with both resources and responsibility, requiring it to maintain its parks, medians, and open spaces while preserving the tranquil tone that distinguished it from inland development.

The suburban neighborhoods also became the city's quiet center of civic participation. Homeowners' associations and local committees became the grassroots infrastructure of self-government. They lobbied the City for traffic calming, view protection, and school improvements, demonstrating that cityhood was not only about beaches and business, but also about the quality of life inland. Over time, these neighborhoods helped integrate the City's two halves, the coastal village and the suburban hillside, into a single civic identity.

At the same time, the lagoons to the north and south framed Solana Beach's boundaries and its environmental conscience. The San Elijo Lagoon, stretching toward Cardiff, and the San Dieguito Lagoon, opening to the south near Del Mar, were once seen as barriers to growth; after incorporation, they became symbols of protection. Their tidal waters reminded residents that Solana Beach was part of a larger natural system. The City collaborated with regional partners to restore wetlands, expand trails, and safeguard wildlife habitats, transforming former flood zones into living classrooms for ecology and climate resilience. By the 2000s, the

lagoons stood as gateways rather than edges, quiet affirmations that environmental stewardship could coexist with urban life.

Technology and the pandemic later tested these connections but also renewed them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the open landscapes of the lagoons and the expansive fairways of the country club became sanctuaries, places of refuge and reflection. Residents walked and biked the trails, finding in those outdoor spaces a sense of continuity when indoor life was suspended. In that moment, the City's blend of built and natural environments proved its worth: it was both suburban and coastal, human and ecological, old-fashioned and adaptive.

Seen from above, Solana Beach remains a study in balance, with the ocean to the west, lagoons at either end, and neighborhoods climbing east toward Lomas Santa Fe. What began as a collection of disconnected zones now functions as a coherent whole, unified by a shared understanding of place. The country club's fairways, suburban streets, coastal parks, and revived lagoons together tell the story of a city that has found harmony in contrast.

Forty years after incorporation, Solana Beach stands as proof that self-government can be both local and layered. It is a city defined not only by what it has built, but also by what it has chosen to preserve: its open spaces, its shoreline, and its sense of proportion. The same impulse that once compelled residents to free themselves from County control now guides them as stewards of land and water, art and technology, tradition and change.

In the end, Solana Beach's lasting achievement is wholeness, a small city that has learned to integrate its coast, suburbs, and lagoons into a single, enduring concept of home.

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration (2011)

In 2011, Solana Beach celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its incorporation with a citywide event. A citizens' committee, led by a City Council member, took charge of planning the celebration.



One of the first steps was designing a special logo to commemorate the occasion. Local artists were invited to contribute ideas, and the committee ultimately decided to modify the official City logo to reflect the milestone.

The celebration's main event took place at City Hall, featuring a historical photographic presentation of Solana Beach's growth and development. Residents were encouraged to contribute images from their collections that showcased the City's past. The Chamber of Commerce and the Civic & Historical Society also combed through their archives, while the San Diego Historical Society's collection was searched for relevant images. Additionally, the San Dieguito Citizen, an early local newspaper, made its archives available.

Civic & Historical Society members gathered at La Colonia Community Center to review these materials, selecting and digitizing photographs of interest. The images were organized and often paired with new photos taken in 2011 to capture the City's evolution. The final product was a slideshow presentation illustrating the transformation of Solana Beach, with historical images morphing into their modern counterparts. Enlarged versions of these photos were displayed as posters during the celebration and later placed in the Visitor's Center near the local train station for ongoing public viewing.

Aerial photographs of the California coastline, taken by the California Coastal Commission and others since 1972, also played a key role in the event. The committee secured images of the Solana Beach coastline from the earliest available records and the most recent surveys. On the day of the celebration, these images were displayed around the City Council Chambers, allowing attendees to visually compare the City's growth over time. These coastline photos continue to be used today at the Civic & Historical Society's booth at Fiesta del Sol, the City's annual summer street fair.

No celebration would be complete without a parade. Just like the 10th anniversary, the parade is on 101 and ended at the Fiesta Del Sol. Every organization in Solana Beach, whether public or private, large or small, was invited to participate. The streets were filled with convertibles, trucks, fire engines, bicycles, scooters, baby carriages, and walkers, all moving in unison with their respective banners.



Many of the photographs featured in this book originate from this community effort, which preserves the City's rich history for future generations.



Between 2011 and 2025, Solana Beach continued to mature, investing in infrastructure, resilience, and cultural life while weathering unexpected disruptions. The Shoreline Management Program stabilized cliffs and widened beaches by replenishing sand. The Lomas Santa Fe Corridor Project, a \$15 million redesign of the city’s main east–west street, moved forward to improve walkability, bike safety, and community character.

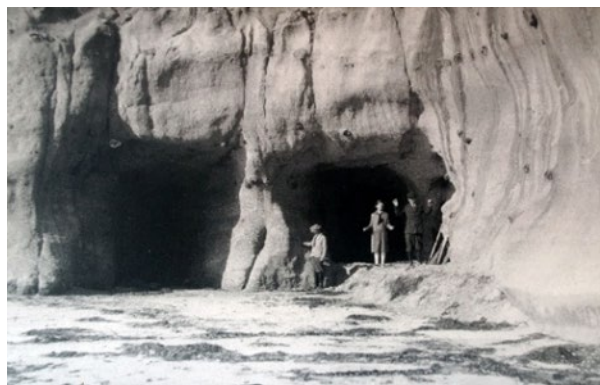
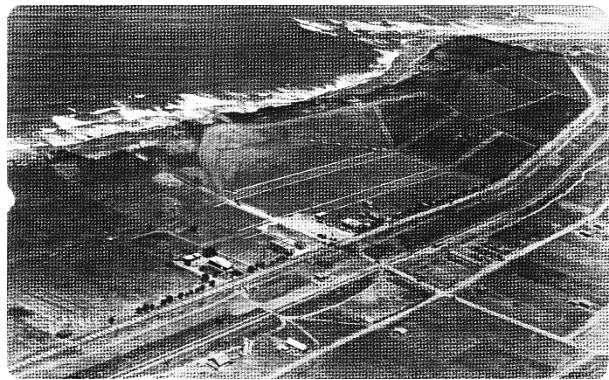
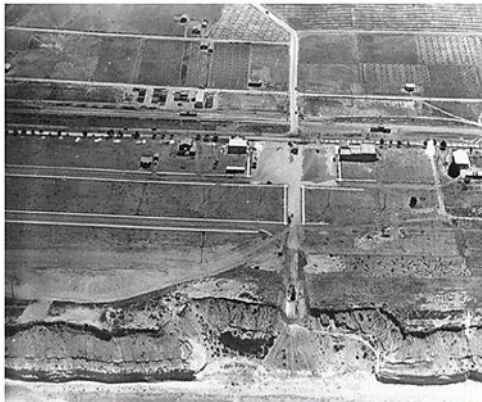
The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) tested Solana Beach’s resilience. Local shops, restaurants, and the **Belly-Up Tavern** closed during statewide shutdowns, and even Fiesta del Sol was canceled. Businesses adapted with outdoor dining and online sales, while residents turned to Fletcher Cove and local trails as sanctuaries. Community groups in La Colonia mobilized to support families, and all levels of government provided relief for renters and small businesses. When concerts, festivals, and the Fiesta Del Sol returned, they became symbols of recovery. The pandemic left lasting marks: a stronger outdoor culture, greater reliance on remote work, and heightened awareness of economic vulnerability.

Solana Beach has matured into a nearly fully developed City, with ~98% of its land in use. The business community continues to evolve, with a growing emphasis on tourism, digital presence, and economic diversification. Modern planning policies prioritize walkability, mixed-use development, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, particularly in areas like Highway 101 and Cedros Avenue. The City’s commitment to balanced growth and environmental stewardship remains at the heart of its identity. Policies promoting “Complete Streets” have introduced bike lanes, improved sidewalks, and enhanced public spaces to reduce car dependence and foster a more vibrant, connected community.

From its origins as a rural outpost to its emergence as a distinctive coastal City, Solana Beach's journey reflects a balance of preservation and progress, shaped by visionary leadership, community engagement, and a deep appreciation for its unique coastal setting.

In the sections that follow, we build upon the work undertaken for the City's 25th Anniversary celebration, which documented Solana Beach's principal commercial districts as they appeared at that time. These sections extend that effort by tracing the evolution of individual areas and establishments, illustrating the broader patterns of change that have defined the City's economic and physical landscape.

VIEWS OF THE BEGINNING



FLETCHER COVE

The story of Solana Beach (which means “a sunny place”) begins on the City’s western edge, where the ocean, bluffs, and beaches define Solana Beach’s landscape and give the town its name. Along this coastline, the bluffs rise to one hundred feet in places, shaping the shoreline that has drawn residents and visitors alike for generations. To the north, a beach forms at the mouth of the San Elijo Lagoon, fed by Escondido Creek, while to the south, another beach forms where the San Dieguito Lagoon meets the Pacific Ocean. At the heart of this section of coastline lies Fletcher Cove Beach and Park, where the City’s story truly begins. Named after Col. Ed Fletcher, the founder of Solana Beach, Fletcher Cove remains the City’s most iconic and historically significant beachfront.

Commonly referred to as Pillbox due to its history as a World War II coastal

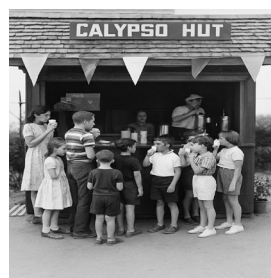


outlook installation, Fletcher Cove is the City’s principal beach and park. Located at the western end of Plaza Street and the City’s central Plaza. Fletcher Cove offers easy public access and parking and is conveniently located near the Solana Beach train station. When Col. Fletcher

first envisioned Solana Beach, it lacked a key amenity: a direct route to the ocean. In the mid-1920s, he solved this problem by blasting an opening through the bluffs with a water cannon, creating a passageway connecting his property to the shoreline. The bluff opening, along with a man-made ramp, quickly became a major attraction for early residents and prospective buyers.



The new access point provided a view and a direct path from the railroad tracks to the ocean.



As the town grew, Fletcher Cove became a hub for community gatherings and recreation, and, with the Plaza, further established it as the heart of the community. In its early days, the Cove was little more than a parking lot with a lifeguard station. Still, it soon became home to a railroad ticket station and a snack shack called the **Calypso Hut**.

Most of the original parking lot at Fletcher Cove Beach later became Fletcher Cove Park, with a lifeguard station at the western end. In 2007, the City obtained final approval from the Coastal Commission to dedicate the Distillery parking lot across from the Solana Beach Post Office for beach parking and to convert the original beach parking lot into a park. At that time, it updated the restroom facilities and improved the landscaping. There was a desire to transform the area into a park featuring a playground, grassy areas, showers, picnic tables, and a basketball court overlooking the ocean. A plan from M.W. Peltz Associates included ocean-themed elements, such as a large sun and a mosaic compass at the park's entrance. There were insufficient funds to build the Park, so the community contributed funds to make the design possible. A local artist, Betsy Schultz, decorated the Park's retaining walls with ocean-themed mosaics and donor tiles.

In 2024, a second major renovation of Fletcher Cove Park was undertaken, resulting in further improvements, including the refurbishment of the existing tot lot and resurfacing of the basketball court.



The Park was an immediate success. The Parks and Recreation Commission, comprised of residents who are part of the City's citizen involvement efforts, immediately put the Park to good use. It began what would become an annual event: a summer Beach Blanket Movie Night, serving as a fundraiser for the organization's other activities. Community members strapped on utility belts for this event, built a stage, and prepared a movie screen. A local band provided pre-sunset music. The City Council welcomes the attendees. Booths were set up to sell refreshments, and raffle tickets were sold for merchandise donated by local merchants. Among the movies were ones featuring extreme sports, filmed by a local producer and filmmaker. The event continues today.

The Park is also the site of a weekly, family-friendly summer event, developed by the Solana Beach Foundation and City staff, called "Concerts at the Cove". The **Belly Up** (a well-known music venue) provides the music. Attendees sit on the lawn or in beach chairs, and kids dance. It is a well-attended social affair. It is still going on today.



The Parks and Recreation Commission is also responsible for the annual Christmas tree lighting. The Commission provides funds for the tree and ornaments and, with the help of the City staff, decorates the tree. The Mayor and City Council typically conduct a ceremonial tree lighting on the first Sunday of December. Santa's sleigh arrives by fire truck. In the early days, Santa was played by Joe Kellejian, a City Councilman.



A second tree lighting event was recently initiated on the second Saturday of December at La Colonia Park, along with a second Concert series.

Before the conversion of the Fletcher Cove parking lot to Fletcher Cove Park, Fiesta Del Sol was held in that parking lot. After the redesign, the Fiesta was relocated to the Plaza and the Distillery parking lots. Fiesta Del Sol is a Solana Beach tradition that has been held for over 40 years.



the Fiesta incorporated live music from **Belly Up**, turning it into a full-fledged music festival. In recent years, it has



The Fiesta Del Sol is a fundraiser for The Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce, initially held in the Fletcher Cove parking lot and organized by Chamber Board members. Unlike other beach town street fairs,

it is now held in the Plaza area, it remains a defining event for the community. The Fiesta Del Sol graduated from a small fundraiser for the Chamber of Commerce, where the members of the Chamber's board were expected to staff, set up, and take down the



event, to a full-blown community-engaging event.



Fletcher Cove Community Center

Up the hill, the Fletcher Cove Community Center has been another important gathering place for Solana Beach residents for nearly eight decades. Initially, a Civilian Conservation Corps barracks was relocated from the Army's 14th Infantry Regiment at Camp Vista. After the war, local men collaborated to convert the barracks into a community center, adding a horseshoe pit, a shuffleboard court, and outdoor seating areas. However, coastal erosion threatened the original horseshoe pit, and it was eventually abandoned. Fencing was subsequently installed to protect the area.

Since its inception, the Community Center has been a hub for meetings, celebrations, and civic events. The Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society, founded in 1953, has long used the space for annual gatherings such as the Holiday Bazaar, as well as for classes and local meetings. However, by 2007, the building had deteriorated significantly, battered by coastal weather and years of deferred maintenance. Recognizing its historical and cultural significance, the City of Solana Beach launched a renovation project. Stephen Dalton Architects, working pro bono, redesigned the building, incorporating a glass-paneled south wall to capture ocean views and wide patio doors for outdoor access.



Despite the City's efforts, funding for the renovation fell short of expectations. The



community rallied, forming the Solana Beach Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to raising the funds needed. The campaign, a joint effort between the City and the Foundation, urged residents to support the project.

A mailer was prepared with this message to the residents:

"Over the years, the structure was rebuilt and maintained by the citizens of Solana Beach. It was the locus of town events and the meeting place for numerous groups... Many residents still remember

attending art classes, parties, and wedding receptions in this humble building with the fabulous ocean view. It became the jewel of the public space in Solana Beach. Today, the Community Center is still used by many of our citizens... still a vital and loved facility. Unfortunately, this gem is in need of significant repair... The City only has a portion of the funds needed to renovate the structure. This is a great opportunity for our City of Solana Beach to come together for a 'Barn Raising.'"

The community answered the call, raising enough funds to hire a contractor.

By 2011, the newly revitalized Fletcher Cove Community Center was completed. The shuffleboard court was filled in during the



renovation, creating a grassy peninsula offering a panoramic ocean vista. Among its new features was an electric piano, used by residents who gathered each month for a community sing-along. The Center

also continued to serve as the meeting place for the Civic and Historical Society's monthly general meetings, thereby maintaining its role as a cherished gathering place for future generations.





BUILDING THE COMMUNITY CENTER

Overlook Park

Overlook Park, which surrounds the Community Center, is another testament to community-driven development and participation. Mike Nichols, a City Council member working pro bono, designed the Park. As with previous projects, the Solana Beach Foundation



led fundraising efforts, and the City provided direction and oversight. The project was largely a grassroots effort, with citizens, local organizations, and contractors volunteering



their time, labor, and materials. Citizens brought their garden tools and cleared the landscape of decades-old ice plant, also known as pickleweed. Once the land was prepared, residents brought succulents from their gardens to plant the landscape or helped plant those brought by the nurseries. Nichols oversaw the placement of walking paths and seating areas, ensuring the park maximized accessibility and natural beauty.

A defining feature of Overlook Park is its sea-themed ceramic mosaic artwork, created by local artist Betsy Schulz. Among these intricate mosaics were those crafted with the help of local schoolchildren, adorning picnic tables. The mosaics depicted marine life such as spiny lobsters, fish, crabs, and octopuses. The artwork visually links Overlook Park and Fletcher Cove Park, unifying the two spaces under a shared celebration of coastal life and creativity.



The Park remains a symbol of community collaboration and pride, a space created by the people of Solana Beach for future generations to enjoy. Like Fletcher Cove, it reflects the City's ongoing commitment to preserving natural beauty, fostering civic engagement, and creating lasting public spaces.







PREPARING THE SITE



AERIAL VIEW OF THE COMMUNITY CENTER AND OVERLOOK PARK

THE PLAZA



The PLAZA was the centerpiece of Col. Ed Fletcher's vision for a thriving town center. Col. Fletcher sited the Plaza west of Highway 101, a short block from Fletcher Cove Beach. Fletcher saw the potential for his property to develop into a sustainable residential and business community, with the creation of the Plaza and other improvements increasing the value of individual lots. Situated along Highway 101, the primary north-south route between Los Angeles and San Diego in the early 1920s, he began shaping the area by constructing one of its first landmarks, a hotel.

The Solana Beach Hotel



The **Solana Beach Hotel's** iconic stone buttresses were built using stones gathered from the surrounding countryside, and the building quickly became

more than just a place for travelers to stay; it was a community hub. In January 1944, the Justice Court was located there. The hotel also hosted the first Sunday School sessions that would later give rise to the Solana Beach Presbyterian Church. Over the years, the building has housed a variety of businesses, including a restaurant (which once raised chickens on-site), a photo studio, a nursery and florist, a shoemaker, real estate offices, and an insurance firm. Today, the building is also home to the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce.





The **Solana Beach Hotel** has undergone several major renovations. The first was in 1990. Early that year, the **Chart House**, a national restaurant chain, moved its corporate headquarters to Solana Beach, settling into a building on Sierra Avenue

where the **Solana Theater** (built in the 1930s) had been. That building had a colorful history. After the theater closed in the 1970s, it became the **Organ Power Pizza Parlor**, featuring a historic Robert Morton organ from the old theater, before transitioning in the 1980s into office space.



The building was controversial when it was first constructed, before the City was incorporated, because it obstructed one of the central views of Fletcher Cove.

Chart House required additional parking spaces for its employees, so it leased and renovated the nearby **Solana Beach Hotel**, converting the rooms into office and training spaces for the company and utilizing the Hotel's existing parking facilities. The hotel's exterior was also remodeled.

In the late 1990s, **Chart House** relocated to Chicago, closing its properties in Solana Beach. The hotel property was converted for other uses.

The Plaza's Business Evolution

The following information relies heavily on a book published by the Civic and Historical Society, titled *Early Solana Beach*, for the location of businesses in early



Solana Beach. This book describes developments made since then. Although the early structures remain essentially unchanged, the companies that occupy them often have not.

After building the Hotel, Fletcher located a bank (later to become **Bank of America**) and a grocery store on the north side of the Plaza. The grocery store doubled as a post office. Both buildings were later converted into **Harker Real Estate**.



Today, the real estate office still contains the original bank vault. The grocery store later became a shoe store and a hair salon, which now operates as **Dirty Dogs**, a dog wash. Alongside the dog wash, various businesses have come and gone, including a dry goods store, a doctor's office, a barber shop, and now a dental center.



Across the Plaza to the south was a former Ford dealership and gas station. The Victorian-style central building, once a pool hall and bar, was later transformed into a series of restaurants: **Delucas**, then a **Dairy Queen** in the 1980s, then **Pasta Pronto**, and later a sushi restaurant. Today, it is known as the **Pillbox Tavern**. At the southwest corner was a bicycle shop, which later became the post office, then **Surf and Saddle**, then **McCaffrey's**, and today is called **Saddle Bar**. A beauty parlor and a dentist's office (once a real estate office) also share adjacent commercial spaces on the south side of the Plaza.



The Plaza briefly served as the original land office for selling property in the new town.

It was a hub of local commerce, reflecting the growing community's needs.

Today, the structures remain largely intact, except for the former gas station, but their uses have adapted to the community's changing needs.

Plaza Renovation



As for the Plaza itself, following World War II, local citizens, many of whom were members of the Women's Civic Club, now the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society, led efforts to enhance the Plaza. In the late 1960s, community members

assisted in landscaping the area and installing a median featuring a fountain and a sunburst sculpture, which became a well-known City landmark.



In 2008, merchants on the north side of the Plaza collaborated with the City to revitalize the Plaza once again. The Plaza was no longer attractive. The landscape was overgrown, and the trees blocked the view across the Plaza to the ocean. The merchants



painted and fixed storefronts, rebuilt the fountain where the sunburst sculpture sits, and relit the Solana Beach sign. The fountain at the base of the sunburst



sculpture had been out of order for years. It was used by surfers



(before showers were installed in Fletcher Cove Park to wash off the salt) and others

as well. Lights were installed in the fountain.

Mike Nichols designed the Plaza renovation, which included the Veterans Memorial at the Plaza's corner. This involved relocating the palm trees, once located in the center median, to the north and south edges of the Plaza, thereby opening up views of the ocean. Additionally, the walkways were redesigned to connect to Fletcher Cove.

From Col. Fletcher's early vision to today's evolving business landscape, the Plaza has remained a central part of the Solana Beach story. There has been a considerable change in the character of the commercial buildings in the Plaza area



over the last forty years. New structures have been added, old ones removed, and others repurposed. A Memorial with flags is in the northern corner of the Plaza, the City's tributes to those who served. Eight palm trees are planted in the Plaza in remembrance of those who gave their lives. Today, the predominant use of commercial space in the Plaza and other commercial buildings on connecting streets is office space. Though the Plaza's function as the City's commercial center has changed, it continues to anchor the community's history, shaped by its residents, businesses, and the enduring spirit of creative adaptation and renewal.



PLAZA VIEWS AFTER 2008 REMODEL



PLAZA VIEWS AFTER 101 REMODEL

HIGHWAY 101

Until the construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s, Highway 101 was the main north-south highway through California, significantly defining the “beach towns” of the early automobile era in Southern California. The section of Highway 101 that runs through Solana Beach is strategically located between Los Angeles and San Diego. During the early automobile era, when cars were more prone to breakdowns and less fuel-efficient, Solana Beach provided several convenient rest areas, gas stations, and auto repair facilities. Its proximity to the Del Mar Fairgrounds and the Del Mar Racetrack further enhanced its appeal, as did the town’s steady growth and ability to meet the needs of both local citizens and visitors.

However, the elements that made Colonel Fletcher’s land valuable as a beach community, Highway 101, and the railroad, also made it challenging to develop a cohesive downtown. Unlike many cities with a traditional town center corridor, Solana Beach had commercial development only on the west side of Highway 101. That is because there was only a narrow and unbuildable strip of land between the eastern edge of the Highway and the railroad tracks.

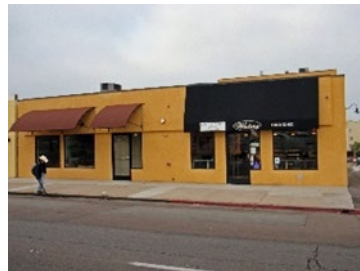
South Highway 101



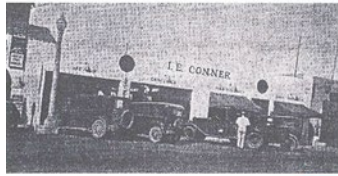
Early businesses along the southern stretch of Highway 101, near the Plaza, included a car dealership and **Cochran's** gas station, which later became **Sacred Spaces**, a custom iron-forging shop, with a coffee kiosk set up on the edge of the property. Today, it's the **San Diego Electric Bike**.



Continuing south, the **Kurtz** drugstore became The **Solana Beach Pharmacy**, which evolved into **Bebe Drugs**, then **Waters** (a delicatessen), and later **Kiln**, a shared office space.



Further south was **Connor's**, a mercantile grocery store with a meat counter. The store also housed the town's first library. The next section of the street contained, at one



time or another, a barber shop, an auto parts store, a radio repair shop, and the first library building. Finally, it turned into **Masuo's**, a sushi restaurant (now closed) with an upstairs apartment rental. Years ago, it was also home to the **Teddy Bear Café**,

which burned down.



The next building was on the site of one of the early homes in Solana Beach, later the site of a mixed-use restaurant and office complex. It housed **Beach Grass Cafe**, which later became **Sunnyside**. In 1983-84, a detached

garage at the rear of the property became home to the **Hideaway Café**, a funky breakfast-and-lunch spot.



Many businesses along South Highway 101 relied heavily on travelers passing through town rather than on local customers. The lower land costs on property



furthest from the Plaza allowed larger sites and buildings, such as motels like **Analos** (Solana spelled backward), which later became an affordable housing complex. One of the many visitor-serving businesses included hotels and restaurants catering to pass-through travelers and visitors going to the Del Mar

Fairgrounds, the Del Mar Racetrack, or further south to Baja California. **El**

Camino Rental, a heavy equipment rental lot, eventually became **Revolution**, a bicycle repair shop and a dental office. The next collection of



shops originally included a laundromat (now occupied by **UPS**), salon, and a veterinary



a

practice, which later became a dog care facility and is now a physical therapy practice.



What was once a **Longs Drug** store has changed to a large **CVS** store sits on this stretch of Highway 101. There was also a Nobu, a Japanese restaurant. Then was a coffee shop. Today, there are offices.



The neighboring lot to the south was a former trailer park and a gas station.



After the gas station closed, it became a drive-through coffee kiosk and a solar company, **Sequoia Solar**. Behind the station were a few houses, a salon, and a trailer park. The whole property was redeveloped into the **Sandbox**, a mixed-use complex with offices, apartments, and three restaurants. Continuing south across Dahlia Street, the former **Bank of America** building (bank operations were relocated to that building decades ago from the Plaza and ultimately to **Town Square Center**) was converted into a private office space.

This southern section of the 101 has two shopping centers, **Beachwalk**, built in



1992, and **Mercado Del Sol**, built in 1975 and renovated in 1996. **Beachwalk** has historically housed several restaurants, including national chains such as **California Pizza Kitchen** (now **Lana**) and **Rubio's**, both long-time tenants, but have since closed. It was also the original home of the popular **Pacific Coast Grill**, which later moved to a beachfront location in a neighboring town. Its fourth large restaurant, named **Blanca's**, closed in 2009. **Solana Beach Kitchen** is at the location today. The shopping center also has a dry cleaner, a bridge club, and health-related establishments.



RESTAURANTS IN BEACHWALK

Adjacent to Beachwalk is a large building that once housed a bowling alley, then became an office for the magazine *Psychology Today*, and later a fitness facility, first named **Frogs**, then **Fit**, and later **The Bxng Club**, which closed in 2025.





South 101 is also home to two hotels, the **Holiday Inn Express** and the **Marriott**, and one of Solana Beach's two time-share properties, the **Sandpiper**. These properties, along with the short-term rentals in the South Sierra condos on the back street (and more recently, Airbnb rentals), house many of the

visitors to the City.



Between the two hotels, a large building was the restaurant **Mon Ami**, which later became **Diego's** nightclub (later **Surfside**). As we discussed earlier, while the club was popular among patrons, it faced opposition from residents and was eventually shut down. The building was sold to the City and became

City Hall.



Adjacent to the Marriott Hotel is the **Parioli** restaurant, formerly the **Seagull Grill**. **Parioli**

showed two-reel movies outdoors in the summer for years. Next is the **Holiday Inn**. Next to the **Holiday Inn** is an **Enterprise Car Rental Agency**.





Mercado Del Sol, the other, smaller shopping center, is home to **Bangkok Bay**, a popular Thai restaurant, and Samurai's original location, which later moved to Town Center Plaza. It also has a Deli called **Qwik Corner**, a bead store called **Oskadusa**, and other offices.



One unique feature of Highway 101 in downtown Solana Beach is that several businesses extend west to



the street behind them. If the business itself did not span the entire depth of the lot, the rear portion often housed a second commercial establishment. While most of these were office buildings, some areas near the Plaza included restaurants, such as **The Naked Café**. Across Sierra Street, one street to the west, are condominium complexes lining the bluff, with over 600 apartments. Despite being located adjacent to shopping centers, the design of the shopping centers, intended for automobiles rather than pedestrians, requires condominium residents to walk through parking lots or around various structures to access restaurants and other businesses. This is an unintended consequence of shopping centers being designed for automobile access before residential development.



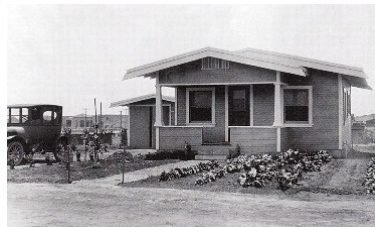
Today, South Highway 101 continues its early pattern of catering to a mix of businesses serving travelers and residents, featuring the same two shopping malls, hotels, a large drugstore, numerous restaurants, and several office buildings.

Typically, when a building changed its original use, the closer it was to the Plaza, the more likely it was to change into office space.

North Highway 101

Businesses along Highway 101, heading north from the Plaza, also have a rich and evolving history. In its early days, the area saw little development. The first building, located at the corner of the Plaza, was **Domicio**, a rug store with a resident interior designer on-site. A spearfishing shop followed; today, it is occupied by **Epic Bicycles**.

One private home eventually became **Love's** restaurant, then a new location of the Teddy Bear Café, before becoming **Sushi Station**.



Continuing north from the Plaza was **Homeloft**, and among other businesses along



this stretch of highway was **Pam's Place**, an eclectic shop offering goods for both tourists and residents



(renamed **Molo**, which was then renamed **Nolki**).



A row of establishments including: **Pizza Port**, an office building (on the site of a **U-Haul** rental facility) with a yogurt shop (later a gelato shop), then a paint store (which became a **Pegasus Pilates**) and later **Lomas**



Brand clothes,, a barbershop, **B&L Bike**, (which became **Roadrunner** shoes), **Mandarin Coast**, (renamed **Tidewater Bar**, and

today, **Chauncey's Pizza And Bar**), a barber shop, a juice bar, and **Java Depot**, which briefly became **Alce** and is now **Mia's**).



The Fuller family owns a significant portion of this block, extending from Highway 101 to Acacia Avenue. At the center of this



property is the **Boardwalk** or **Solana Beach Shopping Center**, an arcade-style shopping center built in the 1940s by the Bryer Company as an outdoor shopping center, a commercial architectural design popular in small towns. The arched, roofed walkways accommodated multiple establishments. Because the street sloped downward from Highway 101 to Acacia, visitors could look through the arcade's rear windows and see the lower-level shops accessed from Acacia Street. Businesses within the center included a bead shop, an electric bike rental service, and a toy store/postal mail drop called **Coastal Postal**.

At the corner stood **Mr. T's** (later renamed **T's** and bar that is famous for its takeout Bloody Mary mix.

Like South Highway 101, the back street to the west, parallel to North Highway 101, also housed retail establishments. Most were professional or beauty-related businesses, with one flexible workspace facility and a tattoo parlor.



Continuing north from **T's**, a former gas station known as **Kaufman-Murfin's** was repurposed into a series of shops, **Vanity** (which became **Muse** salon and the **Dr. Dr.** physician's office), and **Camilia** and **BonBon** in one contiguous space.

The northern section of 101 also includes the **Hanna Fenichel Center for Children's**

Development and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 5431.

In the 1960s, surfboards transitioned from wood to fiber and foam, and movies like *Gidget* and *Endless Summer* romanticized the sport and coastal lifestyle. In the 1960s, music groups like *The Beach Boys* popularized surf and car culture, influencing a generation. Companies like **Surf Ride** and **Mitch's** thrived along north Highway 101, with **Moreland Choppers** next door to **Mitch's** surf shop, embodying California's legendary motorcycle scene memorialized by *The Wild One*.



Continuing north, **Solana Succulents** is a unique addition to the area, a specialty nursery dedicated to succulents and cacti. Operating for over three

decades, it remains a distinctive fixture in the community.

Except for **Roberto's** (previously **Jolly Cone**), the northernmost end of Highway 101 is occupied primarily by offices.



As with South Highway 101, some businesses on North Highway 101 extend through to Acacia Street. The Acacia Street properties are separate businesses, and the commercial establishment itself does not extend from 101 to Acacia. The commercial establishments along Acacia tend to be offices.

Highway 101 Revitalization

For much of its history, Highway 101 in Solana Beach was more of a transit route through the town than a destination in itself. Travelers knew they were in a town by the entry and exit signs. The Plaza's layout, relating to the Highway and the pedestrian walkways on the west side of 101, did little to create a cohesive downtown, and the road's design further fragmented the area. The Highway 101 Association sought to transform the road and the pedestrian walkways west of 101 to capture the same



vibrant energy that the **Cedros Design District**, discussed in the next chapter, had achieved.

The streetscape on the business side of the 101, as well as the roadway itself, was quite unattractive. The streets were scarred with cuts from the construction or repair of water, drainage, sewer, and electric services. Except for some resurfacing, the only repaving was done on a stretch of road going north from Via Del La Via to Lomas Santa Fe Drive, using experimental road-paving material made from recycled rubber from old tires. The sidewalks were a collage of surfaces poured by the property owners when they developed their property. Some areas were not surfaced at all. The medians had been allowed to grow, blocking the view of northbound cars to the stores on the west side of the highway.

In 2013, Lesa Heebner, then the City's **Sandag** representative, helped secure funding through piggybacking onto a **Sandag** bond. While redesign plans had been proposed and produced in the past, there had never been sufficient funds to implement them. With the bond funding, a designer could be hired. A significant collaboration took place with the Highway 101 Association, a group comprising business owners and operators along Highway 101.

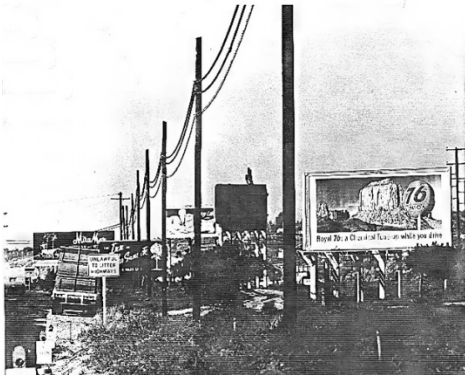
The redesigned street featured curved concrete seating areas inset with mosaic designs. Pedestrian crossings were added in multiple places, facilitating access across Highway 101 to the train station and back and forth for businesses on 101 and Cedros. The mosaic design at one of the pedestrian crossings represents the night sky on the date Solana Beach became a City. A uniform design was applied to all bus stops, and sidewalks were standardized throughout the City. The Plaza was also updated, incorporating seating areas at its corners along Highway 101. Merchants along the corridor renovated their building façades to complement the revitalization efforts.





REDOING HIGHWAY 10

The Rail Trail

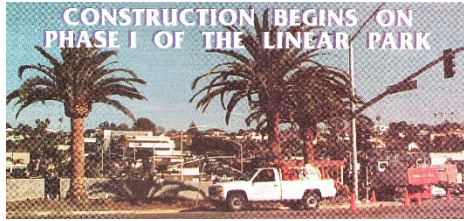


this issue in stages. Initially, efforts focused on making the eastern side of the highway more appealing. After World War II, Highway 101 was cluttered with billboards and utility poles. In the late 1950s, the Women's Civic Club (the

The rail line paralleling Highway 101 and cutting through Solana Beach was a feature that contributed to its early growth but also posed a challenge for its commercial center. The proximity of the tracks to 101 meant that commercial establishments could only be built on the west side of the Highway. The City addressed



precursor to the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society) launched a campaign to remove billboards along Highway 101 in Solana Beach and San Elijo Lagoon, an area known as “Billboard Alley.”



walking and running trail in 2000 that complied with the City’s Linear Park Master Plan. They also succeeded in undergrounding utilities along Highway 101, the Plaza, and Acacia Avenue. The Civic and Historical Society then designed and landscaped the 101 medians and helped establish the first bike lanes along the Highway.

Once the billboards were removed from the railroad right-of-way in Solana Beach, the Women’s Civic Club landscaped the area with Torrey pines, Aleppo pines, and oak trees, creating



In the 1990s, the North Coast Transit District (NCTD) designated Solana Beach as a primary Amtrak and Coaster station, setting in motion one of the City’s most transformative transportation projects. In 1995, the Solana Beach Train Station was constructed, replacing the aging Del Mar stop near the bluffs. The station quickly became a key hub for Amtrak’s Pacific Surfliner and the NCTD Coaster.

The station came to Solana Beach largely through the leadership and quick action of Margaret Schlesinger, Solana Beach’s first Mayor. When Amtrak sought to modernize its North County stop, and Del Mar declined to rebuild its facility, the Mayor recognized the opportunity and moved decisively. Her advocacy made Solana Beach the obvious candidate for the new station. It ensured that the long-needed undergrounding of Lomas Santa Fe Drive was tied to the project, an improvement fundamental to the City’s circulation and safety.

Between 1994 and 1998, Councilmember Joe Kellejian, serving simultaneously on the SANDAG Board, played a critical complementary role. Joe secured the regional funding necessary to lower the tracks that bisected Highway 101 and

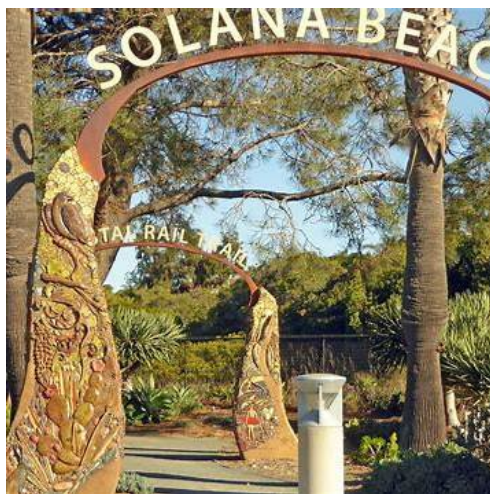
Cedros Avenue and to construct the pedestrian bridge linking the two commercial districts. In 2007, the City obtained additional funds to build a second bridge at Cliff Street, further improving connectivity.

Lowering the tracks—locally known as “The Big Dig”—dramatically enhanced pedestrian safety and unified the city's west and east sides. Although the realignment eliminated the informal running, hiking, and biking path long used by residents, it also resolved long-standing safety concerns.

The combined efforts of these two council members made the project possible. One secured the opportunity; the other delivered the resources. Together, their leadership brought one of the City’s most consequential infrastructure improvements to fruition.



In early 2004, Lesa Heebner played a key role in securing a grant to construct a rail trail along the remaining strip of land between the railroad tracks and Highway 101. These funds, along with some community donations, transformed the strip into an inviting pedestrian and cycling route.

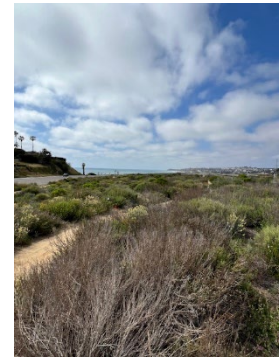


The City also embraced outdoor art, again commissioning Betsy Schulz to design and build artistic entryway arches at the south end of the Rail Trail. Many residents contributed artifacts for the arches, enhancing the trail’s cultural identity.





The Rail Trail's development culminated in the creation of **Harbaugh Seaside Trails** at the north end of the Rail Trail. The Nature Collective, formerly the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, acquired this property. This property is now dedicated as an open space adjacent to San Elijo Lagoon, helping preserve the northern



view created by the earlier effort to remove the billboards.

Harbaugh Seaside Trails — Acquisition and Preservation

For more than a decade, the Gateway property, the old gas-station parcel at the southern entrance to Solana Beach, stood vacant and unresolved. From the early 2000s through 2010, a succession of proposals came and went: hotels, mixed-use buildings, commercial complexes. Each plan drew its own tide of opposition, and the land became a symbol of the community's fears about losing its coastal character. Residents increasingly viewed the parcel as the City's southern "front door," a defining first impression, and the pressure to preserve it as open space steadily grew.

A turning point occurred in December 2011, when the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy (now Nature Collective) successfully purchased the 3.4-acre site. The price had finally dropped to a level that enabled conservation to compete with development. Acting quickly, the Conservancy secured the land through a combination of private bridge loans from community members and short-term financing.

The following years became a testament to community commitment. Between 2011 and 2014, the Conservancy launched a major fundraising campaign to retire the acquisition debt.

A decisive boost came from the George & Betty Harbaugh Charitable Foundation, whose gift enabled the Conservancy to complete the land-purchase financing and initiate long-term restoration planning. In recognition of the foundation's contribution, the site was officially renamed Harbaugh Seaside Trails in 2015.

Around the same time, the City of Solana Beach and the Conservancy secured an additional \$1 million in state transportation-related mitigation funding. A little more than half of this grant went toward retiring the remaining land-acquisition debt, while the rest supported essential restoration and public-access improvements. Between 2017 and 2020, the parcel underwent a transformation.

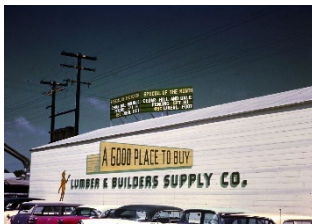
Environmental restoration removed invasive species, stabilized soils, and re-established a palette of native plants suitable for the coastal bluff. ADA-accessible pathways, interpretive features, and safety improvements took shape, weaving the site into the larger network of lagoon and coastal trails. When Harbaugh Seaside Trails officially opened to the public in 2020, it marked the culmination of nearly a decade of persistence, philanthropy, and community vision. What had long been a contested wedge of land became an example of community-driven conservation, open, restored, and permanently preserved.

A standout feature of Harbaugh Seaside Trails is the pedestrian under-crossing beneath the coastal rail corridor (also funded with state transportation-related mitigation funds), placing walkers, dog-leash strollers, and nature lovers safely under the tracks and into the heart of the lagoon's open space. From the bluff of Solana Beach, one moment, you're then under the iron rails the next, and emerge amid native flora and sweeping wetland views.

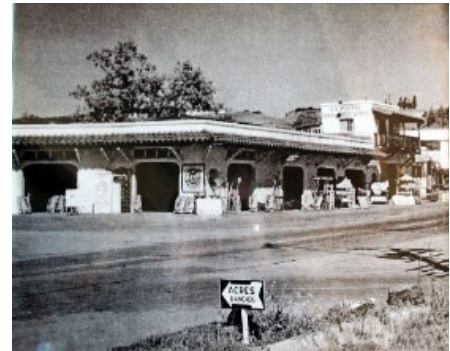
It was opened in 2020.

CEDROS AVENUE

North Cedros



In the early days of Solana Beach, two of the town's largest businesses and employers stood on opposite sides of North Cedros, just north of Skyline Drive, now Lomas Santa Fe. On the west side was **Solana Beach Lumber & Builders Supply**, and across the street was **Wilkens Ranch And Garden Supplies**, the main hardware store for the area.



Today, the Solana Beach Train Station and its parking lot occupy the former lumber yard, while the **Solana Beach Plaza** replaced **Wilken's**.



Near the station, the Solana Beach Chamber of Commerce's Visitor Center kiosk welcomed travelers arriving by train for the Del Mar Fair and Races at the Fairgrounds. Additional information was available at the Chamber Office, located just off the Plaza. This setup was intended to serve visitors who disembarked and headed down South Cedros toward the Fairgrounds. Often, they looked for



places to eat or drink before or after their visit. The Visitor Center helped guide them to dining options along Cedros or across the tracks on Highway 101.

In later years, the North Coast Transit District (NCTD) and the Fairgrounds began providing bus service to and from the Fairgrounds, thereby reducing the City's opportunity to introduce itself to visitors through the visitor information available at the outdoor kiosk. The Chamber then placed a kiosk inside the train station to provide those visitor services. In 2011, the Chamber, in collaboration with the City and NCTD, upgraded this service with a digital kiosk that provided location information on Solana Beach businesses and featured a slideshow on the City's businesses. However, the Chamber still manned the outdoor Visitor Center kiosk during the Fair and Racing season.



A few years later, this service was further refined by completely automating the Visitors Center and shifting any personal interaction to the Chamber Office at its Plaza location.



For years, the **Solana Beach Plaza** parking lot across the street on Cedros Ave was the site of a Farmers Market before it relocated to South Cedros.

Built in the late 1980s, the **Solana Beach Plaza** expanded with a second story in the 1990s. Because of Solana Beach's sloping geography at this location, commercial properties had ground-level access to both floors. The first-level storefronts facing Cedros housed businesses such as **Chiefs**, a burger and brew spot. In the same structure, but facing Lomas Santa Fe Drive, were Caffé La Bocce, an Italian deli (later a health food venue, **Purebowl**); a dry cleaner (now a nail salon); and what is now **Solana Frosty**, formerly **Subway**.



The second level of the **Plaza** includes **The Fish House**, a seafood restaurant, and the now-closed businesses, including Blue



Water fishing store (renamed **Sparks Health and Wellness Medicines and Aesthetics**).



Across Lomas Santa Fe, just opposite this building, stood a restaurant once known as **Sam's Place** (now **Similan Thai**). To the east, on Lomas, there was a convenience store and liquor store called **Hops And Scotch**. Also in this vicinity, over the stores that face south Cedros, is **Peet's Coffee**, which was previously an auto parts store and office space.

Opposite the train station are car repair facilities, a consignment store, and offices.



Further along North Cedros are some offices, a bicycle shop, and **Claire's**, a popular breakfast and lunch café. The northern end of Cedros was once **Central School** and is now home to the **Solana Beach School District** offices.

Further north, across Ocean Avenue, is a warehouse converted into bays, each housing an individual business. This is where **Trios**, a well-known high-end art store that is now closed, had moved from South Cedros.

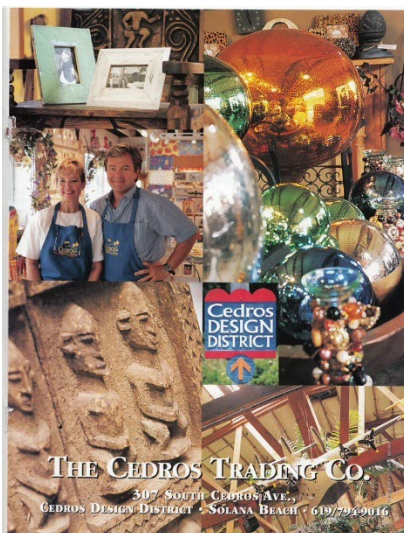


South Cedros, often called Solana Beach's "Miracle Mile," has undergone significant transformations over the years. Originally a mix of private homes, storage, and oil tanks, the area became home to woodworking, cabinetry, ironworks, and the town's newspaper. Over time, these industrial structures were repurposed into shops and offices.



Cedros Design District

The original **Bill Jack** Quonset huts (the iconic look of the street) were purchased by Dave Hodges, who founded **The Belly Up**, and then rented out the other individual huts. **Belly Up** was later sold to its current owners.



The transformation of South Cedros into Solana Beach's premier shopping district was largely driven by Sean MacLeod, who recognized its potential and founded the **South Cedros Property Owners Association (SCOPA)**. SCOPA was a coalition of 26 local property owners, formed by S. Cedros property owners Dave Hodges, Jim King, Gerry Biddulph, Harvey Hertzberg, Carl Turnbull, and Henry Davis. This group established a system of self-assessed fees based on front footage, which they used to fund improvements and negotiate City support for their

initiatives. MacLeod was the managing member of the **Cedros Trading Company** (which became **Solo**) and also managed other buildings on Cedros. His office was at **Art Industria** (former **Teledyne Manufacturing**), a conglomerate of small shops, one of the first on the street. As the leader of **SCOPA**, he initiated the first major upgrades along the street in the early 1980s, which included the installation of sidewalks, curbs, and gutters, the undergrounding of utilities, and the addition of pedestrian streetlights, making the street more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing. **SCOPA** operated as if the street were owned by a single entity, keeping it clean and attractive.

They turned South Cedros into a kind of “Midway,” with a variety of shops and interesting stores along the half-mile stretch. Earlier there was only one small restaurant, **Belly Up Tavern**, was on the strip. But there were a couple of coffee shops, including **Zinc’s**, which became **Lofty’s**, a popular stop. Other South Cedros businesses include an enclave called **The Village** at the south end of Cedros with a breakfast place called **Lockwood Table Café** and later, **Homestead Café**. These coffee houses and places like **Carruth Cellars**, an urban wine tasting room, and **Culture Brewing Company**, a craft beer place (which used to be the **Culligan Water Softener** store), encouraged people to take a restful time-out before continuing to shop. Today, there are even more coffee shops and another restaurant called **Rare Society**.

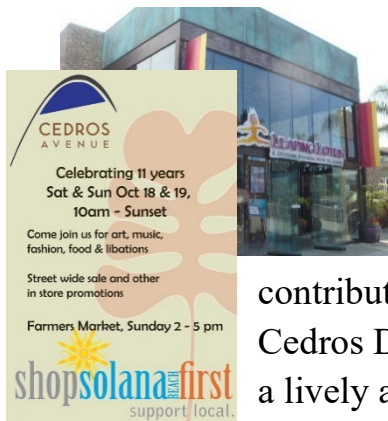
Over time, the district was further enhanced with public art, bright colors, and decorative elements that gave it a distinct and vibrant character. Even the utility boxes were painted.





In 1997, the Cedros Design District street arches were installed. Their curved silhouette was designed to reflect the Quonset huts. The goal was to attract visitors from the Fair and Races and establish Cedros as a destination similar to **Balboa Park, Old Town, the Gaslamp Quarter, or Little Italy**, though on a smaller scale.

The Cedros Design District thrived with several key businesses that became major draws for shoppers. The **David Allen Collection** highlights artistic wood creations crafted from raw tree cuts sourced from jungle forests in Southeast Asia alongside Indigenous art from the same regions. **Solo** houses a collective of interior designers, each with curated décor collections. **Mutropolis** caters to pet owners with specialty pet products.



contributed to the reputation of the Cedros Design District as a place with a lively atmosphere, hosting events such as street parties, WWII-era

Restaurants, boutiques, jewelry stores, furniture shops, and coffeehouses



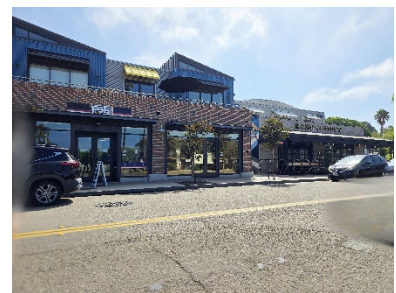
searchlights, Italian chalk art, jazz bands, wine bottling, and street performers on stilts. The relocation of the **Farmers' Market** to the south end of Cedros, on the sidewalk in front of the **444** building, further encouraged Sunday strolls, creating a vibrant “see and be seen” spot for locals. Marketing efforts by **South Cedros Associates** ensured that nearly every promotional material or video about Solana Beach highlighted the Cedros Design District as a must-visit destination.

In recent years, changes in the District’s retail landscape have altered its original character. However, many of the mainstay businesses are still there.

Office spaces replaced the multiple small shops that made up **Leaping Lotus**, a multi-vendor marketplace that advertised “100 shops” of home décor, gifts, and artisan products. The **Antique Warehouse**, now closed, was a converted skating rink transformed into an antique marketplace with individual vendor spaces. **West Elm Furniture** took over the space.



Mia's Garden specialized in plants for both indoor and outdoor decoration. It is now **Cedros 330**, a complex that includes offices, apartments, and the **Rare Society**



restaurant.



The corner on the east side used to



be where **Cassidys**, a furniture store, was located. It moved from there to the center of the block next to the **Leaping Lotus** complex and is now an office building. It has recently relocated to the south end of Cedros, near the **Farmers Market**. **Trios** was one of many art stores on the street. It moved to North Cedros.





The next building up was the original location of **Baker Iron Works**, which moved to La Colonia. The rear became a cabinet shop, then a winery, and the front became an appliance store, which later became **Pirch**, then closed, and is now **Snyder-Diamond**, another appliance store.



The corner of Lomas and South Cedros on the east side is a complex that has undergone several changes in tenants over the years. Although there are more than a dozen places along the North and South Cedros area where one can stop for something to eat or drink, many of these establishments have come and gone over the years.

These are just some of the changes that have redefined the Cedros Design District over the past several years.

As Solana Beach continues to evolve, Cedros Avenue remains a testament to its commitment to blending history, commerce, and creativity, ensuring its place as a must-visit destination for years to come.

LA COLONIA

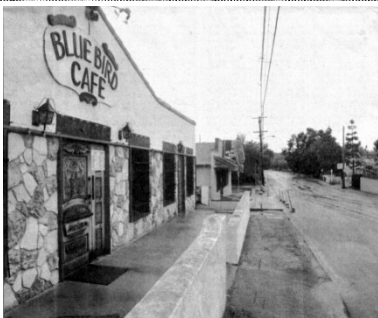
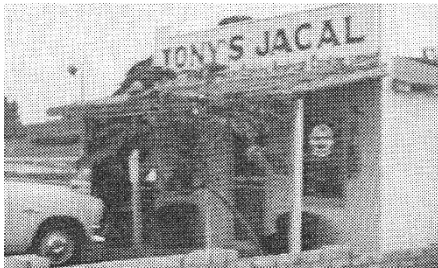


Between Cedros Avenue and the suburban neighborhoods east of Interstate 5 lies La Colonia, a historic community that predates Solana Beach.

Established around 1920, La Colonia was originally home to Mexican American workers who tended the region's various agricultural products. Today, it is well known for its



authentic Mexican restaurants, including **Tony's Jacal** and **Fidel's**, which grew from serving a local clientele to becoming popular with visitors attending the County Fair and Racetrack and attracting patrons from San Diego County. The area has also been home to skilled craftsmen and builders. **Baker Iron Works**, a long-standing Solana Beach institution since 1927 and originally on Cedros Avenue, was responsible for producing the support structure of the Sunburst sculpture in Solana Beach Plaza.



LA COLONIA RESTAURANT

La Colonia Park

At the heart of La Colonia is **La Colonia Park**.

La Colonia Park is also the site of an annual Festival, **Día de los Muertos**. This annual celebration, co-sponsored by the City of Solana Beach and the **La Colonia Community Foundation**, honors the Mexican tradition of remembering and celebrating deceased loved ones. The festival features traditional altars decorated by local families, live music, folk dancing performances, children's activities, diverse food options, and vendor merchandise. Proceeds support community initiatives, including college scholarships, food distributions, and youth and family programs.

La Colonia has a wall of photos in its Community Center to honor those from La Colonia who served. In 2014, the Veterans' Honor Courtyard at La Colonia Park in Solana Beach was dedicated. This courtyard serves as a location to honor and commemorate them.

Every year, on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, ceremonies are held to honor and recognize the service and sacrifices of military veterans and first responders. The

City of Solana Beach annually hosts the event in collaboration with the Solana Beach Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5431, established in 1947.



The event begins with the Camp Pendleton Young Marines presenting the national and state flags, setting a respectful tone for the ceremony. Music plays a big role in the gathering, with the Santa Fe Christian School Band performing patriotic songs. Throughout the event, guest speakers, including veterans and local leaders, share personal stories and reflections on what military service means to them and the community. In addition to the public and City officials, the veterans appear in uniform.

The band plays a song presenting each branch of the service, and the service members stand and salute.

La Colonia also hosts its own December tree-lighting ceremony, featuring traditional holiday treats for children, including Mexican sweet bread and Mexican hot chocolate.

The Parks and Recreation Committee has held a “Paws In the Park” event for pets and their owners.



In 2019, the City constructed **La Colonia Skatepark**, a 5,500-square-foot concrete skatepark that features a variety of amenities suitable for skateboarders of all skill levels.

The Park has been used as a soccer field and for other sports for years. Recent renovations have included upgrading a half-court basketball court, a Tot-Lot, and adding a pickleball court.



A second **Community Center** in the Park was established in 1991, with a kitchen and space for larger community events.

The Park is also home to the **Stevens House**, Solana Beach's oldest residence, which now serves as the city's



Heritage Museum. The Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society operates the Museum on the City's behalf. Among other programs it offers, the Historical Society

annually invites Solana Beach third graders to the Museum for a morning of stories about Solana Beach in the "olden days," with the presenters in period dress. This is followed by traditional games (sack races, jump



rope, hopscotch, etc.) and refreshments. The Museum is also open for visitors on alternating Saturday afternoons during the year.

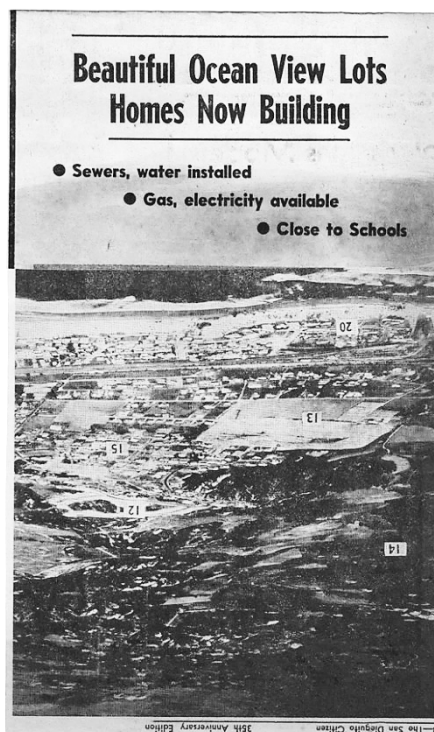
Today, La Colonia is seeing some gentrification. While the neighborhood retains much of its original character, newer homes and modernized properties gradually change its architectural landscape. However, many multi-generational families still reside in the area, and cultural traditions remain strong. It remains a vital cultural and historical landmark in Solana Beach, preserving its rich heritage, strong sense of community, and significant contributions to the City's character.

THE SUBURBS

The suburban development of Solana Beach is closely tied to the City's post-war expansion, infrastructure improvements, and the evolution of planned communities. Unlike the historic downtown core along Highway 101, which developed around the railroad and coastal commerce, the suburbs emerged in response to population growth and the demand for modern residential living.

Before World War II, Solana Beach was a small coastal town with scattered homes, citrus groves, flower fields, and farmland stretching from the ocean bluffs to the inland hills. At the time, most residential developments were located close to the original town center, near the railway station and the ocean. The construction of Lake Hodges Dam in 1918 provided a reliable water source, enabling increased agricultural production; however, the town remained largely rural. Highway 101 helped establish Solana Beach as a beachside destination in the 1920s, and the construction of the Del Mar Fairgrounds in 1936 further increased the area's appeal. Col. Ed Fletcher laid the groundwork for a town, with roads, a grocery

store, a bank, and a hotel. The town had to provide infrastructure piecemeal. Large-scale development did not begin until the late 1940s.



Following World War II, Solana Beach experienced a housing boom similar to many parts of America. Returning veterans and their families sought housing, leading to the transformation of farmland into single-family homes and small subdivisions. The completion of Interstate 5 in the 1960s played a pivotal role in accelerating suburban growth, improving regional access, and making Solana Beach a convenient and attractive residential option. With its natural

geography of ocean views, lagoon overlooks, and inland hills, the City's development pattern followed the contours of the land, creating distinct neighborhoods with scenic vistas.

At the time, Skyline Drive was a major east-west roadway through the middle of Solana Beach. Along this corridor, larger land-use properties, such as churches, schools, and the Boys & Girls Club, were established, and near the intersection of Skyline Drive and Interstate 5, commercial properties, including banks, gas stations, and office complexes, emerged on both sides of Skyline. Another major east-west roadway, Via de la Valle, defined the City's southern border. As the Del

Mar Fairgrounds area grew, condominium developments, commercial centers, and additional gas stations replaced those that had been on Highway 101, which was the main north-south route along the coast. Large office buildings were also built along Via De La Valle in Solana Beach.

The Lomas Santa Fe Interchange and the North Coast Corridor

One important chapter in Solana Beach's recent public infrastructure history centers on two major Caltrans projects that reshaped mobility and the City's relationship with the I-5 corridor.

The first, the Lomas Santa Fe Interchange reconstruction, was completed around 2007. Though modest in scope compared with what followed, it was a significant improvement to the City's primary east-west artery. The redesign modernized on- and off-ramps, improved traffic flow, and updated safety features for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. At the time, it was largely viewed as a necessary upgrade to aging freeway infrastructure that had not kept pace with local growth.

Almost immediately afterward, Caltrans initiated the far larger and far more controversial North Coast Corridor (NCC) project. This multi-agency regional effort included freeway widening, environmental restoration, rail improvements, and coastal mobility enhancements. In Solana Beach, the widening of Interstate 5 and the expanded physical footprint required to achieve it became a flashpoint. Residents were deeply concerned about increased noise, visual impacts, and the long-term consequences of cementing a broader freeway through a small coastal city already hemmed in by lagoons on both sides.

The City pushed back strongly, insisting that any regional mobility project must also benefit the community it bisected. After extended negotiations, Solana Beach was able to secure a suite of Community Benefit Projects, tangible improvements that softened the project's impacts and enhanced local quality of life.

The most significant of these benefits was the construction of the railroad undercrossing linking the San Elijo Lagoon trail system to the Harbaugh Seaside Trails and the beach. This single piece of infrastructure solved a decades-old barrier: the railroad tracks that separated the inland and coastal trail networks. With the underpass in place, hikers, runners, and cyclists gained uninterrupted, safe access from the restored lagoon to the restored bluffs and shoreline.

Together, the interchange upgrade, the NCC improvements, and the negotiated community amenities illustrate a pattern that recurs throughout Solana Beach's 40-year history: the City's willingness to work with regional agencies, but only on terms that protect its character, mitigate impacts, and strengthen local quality of life.

The Growth of Planned Communities

One of the most significant periods in Solana Beach's suburban history was the



development of the "Lomas Santa Fe Master-Planned Community" by Ted Gildred in the late 1960s. Across the United States, planned communities like this gained popularity after World War II, as returning veterans and their families sought affordable housing near major

cities. At the time of this development, Skyline Drive, initially named Plaza Street by Col Ed Fletcher, was renamed Lomas Santa Fe Drive, aligning the road's identity with the new development and reflecting the movement of the City's population center to the east.

Unlike the organically developed neighborhoods along the coast, Lomas Santa Fe was designed as a structured, suburban-style community with defined residential neighborhoods, recreational amenities, and commercial centers. The **Lomas Santa Fe Country Club**, completed in 1969, became a central social and recreational hub, offering a private golf course, pool, tennis courts, and a clubhouse. The adjacent **Lomas Santa Fe Executive Golf Course**, built in 1973, provided a more accessible alternative.



Alongside these recreational facilities, the **Lomas Santa Fe Plaza** and **Town Center Plaza** emerged as commercial hubs catering primarily to nearby residents with grocery stores, medical offices, banks, and essential services. Unlike Highway 101, which, over time, was oriented towards tourism and beachgoers, these new shopping centers were designed to meet the daily needs of local families.

Lomas Santa Fe Plaza, anchored by **Vons**, quickly became a key shopping destination for residents living east of Interstate 5. Over the years, the **Plaza** has hosted a balanced mix of general and specialty retailers, along with an array of



dining options, helping shape its suburban character.

Restaurants and cafés, such as **Pizza Nova**, **The Habit**, **Samurai**, and several smaller fast-food outlets, have provided convenient choices for shoppers and commuters alike. At the



same time, **Starbucks** provided a popular spot for coffee breaks.



The Plaza's commercial mix includes **Home Goods**, **Fabrics - R-Us**, a gym, and a dance studio. It is also home to the **North Coast Repertory Theatre**, a respected cultural institution that draws audiences from across

North County.



Town Center Plaza, situated near the intersection of Lomas Santa Fe Drive and



Interstate 5, emerged as a second central suburban shopping hub in Solana Beach. It includes a major grocery store, **Sprouts Farmers Market**, and features retailers such as **CVS Pharmacy**, **Marshalls**, **Staples**, and **Dixieline Lumber**. Dining options include **Panera Bread** and another **Starbucks**, catering to early

morning commuters and casual diners. The center also supports local services, including long-standing tenants such as **Anthony's Shoe Repair**, **Postal Annex**, and a liquor store. Additional businesses include a **FedEx** store,



Orange Gym, Discount Tires, and Salon World Suites, a collection of independent hair and beauty professionals.

Together, these two centers offer a comprehensive range of goods and services, meeting many of the everyday needs of the suburban Solana Beach community.

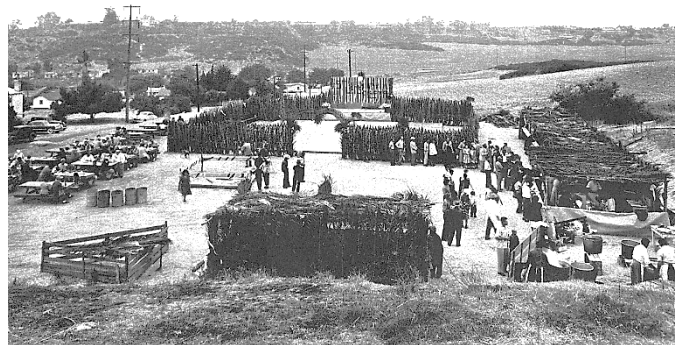
Below the **Plaza**, the **Scripps Medical Services Center** opened a facility in the adjacent **Executive Center** office complex, providing residents with primary and specialized medical care. The **Executive Center** prompted other business expansion toward the edge of LA COLONIA, where a cluster of warehouses and small shopping enclaves began to develop, reflecting the area's layered growth and changing commercial landscape.

With the establishment of Lomas Santa Fe residential areas and country club, suburban expansion continued throughout the eastern half of Solana Beach. Neighborhoods such as **Solana Highlands, Spindrift Del Mar, Santa Elijo Hills, Isla Verde, and St. Francis Court** followed in the 1970s and 1980s. These developments were characterized by carefully planned streets, cul-de-sacs, and architectural styles that emphasized suburban continuity. Many of these communities were built before Solana Beach was incorporated as a City in 1986, meaning their development was regulated under County laws rather than City ordinances. As a result, homeowners' associations (HOAs) played a significant role in maintaining neighborhood aesthetics and enforcing property regulations and other laws. Even after incorporation, the City worked with the homeowners' associations and their private CC&Rs (Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions), which permitted some flexibility in stepping back from detailed municipal oversight. As Solana Beach's population grew, churches and schools became essential to suburban life.



Religious communities played a significant role in the city's development. The first building of the **Solana Beach Presbyterian Church**, one of the town's first permanent places of worship, originally stood as a chapel at Camp Callan in La Jolla before being relocated after World War II to the corner of Acacia and Estrella Streets. The church constructed a larger facility on Stevens Avenue in 1957, which it continues to use to serve the community. Another early church was The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** on North Granados. Other significant churches include **St. James**

Catholic Church, which established a presence at the south end of Nardo Drive and remains one of the most prominent Catholic congregations in the area. **St. Leo's Mission** in La Colonia was founded in 1942 and became **St. Leo's Mission Church**



in 1966 under the pastorship of **St. James**. **Calvary Lutheran Church, Solana Beach United Methodist Church**, and **Horizon Christian Fellowship** also became important spiritual centers, serving a diverse Christian community. As Solana Beach grew, additional religious institutions and non-denominational congregations such as **Church By The Sea** emerged.

Education was another key factor in the development of the suburbs. In the early years, students in Solana Beach had to travel long distances to school, as the first local elementary school did not open until 1925. As the population grew, the City established a more robust educational network. **Skyline School**, located near the suburban heart of Solana Beach, became one of the primary public elementary schools. **Solana Vista School** served younger students before they transitioned to Skyline. For middle school students, **Earl Warren Middle School** provided education for grades 7 and 8. Early on, high school students primarily attended **San Dieguito Union High School** (now **San Dieguito Academy**), and later attended other high schools when they were built, including Torrey Pines High School in nearby Carmel Valley, La Costa Canyon, and Canyon Crest Academy, which opened in the early 2000s.

Private schools also emerged to serve families in the area.

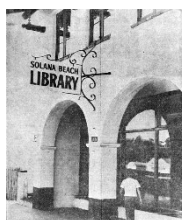


Santa Fe Christian Schools, a college preparatory institution, was established along Academy Drive. It was first the **Las Flores Inn** in the late 1930s and then



the **San Diego Military Academy**. It has become one of the most well-regarded private schools in North County, offering education from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Fusion Academy Solana Beach provided a more specialized approach with one-on-one instruction for middle and high school students.



The **Solana Beach Library** opened its doors in 1925, housed in one of the City's earliest stores along Highway 101. By 1946, the library began a nomadic journey, relocating from one shop or residence to another, until it found a temporary home just a few doors away, again along Highway 101, by 1953.

During this period, Solana Beach experienced dramatic population growth, expanding tenfold between 1925 and the 1950s and doubling again between 1950 and 1960. The modest Highway 101 location soon proved inadequate for the reading needs of a rapidly growing community.

In response, a group of dedicated residents formed "The Friends Of The Solana Beach Library", united to find a larger, more permanent home. Their search led to the **Lomas Santa Fe Shopping Center**, where the library gained more space, but even that location was quickly outgrown.

With the support of the City Council and Friends Of The Solana Beach Library, a campaign for public funding was launched. The Friends also contacted the wider community to gather support for a new facility.

In June 2000, a contract was awarded for the construction of a 10,500-square-foot library located on the Earl Warren Middle School campus at 157 Stevens Avenue. This innovative shared-use facility was designed to serve both the San Diego County Library system and the San Dieguito Union High School District.



The new **Solana Beach Library** was officially dedicated on June 22, 2001. It opened to the public on July 5, 2001, a lasting testament to the Solana Beach community's vision, perseverance, and unity.

The Impact of Suburban Growth

As suburban Solana Beach matured, a dual-core economic structure emerged. The original downtown centered around beach access, tourism, and local businesses along Highway 101. At the same time, the suburban east became virtually self-sufficient with its shopping centers, medical offices, churches, and schools. Despite its growth, estimated at ~98% of the City's available land as of 2024, suburban Solana Beach has retained a low-density, family-oriented character. The planned communities east of I-5, particularly Lomas Santa Fe, transformed the City into a suburban hub. At the same time, the City also maintained a connection to its coastal roots, serving residents and visitors.

NOW WE'RE FORTY

From Depression To Suburban Boom

Solana Beach was the brainchild of land developer Col. Ed Fletcher, who recognized the potential of its prime oceanfront location, where the main north–south highway and railroad run closely parallel. A century ago, he laid the foundation for the town by introducing essential infrastructure, including a reliable water supply and a train station, and helped to create a key economic driver: the **Del Mar Fairgrounds**. These early investments catalyzed growth, setting the stage for the community's evolution through major historical events, including the Great Depression, World War II, and more recent challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the Depression and wartime years, Solana Beach underwent distinct phases that can be traced in its residential growth, its emerging businesses, and its shifting community needs. The town initially developed around a compact central core that provided essential services, including beach access, a hotel, a grocery store, a bank, a train station, and a gas station. Soon, a dry-goods store, market, bar, and restaurant followed, forming the nucleus of a small but vibrant commercial hub. The **PLAZA** became the heart of the community, home to a theater, dance hall, drugstores, and professional offices.

As the town expanded, new attractions appeared: a bowling alley, a skating rink, a nightclub, an arcade, and a growing mix of restaurants and offices. Businesses served both residents and travelers, reinforcing the area's mixed-use character. Over time, however, many of these venues were repurposed; the skating rink, bowling alley, theater, and nightclub gave way to new uses as community patterns evolved.

The arrival of Interstate 5 and the post-war suburban boom again reshaped the City's landscape. New shopping centers, hardware stores, stationery shops, banks, clothing and home-furnishing stores, boutiques, and drugstores appeared, shifting both residents and businesses eastward toward the City's geographic center. The older commercial corridors along the Plaza, Highway 101, and even Cedros Avenue began to cede prominence to this expanding suburban core.

Pandemic and the Digital Shift

Solana Beach is now undergoing another transformation, shaped by the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerating forces of the Digital Age. The way people live, work, and interact with brick-and-mortar businesses has changed dramatically, reshaping the City's economic landscape.

When COVID-19 struck, travel slowed, people stayed home, and in-person activities—including work, shopping, entertainment, and social gatherings—paused almost overnight. The impact on local businesses was profound. Federal, state, and local governments created loan and grant programs to keep companies afloat, but recovery was uneven and, in many cases, incomplete.

Even before the pandemic, the Digital Age had introduced permanent shifts: online shopping, telecommuting, mobile delivery services, and remote collaboration. COVID-19 accelerated them. Zoom replaced conference rooms, Amazon and DoorDash became the modern equivalents of main streets and dining rooms, and delivery trucks replaced storefront windows as the most visible retail presence. Convenience, speed, and frictionless returns reshaped consumer expectations.

Retail businesses in Solana Beach were among the hardest hit. Many storefronts reopened slowly, often emerging in new forms—converted into offices, studios, or service-based enterprises. Restaurants, aided by temporary outdoor dining allowances, faced reduced foot traffic, supply chain disruptions, and chronic staffing shortages. Along Highway 101 alone, six restaurants closed during this period, though new dining ventures quickly reoccupied most spaces. This rapid cycling reflects both the enduring appeal of restaurant-ready locations and the cost advantage of reusing existing kitchens and liquor licenses.

Today, commercial spaces increasingly house offices or health-and-beauty services, making restaurants now the third most common business category. Mixed-use developments such as **Sandbox** on Highway 101 and **330 Cedros** indicate a growing interest in adding residential components to business properties. This evolution may redefine how Solana Beach uses its limited commercial land in the decades ahead.

Changing Faces of the Downtown

One of the most striking stories of the past fifteen years is the transformation of Solana Beach's downtown commercial districts. Whether one looks at the Plaza, South Highway 101, North Highway 101, or Cedros Avenue, the pattern is unmistakable: business types, ownership, and even the underlying use of storefronts have shifted dramatically. Turnover has been constant—sometimes rapid—and the cumulative effect is profound.

A clear example lies in the Plaza. Comparing conditions at the City's 25th anniversary to those of its 40th, only three businesses remain in their original locations: the **Dog Wash**, a Hair Salon, and a Dentist's office. Every other retail or

restaurant space has cycled through one or more tenants, concept changes, or complete repurposing.

South Highway 101 shows a similar transformation. Across nearly a mile of commercial frontage, only a small group of businesses remains from the earlier period: a barber shop, **UPS**, **CVS**, the hotels, **Sandpiper**, **City Hall**, **Parioli**, **Bangkok Bay**, and a deli. Restaurants, in particular, have proven volatile. Of roughly fifteen dining or coffee establishments present during the 25th Anniversary era, only **Bangkok Bay** and **Parioli** still operate today.

North Highway 101 offers the same story in a slightly different form. Long-standing anchors such as **Station Sushi**, **Pizza Port**, a barber shop, **Surf Ride**, the **Veterans Hall**, the School, **Solana Succulents**, **Mitch's**, **Mooreland Chopper**, a car wash, and **Roberto's** have endured. But in the **Boardwalk** shopping center—home to a dozen or more stores and offices—only a barber shop, a mail service, and **T's** remain from the earlier era on 101. Most other spaces have either turned over or been repurposed entirely.

Cedros Avenue mirrors this shift. In the Solana Beach Plaza on North Cedros—housing roughly a dozen tenants—only **Chief's** and the **Fish House** remain from the earlier years. Nearly every smaller retailer has changed hands or closed. On South Cedros, discussed earlier, turnover was even more dramatic. The two major multi-merchant centers, **Leaping Lotus** and **Antique Warehouse**, closed entirely. Larger anchors like **Muttropolis**, **David Alan Collection**, **Solo**, **Belly Up**, and **Cedros 444** remain, but the majority of smaller boutiques and specialty shops have been replaced.

What emerges is a portrait of a downtown in motion—dynamic, fluid, and continuously evolving. Turnover is not unique to Solana Beach, but the scale and consistency of change over the past fifteen years stand out. The commercial districts may look familiar from the outside. Still, their interiors tell a very different story, shaped by rising rents, shifting consumer habits, the COVID-era disruption, and the natural cycling of small coastal businesses.

These changes also carry financial implications. Like most California cities, Solana Beach relies heavily on property taxes, supplemented by sales-tax revenue, hotel occupancy taxes, and business-related fees or grants. As economic patterns evolve,

so too does the City's fiscal foundation. Balancing adaptation with financial stability remains central to ensuring long-term prosperity.

Forty Years As A City

As Solana Beach marks its 40th Anniversary of incorporation, the community finds itself both settled and evolving. Much of the information in this book was first assembled for the 25th Anniversary, and revisiting those benchmarks reveals both continuity and change.

The city's population has stabilized at approximately 13,000 residents, but the average age has increased noticeably. This demographic shift is reshaping the rhythm of daily life. City programs, recreational offerings, and private activities now reflect the interests of an older population, while young families, once the cornerstone of neighborhood identity, have relatively become less prominent.

Civic organizations and business associations that flourished in 2011 remain active, albeit smaller, thanks to a loyal core of long-time members and volunteers. Social Media has altered how residents network and communicate, yet the civic spirit that defined the City's early decades endures.

In land use, Solana Beach is now almost entirely built out. Growth has shifted from expansion to transformation: infill, remodeling, and the upscaling of existing properties. The only major residential project underway is the **SOLANA HIGHLANDS** redevelopment at the south end of Nardo Avenue. Commercially, only two significant mixed-use projects have been added since 2011: **SANDBOX** and **330 CEDROS**. Meanwhile, most changes take the form of adaptive reuse, as older retail spaces are converted into offices, studios, or creative enterprises.

Property values, both residential and commercial, have more than doubled in the past fifteen years, reflecting the City's desirability and the scarcity of buildable land. Yet prosperity has brought new challenges. COVID-19 and rapid technological change have disrupted traditional business models, blurred work-life boundaries, and transformed real estate demand. Even office spaces, once the most stable commercial category, now experience periodic vacancies as remote work continues to gain momentum. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation are reshaping

employment itself. This cannot help but impact the commercial landscape, with an increasing amount of this space being allocated for residential use. Further influencing how commercial and residential space are shared.

Governance, too, reflects the passage of time. Only one member of the original City Council is still alive, and of those serving in 2011 at the time of our 25th Celebration, only one, the current Mayor, remains in office. Senior City staff have turned over, including two transitions in the City Manager position. The debates that once defined early cityhood, growth, zoning, and self-determination have matured into quieter but enduring discussions about preserving and enhancing the City's character.

After forty years, Solana Beach stands as a City confident in its identity, largely built out, civically engaged, and deeply aware of what makes it unique. The challenge ahead is not how to grow larger, but how to protect what it has become: a compact, creative, and enduring coastal community whose future remains anchored in the vision that inspired its incorporation.

THE CITY TODAY

In the span of a century, **Solana Beach** grew from a wedge-shaped 201-acre plot of farmland gently sloping toward the ocean bluffs into a roughly square-shaped city ten times its original size, 2,182 acres, or just about twice the size of San Diego's **Balboa Park**. With about 13,000 residents, the City is nearly built out and is prized as both a place to live and to conduct business.

Nestled between two estuaries, the **San Elijo Lagoon** to the north and the **San Dieguito Lagoon** to the south, the City is framed by the Pacific Ocean on the west and rolling hills to the east. It offers breathtaking views in every direction. At its southern border lies one of California's fifteen county fairgrounds, home to the **Del Mar Fair** and the **Del Mar Racetrack**. Solana Beach is easily accessible by scenic

Highway 101 or Interstate 5, by rail via the Coaster Station, and by air, with **San Diego International Airport** less than twenty miles away.

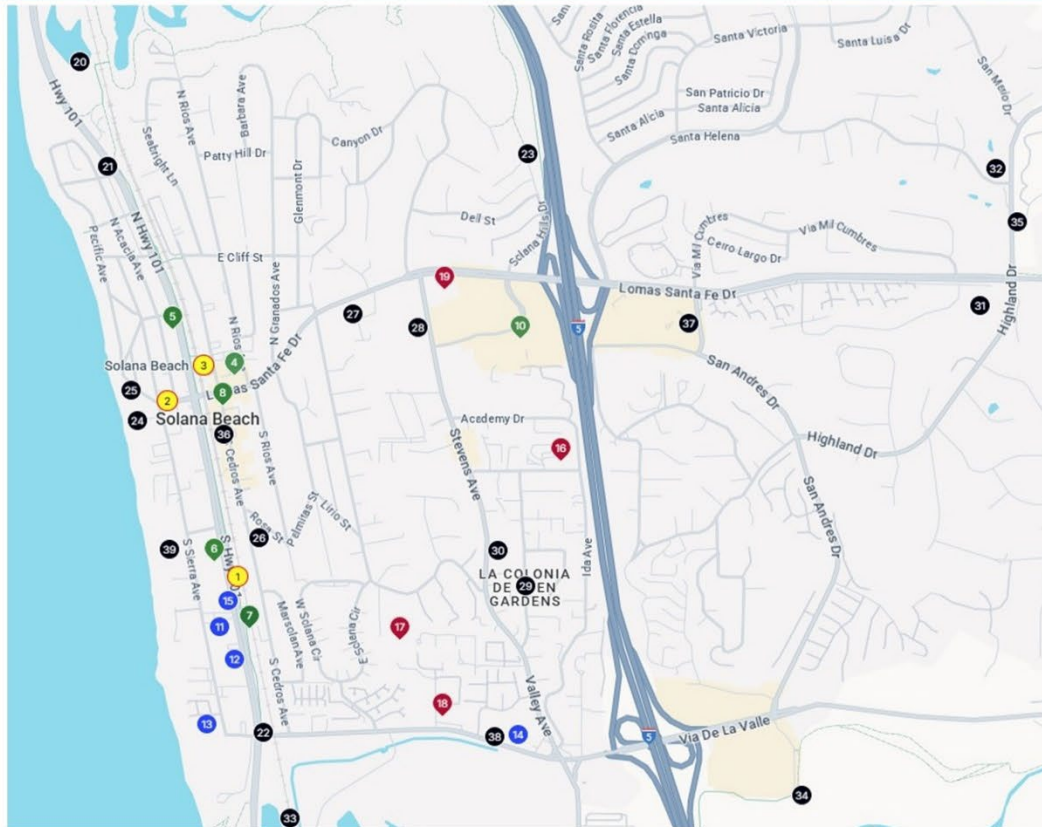
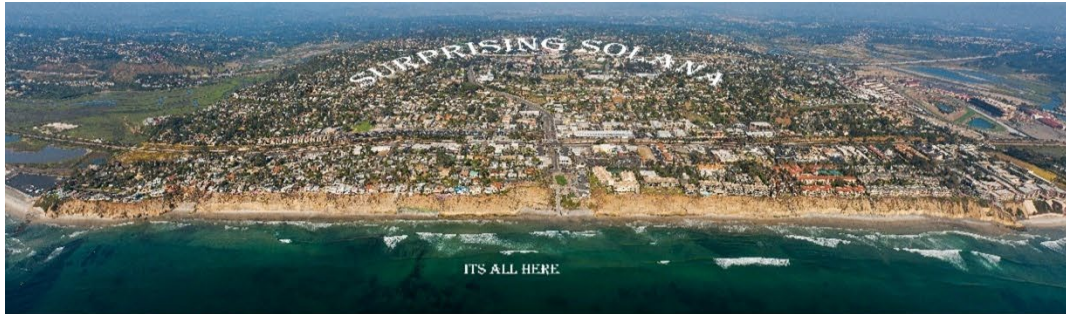
Like many coastal California towns, Solana Beach retains a friendly, small-town character. It celebrates community through parades, street fairs, and annual gatherings, including observances of Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Summer brings free concerts and beachside movie nights at Fletcher Cove, while December lights up with a holiday tree lighting and the Santa Sleigh ride.

The City offers a comprehensive range of public amenities, including nine churches, seven public schools, three private schools, a library, a **Boys & Girls Club**, the **Scripps Coastal Medical Center**, and several specialty clinics and urgent-care facilities, all ensuring comfort and convenience for residents and visitors alike.

Outdoor recreation remains one of Solana Beach's greatest strengths. The City maintains an extensive network of trails and pathways for walking, biking, and hiking. Residents and visitors can swim at five beach access points or in several community pools. There are two golf courses, horseback riding facilities, tennis courts, gyms, and parks of every size, featuring basketball courts, tot lots, skate areas, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields.

For those less inclined toward athletics, the City offers over a dozen shopping centers, a racetrack, the **San Diego County Fair**, multiple music venues, and a theater. More than ninety licensed businesses specialize in physical wellness and personal care, from hair salons and nail studios to skin-care specialists, and the City boasts four full-service spas.

Or relax and enjoy what has always been Solana Beach's most consistent attraction, a near-perfect climate and unforgettable sunsets.



PUBLIC

- 1 City Hall
- 2 Visitors Center
- 3 Solana Beach Train Station

SHOPPING CENTERS

- 4 Solana Beach Plaza
- 5 Boardwalk Shopping Center
- 6 Beachwalk Shopping Center
- 7 Mercado del Sol Shopping Center
- 8 Cedros Design District
- 9 Lomas Santa Fe Plaza
- 10 Solana Beach Towne Centre

HOTELS AND TIMESHARES

- 11 Holiday Inn Express & Suites
- 12 Courtyard San Diego
- 13 Solana Beach Vacation Rentals
- 14 Winners Circle Resort
- 15 Sand Pebbles Resort

CHURCHES

- 16 St Leo Mission Church
- 17 St James Catholic Church
- 18 Calvary Lutheran Church
- 19 Solana Beach Presbyterian Church

PARKS AND RECREATION

- 20 San Elijo Lagoon
- 21 Harbaugh Seaside Trails
- 22 Rail Trail
- 23 Annie's Canyon Trail
- 24 Fletcher Cove Park
- 25 Fletcher Cove Community Center
- 26 Solana Beach Farmers Market
- 27 Boys & Girls Clubs
- 28 San Diego County Library
- 29 La Colonia de Eden Gardens
- 30 La Colonia Park & Skatepark
- 31 Lomas Santa Fe Country Club
- 32 Lomas Santa Fe Executive Golf Course
- 33 San Diego Lagoon
- 34 Coast to Crest Trail
- 35 San Diego County Park
- 36 Belly Up
- 37 North Coast Repertory Theatre
- 38 Meridian Tennis
- 39 Solana Beach & Tennis Club

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND VIDEO LINKS, VISIT:

PREFACE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5hlyJNY_Yo *Making Place in Solana Beach*

SURPRISING SOLANA

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GS0WHB1gWb8> *Annies Canyon Trail*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfuxAeOQMhA> *Things to do in SD*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&t=270s> *Neighborhood*

<https://www.youtube.com/@solanabeachcivichistorical7985> *Hist Society*

<https://youtu.be/roUsa16DhJk> *Ariel View*

INVENTING A CALIFORNIA BEACH TOWN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSBW3TjgDM&t=211s> *Neighborhood 1987*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ-hLdBhBxw> *Creative Community*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHQv8QIeRlc&t=8s> *Over Solana Beach*

FLETCHER COVE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk *Fletcher Cove Park*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG5cYE_S3sk *Inauguration*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5UW6pxUZ30> *Fletcher Cove Beach*

<https://youtu.be/VM3ffasWHp4> *Fletcher Cove*

THE PLAZA

<https://youtu.be/ZQHkMF99exc> *Outdoor Dining*

https://youtu.be/l_3946LF8AY *Fiesta 2024*

HIGHWAY 101

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&t=8s *Revitalization Project*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvL_ZNjfp0U&t=47s *Cliff St. Bridge*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyKBR_7nUxo *Replanting of Torrey Pines*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4nE_M-FNfY&t=2s *101 Revitalization*

[Hwy 101 Part 3g1 California-San Diego County-Solana Beach Part 1 - YouTube](#) *101*

<https://youtu.be/MhCsFB0kSxM> *Distillery Nightclub*

https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWl_I *Solana Succulents*

CEDROS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSAhfnoegZE> *Design District*

<https://youtu.be/nKW6-ILZtxQ> *COVID shopping*

<https://youtu.be/TCiO4s49aKk> *Shopping*

<https://youtu.be/y19y1zKyBiA> *Farmers Market*

LA COLONIA

<https://youtu.be/hAsUnrsC9Fo> *La Colonia*

https://youtu.be/CiglLdFWl_I

OTHER SOURCES

[YouTube.com/@solanabeachcivichistorical7985](https://www.youtube.com/@solanabeachcivichistorical7985)

<https://studio.youtube.com/video/Fka5xHRE4Xg/edit> *Birth of a City Slideshow*

<https://studio.youtube.com/video/E0opfftfKvg/edit> *Remodeling Projects*

<https://studio.youtube.com/video/E0opfftfKvg/edit> *Birth Book*

<https://youtu.be/6RhIByaZnEA> *Forty Years of Progress*

<https://youtu.be/Z11IEUwpaOM> *Early Structures in Solana Beach*

<https://youtu.be/Psmy38aSOhU> *Incorporation of Solana Beach*

<https://youtu.be/RI3kMNZTt-M> *San Dieguito Citizen 40th Anniversary Edition*

