

Strategic Plan for the
SAN BENITO COUNTY
General Plan Update

Community Mail Survey Report

March 2008



2 Findings

The substantive findings from the survey responses are summarized below. Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the survey questions, and Appendix B for detailed crosstabulations.

QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU LIKE THE MOST ABOUT LIVING IN SAN BENITO COUNTY?

In an open-ended question, residents were asked what they liked most about living in San Benito County. The majority of survey respondents—about 88 percent—responded to this question. Most respondents mentioned multiple qualities that they liked about living in the county. The most popular answers included:

- The beautiful weather;
- The small-town country atmosphere (and with it the friendly people);
- A location that is both away from the big cities while at the same time accessible to many different attractions including the coast, cities, camping, and other resources; and
- The scenic natural landscape and agricultural open space.

Virtually every response included one or more of the above points. Other less frequently mentioned answers included the county’s clean air, peace and quiet, the agricultural land and economy, low traffic and congestion, public safety and low crime rate, and local resources like the school system, historic areas, and low housing prices.

QUESTION 2: LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT SHOULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE SAN BENITO COUNTY?

Residents were asked to write about what should be done in the future to improve San Benito County. A majority of survey respondents—88 percent—offered their comments.

In parallel to the responses for Question #1, in Question #2 many respondents stated that keeping San Benito County rural, agrarian, and uncrowded, while meeting the needs of limited growth, were the most important things that should be done to improve the county’s future.

“I love the beauty and climate of San Benito.”

“It is a beautiful place; still has the small-town feeling.”

“Great central coast location.”

“...cattle on the hillsides, hay bales, wine touring, yellow-billed magpie...”

“Just a great place to live. Great area, good people.”

In Question #2 respondents requested that infrastructure be improved, vital downtowns be preserved and flagging areas be rejuvenated, taxes be lowered or maintained (but not raised), and population growth be kept at a minimum. While in Question #1, some survey respondents praised San Benito’s public safety and low crime rate, in Question #2, other respondents wrote about their concern for rising crime and gang activity in the county and the cities. A number of responses requested new and better activities for young people, which could contribute to reducing crime activity among youth. Others simply blamed uncontrolled growth for the apparent rise in gang activity.

While many responses expressed a desire for growth and development to be restricted, many others offered suggestions that imply an acceptance of growth and new development: requests for more jobs and housing for young families; more conveniences such as gas stations, restaurants, and retail stores; more transportation planning and transit options; and appeals to attract new businesses. A number of responses specify that controlled, planned, and compact growth are necessary to the vitality of San Benito County and its constituent communities.

QUESTION 3: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE—THE NEXT 20 YEARS

In Question #3, survey respondents were asked to rate a list of 14 programs or initiatives that the County should pursue over the next 20 years. The list included opportunities related to agricultural resources, environmental resources, water quality, hillsides and ridgelines, economic development, housing, recreation, infrastructure, and transportation. Survey respondents could “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree,” or “strongly disagree” with each statement, or they could report that they have “no opinion”. The item response rate in this question (the percent of those who took the survey who answered each element of this question) exceeds 97 percent for all elements. See Table 2-1 for the full results.

The opportunity areas that receive the most support, with over 65 percent of respondents choosing “strongly agree”, include protecting water quality (87 percent), protecting environmental resources (70 percent), protecting agricultural resources (69 percent), and encouraging employment growth and economic development (65 percent).

Improving and building new roads (54 percent), protecting agricultural-based industries (54 percent), protecting hillsides and ridgelines from new development (53 percent), and encouraging visitors and tourists (52 percent) also received votes of strong agreement from over 50 percent of respondents.

Chart 1: Support for Planning Opportunities: Composite Scores (Low to High)

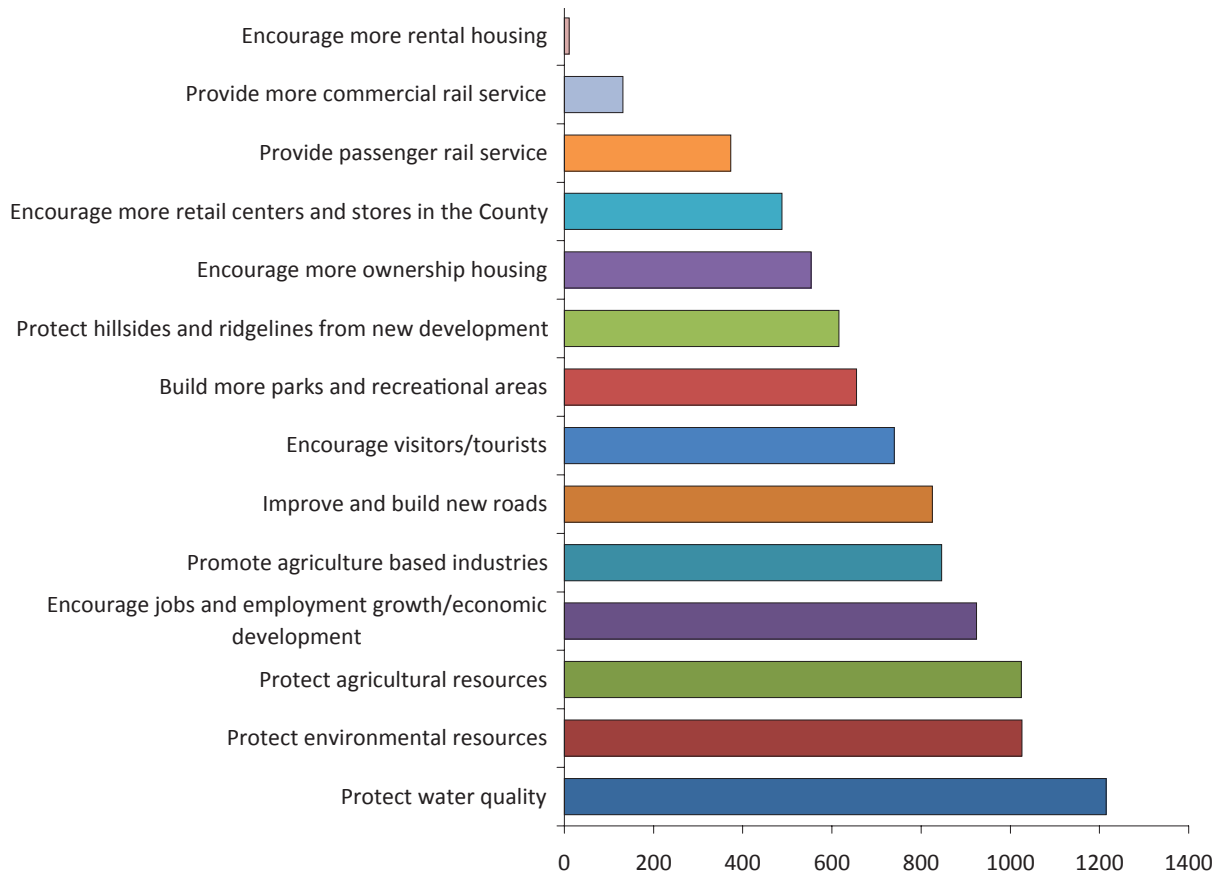
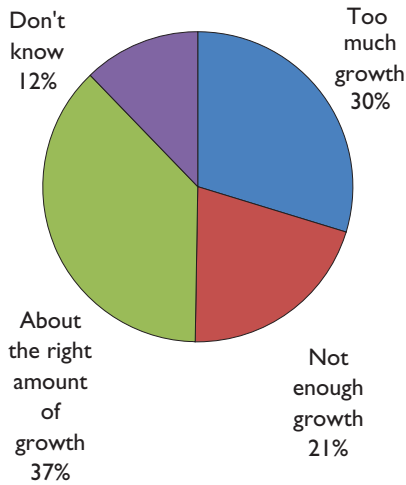


Table 2-1: Opportunities the County Should Pursue—All Results

	Composite Score	Strongly Agree (+2)		Somewhat Agree (+1)		Somewhat Disagree (-1)		Strongly Disagree (-2)		No Opinion (0)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
		Protect agricultural resources	1025	451	69	167	25	20	3	12	2
Protect environmental resources	1026	459	70	160	24	22	3	15	2	4	1
Protect water quality	1215	576	87	76	12	5	1	4	1	1	0
Promote agriculture based industries	846	354	54	219	33	51	8	15	2	15	2
Protect hillsides and ridgelines from new dev.	616	351	53	139	21	95	14	65	10	13	2
Encourage more retail centers and stores in the County	488	286	44	182	28	88	14	89	14	9	1
Encourage visitors/tourists	740	345	52	191	29	69	11	36	6	15	2
Encourage more ownership housing	553	251	38	240	36	71	11	59	9	36	6
Encourage more rental housing	11	110	17	201	31	168	26	121	19	43	7
Encourage jobs and employment growth/economic development	924	425	65	164	25	32	5	29	4	8	1
Build more parks and recreational areas	655	301	46	218	33	81	12	42	6	17	3
Improve and build new roads	825	358	54	209	32	48	7	26	4	18	3
Provide passenger rail service	373	225	34	202	31	79	12	100	15	53	8
Provide more commercial rail service	131	137	21	195	30	124	19	107	16	87	13

Chart 2: Too Much Growth?



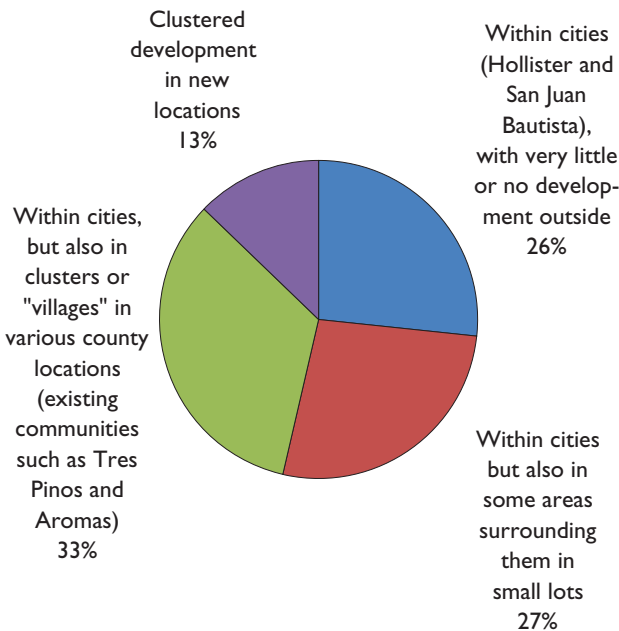
The pool of respondents was largely divided on three issues—encouraging more rental housing, providing passenger rail service, and providing more commercial rail service. Cross-tabulations were run on items on which there was less than 60 percent agreement to understand the perspectives of demographic sub-groups. Detailed cross-tabulations are included in Appendix D. The cross-tabulations revealed no obvious differences between the opinions of sub groups and the overall result regarding the provision of more rental housing, passenger rail, or commercial rail service.

QUESTION 4: OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, DO YOU THINK THE UNINCORPORATED (OUTSIDE OF THE CITIES) SAN BENITO COUNTY HAS HAD TOO MUCH GROWTH, NOT ENOUGH GROWTH, OR ABOUT THE RIGHT AMOUNT?

Of 670 survey respondents, 659, or 98 percent, responded to this question. There was considerable heterogeneity in responses, with the largest group (37 percent of respondents) reporting that San Benito County had seen “about the right amount of growth”, 30 percent felt the County had experienced too much growth, and 21 percent thought the past 20 years had resulted in too little growth in the county. Chart 11 provides a visualization of these results.

Due to the heterogeneity of responses to this question, crosstabulations were performed to determine if there were any obvious differences of opinion between groups according to where respondents live, their ethnicity, or their income. Though there was some minor variability between groups, no obvious large differences of opinion were found to exist based on residence, ethnicity or income. See Appendix D for more information.

Chart 3: Location of New Growth?



QUESTION 5: WHERE DO YOU THINK NEW GROWTH SHOULD BE LOCATED?

There is strong support in the county for keeping growth within or near existing clusters of development. In Question #5 respondents were given the choice of four general locations for new growth in San Benito County, and were asked to check the box beside the location they most preferred. Thirty-three percent (201) of respondents would like to see new growth within existing cities, but also within clusters or “villages” in various county locations (such as Tres Pinos or Aromas). Twenty-seven percent (159) of respondents preferred growth within existing cities only, 27 percent (162) preferred growth within cities but also in small lots in some areas surrounding them, while only 13 percent (77) preferred new growth in the form of clustered development in new locations.

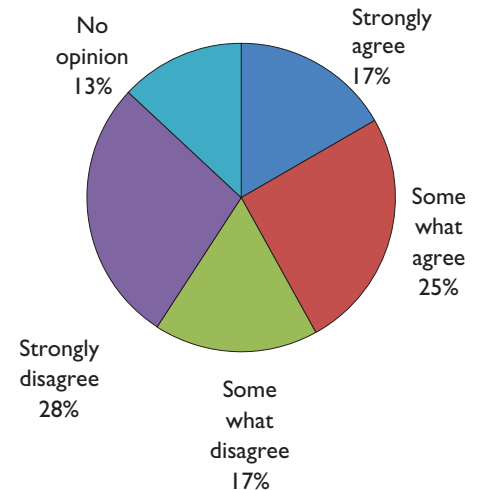
QUESTION 6: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT THE COUNTY SHOULD ENCOURAGE FARMLAND CONSERVATION THROUGH A TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT CREDITS PROGRAM?

Similar to other survey questions, responses were mixed as to whether the County should encourage farmland conservation through Transfers of Development Credits (TDCs). Overall, slightly more respondents opposed the idea than agreed with it, though this was not a true majority (defined as 50 percent or more of respondents). The plurality of opinion strongly disagreed with the use of TDCs (28 percent), and another 17 percent somewhat disagreed. In contrast, 17 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the use of TDC's for farmland conservation, while 25 percent somewhat agreed. The balance of responses, 13 percent, had no opinion about the regulatory tool. These results are summarized in Chart 13.

According to responses to Question #3 described earlier, both environmental and agricultural resource protection were strongly supported by respondents as opportunities to pursue over the next 20 years. However, it appears from responses to this question that TDCs are not necessarily the preferred method of achieving the community's resource protection goals.

Due to the overall heterogeneity of responses, crosstabulations were performed to determine if there were any obvious differences of opinion based on location of residence, ethnicity, or income. No clear differences were discovered between the overall results and the opinions of city versus county residents, between ethnicities, or between respondents with different incomes. See Appendix D for more information.

Chart 4: Opinions on Farmland Conservation through TDCs



QUESTION 7: WHERE SHOULD THE COUNTY LOCATE COMMERCIAL SERVICES THAT PROVIDE SALES TAX REVENUE TO THE COUNTY AND CONVENIENCE TO RESIDENTS?

In this question respondents could indicate their level of agreement (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and No Opinion) with locating new commercial services in three potential locations. Since respondents could, in theory, strongly agree or disagree with all three locations, the percents reported here are not exclusive of one another. Rather, this analysis tries to report where there is the most agreement along with the least disagreement.

The proposed location for new commercial services that generated the most strong agreement and the least strong disagreement was in clusters in existing communities and cities (45 percent strong agreement and 32 percent moderate agreement, with only 19 percent disagreement overall). For each of

Chart 5: Location Preferences for New Commercial Services: Composite Scores

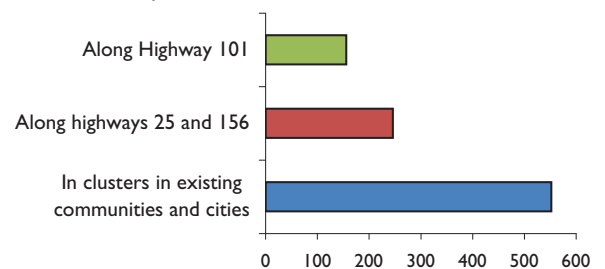


Table 2-2: Location Preferences for Commercial Services

	Composite Score	Strongly Support (+2)		Support (+1)		Oppose (-1)		Strongly Oppose (-2)		No Opinion (0)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
In clusters in existing communities and cities	552	268	45	190	32	56	9	59	10	25	4
Along highways 25 and 156	246	186	33	179	32	63	11	121	22	12	2
Along highway 101	156	155	29	159	30	61	11	126	24	29	6

the other location options (both along highways), between 60 and 65 percent of respondents to those choices were in some sort of agreement with the possible location, however, twice as many respondents strongly disagreed with these options as compared to the option for clustering in existing cities and communities (22-24 percent compared to just 10 percent).

QUESTION 8: FOR WHICH TYPES OF PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS WOULD YOU SUPPORT INCREASES IN TAXES AND FEES?

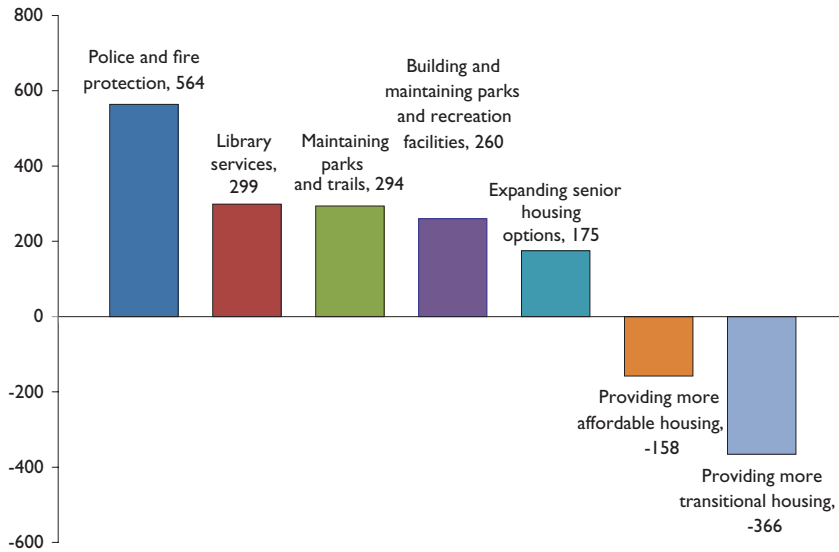
Survey respondents were asked if they supported or opposed increasing taxes and fees for certain programs and projects that would serve the community. Specifically, the survey sought to judge the level of support for tax and fee increases for building and maintaining parks and recreation facilities; police and fire protection; expanding senior housing options; library services; maintaining parks and trails; providing more affordable housing; or providing transitional more housing. Between 90 and 95 percent of respondents stated program preferences in this question.

A majority of question respondents either supported or strongly supported tax and fee increases for police and fire protection (78 percent). A majority of respondents also expressed their support for tax and fee increases for: Library

Table 2-3: Taxes and Fees for Programs

	Composite Score	Strongly Support (+2)		Support (+1)		Oppose (-1)		Strongly Oppose (-2)		No Opinion (0)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Building and maintaining parks and recreation facilities	260	147	24	253	41	101	16	93	15	31	5
Police and fire protection	564	259	41	236	37	58	9	66	10	19	3
Expanding senior housing options	175	106	17	260	41	143	23	77	12	47	7
Library services	299	147	24	260	42	101	16	77	12	36	6
Maintaining parks and trails	294	130	21	287	46	97	16	78	12	35	6
Providing more affordable housing	-158	87	14	161	26	167	27	163	26	47	8
Providing more transitional housing	-366	31	5	121	20	191	32	179	30	85	14

Chart 6: Support for Increases in Taxes and Fees



services (66 percent); Maintaining parks and trails (66 percent); Building and maintaining parks and recreation facilities (64 percent); and Expanding senior housing options (58 percent). A majority of respondents stated that they oppose increasing taxes and fees for the purpose of providing more affordable housing (52 percent) or transitional housing (61 percent). Table 2-3 presents the complete results.

Cross-tabulations were run on items on which there was less than 60 percent support in order to determine if there were any differences of opinion between demographic sub-groups. These detailed tabulations are included in Appendix D; following are some highlights:

- Expanding Senior Housing Options.* Increasing taxes and fees for this purpose was opposed by over a third (35 percent) of survey respondents. When this data is examined by residential location, half or more of residents in Tres Pinos, Paicines, Panoche, and “Other” parts of the county were either opposed or strongly opposed to increasing taxes and fees for more senior housing options. In contrast, in the cities of Hollister and San Juan Batista as well as the community of Ridgemark, there was generally more support for this proposed program, with a high of 69 percent support (or strong support) in Ridgemark, 62 percent in Hollister, and 57 percent in San Juan Batista. There were no noticeable differences in opinion by ethnicity or by income.
- Providing More Affordable Housing.* Increasing taxes or fees for this was opposed or strongly opposed by 52 percent of survey respondents. In terms of residence, whereas there was relatively even distribution of support and opposition in Hollister and Ridgemark, respondents from San Juan Batista and all other parts of the county registered 62 percent or more opposition. In terms of ethnicity, Caucasian or white respondents reported the same level of opposition for this program as

the respondent pool as a whole (52 percent), but Latino or Hispanic respondents showed more support for the program, 54 percent in support and only 36 percent opposed. In terms of income, there was somewhat more support in lower income brackets, and somewhat less support in higher income brackets, but the differences were not substantial.

- *Providing Transitional Housing.* Increasing taxes or fees for transitional housing was opposed or strongly opposed by 61 percent of survey respondents. There were no noticeable differences in opinion among respondents distinguished by residential location. In terms of ethnicity, there was somewhat more opposition from the Caucasian or white respondents (60 percent) than from Latino respondents (47 percent). There were no obvious differences in opinion by income groups.

QUESTION 9: WHERE DO YOU SHOP MOST OFTEN FOR THE FOLLOWING ITEMS?

In Question #9 respondents were asked where they *most often* shop for: groceries, clothing, electronics, home furnishings, office and school supplies, books and music, family entertainment, and gasoline. Respondents could choose from the following locations: San Benito County, Gilroy, Other Santa Clara County, Monterey County, Santa Cruz County, and Other.

Generally, the two favorite locations for shopping were San Benito County and Gilroy. In particular, San Benito County claimed 84 percent of grocery shopping, 74 percent of gas purchases, and 73 percent of purchases of office and school supplies. Gilroy claimed a higher percent of shoppers than San Benito County for electronics (48 percent), clothing (43 percent), and books and music (42 percent). Still, over 30 percent of respondents reported obtaining most of their clothes, electronics, home furnishings, books, music, and family entertainment outside of either San Benito County or Gilroy. This suggests that more could be done to provide these services closer to home.

Chart 7: Shopping Location Preferences of Survey Respondents

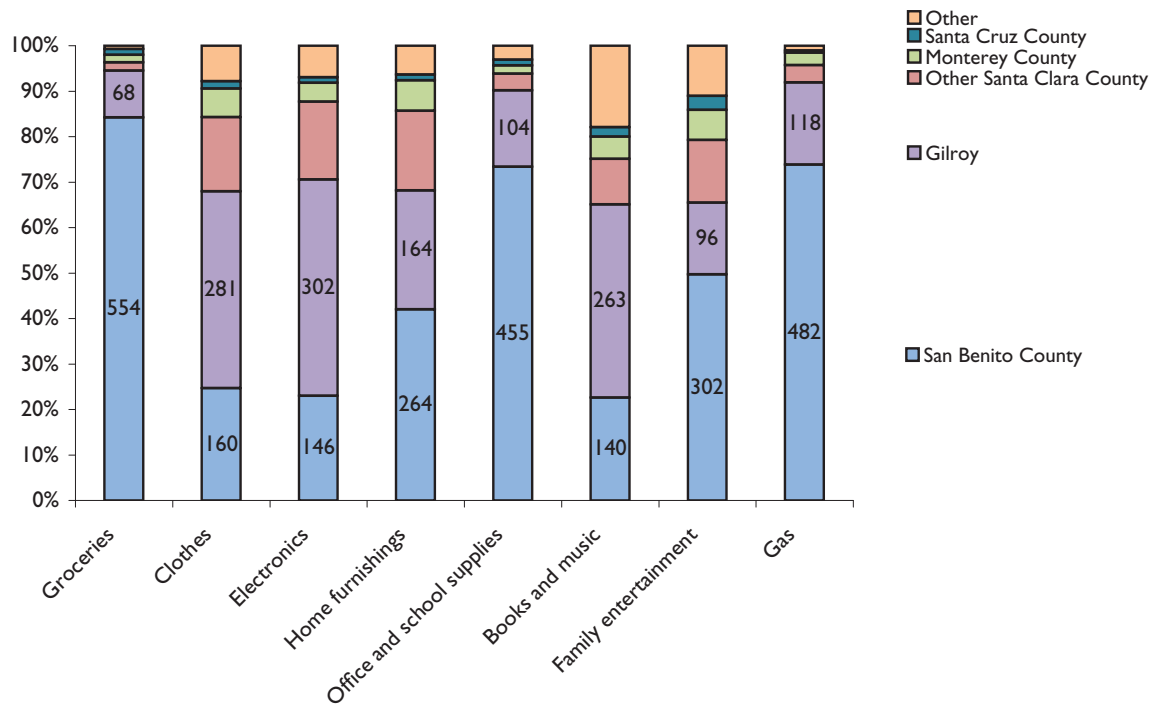


Table 2-4: Shopping Location

	<i>San Benito County</i>		<i>Gilroy</i>		<i>Other Santa Clara County</i>		<i>Monterey County</i>		<i>Santa Cruz County</i>		<i>Other</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Groceries	554	84	68	10	12	2	11	2	8	1	5	1
Clothes	160	25	281	43	106	16	41	6	10	2	51	8
Electronics	146	23	302	48	109	17	26	4	8	1	44	7
Home furnishings	264	42	164	26	110	18	42	7	8	1	40	6
Office and school supplies	455	73	104	17	23	4	11	2	8	1	19	3
Books and music	140	23	263	43	62	10	30	5	13	2	111	18
Family entertainment	302	50	96	16	84	14	40	7	19	3	67	11
Gas	482	74	118	18	25	4	18	3	3	1	7	1