

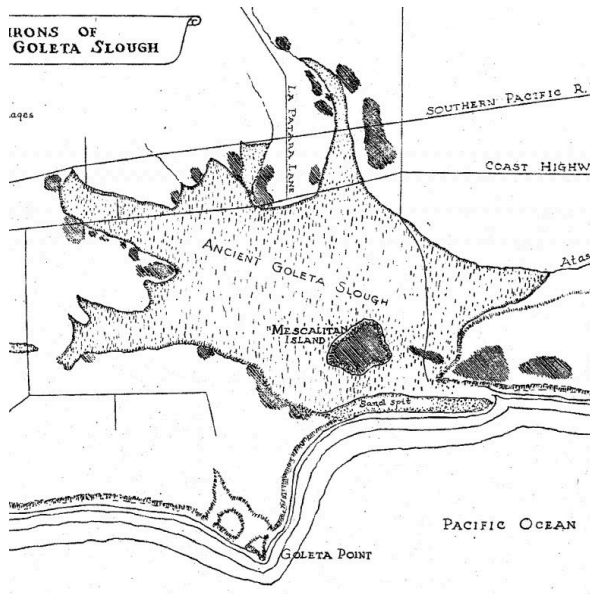
Isla Vista: A Timeless History



~11000 BCE to 800 CE: 'The Anisq'oyo'

Archeological evidence, including the "Arlington Springs Man", who lived when the four northern Channel Islands were all still united together (~13,000 years ago) as one mega-island indicates the earliest evidence of human habitation in the Channel Islands.¹

Painting by Russell A. Ruiz
Chumash villages, houses, and plank boats (Tomols)



800 to 1100: 'He'lo'

The Chumash people eventually settle and name the coastal mesa area Anisq'oyo' ("at the manzanita"). The Chumash village of He'lo (located on Mescalitan Island) served as a major political and economic capital in the Goleta Slough. It housed tribal royalty and at this time, it was probably the largest settlement on the California coast.²

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
Map of the Prehistory Goleta Slough Terrain; Note. Mescalitan Island and the size of the Goleta Slough



1542: 'First European Contact'

Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo enters the Santa Barbara Channel. His expedition observes the large population at Helo', likely the largest settlement on the California coast at the time.²

Daniel Sayre
The landing of Cabrillo in California, located at the Santa Barbara County Courthouse

1769: 'Mission Prospects'

The Portolá expedition passes through. Friar Juan Crespí records seeing a "very grand spot" for the construction of a new mission.²

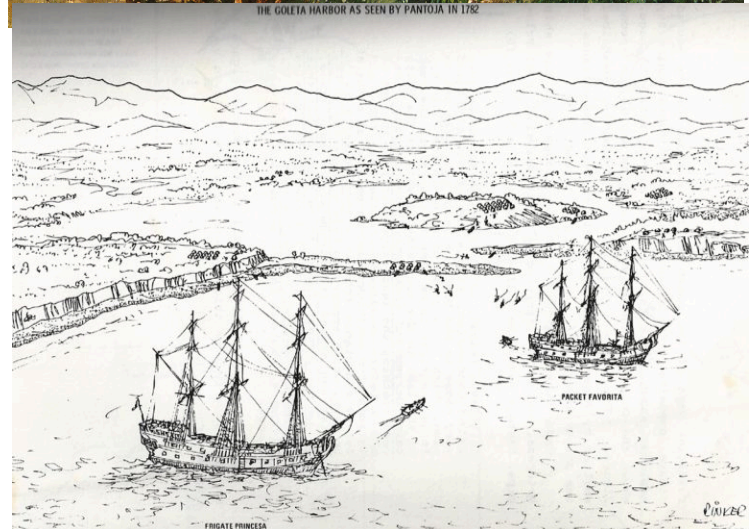
Lloyd Harting
Portolá expedition



1782: 'Pantoja'

Two more Spanish ships were sent to solidify the prospective location for a Mission within the Goleta Valley, stocked with livestock, equipment and soldiers. Yet, facing the thickest forest they had seen on the west coast and thousands of natives, the Spanish decided to choose the alternate spot two languages down the coast.²

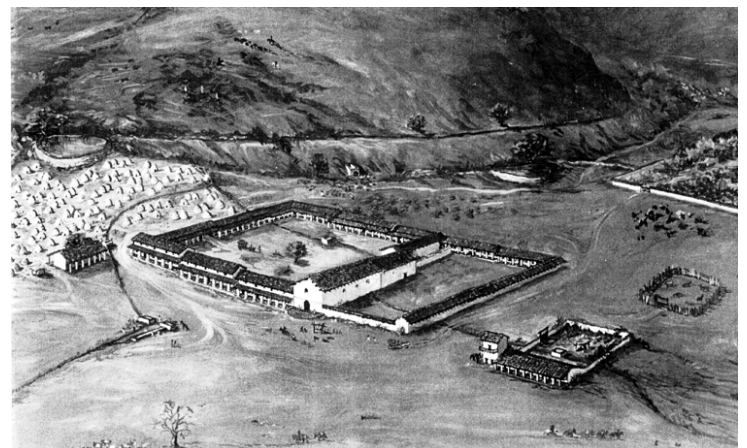
Image Courtesy of Goleta History
The Goleta Harbor as seen by Pantoja in 1782

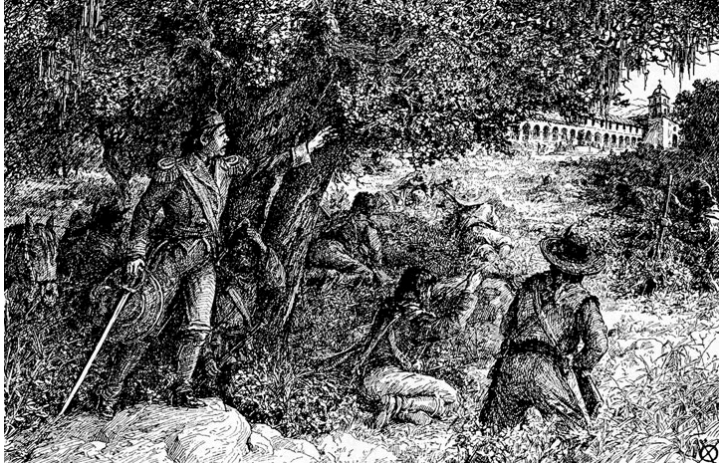


1782 to 1841: 'Population Decline'

In the years that followed, the Chumash population was decimated by the onslaught of white man's diseases, which killed up to two-thirds of the population. Many of those who were spared (nearly 85%) were relocated and settled under the supervision of Spanish priests.³

Rendering by Karan Foster
Lompoc Mission Viejo Complex





February 21, 1824: 'Chumash Revolt'

A Chumash revolt was spontaneously incited (the day before the planned revolt was to start) after a native from La Purisima traveled to Santa Inés to visit an imprisoned relative and was instead whipped for insolence the Chumash fought back. They burned down most of the buildings at the complex (sparing only the church) then moved to La Purisima, captured it and began to hold the mission indefinitely, utilizing the resources an alternate band of Chumash were able to plunder from the Santa Barbara mission before fleeing.⁴

Alexander Harmer
Mexican soldiers shown under fire by Chumash forces as they advance towards La Purísima Mission.



March 16, 1824: 'The Fall'

A month into the occupation of La Purisima the Spanish began an all-out attack in order to regain the mission, their continuous barrage of artillery eventually overpowered the Chumash defence, and as punishments for their crimes against the church, seven of the rebels were sentenced to death.⁴

Michael LeRoyoberg
Image of La Purísima Mission in the aftermath of the barrage

1842 to 1868: 'Land Redistribution'

Nicolas Den is awarded the Rancho Dos Pueblos land grant (approx. 15,500 acres) by the Mexican government. The Isla Vista mesa is designated as the "Rincon Ranch" and is considered the least valuable portion of the estate due to a lack of fresh water and an oak grove that made cattle grazing impossible.⁵

Land awarded to Nicolas Den by the Mexican Government

Image Courtesy of Goleta History

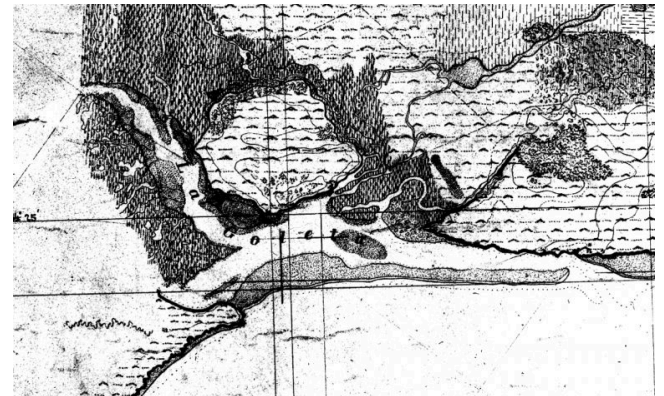


1862: 'Great Flood of 1862'

When the storming months began this year, they simply would not stop, and, inch-by-inch the Goleta Slough accumulated a total of 14 feet of silt in the storm; this turned the bay that had been a safe haven from storms for centuries into a mud bog in a crushingly short period of time.²

Image Courtesy of Goleta History

A map from 1870 that shows the post flood slough looking more like a narrow waterway than a bay



1869 to 1885: 'Division'

Following Den's death, the administrator of his estate stole and sold the parcel to Col. William Welles Hollister. Charles E. Huse sued Hollister on behalf of the Den children, and when he managed to win the case, took much of the prime land as a legal fee. They planted eucalyptus trees on the dividing lines between the properties. These same trees are still present today, seen between UCSB and Isla Vista and on the western side of IV.⁵

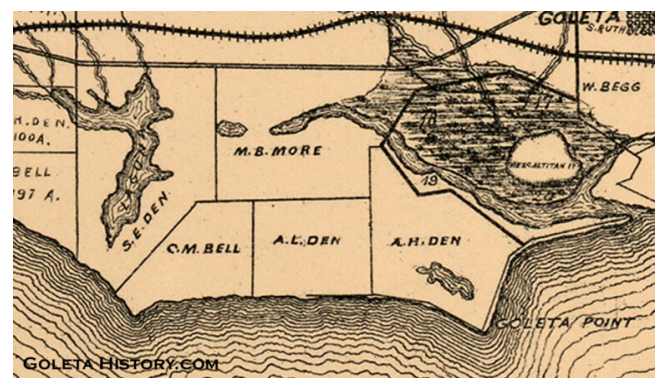
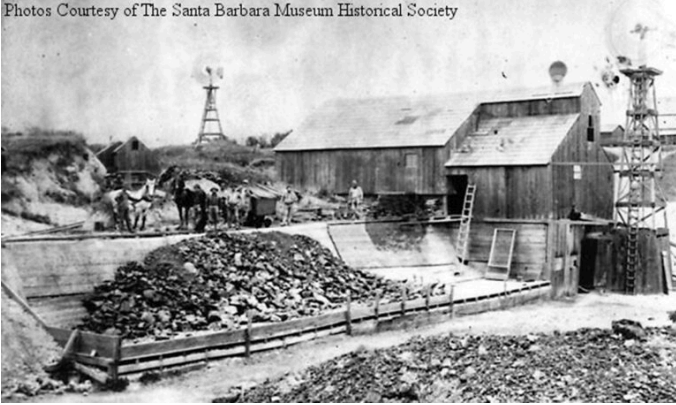


Image Courtesy of Goleta History

The divided land following this series of legal agreements.

1870 to 1880: 'Deforestation'

Photos Courtesy of The Santa Barbara Museum Historical Society



The years Charles Huse managed the Den children's land were fraught with rampant exploitation, as such, in a scheme for his own personal wealth, Huse leased a parcel of it to the More brothers for clearcutting. As part of this deal, not only were over 1,000 cords of oak wood cut and sold to the eager Goleta Beach whaling station without the permission of the Den family, but they also received none of the proceeds from the sales.¹⁰

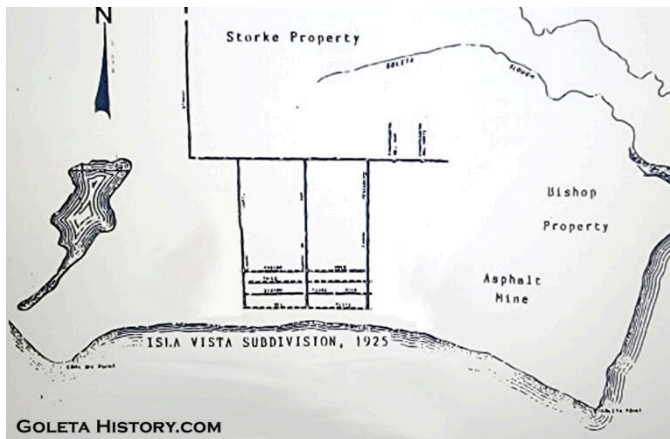
Image Courtesy of Santa Barbara Museum Historical Society

The Goleta Beach Whaling Station regularly required a surplus of logs in order to boil whale fat into oil.

1915 to 1924: 'Isla Vista Subdivision'

John and Pauline Ilharreguy purchase the mesa from Alfonso Den for \$100 in gold. They subdivide the land into narrow lots (some only 25 ft wide) to pool mineral rights for oil drilling, naming the tract Isla Vista.⁶

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
\$100 from 1915 has the same buying power as approximately \$3,200 today (in 2025)



1925 to 1941: 'Expansion'

Two adjacent subdivisions, "Ocean Terrace" and "Orilla Del Mar," are plotted next to the Ilharreguy tract by other speculators, creating the disjointed street grid that exists today.⁶

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
Newspaper advertisements promoting the subdevelopment.

Own Your Own Beach Site
—Overlooking the most beautiful beach and stretch of ocean adjacent to Santa Barbara.

Here's Your
Greatest Opportunity

ISLA VISTA TRACT

Over 100 Lots Sold
Within Three Weeks

The remaining lots—50x200—facing two streets, are offered to you at \$495 and \$595.

\$50 Down—\$10 Monthly

They are selling fast, so do not miss this last opportunity to own a beautiful beach cabin site in this most popular subdivision.
To see this tract Phone 804 or call at 1208 State Street and we will gladly take you out.
All contracts and deeds issued by the Pacific-Southwest Trust and Savings Bank.

SUBDIVIDERS
James H. Thompson & James D. Crawford

1028 State

We consider these lots an excellent investment and recommend them to our clients.

Phone—Office 804
Residence 2051J.
GOLETA HISTORY.COM

1928: 'Expectations vs Reality'

While oil is discovered nearby at the Ellwood field, exploration on the Isla Vista mesa itself fails to yield a major strike. The area remains a "ghost subdivision" inhabited only by bean farmers.⁶

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
Isla Vista circa 1928, most of the roads remained unpaved, no formal construction has begun.



1938: 'Covering our Bases'

This land, now treeless, barren, and ultimately purposeless due to the lack of oil, needed a purpose. The war swiftly brought that purpose to I.V..⁷

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
This photo shows a slough filled far more with silt than water, with Mexcaltitan island appearing to have retreated into the land.



1941 to 1948: 'The Destruction of He'lo'

The Army Corps of Engineers bulldozes the sacred Chumash capital of Help' to create fill dirt for the construction of the Marine Corps Air Station (now Santa Barbara Airport), destroying centuries of archaeology.⁷

Image Courtesy of Goleta History
Aerial photo showing construction of the US Military base in 1941.

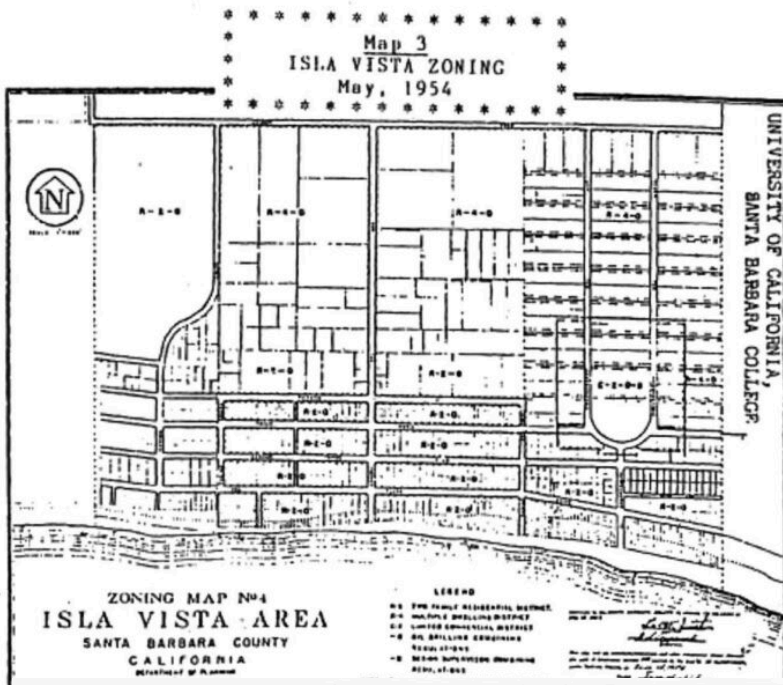


1954: 'UCSB'

The University of California Regents move their seaside campus proposals from the Riviera in Santa Barbara to the Goleta Mesa and purchase the former Marine air base after Thomas Storke and a group of his affiliates persuade the government to sell the whole area to the UC for 1\$.⁸

Image Courtesy of UCSB
Promotional photos from UCSB's opening year.





1954: 'Zoning'

After much discourse, the zoning map for Isla Vista was created, allowing more than 4 or more units per lot for roughly half of IV, keeping the loop on "Ocean Terrace" zoned commercial and the rest for one duplex per lot.¹⁰

Image Courtesy of Goleta History

1954 Zoning map proposing an Isla Vista similar to how we know it today.

1965: 'Development'

As seen from this aerial shot, development in IV has come a long way by 1965, but there are clearly still many undeveloped lots.. not for long.⁶

Image Courtesy of Goleta History

Aerial photo of Isla Vista's development as of 1965.



1967: 'A lack of foresight'

This overpacked neighborhood clearly needed one more thing, parking insecurity! Aggressive out of town developers push for the "S" designation which reduces the parking requirements per unit to less than one space.¹⁰

1956: 'A community staple'

Isla Vista Market opens. This is IV's oldest running business and is still owned and operated by the Johnson's.⁹

Image Courtesy of Local Wiki

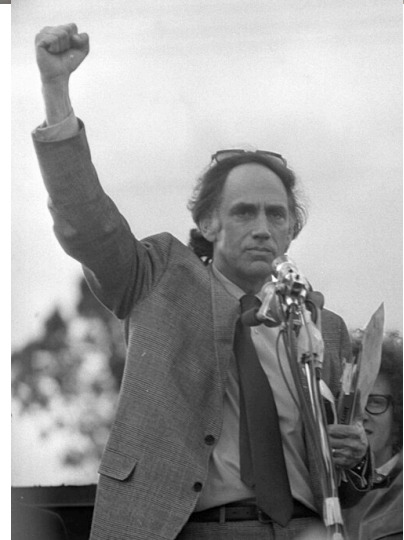
Isla Vista Market circa 1956, it had yet to be remodeled into the building we know it as today.



February 25, 1970 17:00: 'Revolution'

Isla Vista, due to its close proximity to UCSB, lack of governmental oversight, and laid back attitude, soon became a stopping point for hippies and hitch-hikers on their way down the California Coast. Radical lawyer William Kunstler speaks at Harder Stadium, encouraging students to resist the "war machine."¹¹

Image Courtesy of Wikipedia
William Kunstler



February 25, 1970 18:30: 'the Fire'

Police arrest a popular local activist (Richard Underwood) in Perfect Park (now Anisq'oyo' Park) during a peaceful protest, sparking a riot. The crowd attacks the Bank of America branch, seeing it as a symbol of imperialism. A burning dumpster is rammed into the bank, destroying it.¹¹

Image Courtesy of Santa Barbara Independent
The bank of America Logo in tatters as the fire rages on behind it.



February 28, 1970: 'Aftermath'

Headlines make it across the nation, riot police from the Los Angeles Area are sent in to control the student demonstrations.¹¹

Times Newspaper depicting the events and outcomes of the riots; 114 residents were arrested.





April 16, 1970: 'A Second Riot'

During riots protesting the temporary bank building, UCSB student Kevin Moran is shot and killed by police while attempting to put out a fire, as such, Governor Ronald Reagan declares a state of emergency and sends in the national guard to take control of the situation. The shooter is later acquitted.¹²

Image Courtesy of the UCSB Undergraduate Journal
El Gaucho Front Page, April 19, 1970



June, 1970: 'The finale'

Mass protests continue in "Perfect Park" against the 7:30 pm curfew. Hundreds are arrested, but the peaceful sit-ins eventually force the withdrawal of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Special Enforcement Bureau.¹³

Image Courtesy of Kevin Murphy
2,500 become human blockades against 150 real police and an unreal war.



July, 1970 to January, 1987: 'I.V. Community Council'

IVCC was formed, splitting up IV into 8 precincts with 11 representatives, and gained official recognition by the Board of Supervisors and the Board of Regents, both of which provided funding to the body, which took it upon itself to provide an open forum to allow Isla Vista to democratically address issues faced by the area. Among their earliest actions were the establishment of free bus passes for students, the construction of Anisq'Oyo Park, and the formation of Isla Vista Recreation and Park District (the oldest remaining governing entity within IV).¹³

Photo courtesy of the Isla Vista Free Press
The Isla Vista Community Council, 1987

June 15, 1970: 'SBCCD'

Santa Barbara Citizens Commission on Civil disorders was formed on June 15th to help the community mitigate Isla Vista's history of unprovoked beatings, shootings, and tear gassings from the police.¹³

Image Courtesy of AS Living History Project
Newspaper from 1970 depicting Isla Vista in shambles; students gathering, tear gas usage.



1971: 'LEAP'

Isla Vista Youth Projects (now LEAP) is founded to support low-income families and children in the wake of the riots.¹⁴

<https://leapcentralcoast.org/>

1972: 'Isla Vista Co-Op'

Isla Vista Food Co-op transitions from a buying club to a physical storefront.¹⁵

Image Courtesy of Melissa Cohen
Local "owners" stand outside of their newly opened community Co-op.



1972: 'Cityhood: A Dream'

I.V. Creates Community Services District (CSD) on paper; despite this, they had received backlash from the University and never received the required approval of the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).¹⁶

1975: 'Risk of Annexation'

LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) produced a plan which would annex I.V. along with Goleta and Hope Ranch, including it in the municipal borders of Santa Barbara. Rejected strongly by IV and SB residents; IV residents pass another advisory election in favor of cityhood.¹⁶



1975 to 1982: Green Spaces"

The Isla Vista Recreation and parks District unveils 14 new parks including Anisq'Oyo Park on Embarcadero Del Mar, "Dogshit" Park along Del Playa Drive and Children's Park on Picasso Rd.¹⁶

Image Courtesy of IV Parks
Children's Park

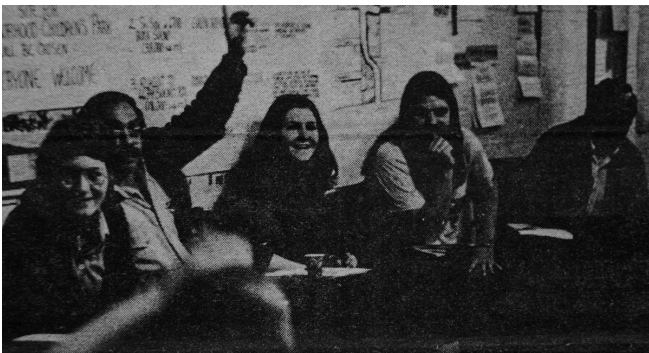
1975: 'Another Rejection'



IVCC (Isla Vista Community Council) makes another submission for independent cityhood to LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission), now with the support of the University; once more is rejected in a 4-1 vote due to financial infeasibility.¹⁶

Image Courtesy of Santa Barbara Independent
LAFCO members hearing legislative proposals following the later proposition of the Isla Vista Community Services District.

1982: 'Shift In Ideals'



With many of the IVCC election candidates supporting the independent cityhood of I.V., the Santa Barbara County board of Supervisors refused to contribute its funding of the council, shortly after this, UCSB and the Board or Regents also pulled out of their funding. In response, the IVCC was going to attempt to create a Community Services District in 1982, but opted to press on with their proposal for cityhood, regardless of the unfavorable political climate, and once more they were rejected with the same 4-1 vote by LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) in 1984. Following this, the council went defunct in 1987 due to a lack of funding.¹⁶

(Photo courtesy of the Daily Nexus)
Members of the final IVCC in discussion.

2001-2003: 'Goleta Becomes a City'

When Goleta decided to stake its claim on cityhood, Isla Vista, in a decision that would not be illegal, was once more left unincorporated; in response to this the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury released a report titled "Isla Vista, Who's in Charge" in 2002, and when it received no response, another in 2003 titled "Isla Vista, Take Charge!". The public of Isla Vista would not become generally aware of these reports until at least a decade later.²⁴

2006: 'Floatopia'

Floatopia begins as a beach party event.¹⁷

The humble beginnings of what became possibly one of the worst environmental and safety hazards the college party scene has ever seen.



2009: 'A Sinking Ship'

From 300 attendees in 2007 to 4,000 in 2008, "Floatopia" continues to grow (now on social media) and attracts over 12,000 people, leading to a public safety emergency and environmental crisis. When faced with a proposed second Floatopia within the same year, the county banned alcohol on beaches and restricted overall access.¹⁸



Santa Barbara Independent
Hordes of party hungry college students swarming the Isla Vista beaches in 2008.

2012: 'Expanding the Community'

The county of Santa Barbara purchases what is now the the Isla Vista community center and begins renovating.²⁰

Community Center: Exteriorer



2013: 'A Pivotal Year'

Seeing the huge deficit in representation, service, and governance in Isla Vista following the Governors decision to dissolve all Redevelopment

Agencies, the community and UCSB Associated Students took charge and won a major victory lobbying the County for \$100,000 in new lighting. This victory, led primarily by students, only made it more apparent the clear need for Isla Vista to be able to lobby for itself.²⁴

2014: 'Deltopia Riots'

After partygoers object to the arrest of a student by police, some of the 15,000 attendees begin to resist, two officers are injured and over 100 people were arrested.¹⁹

The Daily Nexus

Police Officers in riot gear order crowds to disperse on and around Del Playa Drive.

April 18, 2014: 'A Path Forward'

The Open People's Party sweeps AS Elections running on the CSD idea, residents coalesce around the idea of its creation, but there is dissent from IVRPD and after a meeting initiated by the AS Execs with stakeholders of IV from the University, County, law enforcement, and State there is still no clear path forward.²⁴



May 23, 2014: 'A Tragedy'

In the wake of the riot and all of this positive forward thinking sentiment, our community experiences the most horrific tragedy in its history.

Elliot Rodger tragically murders six students and injures 14 others; this leads to the passing of AB 1014, creating the Gun Violence Restraining Order (Red Flag Law), championed by victim's father Richard Martinez.²¹

Claire Bredenoord

Over 4,000 students carried white candles as they walked from campus

October 7, 2015: 'New Beginnings'

With the public viewing the past year as heavily detrimental to UCSB's reputation, trustees looked to the university to swiftly correct the course of Isla Vista. This led to the foundation of the Committee on Isla Vista Strategies to make formal recommendations for the university--from here the concept of "special legislative districts" was rediscovered and at last, the committee formally recommended UCSB to support the establishment of a local government, crafted by state legislation to avoid another rejection from LAFCO.

On October 7th a Town Hall is hosted by Associated Students, the idea of a special legislative community services district is proposed (alongside options for a Municipal Advisory Council and a City) and in a landslide vote for the establishment of a CSD, a path forward begins to appear.²⁴

August 2014 - August 8th 2015: 'AB 3'

After meeting with Assemblymember Das Williams in August 2014 and seeing his immediate support for legislative governance of Isla Vista, the bill was drafted, titled Assembly Bill 3, and turned in on the first day of session.

After lobbying the Country, organizing supporters, negotiating with stakeholders, researching everything about local government law in CA, lobbying government officials, and being the primary point of contact with press to ensure accurate reporting, Governor Brown signed the bill and just like that, a year after the idea was presented to the community, AB 3 passed. A year following this victory, LAFCO voted 7-0 to set and approve the 8% utility tax rate.²²



March 1st, 2017: 'IV Self Governance Day'

Voters approved Measure E with 87% of the vote, and on March 1st, 2017, the Isla Vista Community Services District (IVCSD) was established to provide local services. Measure F, the Utility tax that would fund the CSD, failed with only 62% of the vote, leaving it as a priority for the next year's ballot.²²

IVCSD's alternate Spring Festival event, launched in 2021, featuring sobriety stations, music, and food to encourage safe and responsible fun.



2018: 'Self Sufficiency'

Voters approved Measure R, establishing an 8% Utility User Tax (UUT) on certain utilities to fund the district with 84% of the vote. This once more proved the community longed to take governance into its own hands, and would fight for its essential services.²³

*Santa Barbara Independent
Supporters gather to raise visibility for
measure R.*

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2. **800–1100 CE:** The Chumash settle *He'lo'* (Mescalitan Island), establishing a major political capital in the Goleta Slough.

1542: Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo enters the Santa Barbara Channel and observes the large population at *He'lo'*.

1769: The Portolá expedition passes through, recording the area as a "grand spot" for a potential mission.

1782: Captain Pantoja's expedition rejects the location for a mission due to the "thickest forest" and dense population.

1862: The Great Flood fills the Goleta Slough with 14 feet of silt, destroying the harbor and changing the geography.

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3. **1782-1841:** The Chumash population was decimated by diseases, which killed up to two-thirds of the population; 85% of the remaining were relocated under Spanish priests.

Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. (n.d.). *Our History*. <https://chumash.gov/chumash-history>

The Rancho & Subdivision Era (1842 – 1928)

4. **1824:** A Chumash revolt begins at Mission Santa Inés and spreads to La Purísima, where the Chumash hold the mission for a month.

California Missions Foundation. (n.d.). *Mission La Purísima Concepción*. Retrieved January 23, 2026, from <https://californiamissionsfoundation.org/mission-la-purisima/>

5. **1842:** Nicolas Den is awarded the Rancho Dos Pueblos land grant; the Isla Vista mesa is designated "Rincon Ranch."

1869–1885: Legal disputes between Hollister and the Den family lead to the planting of eucalyptus trees along property lines.

1954: The University of California Regents purchase the former Marine base to establish UCSB.

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6. **1915:** John and Pauline Ilharreguy purchase the mesa for \$100 in gold and subdivide it into narrow lots for oil speculation.

1928: Oil exploration fails to yield a major strike, leaving the area a "ghost subdivision" inhabited by bean farmers.

1965: As seen from this aerial shot, development in IV has come a long way by 1965, but there are clearly still many undeveloped lots.. not for long

Social Print Lab. (n.d.). *Research and History: Isla Vista*. Retrieved January 23, 2026, from <https://socialprintlab.com/research-and-history>

War, The University, & Zoning (1941 – 1967)

7. **1938-41:** The Army Corps of Engineers bulldozes the sacred village of *He'lo'* to create fill dirt for the Santa Barbara Airport.

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9. **1956:** The Isla Vista Market opens; it remains the oldest running business in the community.

LocalWiki. (n.d.). *Isla Vista Market*. Retrieved January 23, 2026, from

https://localwiki.org/islavista/Isla_Vista_Market

10. **1870:** Charles Huse, managing the Den Family's land, sold over 1,000 cords of old

growth oak wood, giving none of the proceeds to the family.

1967: Developers push for the "S" parking designation, reducing parking requirements to less than one space per unit.

Modugno, T. (2023, October 26). *Isla Vista*. Goleta History.
<https://goletahistory.com/isla-vista/>

The Riots & Community Building (1970 – 1987)

11. **1970 (Feb 25):** The Bank of America branch is burned down during riots following a speech by William Kunstler.

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12. **1970 (Apr 16):** Student Kevin Moran is shot and killed by police while attempting to put out a fire during a protest.

Time Magazine. (1970, May 4). *California: Second Version*.
<https://time.com/archive/6876878/california-second-version/>

13. **1970 (June):** Mass protests continue in "Perfect Park" (Anisq'oyo' Park) against curfews.

1970–1987: The Isla Vista Community Council (IVCC) is formed to advocate for self-governance.

1972–1984: Multiple proposals for cityhood are rejected by LAFCO due to financial feasibility concerns.

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16. **1972:** Isla Vista attempts to form a Community Services District (CSD) on paper. The

Proposal faces backlash from the University and ultimately fails.

1975: LAFCO proposes a plan to annex Isla Vista. Residents of both Isla Vista and Santa Barbara strongly oppose the merger.

1975–1982: The Isla Vista Recreation and Park District (IVRPD) transforms the landscape by establishing 14 new parks.

1975: The Isla Vista Community Council (IVCC) submits a new bid for independent cityhood, this time securing the support of the University. Despite this backing, LAFCO rejects the proposal in a 4-1 vote, citing financial infeasibility.

1982: After the County and University pull funding from the IVCC due to its aggressive pursuit of cityhood, the council attempts one final proposal. LAFCO rejects another cityhood proposal in 1984, and without funding, the IVCC officially goes defunct in 1987.

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