Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

Richard J. Bruckner
Director

February 28, 2012

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

HEARING ON SANTA CLARITA VALLEY AREA PLAN UPDATE
PROJECT NO. R2007-01226-(5)
PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 2009-00006-(5)
ZONE CHANGE NO. 2009-00009-(5)
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO. 2009-00080-(5)
(FIFTH SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT) (3-VOTES)

SUBJECT

The Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan (Area Plan) was adopted by your Board on February 16, 1984. A comprehensive update of the Area Plan was adopted by your Board on December 8, 1990. The Area Plan, a component of the Countywide General Plan, guides development and conservation within the unincorporated communities of the Santa Clarita Valley (Valley). The Area Plan has a "horizon year" of 2010, so it is necessary to update the Area Plan with revised demographic information, maps, goals, objectives, and policies that reflect current conditions, projected growth, and desired outcomes.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD, AFTER THE PUBLIC HEARING:

1. Certify that the Board has reviewed and considered the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR), the related California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations (SOC), and the Mitigation Monitoring Plan (MMP) for the Area Plan Update in accordance with CEQA, the County CEQA Guidelines, and the County's Environmental Document Reporting Procedures and Guidelines.

2. Determine that the mitigation measures in the FEIR and MMP reduce the project's significant environmental impacts to less-than-significant levels except for certain specified unavoidable impacts, which have been reduced to an acceptable level and are outweighed by the benefits of the project as identified in the CEQA Findings and SOC for the Area Plan Update.

3. Certify the FEIR and adopt the related CEQA Findings and SOC and the MMP for the Area Plan Update.

4. Indicate its intent to approve Plan Amendment No. 2009-00006-(5) and Zone Change No. 2009-00009-(5), as recommended by the Regional Planning Commission (RPC).

5. Instruct County Counsel to prepare the final documents and findings for the Area Plan Update and to bring them back to your Board for consideration at a future Board meeting.

PURPOSE/JUSTIFCATION OF RECOMMENDED ACTION

The City of Santa Clarita (City) was incorporated on December 15, 1987. The City's first General Plan was adopted by the City Council on June 26, 1991. The City's General Plan guides development and conservation within the City's jurisdiction, which is surrounded by the unincorporated communities of the Valley.

In 2000, the County and City initiated "One Valley One Vision" (OVOV), an effort to update the County's Area Plan and the City's General Plan with compatible goals, objectives, and policies that would provide cohesive guidance for development and conservation within the entire Valley, which both jurisdictions share. This unique collaborative effort acknowledged the common needs and desires of Valley residents, regardless of whether they lived in the City or in an unincorporated community. It was guided by the following Vision, which was developed by the County and City through an extensive outreach process:

> *The Santa Clarita Valley is a wonderful place to live, work, play, and raise a family. The Valley is a mosaic of unique villages with growing ethnic diversity, each with individual identities, surrounded by a greenbelt of forest lands and natural open spaces. The villages are unified by the Valley Center activity core, a beautiful environmental setting that includes the skyline and Santa Clara River, a vibrant growing economy, and a rich history of common social values. The Valley's network of roads, transit, and trails link these villages and provides access to a wide offering of quality education, cultural, recreation, and social services and facilities.*
>
> *Life in the Santa Clarita Valley will continue to be exciting, enjoyable, and rewarding through a broad range of housing types, an increase in quality jobs in proximity to all neighborhoods, and transit-oriented villages complemented by excellent schools, attractive pars and other recreational amenities, expanded trail networks, and preserved natural resource areas. As the Valley moves forward, it is crucial that sound and sustainable planning principles shape new villages and enhance established neighborhoods. Implementing policies to increase mobility*

and accessibility, manage traffic congestion, improve air quality, and conserve water and energy resources throughout the Valley is essential to maintain the overall high quality of life.

Plan Amendment No. 2009-0006-(5) would repeal the current Area Plan, adopted in 1984 and subsequently amended, and would adopt the Area Plan Update that was developed through the OVOV effort. The Area Plan Update includes the following Elements, which are compatible with the corresponding Elements in the City's updated General Plan:

Land Use Element: This Element guides and directs the physical development of each unincorporated community in the Valley. Topics covered by this Element include the "Valley of Villages" theme, Specific Plans, demographic characteristics, economic issues, urban form and community design, planning for public health and environmental quality, and coordination of land use planning with other agencies. In addition, this Element describes the proposed Land Use Policy Map. The proposed Land Use Policy Map includes a new land use legend that is designed to be compatible with the new land use legend in the proposed Countywide General Plan Update.

The proposed Land Use Policy Map was developed through a suitability analysis that was applied to every parcel in the Valley. The suitability analysis was driven by compatibility with the existing development pattern as well as environmental, safety, and infrastructure constraints, including but not limited to:

- Slopes
- Significant ridgelines
- Existing and proposed Significant Ecological Areas
- Biological resources
- Very high fire hazard severity zones
- Seismic zones
- Landslide and liquefaction zones
- Flood zones
- Proximity to existing and proposed major roadways (as identified in the Countywide Highway Plan) and transit facilities
- Proximity to existing urban infrastructure and services, such as sewers, water lines, fire stations, and schools

The suitability analysis and the proposed Land Use Policy Map that was developed through this analysis are consistent with the Vision, Guiding Principles, Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Area Plan Update.

Circulation Element: This Element plans for the continued development of efficient, cost-effective, and comprehensive transportation systems and is closely tied to the Land Use Element and the proposed Land Use Policy Map. Topics covered by this Element include congestion management, existing roadways, recommendations for new

roadways and improvements to existing roadways, rail service, air service, public transit, and non-motorized travel modes, such as bikeways and multi-purpose trails. In addition, this Element includes amendments to the Countywide Highway Plan within the Valley and new Highway cross-sections that are consistent with the cross-sections in the City's updated General Plan. A traffic study was completed by Austin-Foust Associates using a traffic model jointly developed by the County and City, and the results of this study were incorporated into this Element.

Conservation and Open Space Element: This Element establishes a policy framework for the designation and long-term preservation of open space and also addresses resource conservation issues and global climate change. Topics covered by this Element include environmental sustainability, soil and geologic resources, water resources, biological resources, cultural and historic resources, scenic resources, air resources, energy conservation, parks and recreation, and open space resources, including trails. In addition, this Element significantly expands the Significant Ecological Areas within the Santa Clarita Valley, based on studies conducted for the proposed Countywide General Plan Update.

Safety Element: This Element aims to reduce the potential risk of death, injuries, property damage, and economic and social dislocation, resulting from natural hazards, crime, and emergencies. Topics covered by this Element include seismic and geological hazards, flood hazards, fire hazards, severe weather conditions, hazardous materials, emergency preparedness and response, law enforcement, terrorism, and accident prevention.

Noise Element: This Element includes a comprehensive program for noise management in the planning process. Topics covered by this Element include the health effects of noise, existing and future noise in the Santa Clarita Valley, and other noise issues. A noise study was completed by Mestre Greve Associates using a methodology jointly developed by the County and City, and the results of this study were incorporated into this Element.

In addition, Plan Amendment No. 2009-00006-(5) would also amend the currently adopted Countywide General Plan to clarify adopted provisions related to hillside management areas, and to allow local plans, such as the Area Plan Update, to establish the allowable maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas. At the current time, allowable maximum residential densities in hillside management areas within rural land use designations are determined by the slope of the parcel. In order to provide greater clarity and clearer expectations among property owners, community residents, and reviewing authorities, the rural land use designations in the Area Plan Update will determine the allowable maximum residential densities in hillside management areas, regardless of slope. These rural land use designations are intended to reflect development constraints, including slope.

Zone Change No. 2009-00009-(5) would change the zoning designations of parcels within the Bouquet Canyon, Castaic Canyon, Mount Gleason, Newhall, Sand Canyon, and Soledad Zoned Districts. This change in zoning designations is necessary to ensure that zoning is consistent with the proposed Land Use Policy Map, as required by State Law. Staff conducted an extensive zoning consistency analysis for all unincorporated communities within the Valley. This zoning consistency analysis accounted for the minimum lot size requirements of the adopted Agua Dulce, Castaic Area, and San Francisquito Canyon Community Standards Districts.

In addition, Zone Change No. 2009-00009-(5) would also amend the County Zoning Ordinance to clarify adopted provisions related to hillside management areas, and to allow local plans, such as the Area Plan Update, to establish the allowable maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas. An explanation of the change in allowable maximum hillside management area density is provided in the description of the proposed Plan Amendment above. This amendment to the County Zoning Ordinance is necessary to ensure consistency with the proposed Plan Amendment, as required by State Law.

As a component of the Countywide General Plan, the Area Plan must be consistent with the currently adopted Countywide General Plan. The Area Plan Update has been developed to be consistent with the currently adopted Countywide General Plan, although the proposed Plan Amendment will amend the currently adopted Countywide General Plan to clarify adopted provisions related to hillside management areas, and to allow local plans, such as the Area Plan Update, to establish the allowable maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas.

The Area Plan Update is consistent with the policies of the currently adopted Countywide General Plan, including but not limited to:

- **General Policy 9:** Direct urban development and revitalization efforts to protect natural and man-made amenities and to avoid severe hazard areas, such as flood prone areas, active fault zones, steep hillsides, landslide areas and fire hazard areas.
- **General Policy 12:** Conserve energy to ensure adequate supplies for future use.
- **General Policy 13:** Conserve the available supply of water and protect water quality.
- **General Policy 14:** Restore and protect air quality through the control of industrial and vehicular emissions, improved land use management, energy conservation and transportation planning.
- **General Policy 17:** Promote the efficient use of land through a more concentrated pattern of urban development, including the focusing of new urban growth into areas of suitable land.

- **General Policy 22:** Ensure that new development in urban expansion areas will occur in a manner consistent with stated plan policies and will pay for the marginal public costs (economic, social, and environmental) that it generates.
- **General Policy 23:** Ensure that development in non-urban areas is compatible with rural life styles, does not necessitate the expansion of urban service systems, and does not cause significant negative environmental impacts or subject people and property to serious hazards.
- **General Policy 24:** Focus intensive urban uses in an interdependent system of activity centers located to effectively provide services throughout the urban area and supported by adequate public transportation facilities.
- **General Policy 49:** Upgrade the existing road system in a manner consistent with the policies and strategies of the plan for resource protection and urban development.
- **General Policy 64:** Promote jobs within commuting range of urban residential areas in order to reduce commuting time, save energy, reduce air pollution, and improve public convenience.
- **General Policy 67:** Improve the effectiveness of intergovernmental coordination.
- **Area-Specific Policy 63 (Santa Clarita Valley):** Focus new urban growth in a compact pattern on suitable land in and around the existing communities of Newhall, Saugus, Valencia, Canyon Country, and Castaic.
- **Area-Specific Policy 64 (Santa Clarita Valley):** Encourage the development of a new regional center in Valencia.
- **Area-Specific Policy 65 (Santa Clarita Valley):** Maintain the non-urban character of the remainder of the Santa Clarita Valley.
- **Area-Specific Policy 66 (Santa Clarita Valley):** Maintain non-urban hillside areas in open space and low density non-urban uses.

The Area Plan Update has also been developed to be consistent with the proposed Countywide General Plan Update. As previously mentioned, the proposed Land Use Policy Map includes a new land use legend that is designed to be compatible with the new land use legend in the proposed Countywide General Plan Update. In addition, the Area Plan Update significantly expands the Significant Ecological Areas within the Valley, based on studies conducted for the proposed Countywide General Plan Update.

Implementation of Strategic Plan Goals

The Area Plan Update promotes Goal One of the County's Strategic Plan related to "Operational Effectiveness" by ensuring certainty for property owners and eliminating potential regulatory burdens associated with inconsistent zoning and land use. The Area Plan Update promotes Goal Three of the County's Strategic Plan related to "Community and Municipal Services" by identifying the Valley's long-term vision and needs and establishing a framework of goals, policies, implementation strategies, and land uses to meet those needs.

FISCAL IMPACTS/FINANCING

Implementation of the Area Plan Update will not result in additional net County costs. Therefore, no funding is being requested at this time.

FACTS AND PROVISIONS/LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

On September 4, 2009, the County released a Draft Area Plan Update and a related Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). To facilitate public review, copies of the Draft Area Plan Update and DEIR were made available on the Department of Regional Planning Web Site and were provided to County Libraries in Canyon Country, Castaic, Newhall, and Valencia. On October 5, 2009, the RPC held a public hearing regarding the Draft Area Plan Update and DEIR at the Castaic Sports Complex. In preparation for the hearing, a notice was published in *The Signal*, a newspaper of general circulation, satisfying the notice requirements of State Law and the County Zoning Ordinance. A mailed notice was also provided to the owner of each parcel within the unincorporated areas of the Valley.

The RPC continued the October 5, 2009, public hearing to November 23, 2009, then to February 24, 2010. Over the course of those three dates, approximately 50 individuals testified and the RPC was provided with approximately 100 written comment letters. On February 24, 2010, staff reported that the Draft Area Plan Update and DEIR would be revised and re-circulated in order to address the various issues and concerns that had been raised in the testimony and written comments. The RPC continued the public hearing to September 29, 2010, then to December 8, 2010.

On November 23, 2010, the County released a Revised Draft Area Plan Update and a related Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report (RDEIR). To facilitate public review, copies of the Revised Draft Area Plan and RDEIR were made available on the Department of Regional Planning Web Site and were provided to County Libraries in Acton/Agua Dulce, Castaic, Newhall, and Valencia. A notice was published in *The Signal*, and a mailed notice was also provided to each individual and organization that previously testified or submitted written comments to the RPC.

On December 8, 2010, the RPC continued the public hearing to March 23, 2011, then to May 25, 2011. Over the course of those three dates, approximately 20 individuals testified and the RPC was provided with approximately 130 written comment letters. The FEIR includes responses to the issues raised in the aforementioned testimony and written comments.

On September 15, 2011, the County released a Final Draft Area Plan Update and a related FEIR. To facilitate public review, copies of the Final Draft Area Plan and FEIR were made available on the Department of Regional Planning Web Site, were provided

to County Libraries in Acton/Agua Dulce and Castaic, and were provided to each individual and organization that previously testified or submitted written comments on the RDEIR.

On September 28, 2011, the RPC closed the public hearing and adopted a resolution to your Board. The resolution recommended that your Board conduct a public hearing regarding the Area Plan Update, certify the FEIR, and approve Plan Amendment No. 2009-00006-(5) and Zone Change No. 2009-00009-(5).

A public hearing by your Board is required pursuant to Section 22.16.200 of the County Code and Section 65856 of the State Government Code. Required notice must be given pursuant to the procedures and requirements set forth in Section 22.60.174 of the County Code. These procedures exceed the minimum standards of Sections 6061, 65090, and 65856 of the State Government Code relating to notice of public hearing.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

Staff has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is the appropriate environmental document for this project. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the EIR was distributed in July 2008. Written comments regarding the NOP were received throughout the remainder of 2008. An EIR Scoping Meeting, in which members of the public could submit verbal comments regarding the NOP, was held on August 4, 2008, at Santa Clarita City Hall.

In 2009, a DEIR was prepared for this project in compliance with CEQA and the County's environmental reporting procedures. Written and verbal comments on the NOP were addressed in the DEIR. A Notice of Completion was filed with the County Clerk and the State Clearinghouse. The formal review period for the DEIR was from September 4, 2009, to November 2, 2009. Subsequently, the RPC extended the formal review period for the DEIR to February 1, 2010. Written comments received regarding the DEIR required a reexamination of the DEIR data and revisions to the DEIR. At the continued public hearing on February 24, 2010, staff advised the RPC that the DEIR would be revised and re-circulated.

Accordingly, a RDEIR was prepared for this project in compliance with CEQA and the County's environmental reporting procedures. Written and verbal comments on the NOP were addressed in the RDEIR. A Notice of Completion was filed with the County Clerk and the State Clearinghouse. The formal public review period for the RDEIR was from November 23, 2010 to January 24, 2011. While substantive changes were only made to the Air Quality, Traffic and Circulation, Global Climate Change, and Water Supply Sections of the DEIR, staff determined that the entire DEIR would be re-circulated for review and comment as an RDEIR. Since staff re-circulated the entire DEIR as an RDEIR, staff required reviewers to submit new comments and did not respond to previous comments received during the first circulation period, even if those comments

pertained to a portion of the DEIR that had not been substantively changed. Although previous comments are part of the administrative record, the previous comments did not require a written response in the FEIR.

The RDEIR concluded that this project, even with the recommended mitigation measures, will result in potentially significant environmental impacts with regard to:

- Air Quality
- Global Climate Change
- Agricultural Resources
- Biological Resources
- Water Service (outside the Castaic Lake Water Agency service area)
- Utilities and Infrastructure (solid waste)
- Noise

The FEIR was distributed to the State Clearinghouse, individuals and organizations that submitted comments on the RDEIR, and other interested parties on September 14, 2011. It includes written responses to public testimony and comment letters received during, or after, the RDEIR comment period.

IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES (OR PROJECTS)

Implementation of the Area Plan will not significantly impact County services.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard J. Bruckner
Director

RJB:JS:MWG:AT:gmc

Attachments:

1. Project Summary
2. Summary of Public Hearing Proceedings
3. Resolution of the Regional Planning Commission
4. FEIR
5. CEQA Findings and SOC
6. MMP
7. Final Draft Area Plan Update
8. Draft General Plan Amendment
9. Draft Zoning Ordinance Amendment
10. Legal Notice of Board Hearing
11. List of Persons to be Notified

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
Chief Executive Office
County Counsel