



# Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning

*Planning for the Challenges Ahead*



Richard J. Bruckner  
Director

September 15, 2011

**TO:** Pat Modugno, Chair  
Esther L. Valadez, Vice Chair  
David W. Louie, Commissioner  
Harold V. Helsley, Commissioner  
Curt Pedersen, Commissioner

**FROM:** Mitch Glaser, AICP, Supervising Regional Planner  
Community Studies North Section

**SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 28, 2011 – AGENDA ITEM #6**  
**PROJECT NO. R2007-01226-(5)**  
**PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 2009-00006-(5)**  
**ZONE CHANGE NO. 2009-00009-(5)**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO. 2009-00080-(5)**  
**SANTA CLARITA VALLEY AREA PLAN UPDATE (ONE VALLEY ONE VISION)**

## **SUMMARY**

This staff report is a supplement to the staff reports submitted to your Commission on September 17, 2009; November 10, 2009; February 11, 2010; September 16, 2010; November 23, 2010; December 2, 2010; December 8, 2010; March 10, 2011; and May 12, 2011.

On September 4, 2009, the County released its Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan (Draft Area Plan) and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). On October 5, 2009, your Commission held a public hearing regarding the Draft Area Plan and DEIR. Your Commission continued the public hearing to November 23, 2009, then to February 24, 2010. On February 24, 2010, staff reported that the Draft Area Plan and DEIR would be revised and re-circulated in order to address the various issues and concerns that had been raised in testimony and written comments provided to your Commission. Your Commission continued the public hearing to September 29, 2010, then to December 8, 2010.

On November 23, 2010, the County released its Revised Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan (Revised Draft Area Plan) and Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report (RDEIR). At the continued public hearing on December 8, 2010, your Commission considered the Revised Draft Area Plan and RDEIR and directed staff to investigate issues related to groundwater recharge areas and concerns related to the proposed

land use designations in portions of the unincorporated community of Castaic. In addition, your Commission directed staff to prepare the Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan (Final Draft Area Plan) and Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) and continued the public hearing to March 23, 2011. Subsequently, your Commission continued the public hearing to May 25, 2011, then to September 28, 2011.

On September 15, 2011, the County released its Final Draft Area Plan and FEIR. At the continued public hearing on September 28, 2011, your Commission will consider the Final Draft Area Plan and FEIR. Staff recommends that your Commission close the public hearing and adopt a resolution which recommends that the Board of Supervisors hold a public hearing to consider and adopt the Final Draft Area Plan, as well as the related General Plan amendment and County Zoning Ordinance amendment, and to consider and certify the FEIR, as well as the related California Environmental Quality Act findings, statement of overriding considerations, and mitigation monitoring and reporting program.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan (Area Plan) was adopted by the Board of Supervisors (Board) on February 16, 1984. A comprehensive update of the Area Plan was adopted by the 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.

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," 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 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 parks 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.*

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The One Valley One Vision effort includes extensive community outreach, jointly conducted by the County and City over the course of several years. This outreach began with a "Flapjack Forum" in January 2001, at which time the initiation of the One Valley One Vision effort was formally announced. Other early outreach activities included stakeholder interviews, a community survey, activities at local schools, and creation of the "Santa Clarita Valley Snapshot" brochure.

In April and May 2001, "Visioning" workshops were held at the following locations:

- Castaic Elementary School, Castaic;
- La Mesa Junior High School, Canyon Country;
- Pinetree Elementary School, Canyon Country; and
- William Hart High School, Newhall.

In October 2001, the "Valley Congress" event was held at Canyon High School in Canyon Country. At this event, the Vision and Guiding Principles were ratified by County and City residents. The Vision and Guiding Principles are the foundation of the County's updated Area Plan and the City's updated General Plan.

Over the course of the next several years, the County and City prepared and released a Technical Background Report and began preparing the updated Area Plan and updated General Plan. In May 2007, a "Poster Plan" was released, which depicted a Land Use Concept Plan, documented the progress of the One Valley One Vision effort, and

identified future tasks. Also in May 2007, “Vision into Reality” workshops were held at the following locations:

- Agua Dulce Elementary School, Agua Dulce;
- Castaic Middle School, Castaic;
- Santa Clarita Sports Complex, Canyon Country; and
- West Ranch High School, West Ranch.

In October 2008, the County released its Preliminary Draft Area Plan and the City released its Preliminary Draft General Plan. In addition, the County launched OVOV-NET, an interactive Geographic Information System mapping tool that the public could access on the Internet. In November 2008, “Open House” events were held at the following locations:

- Castaic Elementary School, Castaic;
- Pinetree Elementary School, Canyon Country;
- Rancho Pico Junior High School, West Ranch; and
- Santa Clarita Sports Complex, Canyon Country.

Also in October 2008, *The Signal* newspaper published an extensive 11-part series on the One Valley One Vision effort, which is archived on the Internet at <http://www.the-signal.com/news/archive/4713>. This 11-part series was re-published by *The Signal* as a special supplement in March 2009. Subsequently, *The Signal* continued to report on the progress of the One Valley One Vision effort, as did other publications, such as the *Los Angeles Daily News*, the *Acton/Agua Dulce News*, and the *California Planning & Development Report*.

County staff attended a meeting of the Castaic Area Town Council in March 2009, and meetings of the Agua Dulce Town Council in September 2009 and March 2011, to discuss the One Valley One Vision effort.

On September 4, 2009, the County released its Draft Area Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). To facilitate public review, copies of the Draft Area Plan 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 December 5, 2009, your Commission held a public hearing regarding the Draft Area Plan and DEIR at the Castaic Sports Complex. In preparation for the hearing, notice was published in *The Signal*, 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 area of the Santa Clarita Valley (over 30,000 parcels). The notice was customized for each parcel, listing the current and proposed land use designations and zoning designations for that parcel.

Your Commission 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 your Commission was provided with approximately 100 written comment letters. On February 24, 2010, staff reported that the Draft Area Plan 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. Your Commission continued the public hearing to September 29, 2010, then to December 8, 2010.

On November 23, 2010, the County released its Revised Draft Area Plan and 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. Notice was published in *The Signal* newspaper and a mailed notice was also provided to each individual and organization that previously testified or submitted written comments to your Commission.

On December 8, 2010, your Commission continued the public hearing to March 23, 2011, then to May 25, 2011. Over the course of those three dates, 22 individuals testified and approximately 130 comment letters were received. The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) includes responses to the issues raised in the aforementioned testimony and written comments.

On September 15, 2011, the County released its Final Draft Area Plan and 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. In addition, copies of the FEIR were provided to County Libraries in Acton/Agua Dulce in Castaic and were provided to each individual and organization that previously testified or submitted written comments on the RDEIR.

### **PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT**

Plan Amendment No. 2009-00006-(5), if adopted, would repeal the currently adopted Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, adopted in 1984 and subsequently amended, and would adopt the Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan that was developed through the One Valley One Vision effort. The Final Draft Area Plan 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 Santa Clarita 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 Santa Clarita 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; and
- 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 Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan.

**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 Santa Clarita Valley and new Highway cross-sections that are consistent with the cross-sections in the City's updated Draft General Plan. A traffic study was completed by Austin-Foust Associations, 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, climate change and 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 including noise management in the planning process. Topics covered by this Element include 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.

As previously mentioned, the Revised Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan was released in November 2010. The Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, released on September 15, 2011, includes the following changes:

- Nine policies in the Land Use Element have been added or revised;
- One objective and 15 policies in the Circulation Element have been added or revised; and
- Eight policies in the Conservation and Open Space Element have been added or revised.

These changes were made to address the various issues and concerns that were previously raised in testimony and written comments regarding the Revised Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan and Revised Draft EIR. A document highlighting these changes is attached to this staff report.

In addition, Plan Amendment No. 2009-00006-(5), if adopted, 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 Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, 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 Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan 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.

### **PROPOSED ZONE CHANGE**

Zone Change No. 2009-00009-(5), if adopted, 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 Santa Clarita 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), if adopted, would also amend the County Zoning Ordinance to clarify adopted provisions related to hillside management areas, and to allow local plans, such as the Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, 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 Zoning Ordinance is necessary to ensure consistency with the proposed Plan Amendment, as required by State Law.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH GENERAL PLAN**

As a component of the Countywide General Plan, the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan must be consistent with the currently adopted Countywide General Plan. The Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan 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 Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, to establish the allowable maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas.

The Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan 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 Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan 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 Final Draft Area Plan significantly expands the Significant Ecological Areas within the Santa Clarita Valley, based on studies conducted for the proposed Countywide General Plan Update.

## **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 Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) was prepared for this project in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act 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, your Commission 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 your Commission that the DEIR would be revised and re-circulated.

Accordingly, a Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report (RDEIR) was prepared for this project in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act 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 Final Environmental Impact Report (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); and

- 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 that were received during, or after, the RDEIR comment period. CEQA findings, a statement of overriding considerations, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting program have also been prepared.

### **CITY OF SANTA CLARITA DOUCMENTS**

On June 14, 2011, the Santa Clarita City Council adopted the City's updated General Plan and certified the related Final Environmental Impact Report.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that your Commission close the public hearing and adopt a resolution which recommends that the Board of Supervisors hold a public hearing to consider and adopt the Final Draft Area Plan, as well as the related General Plan amendment and County Zoning Ordinance amendment, and to consider and certify the FEIR, as well as the related California Environmental Quality Act findings, statement of overriding considerations, and mitigation monitoring and reporting program.

### **RECOMMENDED MOTION**

**I move that the Regional Planning Commission close the public hearing adopt the resolution related to Project No. R2007-01226-(5).**

Please find pertinent documents attached. A draft resolution will be transmitted to your Commission on September 22, 2011. Additional information on the One Valley One Vision is available on the Internet at <http://planning.lacounty.gov/ovov>. Should you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 974-6476 or [mglaser@planning.lacounty.gov](mailto:mglaser@planning.lacounty.gov).

MWG:mwg

Attachments:

1. Final Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, including proposed Land Use Policy Map and Zoning Map (CD-ROM)
2. Final Environmental Impact Report (CD-ROM)

3. Draft Amendment to the Countywide General Plan
4. Draft Amendment to the County Zoning Ordinance
5. Revisions for Final Draft Area Plan
6. CEQA Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations