



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



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FROM: Mitch Glaser, AICP, Supervising Regional Planner *MG*
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SUBJECT: OCTOBER 5, 2009 -- AGENDA ITEM #5
PROJECT NO. R2007-01226-(5)
PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 2009-00006-(5)
ZONE CHANGE NO. 2009-00009-(5)
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CASE NO. 2009-00080-(5)
SANTA CLARITA VALLEY AREA PLAN UPDATE (ONE VALLEY ONE VISION)

BACKGROUND

The Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on February 16, 1984. A comprehensive update of the Area Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on December 6, 1990. The Area Plan, a component of the Countywide General Plan, contains policies for future development and conservation that are specific to the unincorporated communities of the Santa Clarita 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 and projected growth.

The City of Santa Clarita was incorporated on December 15, 1987. The City of Santa Clarita General Plan was adopted by the Santa Clarita City Council on June 26, 1991. The General Plan contains policies for future development and conservation that are specific to the City's jurisdiction, which is surrounded by the unincorporated communities of the Santa Clarita 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 consistent goals, objectives, and policies for the entire Santa Clarita Valley. This unique collaborative effort acknowledges the common needs and desires of Valley residents, regardless of whether they live in the City or an unincorporated community. It is 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. These 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 close 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.

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 updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan that was developed through the "One Valley One Vision" effort. The Draft Area Plan includes the following Elements, which are consistent with the corresponding Elements in the City's updated Draft 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 consistent with the new land use legend in the Draft 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 severity fire zones;
- Seismic 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 updated 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 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 Associates, using a traffic model jointly developed by the City and County, 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 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 Draft 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 hazard, 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 City and County, and the results of this study were incorporated into this Element.

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 updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, to establish the maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas. At the current time, maximum residential densities in hillside management areas within non-urban/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 updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan will determine the 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 designation 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 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 updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, to establish the maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas. An explanation of the change in 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.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The “One Valley One Vision” effort included 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 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
- 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 Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan and the City’s updated Draft General Plan.

Over the course of the next several years, the County and City developed and released a Technical Background Report and began preparing the policy document and proposed Land Use Policy Map. In May 2007, a “Poster Plan” was released, which included 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 School, Agua Dulce
- Castaic Middle School, Castaic
- Santa Clarita Sports Complex, Canyon Country
- West Ranch High School, West Ranch

In October 2008, the County released its updated Preliminary Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan and the City released its updated Preliminary Draft General Plan. In addition, the County launched OVOV-NET, an interactive mapping tool that the public could access on the World Wide Web. 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
- Santa Clarita Sports Complex, Canyon Country

In October 2008, *The Signal* newspaper published an extensive 11-part series on the "One Valley One Vision" effort, which is archived on the World Wide Web at <http://www.the-signal.com/news/archive/4713/>. This 11-part series was re-published by *The Signal* newspaper as a special supplement in March 2009.

In addition, County staff attended a meeting of the Castaic Area Town Council in March 2009, and a meeting of the Agua Dulce Town Council in September 2009, to discuss this effort.

In preparation for the hearing, notice was published in *The Signal* newspaper, satisfying the notice requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance and State Law. However, a mailed notice was also provided for 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. Notice of future hearings will also be published in *The Signal* newspaper. Due to resource constraints, mailed notice will not be provided for future hearings, but the mailed notice indicates that property owners may request mailed notice of future hearings if desired.

The updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) were made available on the Department of Regional Planning Web Site on September 4, 2009. In addition, copies of the Draft Area Plan and DEIR were provided to County Libraries in Canyon Country, Castaic, Newhall, and Valencia for public review, beginning on September 4, 2009.

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 Draft Area Plan has been developed to be consistent with the General Plan, although the proposed Plan Amendment will amend the General Plan to clarify adopted provisions related to hillside management areas, and to allow local plans, such as the updated Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, to establish the maximum residential densities in all hillside management areas. Examples of consistency with the General Plan include but are 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 Draft Area Plan has also been developed to be consistent with the Draft Countywide General Plan update. As previously mentioned, the Proposed Land Use Map includes a new land use legend that is designed to be consistent with the new land use legend in the Draft Countywide General Plan update. In addition, the Draft Area Plan significantly expands the Significant Ecological Areas within the Santa Clarita Valley, based on studies conducted for the Draft Countywide General Plan update.