

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Project

Advance Planning Case No. RPPL2018002314 is a proposed ordinance amending Title 22 (Planning and Zoning) of the Los Angeles County (“County”) Code to update the Acton Community Standards District (“CSD”), Chapter 22.302, which was established in 1995. The CSD Update includes new and updated standards for cargo containers, signage, vegetation protection, subdivisions, commercial and industrially zoned property, trails, and home-based occupations.

Acton is an unincorporated community with a population of approximately 7,600 people (2010 Census). The community is located in the southwestern portion of the Antelope Valley, south of the City of Palmdale and east of the City of Santa Clarita along State Route 14. Acton extends south into the Angeles National Forest and a large portion of the Santa Clara River Significant Ecological Area (“SEA”) is within its boundaries. Hillsides and significant ridgelines ring the community, geographically delineating it from the City of Palmdale and the remainder of the Antelope Valley.

The Acton CSD area consists primarily of Light Agricultural (A-1) and Heavy Agricultural (A-2), and Residential-Agricultural (R-A) zoned lots, with a small number of Rural Commercial (C-RU) zoned lots along Sierra Highway and at the Crown Valley Road freeway entrance. The rural town center, serving the daily needs of residents and providing local employment opportunities, is situated along Crown Valley Road with C-RU zoned lots on either side, between Syracuse Avenue and Soledad Canyon Road. The town center is buffered by Residential-Agricultural (R-A) zoned lots to the north and west, with Manufacturing (M-1) zoned lots to the south and east along Soledad Canyon Road and the Acton Wash.

Some portions of the CSD area are partially developed with a variety of agricultural uses and single-family homes on large lots. Other portions are largely undeveloped and are generally not served by existing infrastructure. Most of these less-developed areas are within the Santa Clara River SEA and Hillside Management Areas. Acton is entirely contained within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

B. Project Background

On June 16, 2015, the County Board of Supervisors adopted the Antelope Valley Area Plan (AVAP), which includes goals and policies applicable to the unincorporated areas within the Antelope Valley. As part of its implementation, the AVAP specifies that a comprehensive review shall be required of all existing CSDs, which may include a program to prepare and adopt amendments to existing CSDs (AVAP, Page IMP-6).

On June 13, 2018, the Regional Planning Commission initiated the Antelope Valley CSDs Update Program, which includes the Acton CSD.

C. Major Elements and Key Components

The following changes are included in the CSD Update:

- **Removal of Duplicative Language** – Removal of language that is redundant with standards elsewhere in Title 22. For example, staff removed language for hillside design considerations that are redundant with the Hillside Management Area Ordinance.
- **Cargo Containers** – Permitting cargo containers as an accessory use in an Agricultural Zone, provided that certain standards are met, and all necessary Public Works permits are obtained.
- **Vegetation Protections** – Language in the CSD to clarify when a permit is required for grading or development that impacts vegetation on a lot.
- **Signage** – Regulations for new types of signage, including temporary real estate signs and residential ranch entrance signs. Staff also rewrote the existing standards for signage for clarity.
- **Removal of Additional CSD Compliance Review** – Removal of the requirement for all potential development to be subject to a Ministerial Site Plan Review solely for the purpose of determining compliance with the CSD. The standards required by the CSD and Title 22 will still apply to all new developments and additions.
- **Subdivisions** – Prohibition of clustering of lots.
- **Trails** – New standards for trails, and clarification on when a multi-purpose trail is dedicated as a part of the discretionary review process.
- **Home-based Occupations** – Additional standards and changes for home-based occupations, previously referred to in the Acton CSD as “Home Occupations”, have been included or updated.
- **Technical Changes** – Reorganization, corrections, and other edits to add clarity. For example, staff removed language indicating that the Acton CSD is a Billboard Exclusion Zone and replaced it with language specifying that outdoor advertising signs (billboards) are prohibited throughout the community.

ANALYSIS

A. Draft Plan / Ordinance Updates

On October 7, 2020, staff posted the public hearing draft of the CSD Update on the Department of Regional Planning’s website for public review. At the December 9, 2020 RPC public hearing, the item was continued to February 24, 2021.

An updated version of the draft ordinance was released to the public on January 21, 2021 in advance of remote community meetings conducted at the end of January 2021, and a public hearing draft was released to the public on February 11, 2021 for the February 24 continued hearing date.

The February draft ordinance included updates to language dealing with cargo containers, home-based occupations, subdivisions, trails, and lot design standards, which were added after the December draft document.

B. General Plan Consistency

This project implements the policy goals of the AVAP and the County's General Plan. The following policies of the General Plan are applicable to the project:

LA County General Plan

- **Policy LU 3.1:** Encourage the protection and conservation of areas with natural resources, and SEAs.
- **Policy LU 5.10:** Encourage employment opportunities and housing to be developed in proximity to one another.
- **Policy LU 6.1:** Protect rural communities from the encroachment of incompatible development that conflict with existing land use patterns and service standards.
- **Policy LU 6.2:** Encourage land uses and developments that are compatible with the natural environment and landscape.
- **Policy LU 6.3:** Encourage low density and low intensity development in rural areas that is compatible with rural community character, preserves open space, and conserves agricultural land.
- **Policy ED 1.1:** Encourage a diverse mix of industries and services in each Planning Area.
- **Policy ED 1.7:** Identify opportunities to lower the costs of doing business in Los Angeles County.

The following policies of the Antelope Valley Area Plan are applicable to the project:

Antelope Valley Area Plan

- **Policy LU 1.4:** Ensure that there are appropriate lands for commercial and industrial services throughout the unincorporated Antelope Valley sufficient to serve the daily needs of rural residents and to provide local employment opportunities.
- **Policy LU 1.5:** Provide varied lands for residential uses sufficient to meet the needs of all segments of the population, and allow for agriculture, equestrian uses and animal-keeping uses in these areas where appropriate.
- **Policy M 11.3:** Within rural town center areas, promote pedestrian-oriented scale and design features, including public plazas, directional signage, and community bulletin boards.
- **Policy M 11.4:** Within rural town center areas, encourage parking to be located behind or beside structures, with primary building entries facing the street. Encourage also the provision of direct and clearly delineated pedestrian walkways from transit stops and parking areas to building entries.

- **Policy ED 1.8:** Promote farming and other agricultural activities that contribute to the Antelope Valley economy.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption (Class 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, and 21 Categorical Exemptions) under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and the County environmental guidelines. The standards proposed as part of this project will either be more restrictive than those found in the County Code or will include standards that are more or similarly environmentally protective. The CSD Update standardizes the process for additional reviews for vegetation and landscaping proposals; includes standards for signage, commercial and industrial design, and cargo containers, which are considered an accessory use; and includes a prohibition of gated or walled subdivisions.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Regional Planning Commission find that the project is categorically exempt from CEQA. A Categorical Exemption (Exhibit E – Environmental Determination) was issued for the project.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

A. County Department Comments and Recommendations

Staff consulted with other County departments in July 2020. Public Works recommended that the existing language for street requirements be placed into a separate section of the CSD. The Fire Department indicated that future development within the CSD should comply with the Fire Code, and plans should be submitted to the Fire Department for review and approval according to specific fire and life safety requirements. The Department of Public Health did not have any comments on the CSD Update.

B. Project Outreach and Engagement

Staff regularly attended the meetings of the Association of Rural Town Councils and briefed the attendees on the progress of the overall CSD effort on May 30, 2018, June 27, 2018, January 30, 2019, and May 29, 2019.

Staff also conducted general project outreach at community events, including the Parks After Dark held on July 27, 2018, July 28, 2018, August 3, 2018, August 1, 2019, and August 2, 2019; the Leona Valley Cherry Festival on June 2, 2018; and the Valley Fever Walk on August 4, 2018.

On June 7, 2018 and July 9, 2018, staff attended CSD Working Group meetings with Acton community members to identify and discuss the topics that they would like to see addressed in the CSD Update. Staff created and distributed a summary of the community desired topics for the CSD Update, called the Acton CSD Community Concept Draft (Exhibit I - Acton CSD Community Concept Draft).

Following the release of the Acton CSD Community Concept Draft, staff sent postcards to 4,163 property owners and occupants within the Acton CSD area to make them aware of the Community Concept Draft and provide options for commenting on it.

Additionally, in June and July 2019, staff displayed posters at local gas station/markets, with copies of the Community Concept Draft and project summaries available onsite. Staff also placed comment boxes at these locations. Additionally, the Antelope Valley Regional Planning Field Office and Quartz Hill Library had posters, materials, and comment boxes available for information on the project and the ability to submit comments. The postcards also provided contact information for staff and a link to the project website where comments could also be submitted through an online form. Blog posts on the website and newsletter blasts were also used to inform the community of project updates.

Staff received 27 comments on the Community Concept Draft from the online comment form, email, phone calls, and the project website blog.

Comments submitted at this time expressed support for the project, citing specific topics, such as cargo containers, and encouragement of a rural lifestyle. There were also concerns and disagreement from commenters on specific topics, such as trails, filming, home-based occupations, billboards, and commercial design standards.

Due to the COVID-19 health emergency, which began on March 16, 2020, community meetings were moved to an online setting. Staff conducted an online meeting with the CSD Working Group on September 24, 2020 to discuss the draft of the CSD Update and provide them with the status of the process.

On October 14, 2020, public notice for the December 9, 2020 RPC Public Hearing was posted in the Antelope Valley Press. In addition, 3,809 postcards were sent on October 29, 2020 to all property owners within the Acton CSD area.

A community meeting was held on October 27, 2020 using the Zoom online meeting platform. Attendees primarily expressed concern that the CSD was not including additional language on trails and commented on standards for cargo containers.

Other comments included requests to prohibit the clustering of lots and to change the home-based occupations section, and objections to the removal of the site plan review requirement and removal of redundant language.

On December 9, 2020, the Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing to consider the CSD Update. After a brief presentation, the item was continued to February 24, 2021. No public comments were received during the hearing. Staff met with the Acton CSD Committee on December 14, 2020 and January 27, 2021.

A community meeting was held on January 21, 2021 using the Zoom online meeting platform. Attendees primarily expressed concerns over the language on trails, standards for cargo containers, language on home-based occupations, and the removal of the site plan review requirement for all activity within Acton CSD area.

C. Public Comments

As of the date of this report, staff received public comments on the CSD Update related to trails, the removal of the site plan review requirement, cargo containers, standards for home-based occupations, and technical changes. Commenters were generally seeking clarification, additional standards and requirements for trails for any type of development within the Acton CSD area, or the allowance of any type of use or business in a single-family residence as a home-based occupation.

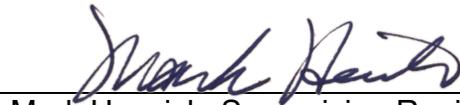
See Attachment H for copies of correspondence(s).

ADDITIONAL STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

To address comments from additional outreach meetings that occurred after the December 9, 2020 public hearing, staff updated the draft ordinance language related to cargo containers, home-based occupations, subdivisions, and lot design standards. Staff also updated the language to ensure consistency with County standards for trails and added technical corrections.

Report

Reviewed By:



Mark Herwick, Supervising Regional Planner

Report

Approved By:



Bianca Siegl, Deputy Director

LIST OF ATTACHED EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT A	Ordinance
EXHIBIT B	Ordinance Changes
EXHIBIT C	Draft Resolution
EXHIBIT D	GIS Maps
EXHIBIT E	Environmental Determination
EXHIBIT F	Public Hearing Notice
EXHIBIT G	Agency Correspondence
EXHIBIT H	Public Correspondence
EXHIBIT I	Acton CSD Community Concept Draft
EXHIBIT J	Concept Draft Comments
EXHIBIT K	Community Proposals