

## 3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY SETTING

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### PURPOSE

The following discussion of the environmental and regulatory setting addresses those physical and regulatory conditions that characterize not only the project site, but also the local and regional areas in the project vicinity. Applicable requirements of an Environmental Setting discussion of an EIR, as defined under Section 15125 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, include the following:

- (a) An EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published, or if no notice of preparation is published, at the time environmental analysis is commenced, from both a local and regional perspective. This environmental setting will normally constitute the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether an impact is significant. The description of the environmental setting shall be no longer than is necessary to [gain] an understanding of the significant effects of the proposed project and its alternatives.
- (b) When preparing an EIR for a plan for the reuse of a military base, lead agencies should refer to the special application of the principle of baseline conditions for determining significant impacts contained in Section 15229.
- (c) Knowledge of the regional setting is critical to the assessment of environmental impacts. Special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to that region and would be affected by the project. The EIR must demonstrate that the significant environmental impacts of the proposed project were adequately investigated and discussed and it must permit the significant effects of the project to be considered in the full environmental context.
- (d) The EIR shall discuss any inconsistencies between the proposed project and applicable general plans and regional plans. Such regional plans include, but are not limited to, the applicable air quality attainment or maintenance plan (or State Implementation Plan), areawide waste treatment and water quality control plans, regional transportation plans, regional housing allocation plans, habitat conservation plans, natural community conservation plans and regional land use plans for the protection of the coastal zone, Lake Tahoe Basin, San Francisco Bay, and Santa Monica Mountains.
- (e) Where a proposed project is compared with an adopted plan, the analysis shall examine the existing physical conditions at the time the notice of preparation is published, or if no notice of preparation is published, at the time environmental analysis is commenced as well as the potential future conditions discussed in the plan.

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) for The Master's College Master Plan project was published and distributed for a 30-day review period on November 1, 2006. A revised NOP was circulated for a 30-day review period on May 21, 2007, which included the water tank replacement, a revised Conditional Use Permit (allowing up to three stories for the 54 multi-family homes and deleting the need for off-site transportation of earth) and a revised General

*Plan/Zone Change Permit (allowing a RM designation for the residential area of the project instead of a RS designation).*

*CEQA further requires that an EIR include a description of the physical environment that currently exists on, and in the vicinity of, the project site. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to generally describe the physical environment in which the project site is located. Emphasis is afforded to local and regional land uses and environmental conditions, such as geographic features, sources of noise, and significant structures and/or landmarks. This section also provides a consistency analysis of the proposed project in relation to applicable local and regional plans. This approach allows the reader to formulate an understanding of the project site and the surrounding area, and to establish perspective on potential project impacts.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

### Regional Setting

The location of the project site in its regional and local settings are illustrated in **Figures 2.0-1, Regional Location**, and **2.0-2, Vicinity Map**, respectively (see **Section 2.0, Project Description**). As shown, the project site is situated in the southern central part of the City of Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County. The project site lies within a greater area referred to as the Santa Clarita Valley. This urbanizing region is characterized by a variety of land uses and physical features.

Vehicular access to the Santa Clarita Valley is primarily from Interstate 5 (I-5), which is the major north-south freeway corridor in the area, and from State Route (SR)-14, which runs along the eastern side of the Santa Clarita Valley and then northeasterly to the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale in the Antelope Valley. The closest major airport is the Bob Hope Airport, located in Burbank approximately 18 miles southeast of the project site.

A variety of topographic features contributes to the regional setting of the project site. The Santa Clarita Valley (Valley) is generally flat with some gently rolling hills that range in elevation from approximately 1,200 to 1,600 feet. The Valley is bounded on the south by the Santa Susana Mountains, to the east by the San Gabriel Mountains, and to the north and east/south by the Angeles National Forest. The mountain ranges that surround the Valley can be viewed from great distances and from the other more dominant visual features in the area. Whitaker Peak to the north of the project site has an elevation of 4,148 feet, Oat Mountain to the south is 3,747 feet high, and Mt. Gleason to the east has an elevation of 6,502 feet. Several watercourses, the largest of which is the Santa Clara River, cross the Valley floor. The watercourses in this area are usually dry, maintaining surface water flow only during the rainy months. Other prominent topographic features of the Valley are the north-south trending canyons, which form the northern part of the area.

The Santa Clarita Valley has a Mediterranean-type climate characterized by warm, dry summers and mild winters. Most rainfall occurs between November and March, and usually totals approximately 15 to 18 inches annually. Santa Ana winds often sweep through the area in the fall and winter months, bringing periods of warm, dry weather.

The Southern California area has been divided into a number of geographical air basins by the California Air Resources Board. The Santa Clarita Valley is located within the South Coast Air Basin, which includes all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties. This air basin consistently generates the highest levels of smog in the United States and is, therefore, considered to have the worst air quality in the nation. The topography and climate of the South Coast Air Basin combine to make it an area of high smog potential.

The Santa Clarita Valley is divided into two political regions: (1) the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, and (2) the City of Santa Clarita. The City of Santa Clarita is generally located in the more central portions of the Santa Clarita Valley with unincorporated County areas surrounding the City. The project site is located entirely within the limits of the City of Santa Clarita.

## Public Services

The Santa Clarita Valley planning area is served by one wholesale water agency, the Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA), which serves four local retail water purveyors: Santa Clarita Water Division, Valencia Water Company, Newhall County Water District, and Los Angeles County Waterworks District #36 (Val Verde Water District). Additional discussion with regard to the Santa Clarita Valley-wide planning area can be found in **Section 5.0, Environmental Impact Analysis**. The Newhall County Water District would serve the project site. Refer to **Section 5.11.1, Water Services**, for additional information regarding water.

Most wastewater generated within the Santa Clarita Valley is treated at two existing water reclamation plants (WRPs), which are operated by the Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District (SCVSD). The Saugus WRP is located at 26200 Springbrook Avenue in Saugus. The Valencia WRP is located at 28185 The Old Road in Valencia. These two facilities provide primary, secondary, and tertiary treatment. The SCVSD has a permitted treatment capacity of 28.1 million gallons per day (mgd) and a treated average of 21.0 mgd, including 4.95 mgd at the Saugus WRP and 16.05 at the Valencia WRP.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the community of Placerita Canyon is transitioning from septic systems to a new public sanitary sewer system. A backbone sewer line was recently installed by the City along Placerita Canyon Road. The Master's College has connected most of the existing campus buildings to the sewer system with the exception of the North

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<sup>1</sup> Written correspondence from Ruth I. Frazen at the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, May 29, 2008.

Campus and seven buildings fronting Placerita Canyon Road that are more than 200 feet from the sewer trunk line. Existing buildings not connected to the new sanitary sewer system will remain on septic systems. All new buildings on the campus would be required to connect to the sewer system. Wastewater generated at The Master's College campus will be conveyed to and treated at the Valencia WRP.

Primary police protection service for the project site and the surrounding Santa Clarita Valley area is provided by the County of Los Angeles Sheriff's Department through a contract with the City of Santa Clarita. The area is served by the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Station located at 23740 West Magic Mountain Parkway in Valencia. Additionally, the California Highway Patrol provides traffic regulation enforcement, emergency incident management, service, and assistance on I-5, SR-126, SR-14, and other major roadways in the Santa Clarita Valley area. Fire protection and emergency medical response services for the project site and the surrounding area are provided by the Los Angeles County Fire Department through a contract with the City of Santa Clarita. Currently, eight fire stations and three fire camps provide fire protection services for the Santa Clarita Valley area. Refer to **Section 5.9.1, Fire Services**, and **Section 5.9.2, Sheriff Services**, for additional information regarding these service areas.

The Newhall Union School District and William S. Hart Union High School District provide primary and secondary public education in the project area.

In addition to the Powell Library on The Master's College campus, library services for the project site and the Santa Clarita Valley area are provided by the County of Los Angeles Public Library system. Three County libraries (Valencia, Newhall, and Canyon Country) and a mobile library service currently serve the Santa Clarita Valley area.

There are existing and proposed parks within close proximity to and on the project site. Such facilities include parks maintained by Los Angeles County, the City of Santa Clarita, the State of California, and the federal government. Additionally, the proposed project would include a prayer garden, oak garden, public green area, and pedestrian paths. Several recreational facilities exist on The Master's College campus, including a swimming pool, tennis courts, fitness center, soccer clubhouses, equestrian trails, and the Pete Reese Athletic Field. The 5-acre improved Creekview Park is located in the southernmost portion of the project site and would be dedicated along with additional open space in the southern portion of the project site, totaling 20.5 acres, to the City of Santa Clarita for future parkland/open space purposes.

All required utilities and services are currently available at locations adjacent to the project site and would serve the project without impacting the overall system capacity. Natural gas service would be

supplied by the Southern California Gas Company (SCGC), electric service would be provided by Southern California Edison (SCE), and telephone service would likely be supplied by AT&T.

## LOCAL SETTING

### Surrounding Land Uses

**Figure 2.0-3, Project Site Boundary/Environmental Setting**, depicts the project site boundary in relation to surrounding land uses. The northern portion of the project site is surrounded by the Placerita Canyon community to the north, east, and west. The Placerita Canyon community is primarily composed of single-family residences, a mobile home park, movie studio, and schools. A Special Standards District aimed at maintaining the rustic and equestrian character of the area applies to new development and existing land uses within the canyon. Open space and the Deputy Jake Neighborhood also exist immediately to the east of The Master's College property with multi-family residences surrounding the current western terminus of Dockweiler Drive. Single-family residences within east Newhall abut the project site to the south and north Newhall. A 250-foot-wide property owned by MWD exists immediately to the west of the project site. Refer to **Section 2.0, Project Description**, for a thorough background, on a local and regional level, on the history and values of the communities surrounding the project site, the planning involved with the extension of Dockweiler Drive and history of the 5-acre improved Creekview Park and adjacent open space parcels.

### Site Characteristics

The project site includes the 94.96-acre property owned by The Master's College; 7.02 and 0.61 acres to the east and west of The Master's College property, respectively, and 2.58 acres within a larger parcel owned by Metropolitan Water District (MWD) that bisects the project site, which will accommodate the proposed Dockweiler Drive extension; and a 2.48-acre site to the east of The Master's College property where 0.75- and 3.0-million-gallon water tanks are located.

For planning purposes, The Master's College campus is divided into three areas, which include the North Campus north of Placeritos Road, the Valley Campus south of Placeritos Road to the southern ridgeline of Placerita Canyon, and the Hilltop Campus south of Placerita Canyon. These three campus areas are shown in **Figure 2.0-10, Campus Identity Zones**. The North Campus was formerly a church and was acquired by The Master's College in 1997. The North Campus is currently improved with four classroom buildings and surface parking and operates under a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). Approximately 2.4 acres of the North Campus area is not suitable for development due to a flood hazard zone.

The Valley Campus serves as the main campus area and includes classrooms, dormitories, administrative offices, a student center, a gym, athletic fields, recreational facilities, surface parking, and maintenance facilities. Most buildings within the Valley Campus are one to two stories and distributed throughout this portion of the campus. The streets are rural with no curb or gutter. More than 350 native oak trees exist within the Valley Campus, including 35 heritage oaks. Heritage oaks are defined as any oak tree measuring 108 inches or more in circumference or, in the case of a multiple trunk tree, two or more trunks measuring 72 inches each or greater in circumference, measured 4.5 feet above the natural grade surrounding the tree. The locations of oak trees on campus are shown in **Figure 2.0-13a, Oak Tree Plan for The Master's College Campus**. Protected oak groves are located primarily on north facing slopes and limit development in those areas. The portions of the campus north of Placerita Canyon Road, including the entire North Campus and a portion of the Valley Campus are generally flat with a slight gradient down to the west. Elevations in this area range from about 1,300 feet near the northeast property corner to 1,285 feet near the western property edge.

The Hilltop Campus is currently undeveloped with a mixture of native and non-native grasses. An east/west ridgeline traverses the northern edge of the Hilltop Campus area. Elevations within this area of the campus range from approximately 1,275 and 1,455 feet above mean sea level at Newhall Creek and the highest point, respectively. A MWD property cuts a 250-foot-wide, 12.6-acre swath through the southern portion of the Hilltop Campus. Approximately 4 acres of the MWD property are available for dormitory parking and athletic fields for the college. Newhall Creek generally trends east/west within the project site and the MWD property.

In addition to the oak trees discussed above, on-site vegetation communities vary depending upon their location on the project site. Plant communities present include: Big Sagebrush-Rubber Rabbitbrush Scrub, California Sagebrush Scrub, California Buckwheat Scrub, California Sagebrush-California Buckwheat Scrub, California Sagebrush-Deerweed Scrub, Chamise Chaparral, Chamise-California Buckwheat Chaparral, Chamise-California Sagebrush-Yerba Santa Chaparral, Chamise-Hoary-leaf Ceanothus Scrub, Coast Live Oak Woodland, Coast Prickly Pear Succulent Scrub, Disturbed, Hoary-leaf Ceanothus Scrub, Mexican Elderberry Scrub, Non-native grassland, Ornamental Landscaping, Scalebroom Scrub, and Scrub Oak-Hoary-leaf Ceanothus Chaparral.

The 2.48-acre portion of the project site to the east of The Master's College property that corresponds to the water tank project component is located along the ridgeline, south of the proposed Dockweiler extension within the Deputy Jake Neighborhood. The area immediately surrounding the existing 0.75- and 3.0-million-gallon water tanks has been disturbed and is void of vegetation.

The portions of the project site to the east and west of The Master's College property, which will accommodate the Dockweiler Drive extension, are similar in topography and vegetation to the Hilltop Campus described above. This portion of the site follows the ridgeline and decreases in elevation from east to west.

Geologically, the project site lies within the eastern portion of the Ventura Basin within the western Transverse Ranges. The Ventura Basin and Transverse Ranges are characterized by ongoing tectonic activity. In the Ventura Basin, tertiary and quaternary sediments have been folded and faulted along predominant east/west structural trends. Please see **Section 5.4, Geology and Soils**, for a complete discussion of geological impacts at the project site.

With respect to air quality, the project site is located within the South Coast Air Basin, which includes all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties. It is also located in the transitional microclimatic zone of the basin between two climatic types (termed valley marginal and high desert), and in Source Receptor Area (SRA) 13, which encompasses the Santa Clarita Valley. The station that monitors the air quality of this SRA, located at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Placerita Canyon Road, has registered values above state and federal standards for ozone and the state standard for PM<sub>10</sub> (particulates that are 10 microns or smaller in size). PM<sub>2.5</sub> is not measured in SRA 13; however, it is a subset of PM<sub>10</sub>. Concentrations of carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide have not been exceeded within the Santa Clarita Valley, and concentrations of two other criteria pollutants—sulfur dioxide and lead—have not been exceeded anywhere within the basin for several years. Please refer to **Section 5.2, Air Quality**, for additional information on ambient air quality on, and in the vicinity of, the project site.

Portions of the project site presently subject to vehicle trip noise include the North and Valley Campuses and sources include traffic along Placeritos Boulevard and Quigley Road and Placerita Canyon Road, respectively. Noise impacts are addressed in detail in **Section 5.7, Noise**.

I-5 is located approximately 2.75 miles west of the project site and SR-14 is located approximately 1.5 miles to the east. Site access is currently provided via Placerita Canyon Road. The existing terminus of Dockweiler Drive is located east of the project site and near Valle del Oro. Deputy Jake Drive currently ends near its intersection with Matthew Place near the eastern border of the project site. Traffic and circulation impacts are addressed in detail in **Section 5.10, Transportation and Circulation**.

## REGULATORY SETTING

According to the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the proposed project is not of regional significance. Please see **Appendix I** for a copy of the NOP response letter from SCAG. As such, project consistency with local plans is discussed below.

## City of Santa Clarita General Plan

The City of Santa Clarita General Plan is the primary policy-planning document that guides land uses in the City. The current City general plan land use designations for the project site include Private Education (PE) Residential Low (RL) and Specific Plan Open Space (SP-OS). Current land use designations are shown in **Figure 2.0-4, Existing and Proposed General Plan and Zoning Designations**. A general plan amendment has been requested by the project applicant for consistency with the proposed uses. The land use designation for that portion of the college north of Placeritos Boulevard is currently RL and would be changed to PE, which is consistent with the land use designation for the college south of Placeritos Boulevard. The 4.7-acre area south of the proposed Dockweiler Drive extension where a Tentative Tract Map (TTM) to allow for the future development of 54 condominium units is proposed is currently designated as PE and would be amended to the RM (Residential Moderate) designation. The Circulation Element would be amended with this application because it currently designates Dockweiler Drive as a six-lane Major Highway. With this amendment, Dockweiler Drive would be designated as a four-lane Secondary Highway. Consequently, this action would limit grading on the ridge that the alignment of Dockweiler Drive traverses within the project area and accommodate the volume of traffic anticipated, which would not require a Major Highway designation. Additionally, the designation would assure that the roadway width is consistent with the current portion of the street to the east of the project area, and that the reduction in width will also allow for a feasible and safe installation due to the anticipated grade of the street.

Consistency with City of Santa Clarita General Plan goals is included in **Section 5.6, Land Use and Planning**

### Zoning

A Zone Change is needed to ensure the general plan and zoning designations for the project site are consistent. Areas to be changed with this entitlement request include the area directly south of the proposed extension of Dockweiler Drive, which would be subdivided and developed with 54 condominium units in the future, and the northernmost portion of the campus bordered by Placeritos Boulevard to the south and Quigley Canyon Road to the west. The area to be developed with condominium units is currently zoned PE and with the zone change request would be designated RM for consistency with the proposed residential use. The northernmost portion of The Master's College campus is zoned RL and would change to PE because existing buildings on this portion of the project site are currently used by the college for instructional activities. **Figure 2.0-4, Existing and Proposed General Plan and Zoning Designations**, shows the existing and proposed general plan designations described above.



### *Placerita Canyon Special Standards District*

In order to maintain, preserve, and enhance the rural and equestrian character of Placerita Canyon, the City of Santa Clarita includes a Placerita Canyon Special Standards District in the Unified Development Code, which will be maintained. The special standards included in this portion of the Unified Development Code stipulate landscaping, lot orientation, fencing, and animal keeping requirements applicable to property development and trails within the community.