

7.0 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

1. PURPOSE

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires a discussion of the ways in which a project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this discussion are projects that would remove obstacles to population growth. Such discussion also should identify the characteristics of a project that may encourage and/or facilitate other activities that, either individually or cumulatively, could significantly affect the environment. CEQA emphasizes that growth in an area should not be considered beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance. The purpose of this section is to evaluate the growth-inducing potential of the proposed Vista Canyon project.

2. INTRODUCTION

The *State CEQA Guidelines* require an EIR to “discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment.”¹ The guidelines, though, do not require or even suggest that an EIR speculate with respect to the specific growth that the project may induce, such as where such growth would occur, in what form it would occur, or when it would occur.² The *State CEQA Guidelines* expressly advise that “it must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.”³

Generally, a project may foster spatial, economic, or population growth in a geographic area if it meets any one of four criteria that are identified below:

- Removal of an impediment to growth (e.g., expansion of a wastewater treatment plant or the provision of new access to an area)
- Economic expansion or growth (e.g., changes in revenue base or employment expansion, etc.)
- Establishment of a precedent setting action (e.g., an innovation, a change in zoning or general plan designation)
- Development or encroachment in an isolated or adjacent area of open space (being distinct from an “infill” type of project)

Should a project meet any one of these criteria, it can be considered growth inducing. An evaluation of this project versus these four growth-inducing criteria is provided in the sections below.

¹ *State CEQA Guidelines*, Sec. 15126.2(d)

² *State CEQA Guidelines*, Sec. 15126.2(d); see also *State CEQA Guidelines* Sec. 15145.

³ *State CEQA Guidelines*, Sec. 15126.2(d).

3. GROWTH INDUCEMENT POTENTIAL

a. Removal of an Impediment to Growth

Growth in an area may result from the removal of physical impediments or restrictions to growth. In this context, physical growth impediments may include nonexistent or inadequate access to an area or the lack or insufficiency of essential public services, such as sewer and water service. The following discussion evaluates the effects of the proposed project with respect to this criterion. As described below, approval of the proposed project would provide for transitional uses in an already urbanized area and, therefore, would not be growth-inducing with respect to this criterion.

The project is an infill development that is generally surrounded by existing residential and commercial land uses. As such, the project site is proximate to existing major roadways; therefore, access is not restricted and public services (i.e., electricity, sewer, water, natural gas, police and fire protection) would be available and would require no major expansions or extensions.

The project proposes to use recycled water for landscape irrigation purposes and other allowable uses, such as restroom facilities for office and commercial uses. The proposed water reclamation plant (WRP) would treat the wastewater generated by the project uses along with a portion of flows from a City sewer line crossing the project site. Recycled water from the WRP would then be delivered to Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA) as the wholesale water agency for the Santa Clarita Valley. This water would be distributed by CLWA through its reclaimed water distribution system to proposed on-site and existing off-site uses. Initially, some of the water may be directed to the percolation pond(s), or infiltration basin(s), adjacent to the WRP until the CLWA recycled system comes online.

Electricity transmission infrastructure would come from the existing power lines that presently cross the Santa Clara River and project site. Existing lines would be extended to serve the project's initial development phases. Upon its construction, power lines would be placed within the Vista Canyon Road Bridge. Additionally, service lines exist within Lost Canyon Road to the southwest and Lost Canyon Road at La Veda Avenue to the east both of which would likely be extended into the project site. The system would be designed to accommodate uses included within the proposed project, and would not extend beyond the requirements or boundary of the proposed project site.

Existing natural gas service lines are located to the north, to the southwest, and to the east. Gas service to the project would be extended to the site from one or all of these existing sources. A gas line would also be placed into the Vista Canyon Road Bridge. Given the existence of established energy transmission lines in this area, no growth-inducing impacts are expected with regard to this type of infrastructure.

As previously mentioned, an established transportation network presently exists in the area that affords access to the project site. Regional east-west access is provided via SR-14, which is directly north of the project site. Vehicular access to and from the project site is proposed from four existing roadways. Primary access to the site would be from Vista Canyon Road (connecting to Soledad Canyon Road) and Lost Canyon Road (westerly) from Fair Oaks Ranch. Secondary access would come from Jakes Way and Lost Canyon Road easterly to Sand Canyon Road. The proposed roadway network is designed as an orderly extension of the regional circulation pattern in the Santa Clarita Valley, and would also complete planned roadway extensions and improvements that ultimately would connect existing development and the proposed project to Soledad Canyon Road. The project, as a transit-oriented development, also proposes to relocate the Via Princessa Metrolink Station to the project site. This would be accomplished by providing the land and partnering with the City and Metrolink on facilities needed for the City/Metrolink transit center, located north of the existing Metrolink rail line along the project site's southern boundary.

In addition to the physical and political impediments discussed above, development impediments and regulatory legislation, such as land use plans and policies, may also restrict or deter localized growth and can be considered an impediment to growth. Approval of the Vista Canyon project would require a general plan amendment (to adopt a specific plan), zone change, pre-zone and annexation, tentative tract map, conditional use permit, and oak tree permit. However, amending the existing City of Santa Clarita General Plan land use designation from Business Park to Specific Plan would not represent a removal of an impediment to growth.

b. Economic Growth

The proposed project includes a mix of single-family, multi-family, transit, recreational, commercial, office and open space uses. The project would provide land uses that support the local vicinity and region, particularly with the incorporation of a Metrolink and multi-modal transit hub, corporate office campus, and retail "Main Street" into the project design.

In the short term, buildout of the proposed project would provide for short-term construction employment opportunities. It is anticipated that construction employees would commute from the local area, elsewhere in the region, or may relocate to the area for a temporary assignment.

In the long term, given the relation of the project to the existing development pattern in the surrounding area, the relative size of the proposed project and the relatively small resulting increase in population (2.0 percent), it is expected that new project residents seeking commercial or recreational uses in the project site would utilize on-site commercial or recreational areas or existing services in the eastern Santa

Clarita Valley. As such, the proposed project is not anticipated to induce economic growth in connection with the provision of commercial and recreational services to project residents.

The proposed project, which would develop up to 950,000 square feet of on-site commercial uses, is expected to provide between 2,000 and 4,000 new jobs in its retail/commercial and office areas, which is considered a growth-inducing attribute under this criterion. However, the provision of additional employment opportunities is beneficial. More specifically, as discussed in **Section 4.17**, SCAG's growth forecasts for the City show a 32 percent projected population increase by 2035 (from 181,974 in 2010 to 239,923 in 2035). As such, additional employment opportunities will be required to accommodate the projected population increase. When combined with other job centers in the Santa Clarita Valley, the proposed project would help the Santa Clarita Valley's jobs-housing base, which is critical to establishing a sustainable community because it allows people to work close to home and minimize vehicle miles traveled. Additionally, because the proposed commercial uses would be placed in close proximity to proposed residential uses, future employees on on-site uses also could reside within the project site, minimizing the demand for off-site housing to accommodate the employment opportunities. Therefore, this economic growth would be consistent with the goals of the City's General Plan and with the proposed One Valley One Vision (OVOV) General Plan Update.

c. Precedent Setting Action

The proposed project would request approval of the following discretionary entitlements to allow for construction of the Vista Canyon project site: (a) Pre-Zone/Zone Change No.07-001; (b) Annexation No. 07-002a (Vista Canyon); (c) General Plan Amendment No. 07-001; (d) Specific Plan No. 07-001; (e) Tentative Tract Map No. 69164; (f) Conditional Use Permit No. 07-009; and (g) Oak Tree Permit No. 07-019. Additionally, this Draft EIR (specifically, **Section 4.24**) addresses the environmental impacts associated with the annexation of properties surrounding the Vista Canyon project site (Annexation 07-002b (Fair Oaks Ranch, Sand Canyon, Jakes Way)).

The County of Los Angeles and City of Santa Clarita are presently completing OVOV—a joint effort to create guidelines for the future growth and development of the Santa Clarita Valley while also preserving natural resources. The jurisdictional planning boundaries established in OVOV include the City and its four communities (i.e., Canyon Country, Newhall, Saugus and Valencia), and the County communities of Stevenson Ranch, Castaic, Val Verde, Agua Dulce, and the future Newhall Ranch.

The County of Los Angeles, in the draft OVOV Land Use Plan (dated October 2008), designates the project site as UR2 (Urban 2, five dwelling units per acre) with an SEA overlay over portions of the project site. Under this draft land use designation, the project site could be developed with up to 700

residential units. However, various goals and policies within OVOV encourage transit oriented development (TOD) through the permitting of higher densities and intensities, and would allow for mixed-use, compact development in close proximity to new or existing rail stations and/or multi-modal transit facilities. As proposed, Vista Canyon includes both a new rail station and multi-modal transit facility.

The City's General Plan currently designates the site for business park uses, with an SEA overlay over portions of the site. The applicant proposes to amend the City's Land Use and Circulation Elements of the General Plan. The applicant is requesting annexation of the project site into the City. The project site is not currently within the City's Sphere of Influence as defined by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). However, the General Plan Amendment and Zone Change for the proposed project would not be considered "precedent setting" because the existing General Plan designation and zoning for the site already calls for urban development.

The goals of the proposed project and the boundaries, goals, and policies established in the OVOV General Plan would be consistent with one another. For these reasons, the discretionary approvals are not considered to set a precedent that would be applicable to any other properties in the City.

d. Development of Open Space

Development of open space is considered growth inducing when it occurs on the fringes of built-up areas, or if the development "leapfrogs" over an intervening area of open space with the expectation or if it would be developed in the reasonably foreseeable future as a result of the development. The proposed project site is situated in an area that is surrounded predominantly by existing urbanized portions of the City of Santa Clarita to the north and east, and by existing urbanized portions of unincorporated Los Angeles County (Jakes Way and Fair Oaks Ranch) to the west and south. Therefore, a large intervening area of open space between the project and those uses would not be created. Given that the project is neither on the urban fringe nor does it leapfrog large tracts of open space, this project would not be considered growth inducing.

e. Conclusion

The proposed project is considered growth inducing in light of its introduction of approximately 2,000 to 4,000 jobs to the region. However, the provision of additional employment opportunities is considered beneficial.