8.0 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

1. PURPOSE

Section 15126.2(c) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines *states that use of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of a proposed project may be irreversible if a large commitment of these resources makes their removal, indirect removal, or non-use thereafter unlikely. This section of the EIR evaluates whether the proposed project would result in the irretrievable commitment of resources or cause irreversible changes in the environment. Also, in accordance with Section 15126.2(c) of the* State CEQA Guidelines*, this section identifies any irreversible damage that could result from environmental accidents associated with the proposed project.*

2. IRREVERSIBLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Buildout of the proposed project would represent a long-term commitment to a more intensive land use than currently occurs on the project site. The primary effect would be to commit mostly undeveloped land to urbanized uses. The commitment of such land to urbanized uses is, essentially, an irreversible environmental change.

In addition, construction and operation/habitation of the land uses proposed by the project would contribute to the incremental depletion of resources, including renewable as well as non-renewable or slowly renewable resources. Resources, such as lumber and other forest products, as well as water, are generally considered renewable resources. Such resources would be replenished over the lifetime of the project. For example, lumber supplies are increased as seedlings mature into trees, while water supplies are replenished as water is redistributed through the action of the hydrologic cycle. Given this, the development of the proposed project would not result in the irreversible commitment of renewable resources, although there would be an incremental increase in the demand for such resources over the project lifetime.

On the other hand, nonrenewable or slowly renewable resources, such as natural gas, petroleum products, asphalt, petrochemical construction materials, steel, copper and other metals, and sand and gravel, are considered to be commodities in limited supply. The actions or processes that created these products occur over a long period and cannot replace those supplies consumed in the development and habitation of the project site within its lifespan. To varying degrees, the aforementioned materials are all readily available and some materials, such as asphalt or sand and gravel, are abundant. Other

commodities, such as metals, natural gas, and petroleum products, are also readily available, but are finite in supply given the length of time required by the natural process to create them.

According to the Southern California Association of Government's *Regional Growth Forecast 2005–2035,* the population of the City of Santa Clarita will increase from 167,185 to 239,923 over the 30-year period between 2005 and 2035, or by about 44 percent. This increase in population will directly result in the need for more infrastructure projects, retail facilities, and commercial facilities in order to provide the needed services associated with this growth. The resources consumed by the Vista Canyon project would be used to provide housing, jobs, services, and utilities to meet anticipated demand created by the projected demographic growth. These resources would likely be committed to other projects in the region intended to meet this demand if the project is not constructed. Further, the investment of resources in the project would be typical of the level of investment normally required for a mixed-use community of this scale. Provided that all standard building codes, including energy conservation standards, are followed, no wasteful use of energy or construction resources is anticipated.[1]

3. IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Irreversible long-term environmental changes would accompany the proposed conversion of a partially developed and mostly disturbed infill site to a transit-oriented development consisting of a mix of land uses. These changes would include: an alteration in the visual character of the site through the development of commercial, residential, transit and recreational uses; an increase in local and regional traffic, along with associated air pollution emission and noise levels; solid waste generation; and an increase in energy consumption. The proposed project would include a water reclamation plant, which would treat the majority of on-site generated wastewater and reuse, after treatment, this water for on- and off-site use (landscaped areas, public restrooms). The project would create the need for additional school space, and the need for a variety of recreational opportunities. Portions of the Santa Clara River Corridor also would be modified during construction of the buried bank stabilization and Vista Canyon Road Bridge. While it is not likely that the existing environmental condition could be restored to its original condition subsequent to project development, mitigation measures are proposed throughout **Section 4.0** of this EIR to minimize the effects of development impacts.

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1 Of note, various mitigation measures identified in **Section 4.22** ensure that the proposed project does not result in the wasteful use of energy resources. For example, some of the measures require the project applicant to go above and beyond the energy conservation standards established by Title 24 of the California Building Code, thereby ensuring that environmental resources are managed mindfully and efficiently.

4. POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE FROM ACCIDENTS

The following discussion identifies the proposed project's uses that could be sources of potential environmental accidents.

Preliminarily, no unique hazards or hazardous uses are found on the Vista Canyon site. While the site is located within a seismically active region and may be exposed to ground shaking in the event of a seismic event, conformance with the regulatory provisions of the City of Santa Clarita Municipal Code and California Building Code pertaining to construction standards would minimize, to the extent feasible, damage and injuries in the event of such an occurrence. As such, geotechnical hazards, including strong seismic ground shaking, liquefaction and its effects (such as lateral spreading and differential settlement), soil expansion, and soil corrosiveness can be mitigated by stabilization, removal, or redesign, and no significant impacts on the site are expected.

Uses proposed by the project (e.g., residential, commercial, water reclamation plant) would be expected to use and store chemicals and/or substances that are typically found in urban settings. Given the multitude of federal, state, and local regulations governing the use of such substances, however, the proposed project is not expected to involve activities that would damage the environment or pose a risk to public health.

Finally, within the site boundaries, no Proposition 65 pesticides (insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides) would be used in the common and public areas. Moreover, humans would not be subject to either acute overexposure or chronic exposure to these substances if used and handled according to state and federal regulations.