

R E P O R T

MEETING DATE: June 3, 2002

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Development Services

SUBJECT: SEIR 90-16/SP 89-16(2001mod)/TSM 408; San Marcos Highlands

A. SUMMARY:

Request: Adoption of a Specific Plan Amendment and replacement Tentative Subdivision Map based on a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) to reduce the original Specific Plan yield to 230 residential lots, and 10 open space lots, including annexation of a portion of the site that is in the City's Sphere of Influence. Refer to attachment "A", project site plan.

Location: In the north-central portion of San Marcos, North of Santa Fe Hills (previously known as Paloma) along the extension of Las Posas Road.

Applicant: San Marcos Highlands

Environmental findings:

- ☐ Negative Declaration
- ☐ Categorical exemption, class
- ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration
- ☒ Supplemental EIR

Environmental analysis for the project resulted in preparation of a Supplemental EIR. Although the submitted application amounted to a reduction in overall dwelling units, grading and landform alteration, with less traffic, air quality, noise, public services, and utilities impacts, a Supplemental EIR was prepared. This was due to significant concerns raised by the adjacent landowners, resource agencies and LAFCO. The Supplemental EIR concluded that no other new or significant impacts would result from implementation of the new project.

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Staff recommendation:

☐ Approval

☐ Conditional Approval

☒ Recommend approval to the City Council

☐ Continuance to

B. BACKGROUND:

• In 1998, the tentative Subdivision approved with SP 89-16 expired. SP 89-16 was approved prior to the listing of the California gnatcatcher. As such, the applicant is requesting modification to the previously approved Specific Plan, along with a new tentative map to preserve habitat/open space and reduce the total number of units. In 1990, a previous Tentative Map, Pre-zone, Specific Plan, General Plan Amendment and EIR were approved by the City.

• The previous application included 279 residential lots, 101 acres of open space, and a 1 acre park.

• The current application provides for a 45 unit reduction in dwelling units, an increase in habitat/open space and park acreage, and enhanced park design.

• The College Area Community Plan, which includes the subject property is included within a Public Facility Financing Plan area which provides for the phasing of major public improvements necessary to serve the subject site and complete build-out of the community plan. The plan includes direct developer contributions to reimburse for backbone infrastructure improvements already installed to serve the subject property.

• Staff has worked extensively with the applicant and their design team to refine the site design concepts, park design, and biological mitigation measures.

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C. NEIGHBORHOOD AND PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOPS:

- In order to facilitate discussion on project issues based on the current revised plans, neighborhood workshops were held on December 15, 1998 and April 8, 1999.
- In an effort to familiarize the Planning Commission on project issues, proposed revised design concepts, and continue the community input process, the applicant and staff conducted a Planning Commission workshop on May 24, 1999.
- The workshop focused on residential design and open space revisions included in the new application, land use compatibility, biological mitigation measures and site design.
- On August 18 a meeting was held between the Twin Oaks Sponsor Group, the developer and design team. The applicant listened to comments, presented the project, and responded to questions. Based on the earlier workshops, staff was never aware of project concerns from this area.

D. SITE/PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS:

- The project site includes 225 acres, and is currently vacant. Scattered estate homes and orchards bound the project site to the north, vacant land and estate homes exist to the west, vacant land extends to the east, and the Santa Fe Hills (previously known as Paloma) residential planned community exists to the south.
- The project is included in the College Area Community Plan.

		EXISTING	G.P.
PROPERTY	LAND USE	ZONING	DESIGNATION
Subject	Vacant	A-1	.125-1, 1-2, 2-4 du/ac

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1	North	Estate homes	A-70-.5	Residential 2-4
2		Orchards		du/ac .
3	South	Single family	SPA	1 du/2-4 ac
4	East	Vacant	A-70-.5-.25	1 du/2-4 ac
5	West	Vacant	A-70-.5	1 du/2-4 ac,
6		Estates		
7	Flood Hazard Zone			<u> </u> yes <u> x </u> no
8	Resource Conservation Zone			<u> </u> yes <u> x </u> no
9	Redevelopment Project Area			<u> </u> yes <u> x </u> no
10	Sewers			<u> x </u> yes <u> </u> no
11	Water			<u> x </u> yes <u> </u> no

- The proposed project is subdivided into three planning areas. Planning area 1 lies to the west of Las Posas Road and includes 154 residential lots on 38 acres.
- Planning area 2 consists of the southerly area along the eastern side of Las Posas Road, adjacent to the Santa Fe Hills Specific Plan Area, and includes 76 residential lots on 24 acres. Planning area 3 includes open space on both sides of Las Posas Road, with no residential development.
- It should be noted that of the proposed 225 acre project, residential development is limited to 60.3 acres, with 138 acres or 68% devoted to permanent open space.
- A public park is located in Area 3b, on the northerly side of street, and a view park is planned on the southeastern corner of Planning area 3e. A tot lot has been proposed on the west side.

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E. SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

- ☒ General Plan Conformance
- ☒ Land Use Compatibility and Density
- ☒ Site Design
- ☒ Biological Resources
- ☒ Park Design
- ☒ Circulation
- ☒ Annexation
- ☒ Traffic

F. ISSUE ANALYSIS:

GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE:

- The proposed project complies with the college Area Community Plan. The Community Plan designates the maximum yield of 302 units for the subject site. The existing Specific Plan had a gross density of 1.22 du/ac. The Specific Plan is proposing 230 units at a gross density of 1.13 du/ac. The Community Plan requires an integrated system of public open space, developed parks and public/private recreation facilities. The Specific Plan provides for these amenities.
- Assurance that an adequate roadway network is provided for the Community is required by the Community Plan, and the Specific Plan satisfies this goal. The community Plan promotes a variety of housing types and styles. The Specific Plan provides lot sizes from 5,800 square feet to 10,500 square feet with a variety of architectural styles.
- The Community Plan requires protection and enhancement of natural resources by preserving 68% of the site. The Mitigation Monitoring Program (MMP) for the project requires preservation of 129 acres of coastal sage scrub habitat, 10 acres of riparian habitat, .11 acres of water of the US, revegetation of 2.07 acres of riparian vegetation.

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LAND USE COMPATIBILITY:

- The proposed project is similar in character to the previously adopted Specific Plan and Tentative Subdivision Map with deletion of a phase of development from the easterly hillside area. The current application reduces residential development from 279 lots to 230 lots (an 18% reduction), and increases open space from 101 acres to 138 acres (a 27% increase), within the same 225 acre site.
- The total lot count of 230 also includes a recent reduction of 8 lots, as a result of working with the Wildlife Agencies and expanding the wildlife corridor on the west side of the project adjacent to the open space/Water Authority aqueduct.
- The additional open space area includes expanded habitat areas. The increased buffers, additional open space and lot size increases have been incorporated into the current application to mitigate land use impacts.
- Residential lots have been increased in lot size from 4,500 square feet to 5,000 square feet along the western project boundary, and landscaped buffer areas have been increased along the north, west and south project boundaries. (Refer to Attachment "C", profile exhibit and Attachment "D" western landscape buffer profile), which illustrates the grading and proposed buffering along the west and north property lines to mitigate project impacts.
- Section B-B illustrates the "worst case" buffering condition on the west edge of the project and indicates that the closest existing home to the proposed project would be 660'. Low growing plant material has been added to further screen the new homes, while not impacting views from existing residences. Section E-E illustrates the revised buffering concept which responds to land use compatibility issues raised at the community workshops. The buffering for lots 8-17 along the northern edge has been

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increased from an average of 37 feet to an average of 62 feet, and consists of natural and landscaped slope areas.

- It should be noted that the applicant has recently revised the minimum lot size from 4,000 s.f. To 4,500 s.f., and that the proposed lot sizes for the project are larger than the minimum lot size permitted for Santa Fe Hills to the south.

- The minimum lot sizes approved in the Santa Fe Hills (aka Paloma) project is 3,450 square feet, below the 4,500 square feet proposed for this project. It should be noted that 56% of the Santa Fe Hills project is approved for lot sizes greater than 4,000 square feet.

- Attachment "D", revised table 1-1, summarizes the proposed lot sizes and development regulations for the residential product proposed for San Marcos Highlands.

SITE DESIGN:

- The overall area of grading and landform disruption has been diminished in the revised application. Overall grading and earthwork has been reduced from 1.2 million cubic yards (c.y.) in the previous application to 760,000 c.y. in the current plan.

- Extensive site design modifications have been completed to accommodate the passive park adjacent to the riparian corridor in the central portion of the site, and landscaped slope buffering to mitigate adjacent land use impacts.

- The Specific Plan includes design objectives and guidelines for landscaping, architecture, treatments in the riparian corridor, grading, and fuel modification. These objectives and guidelines are generally consistent with the level of quality associated with other Specific Plans recently reviewed by the Planning Commission.

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1 • Included in the conditions of approval is a requirement for the applicant
2 to enhance the architectural design guidelines, to provide for varied floor
3 plans, variation in the streetscene, and architectural upgrades in view
4 sensitive areas.

5 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:

6 • A complete biological assessment has been prepared by Dr. Pat Mock
7 of URS Corporation to assess the biological and wetland impacts
8 associated with the proposed project and respond to community concerns
9 on sensitive site resources. The applicant has worked extensively with
10 agencies to create on-site solutions for biological mitigation.

11 • Sensitive habitats on the project site include coastal sage scrub,
12 riparian woodland, and freshwater marsh. The proposed project will result
13 in the loss of 84 acres of coastal sage scrub. The current design will
14 conserve approximately 40 acres more coastal sage scrub than the
15 previous Specific Plan.

16 • A northeast/southwest trending drainage corridor (Agua Hedionda
17 Creek) in the center of the site, is the main wildlife corridor within the
18 property. The corridor includes the San Diego Aqueduct easement. The
19 Wildlife Agencies have indicated that the extension of Las Posas Road to
20 the second intersection of Street "A" could result in impacts to wildlife
21 movement, if not properly designed. Construction of two 48" diameter
22 culverts, under Las Posas Road and Street "A", will facilitate terrestrial
23 wildlife movement. These corridors would allow movement of wildlife and
24 link with the aqueduct right-of-way to connect to the existing habitat in the
25 unincorporated county jurisdiction.

26 • A corridor width of 250 feet is proposed in the SEIR. This width is
27 consistent with recent studies of wildlife movement in suburban and rural
28 landscapes in Southern California and is consistent with the planning

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guidelines developed by the MHCP program. These studies demonstrate evidence that widths of about 250' are utilized by wildlife to transit between patches of conserved habitat. A wider corridor is being requested by the USFWS. The applicant approached the adjacent property owner to the west to purchase conservation easements over existing slopes areas to guarantee a wider corridor, however, this was not approved by the adjacent property owner.

- Within the wildlife corridor, a total of .87 acres of riparian habitat (vegetated wetlands) will be impacted by the Las Posas Road extension and the road crossing the creek. Impacts to sensitive species will be reduced to below a level of significance through development of a riparian revegetation plan, which would create 2.07 acres of riparian vegetation along the upper corridor in the northern portion of the site or elsewhere in northern San Marcos. The rehabilitated riparian area includes the pond, east of Las Posas Road.

- Implementation of the mitigation measures in the Supplemental EIR declaration would reduce these potential impacts to below a level of significance.

- A letter dated December 28, 2001 was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and California Department of Fish and Game. It identified agency concerns including inadequacy of the open space configuration, impacts to wetlands, fuel modification, coastal sage scrub mitigation and culvert size for wildlife movement. Dr. Mock, with City staff and the applicant, has met with the agencies and prepared a formal response letter, attached to this report and included in the Final EIR

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PARK DESIGN:

- Staff has worked closely with the applicant and the design team to modify the park design elements for the project. (Refer to Attachment “F” proposed Park and Trail plan.)
- The project exceeds the General Plan and Specific Plan requirement for 1 acre of active park by providing 3 acres of active play and meadow play area. The park and turf area above the pond will not encroach on sensitive riparian habitat.

CIRCULATION:

- The extension of Las Posas Road northward, beyond the northern limits of the project, has been discussed throughout the course of the project review. This issue has been resolved, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer with the road extension ending at the northernmost intersection which is the second intersection with Las Posas Road. No extension of Las Posas Road is necessary at present, to serve project or surrounding traffic needs.
- Although the extension of Los Posas Road is reflected in the County General Plan and City’s Circulation element, future extension will not occur unless future development occurs in the County.
- Secondary access to the site will be provided from Santa Fe Hills, via Street “I” in Planning Area 2.

ANNEXATION:

- Staff has worked extensively with LAFCO to resolve their concerns on a County island and clarification of various service agency acreages and boundary adjustments, including fire service. All issues have been resolved. Annexation of 109 acres of property in the existing Sphere of Influence will be initiated by the City prior to development.

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• Approximately 90 acres of the Specific Plan is currently in the City. Another 112.9 acres of the site is within the LAFCO adopted sphere of influence for the city of San Marcos. The applicant is proposing to annex the 112.9 acre portion of the site as a logical extension of government facilities and services in this area. Public Facilities that serve the subject site is Las Posas Road which exists in the City. The SEIR shows that the San Marcos Fire Department is better equipped from a response time and facilities standpoint to serve the site. The existing school in Santa Fe Hills in San Marcos will serve the project. The backbone water and drainage facilities are also in place in San Marcos that will serve the site.

• Numerous City and special district boundaries and spheres affecting the project site exist at present. Approval of annexation and detachment requests by LAFCO for the City and other special districts including the San Marcos Fire Protection District, Vista Fire Protection District, Vallecitos Water District (water and sewer) and vista Irrigation District is required prior to development.

TRAFFIC:

• The proposed SPA reduces traffic generation and impacts to the surrounding roadway network. By reducing density to 230 d.u., and using a factor of 10 trips per d.u., the proposed project will generate a total ADT of approximately 2300 trips, a reduction of 660 ADT, or about 22%, from the previous project.

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