

LAND USE ELEMENT



INTRODUCTION

The Land Use Element is a guide to land use planning within Rancho Santa Margarita. This Element identifies the type and location of existing and future land uses within the City. The land uses identified in the Land Use Element reflect the community's goals for its form and character, the desire to maintain a quality living environment for families, strengthen the community's distinctive image, encourage economic development, and preserve the natural areas that make Rancho Santa Margarita unique.

Purpose of the Land Use Development Element

The Land Use Element describes present and planned land use activity, and addresses the relationship between development and environmental quality, protection of natural water resources, potential hazards, and social and economic objectives. As a guide for future growth and development, the Element identifies the general distribution, location, mix and extent of desired land uses including residential, commercial and business, public/quasi-public facilities, open space uses, and other land uses.

Using text, maps, and diagrams, a clear and logical land use pattern is established including standards for future development. An important feature of the Element is the Land Use Policy Map. This map shows the location, density, and intensity of development for current and future desired land uses in the Rancho Santa Margarita Planning Area.



This Element addresses the following key issues related to land use planning and development and identifies goals and policies to establish a constitutional framework that guides decision-makers in future land use planning and development decisions in the City:

- 1) Balance of land uses;
- 2) Control and direct future land use;
- 3) Land use and water quality;
- 4) Integrate transportation and land use planning; and
- 5) Provision of public services and facilities.

Scope and Content of the Land Use Development Element

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita incorporated to gain local political control and strengthen community identity and pride. One of the responsibilities of an incorporated city is controlling future growth and development. Per State law, cities must prepare and adopt a General Plan as a tool to manage growth and development. The Land Use Element is a mandatory element of the General Plan and pursuant to California Government Code Section 65302(a) designates the proposed general distribution, location, and extent of land uses such as housing, business, industry, open space, natural resources, recreation, scenic beauty, education, public buildings and land, and other public and private uses of land. The Land Use Element is also required to establish standards for residential density and nonresidential building intensity for designated land uses.

The Land Use Element is comprised of three sections:

- 1) Introduction;
- 2) Issues, Goals, and Policies; and
- 3) the Land Use Plan.

The Introduction summarizes key considerations for land use in the City. The Issues, Goals, and Policies section identifies major land use issues and related goals and policies that are established to address these issues. The goals, which are overall statements of the community's desires, are comprised of broad statements of purpose and direction. The policies serve as guidance for reviewing development proposals, planning facilities to accommodate anticipated growth, and accomplishing community development strategies. The Land Use Plan defines the land use standards and identifies the location and extent of land uses within the planning area. It also identifies future land use opportunities and articulates how future land uses will be directed. The Land Use Plan further ensures that infrastructure and public facilities and services are available to accommodate planned land uses, and that the unique environmental quality of Rancho Santa Margarita is safeguarded and enhanced.

The Land Use Plan contains the Land Use Policy Map that graphically identifies the land use designations within the Rancho Santa Margarita planning area. The planning area includes land within the municipal boundaries and unincorporated



land within the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI)¹. Descriptions of the land use designations, including the type and density of allowed uses, and a statistical summary of the future land use composition is provided. Areas of special interest, which involve more focused planning efforts, are also identified.

Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

Per State planning law, the Land Use Element must be consistent with the other General Plan elements. Each element is independent and all the elements together comprise the General Plan. All elements of the General Plan are interrelated to a degree, and certain goals and policies of each element may also address issues that are the primary subjects of other elements. The integration of overlapping issues throughout the General Plan elements provides a strong basis for implementation of plans and programs, and achievement of community goals.

In 2016, Senate Bill 1000 was passed, which required cities and counties that have disadvantaged communities² to incorporate environmental justice (EJ) policies into their General Plans as either a separate Element or by integrating related goals, policies, and objectives throughout the other elements. Although Rancho Santa Margarita does not contain any disadvantaged communities designated by California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), the City recognizes the importance of public health, quality of life, and economic opportunity for all its residents. Goals and policies are included throughout the General Plan to support improved air quality, promote public facilities, and improve physical activity and access to services.

The Housing Element of the General Plan provides the basis for establishing housing stock that meets the affordability requirements and other special needs of the community. Emphasis is given to the development of housing to accommodate the City's share of regional housing need. The Circulation Element provides a Circulation Plan to accommodate increased traffic from planned development. The use of alternative transportation modes and reduction of automobile trips are addressed in the Circulation Element to meet the transportation demands from new development, and to mitigate the impact of development on regional air quality and traffic conditions. The Land Use Element serves to reduce automobile trips by encouraging the development of office, commercial and light industrial uses, and consequently improves the jobs-to-housing balance.

¹ A Sphere of Influence is defined as a planning boundary outside of an agency's legal boundary (such as the city limit line) that designates the agency's probable future boundary and service area.

² For purposes of SB 1000, "Disadvantaged communities" means an area identified by the CalEPA Pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code OR an area that is a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation (Gov. Code Section 65302(h)(4)(A)).

The statute further defines "low-income area" to mean "an area with household incomes at or below 80 percent of the Statewide median income or with household incomes at or below the threshold designated as low income by the Department of Housing and Community Developments list of State income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093" (Gov. Code Section 65302(h)(4)(C)).



Rancho Santa Margarita has been recognized as a city that incorporates many of the principles of smart growth. Rancho Santa Margarita includes a mix of housing, commercial, and retail land uses. A system of pedestrian trails and neighborhood parks offers residents numerous alternatives to driving. The City's mixed-use design reduces the number and length of vehicle trips.

Several areas are designated for parks and open space on the Land Use Policy Map for recreational, aesthetic, and resource protection purposes. Conservation/Open Space Element policies are designed to protect environmental and open space resources that contribute to the natural character of the community. The Safety and Noise Elements ensure that the planned land uses identified in the Land Use Element are compatible and will not result in public safety hazards or excessive noise.

As development continues in Rancho Santa Margarita, utilities and public services must be available for new and existing businesses and residents. The *Public Facilities and Services* portion of the Land Use Element addresses the availability of utilities and services for planned development including water supply, treatment and distribution, sewer treatment, solid waste, drainage/flood control, fire protection and emergency services, law enforcement, public education, parks, community centers and recreational opportunities, and libraries. The *Public Facilities and Services* portion of this Element ensures that adequate utilities and services are available for planned development.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND POLICIES

The Goals and Policies identified in this Element reflect the community's goals for its form and character, and the desire to maintain a quality living environment for families and strengthen the community's distinctive image. These include:

- 1) Maintaining a mix of land uses that allow residents to live, work, play, and shop within the community;
- 2) Controlling and directing future land use so that it complements and protects the quality of the existing community;
- 3) Protecting water quality associated with development;
- 4) Integrating transportation and land use planning to improve mobility options; and
- 5) Providing adequate public services and facilities to meet the needs of the existing community and future development.





Balance of Land Uses

Rancho Santa Margarita strives to provide an appropriate mix of land uses to meet community needs and desires, which include residential uses that provide housing for those living within the community, commercial and industrial uses that provide revenue, employment, and shopping opportunities for the City's residents, public and institutional uses that provide services such as education and utilities, and open space and recreational uses for the enjoyment of all.

Goal 1: Maintain a mix of land uses and a balance of jobs and housing to support a community in which people can live, work, shop, and play.

Policy 1.1: Attract and retain research and development, light industrial, and high technology developments that provide both community benefits, such as retail and entertainment options and high-paying employment opportunities within the community.

Policy 1.2: Encourage high-quality diverse commercial activities in the community that improve access to essential services and entertainment opportunities.

Policy 1.3: Maintain a land use composition in Rancho Santa Margarita that provides a balance or surplus between the generation of public revenues and the cost of providing public facilities and services.

Policy 1.4: Maintain a variety of housing types that complement the employment opportunities in the community and encourage a jobs/housing balance.



Policy 1.5: Streamline permit approval of developments for industries that produce high-paying employment when considering development applications within the City's business park areas.

Control and Direct Future Land Use

Rancho Santa Margarita is almost fully developed and limited future development is anticipated, as described in the *Land Use Plan* section of this Element. The Land Use Element will guide future development and land use to ensure that it complements the existing community, and protects and enhances the existing character of Rancho Santa Margarita.

Goal 2: Control and direct future land use so that the community is protected and enhanced.

Policy 2.1: Ensure that new development is complementary to the existing small-town village character of the City.

Policy 2.2: Annex land within the Sphere of Influence prior to its development to ensure that new development is compatible with existing development in Rancho Santa Margarita.

Policy 2.3: Ensure that the architecture and other physical characteristics of new development and land uses are consistent and compatible in scale and style with existing development, surrounding land uses, and available infrastructure.

Policy 2.4: Ensure that new development funds its share of community services and facilities (e.g., parks, schools, trails, utilities) and provides fiscal benefit to the community.

Policy 2.5: Preserve and enhance the quality of Rancho Santa Margarita by actively abating any non-conforming uses when a use is changed, abandoned, or destroyed and not rebuilt in a timely manner.

Policy 2.6: Preserve the nighttime sky by reducing excessive artificial lighting and off-site lighting impacts while maintaining nighttime safety and security.

Policy 2.7: Enhance the character of the community by modernizing and upgrading the quality of development and improving the quality of the public realm.

Policy 2.8: Evaluate impacts of proposed new development and land uses on the watershed in accordance with current watershed planning tools.



Land Use and Water Quality

Existing and future development can affect the environment in many ways, including water quality. Rancho Santa Margarita will ensure that pollutant discharge that enters waterways is limited to the extent necessary to meet Federal regulations and protect human and natural environment health.

Goal 3: Reduce the discharge of pollutants and runoff flow from urban development consistent with Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) regulations.

Policy 3.1: Require property owners or developers to use best available practice and techniques to minimize pollutant loading and flow velocity from new development projects and redevelopment/revitalization projects during and after construction.

Policy 3.2: Limit development that disturbs natural water bodies and natural drainage systems consistent with the RWQCB regulations.

Policy 3.3: Provide information and resources to the community that describes how to minimize activities that pollute urban runoff.

Integrate Transportation and Land Use Planning

The transportation network is important to the residents and businesses within the City. The goals and policies of this Element encourage greater mobility through integration of various transportation modes.

Goal 4: Integrate transportation and land use planning to provide mobility options and comfort for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and personal vehicles.

Policy 4.1: Establish appropriately scaled car-free and pedestrian-only zones in high pedestrian demand locations.

Policy 4.2: Ensure that City rights-of-way provide adequate infrastructure for the movement of vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians with facilities that provide safety and comfort for all transportation modes.

Policy 4.3: Balance street space allocated for alternative transportation options with parking when determining the appropriate future use of street space.

Policy 4.4: Support the creation of multiuse trails within the City and their connection to regional trails in order to provide enhanced access to open space, promote alternative transportation options, and increase recreational opportunities.



Policy 4.5: Support transit, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements that connect within the City and to neighboring jurisdictions.

Policy 4.6: Encourage nodes of interest and activity, public open spaces, well-planned development, mixed-use projects, and signature commercial uses that are highly accessible by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

Provision of Public Services and Facilities

Public facilities and services, such as water supply, treatment and distribution, sewer treatment, solid waste, drainage/flood control, fire protection and emergency services, law enforcement, education, parks, community centers, recreational opportunities, and libraries are provided by the City or other service entities. Other service providers include: Trabuco Canyon Water District, Santa Margarita Water District, Orange County Flood Control District, Orange County Fire Authority, Orange County Sheriff's Department, various school districts and private schools, the Orange County (OC) Public Library system, and homeowners' associations such as the Santa Margarita Landscape and Recreation Corporation (SAMLARC). The provision and maintenance of these services and facilities enhance the quality of life and the livability of the community.

The following goals and policies are designed to ensure that public services and facilities are provided at levels of service that meet or exceed the community's needs.



Water Supply, Treatment and Distribution

Goal 5: **Consult with local and regional water suppliers to ensure that an adequate and safe water supply is available and that delivery and treatment capacity are adequate to meet the community's needs.**

Policy 5.1: Consult with Santa Margarita Water District and Trabuco Canyon Water District as well as regional water suppliers and distributors to ensure that high quality water is available and deliverable to the community.

Policy 5.2: In cooperation with the Santa Margarita and Trabuco Canyon Water Districts, review development proposals to ensure that adequate water supply, treatment, and distribution capacity are available to meet the needs of proposed development without negatively impacting the existing community.

Policy 5.3: Consult with local and regional water suppliers to ensure adequate water reserves exist in case of natural disaster.

Sewer Treatment

Goal 6: **Consult with local sewer treatment providers to provide and maintain adequate levels of sewage treatment.**

Policy 6.1: Actively coordinate with Santa Margarita Water District and Trabuco Canyon Water District to ensure that sewer service and facilities are provided and maintained to meet the community's need for sewer collection and treatment.

Policy 6.2: In cooperation with the Santa Margarita Water District and Trabuco Canyon Water District, review development proposals to ensure that adequate sewer collection and treatment facilities are available to meet the needs of development without negatively impacting the existing community.

Solid Waste

Goal 7: **Ensure that local providers of solid waste collection and disposal provide sufficient, cost-effective recycling and solid waste disposal services.**

Policy 7.1: Ensure solid waste collection and disposal service providers deliver adequate solid waste collection and disposal services to City residents and businesses.

Policy 7.2: Participate in local and regional programs that encourage the per capita reduction of solid waste in Rancho Santa Margarita in order to meet State mandates for waste reduction.



Policy 7.3: Provide recycling collection facilities convenient to residences and businesses.

Drainage/Flood Control

Goal 8: **Coordinate with the Orange County Flood Control District (OC Flood) to provide a level of flood control protection that meets the needs of the community.**

Policy 8.1: Cooperate with OC Flood and homeowners' associations to ensure an adequate level of drainage and flood control facilities and programs are provided and maintained within the community.

Fire Protection and Emergency Services

Goal 9: **Ensure provision of effective fire protection and emergency response service.**

Policy 9.1: Coordinate with the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) to provide a sufficient level of fire protection, public education, and emergency response service (including facilities, personnel, and equipment).

Policy 9.2: Implement and enforce regulations, such as the most recent building codes, to ensure existing and new development is constructed and maintained to minimize potential fire hazards.

Policy 9.3: Coordinate with homeowners' associations to ensure that street widths and clearance areas are sufficient to accommodate fire protection equipment and emergency vehicles.

Law Enforcement

Goal 10: **Provide effective and responsive police protection.**

Policy 10.1: Provide a superior level of police protection (including facilities, personnel, and equipment) and public education through the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

Policy 10.2: Continue to implement innovative policing methods, such as Community Oriented Policing to maintain the low crime rate within Rancho Santa Margarita.



Education

Goal 11: Cooperate with local school districts and other educational organizations to ensure that a level of education is provided that meets the community's educational needs.

Policy 11.1: Cooperate with local school districts and other educational organizations and assist them in identifying the need for new, expanded, or rehabilitated school sites and facilities so that sufficient educational facilities for programs are provided and maintained.

Policy 11.2: Coordinate with school districts to consider the need for new or expanded educational facilities when annexing new land.

Policy 11.3: Encourage shared parking arrangements and facilities at community schools and other community gathering places to provide adequate parking for large special events.

Policy 11.4: Work with schools to develop cooperative agreements for community use of school facilities, such as recreation fields and gyms.

Policy 11.5: Coordinate with local school districts during planning and environmental review of proposed non-education school reuse projects.



Parks, Community Centers and Recreational Opportunities

Goal 12: Provide a balance of high-quality active and passive public open spaces, a regional trail system, and recreation facilities based on community needs and the ability of the City to finance, construct, maintain, and operate facilities now and in the future.



Policy 12.1: Establish and ensure maintenance of a standard of 3.0 acres of active park land per 1,000 population.

Policy 12.2: Promote and support the Community Center and the provision of a variety of recreational programs, classes, and events that serve the entire community.

Policy 12.3: Coordinate with public, private, and non-profit healthcare and social service providers to better identify and serve the needs of the community.

Policy 12.4: Encourage native and large trees of various ages within parks and open spaces to be provided and maintained.

Policy 12.5: Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions to facilitate regional trail connections.

Policy 12.6: At the time of review of new residential development, require park dedication and provision of recreational trails that enhance the existing private recreational system.

Goal 13: **Cooperate with homeowners associations and other recreation providers to ensure that parks, community centers, and recreational opportunities and programs are provided and maintained that promote a family-oriented community and encourage community spirit and participation.**

Policy 13.1: Collaborate with homeowners associations and other recreation providers to provide and maintain a variety of community amenities, such as the lake, parks, open space areas, community centers, public meeting facilities/spaces, and pedestrian/bicycle trails.

Policy 13.2: Evaluate the need for, and facilitate the provision of, additional neighborhood, senior, youth, and day-care centers as needed.

Policy 13.3: Cooperate with homeowners' associations and other recreational facility owners and program providers to facilitate the maximum effective utilization of parks and recreational opportunities and programs in the community.

Policy 13.4: Work with school districts in planning for parks and recreation facilities to maximize joint use community recreation opportunities.

Policy 13.5: Encourage homeowners associations and other private recreational facility owners to preserve and maintain active parkland and recreation facilities.



Libraries

Goal 14: Cooperate with the County of Orange to provide a level of library facilities and services that meets the needs of the community.

Policy 14.1: Actively work with the County to provide library services and facilities that meet State standards for library facilities and meet the needs of the community.

Policy 14.2: Encourage the maintenance of a high-quality library system that: enhances the cultural life of the community; is the repository of people's ideas, knowledge, and thoughts; and is the information center for the community.

Policy 14.3: Collaborate with the County library system to enhance the provision of programs to the residents of Rancho Santa Margarita and surrounding communities.

Related Goals and Policies

The goals and policies in the Land Use Element are related to and support subjects included within other General Plan elements; refer to Table LU-1.

Table LU-1
Land Use Development Related Goals and Policies by Element

General Plan Element	Land Use Element Issue Areas				
	Balance of Land Uses	Control and Direct Future Land Uses	Land Use and Water Quality	Integrate Transportation and Land Use Planning	Provision of Public Services and Utilities
Land Use	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5				1.3, 2.4
Circulation				4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6	9.3, 12.5
Housing	1.4	1.4, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2			
Conservation/Open Space		2.8	3.1, 3.2, 3.3	4.4	8.1, 11.5, 12.1, 12.4, 12.6, 13.3, 13.4, 13.5
Safety		2.6, 2.8			
Noise					5.1, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 10.1, 10.2



LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan focuses on the balance of land uses within the City by addressing present and planned land use activity. The Land Use Plan is based on the Master Plan documents and reflects the community's goals for its form and character, the desire to maintain a quality living environment for families, strengthen the community's distinctive image, encourage economic development, and preserve the natural areas that make Rancho Santa Margarita unique. The Land Use Plan addresses planned uses through 2040 and directs growth in a way that ensures the desirable aspects of the community are protected and enhanced.

Balance of Land Uses

The variety of land uses within Rancho Santa Margarita creates a desirable community in which people work, shop, reside, and recreate. Most of Rancho Santa Margarita is developed, and limited vacant land is available for future new development. As a result, future growth in Rancho Santa Margarita will occur through reuse and revitalization of existing development. There is also potential for future new development in the Northeast Future Planned Community, within the City's Sphere of Influence. Based on the Land Use Plan, the City will maintain a land use composition that provides a balance between the generation of public revenues and the cost of providing public facilities and services.

Implementation of the Land Use Plan will also assist in creating a balance between jobs and housing units within the City. A balance between jobs and housing allows some people to live and work within the same community. This results in a reduction of traffic, thereby reducing the level of air pollution and improving the quality-of-life for the community. Furthermore, ensuring that affordable housing is available for those lower income households working within the commercial, office, and retail areas of Rancho Santa Margarita is important. The City has



identified land for employment generating uses, as well as residential uses. An economic development strategy is discussed in the Economic Development Element of the General Plan, and the provision of adequate housing is discussed in the Housing Element.

Land Use Classification System

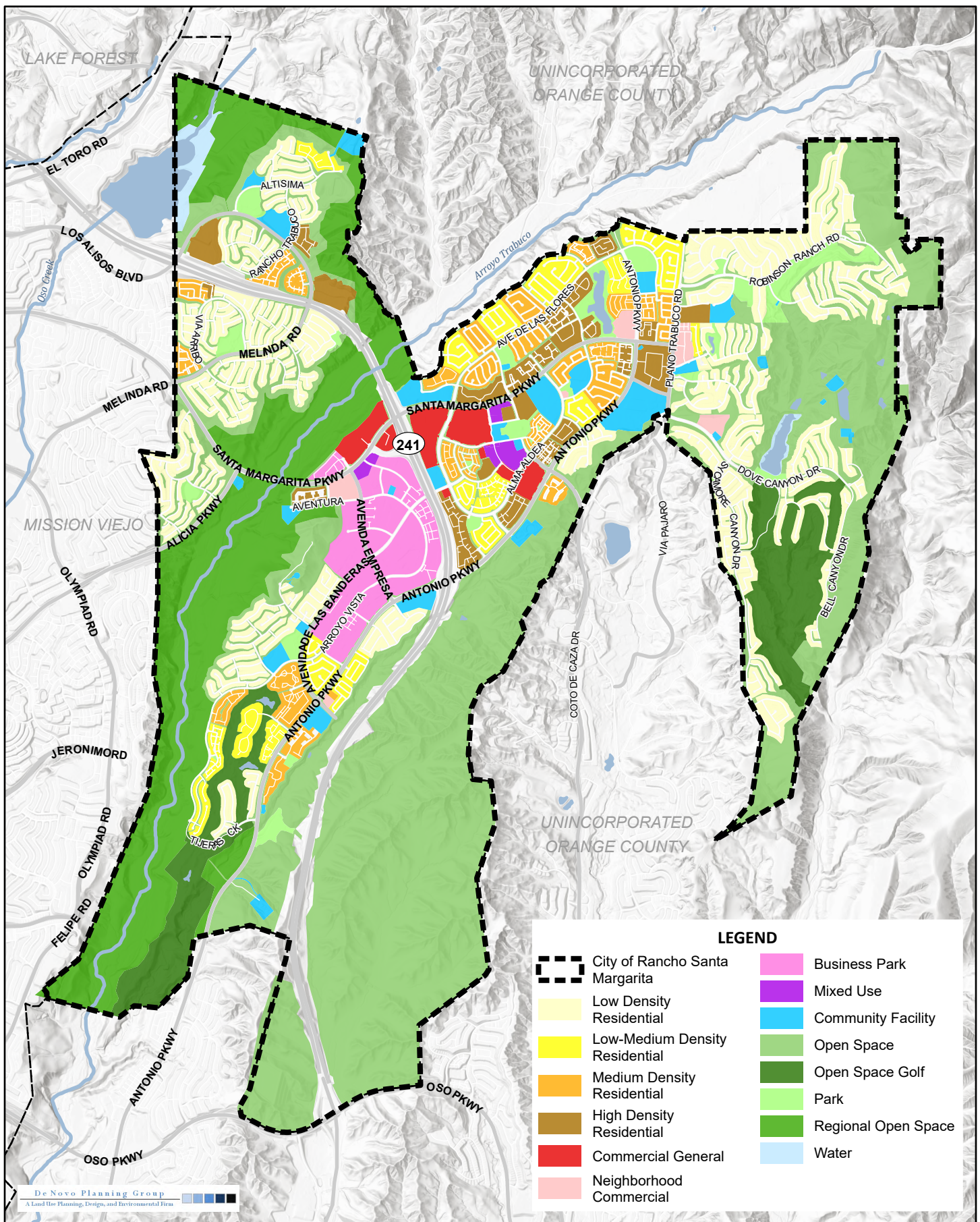
The Land Use Policy Map (Figure LU-1) illustrates where specific land uses are allowed. The land use classification system is presented in Table LU-2. These land use designations identify the types and nature of development allowed as depicted on the Land Use Policy Map. Table LU-2 also identifies the maximum density or intensity of development allowed under each General Plan land use designation.



**Table LU-2
Land Use Classification System**

Land Use	Maximum DUs/Net Acre or Maximum FAR/Net Acre	Summary Description of Land Use Designation
Residential Land Uses		
LDR – Low Density Residential	7.0 du/acre	Single-family detached units on moderate to large lots.
LMDR – Low-Medium Density Residential	11.0 du/acre	Small-lot single-family detached homes, as well as some single-family town homes and duplexes.
MDR – Medium Density Residential	18.0 du/acre	Detached single family homes on smaller lots, and attached, town homes, duplexes, multiple-family units such as apartments and condominiums.
HDR – High Density Residential	25.0 du/acre	Attached homes, apartments, condominiums, and senior housing.
Commercial and Business Land Uses		
C – General Commercial	1.0:1 FAR	Retail stores, restaurants, lodging, personal services, business services, and financial services of a citywide or regional nature. Does not promote development of commercial strips.
NC – Neighborhood Commercial	0.6:1 FAR	Retail stores, service stations, restaurants, and services that serve the needs of surrounding neighborhoods.
BP – Business Park	1.0:1 FAR 35 du/acre	Service commercial, retail commercial, office, light industrial, open space, and community facilities (excluding public and private schools). Limited residential development may be permitted on properties designated with Workforce Housing Overlay zoning.
Public/Quasi-Public Facilities Land Use		
CF – Community Facility	0.6:1 FAR	Fire stations, police stations, public and private schools, recreation centers, water tanks, utilities, or other community facilities.
Open Space Land Uses		
P – Parks	0.5:1 FAR	Publicly- or privately-owned and dedicated park lands.
OS – Open Space	N/A	Streams and washes, open space easements, and other private and public open spaces.
OSG – Open Space Golf	0.4:1 FAR	Maintenance and development of golf courses and other private recreational uses.
ROS – Regional Open Space	0.4:1 FAR	Sections of O'Neill Regional Park within the City. Active and passive recreational uses consistent with Orange County regulations.
Other Land Uses		
FPC – Future Planned Community	To Be Determined	Denotes large areas of land within the Sphere of Influence for detailed planning and development for residential, commercial, community facility, recreation and open space uses.
MU – Mixed-Use	35.0 du/acre 1.0:1 FAR	Provides for combinations of uses typically found within the HDR, and C designations. Mixed-use can take place in a single structure, on a single parcel, or on adjacent parcels.





CITY OF RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA



Sources: City of Rancho Santa Margarita; Orange County GIS; USGS; LAFCO. Map date: March 25, 2024.

General Plan Land Use Map
Figure LU-1



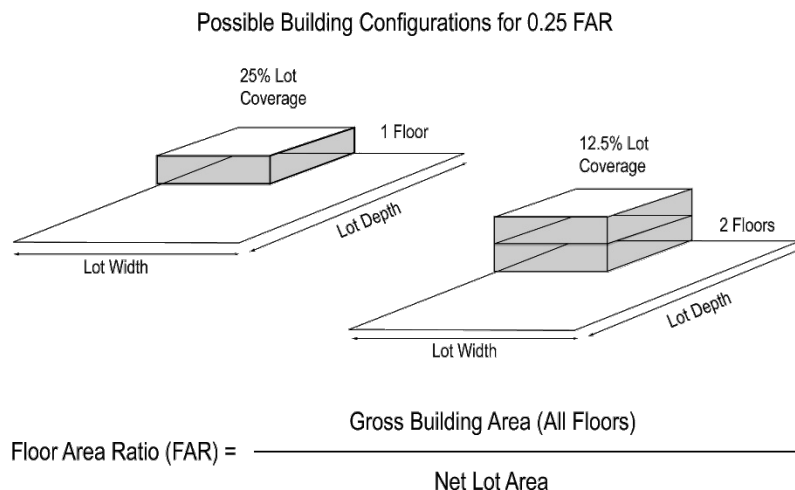
The General Plan land use designations are grouped according to the following five general land use categories: Residential; Commercial and Business; Public/Quasi-Public Facilities; Open Space; and Other.

The Residential categories include four designations that allow for a range of housing types and densities. The non-residential categories include a variety of designations that promote a range of goods and services for the community, as well as revenue- and employment-generating businesses, such as General Commercial, Neighborhood Commercial, and Business Park. Public/Quasi-Public Facilities uses include community, school, and government facilities. Open Space categories include Parks and a variety of Open Space designations, such as parks and recreational facilities like golf courses. The category of Other includes the Mixed-Use Category and a Future Planned Community designation to address future growth opportunities.

This Element uses certain terminology to describe the land use designations. The term **density** is used for residential uses and refers to the population and development capacity of residential land. Density is described in terms of dwelling units per gross acre of land (du/gross acre).

Development **intensity**, which applies to non-residential uses, refers to the extent of development on a parcel of land or lot (i.e., the total building square footage, building height, the floor area ratio, and/or the percent of lot coverage). Intensity is often used to describe non-residential development levels; but, in a broader sense, intensity is also used to express overall levels of both residential and non-residential development types. In this Element, floor area ratio and building square footage are used as measures of non-residential development intensity.

Floor area ratio (FAR) represents the ratio between the total gross floor area of all buildings on a lot and the total area of that lot. The FAR controls the intensity of use on a lot. FAR is determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the land area of that lot. For example, a 10,000-square foot building on a 40,000-square foot lot yields a FAR of 0.25:1. A 0.25:1 FAR allows a single-story building, which covers one-quarter of the lot, or a two-story building with reduced lot coverage.



State General Plan law requires that the Land Use Element indicate the maximum densities and intensities permitted within the Land Use Plan. The land use designations shown on the Land Use Policy Map are described in detail in this Element. Table LU-2 lists each of the land use designations shown on the Land Use Policy Map and provides a corresponding indication of maximum density or intensity of development. Maximum allowable development on individual parcels of land is governed by these measures of density or intensity. The actual density or intensity of development on a parcel is usually less than the maximum permitted within the Land Use Plan.

Land Use Designations

All land in Rancho Santa Margarita is assigned to one of the 14 land use designations described below:

Residential Land Use Designations

Low Density Residential (LDR): The Low Density Residential land use designation provides for single-family detached homes on moderate to large lots. The designation allows a maximum density of 7.0 units per net acre. Uses such as accessory dwelling units, community facilities, parks and open space, day care, churches, and others that are compatible with and oriented toward serving the needs of the low-density single-family neighborhood may also be allowed.

The maximum density of this land use designation may be exceeded in accordance with the density bonus provisions of California Government Code (CGC) Section 65915 et. seq. and Section 9.14.040 (Residential Density Bonus) of the Rancho Santa Margarita Zoning Code (RSMZC).

Low-Medium Density Residential (LMDR): The Low-Medium Density Residential land use designation provides for single-family detached homes on smaller lots, as well as development of single-family attached residential units, such as town homes and duplexes. The designation allows a maximum density of 11.0 units per net acre. Uses such as accessory dwelling units, community facilities, parks and open space, day care, churches, and others that are compatible with and oriented toward serving the needs of the low-medium density single-family neighborhood may also be allowed.

The maximum density of this land use designation may be exceeded in accordance with the density bonus provisions of CGC Section 65915 et. seq. and Section 9.14.040 (Residential Density Bonus) of RSMZC.

Medium Density Residential (MDR): The Medium Density Residential designation provides for detached and attached single-family homes, condominiums, duplexes, and apartments. The designation allows a maximum of 18.0 units per net acre. Uses such as day care, churches and others that are compatible with and oriented toward serving the needs of the medium density neighborhood may also be allowed.



The maximum density of this land use designation may be exceeded in accordance with the density bonus provisions of CGC Section 65915 et. seq. and Section 9.14.040 (Residential_Density Bonus) of the RSMZC.

High Density Residential (HDR): The High Density Residential designation provides for attached condominiums, duplexes, and apartments. The designation allows a maximum of 25.0 units per net acre. The High Density Residential designation also provides for development of senior housing. Uses such as day care, parks and open space, churches and others that are compatible with and oriented toward serving the needs of high density or senior neighborhoods may also be allowed.

The maximum density of this land use designation may be exceeded in accordance with the density bonus provisions of CGC Section 65915 et. seq. and Section 9.14.040 (Residential Density Bonus) of the RSMZC.

Commercial and Business Land Use Designations

General Commercial (C): The General Commercial land use designation provides for retail uses that rely on automobile traffic and attract customers from a citywide and/or regional trade area. The maximum intensity of development is 1.0:1 FAR. The average intensity is 0.4:1 FAR.

Neighborhood Commercial (NC): The Neighborhood Commercial land use designation provides for a variety of retail uses that serve the needs of nearby neighborhoods. In addition to retail uses, areas designated Neighborhood Commercial can also include general business, medical, or professional offices. The maximum intensity of development is 0.6:1 FAR. The average intensity is 0.3:1 FAR.

Business Park (BP): The Business Park designation applies to all non-residential properties within the Rancho Santa Margarita Business Park area. Permitted uses include service commercial, retail commercial, office, light industrial, open space, and community facilities (excluding public and private schools). The maximum intensity of non-residential development is a floor area ratio of 1.0:1 and the average intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.35:1. Limited residential development may be permitted on properties designated with Workforce Housing Overlay zoning to create housing opportunities that can co-exist, complement, enhance and support the needs of employees and employers in the Business Park. The maximum permitted density of residential development on such properties is 35 dwelling units per acre.

Public/Quasi-Public Land Use Designation

Community Facility (CF): The Community Facility land use designation allows development of fire stations, police stations, public and private schools, recreation centers, water tanks, utilities, or other non-commercial, non-residential, or non-industrial purposes. The maximum intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.6:1 and the average intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.3:1. Ownership and control of properties designated as Community Facility are indicated on the Land Use Policy Map using the following symbols:



S – Public Schools (Capistrano and Saddleback Valley Unified School Districts)
R – Churches, Religious Institutions, and Religious Schools
L – Libraries (Orange County Public Library)
CH – City Hall and Bell Tower Regional Community Center (City of Rancho Santa Margarita)
FS – Fire Station (Orange County Fire Authority)
W – Water District (Santa Margarita and Trabuco Canyon Water Districts)

Open Space Land Use Designations

Parks (P): The Parks designation provides for public and private-owned parklands, which may include areas for active sports play, large multipurpose fields for community sports fields and courts, and informal recreation, tot lots, community event space, maintenance/support facilities, and caretaker facilities. The maximum intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.5:1 and the average intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.1:1.

Open Space (OS): The Open Space designation provides open space for outdoor recreation, buffering of land uses, preservation of natural resources, managed production of resources, and protection of health and public safety. Areas designated as Open Space include: streams and washes, open space easements, and other private and public open space. No density or intensity standards are applied within this designation.

Open Space Golf (OSG): The Open Space Golf designation provides for maintenance and development of golf courses and other private recreational uses. The maximum intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.4:1 and the average intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.05:1.

Regional Open Space (ROS): The Regional Open Space designation applies to sections of O'Neill Regional Park that lie within the City of Rancho Santa Margarita. The designation provides for a variety of active and passive recreational uses, consistent with Orange County regulations for use of the Park. The maximum intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.4:1 and the average intensity of development is a floor area ratio of 0.05:1.

Other Land Use Designations

Future Planned Community (FPC): The Future Planned Community designation applies to land located within the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) northeast of the City's existing boundary; refer to Figure LU-1. Future development of the Northeast Future Planned Community is expected to occur following annexation of the properties by the City and the City approval of a Specific Plan. This area is subject to detailed planning and development of residential, commercial, community facility, recreation and open space uses to ensure that it is complementary to the master planned development of Rancho Santa Margarita and properly planned for its interface with Trabuco Canyon and adjacent neighborhoods.



Mixed-Use (MU): The Mixed-Use designation provides for combinations of uses typically found within the High Density Residential (HDR) and Commercial General (C) designations. Mixed-use can take place in a single structure, on a single parcel, or on adjacent parcels. Mixed-use developments may occur as vertical (first-floor commercial with 2 – 3 floors of residential above) or horizontal (adjacent development on the same parcel or site). The maximum permitted density of residential development is 35 units per net acre. The maximum intensity for non-residential development is 1.0:1 FAR. The maximum density of this land use designation may be exceeded in accordance with the density bonus provisions of CGC Section 65915 et. seq. and Section 9.14.040 (Residential Density Bonus) of the RSMZC. Additional information regarding the implementation of Mixed-Use designation is found in the 2022 General Plan Housing Element.



Vantis, Aliso Viejo



The intent of this designation is to provide the ability for development projects to combine compatible uses in ways which offer a balance of land uses where people can live, work, shop and dine on a neighborhood scale, and which remain consistent with the City's Master Plan and the Goals and Policies of the General Plan. Further, the Mixed-Use designation is a key component of the Housing Element programs designed to accommodate the City's RHNA obligations.



The Village at Irvine Spectrum

Mixed-use development encourages property owners to make efficient use of their land and propose unique mixes of development designed to meet the demands of the surrounding area. The maximum density for this designation is specified to ensure compatibility with the existing form and character of the master planned community.

Future Land Use Opportunities

Northeast Future Planned Community

The unincorporated area located north of Robinson Ranch is known as the Northeast Future Planned Community and designated Future Planned Community (FPC) on the Land Use Policy Map. This area consists of approximately 300 acres within the unincorporated jurisdiction of Orange County and is part of the Foothill-Trabuco Specific Plan adopted by the County in 1991. Future development of the Northeast Future Planned Community is expected to occur following annexation of the properties by the City and City approval of a Specific Plan ensuring that new development is compatible with the character of Rancho Santa Margarita.



The City will work with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and owners of the area to prepare appropriate development plans and to annex this area into the City.

As part of the annexation plan, developers will need to prepare an urban services plan that outlines how adequate levels of public services and facilities will be provided to serve the new development, without reducing the level of services in the City. The plan will identify who will be responsible for the provision of the various public services and facilities, as well as identify funding sources to finance the services and facilities. Prior to City approval, the urban services plan must demonstrate that the proposed development meets identified service standards.

Chiquita Ridge

The City owns an approximately 92-acre property, known as Chiquita Ridge, along the east side of Antonio Parkway just south of Canada Vista Park. While the property is currently designated as open space, it may be developed in the future subject to the terms of the Settlement Agreement which transferred the property to City ownership. According to the Settlement Agreement, 55 acres of the property may be developed and 37 acres must be preserved for natural habitat. Future development would require the land use designation to be revised. The City will ensure that any development at Chiquita Ridge is compatible with the existing community while providing appropriate uses.

Mixed-Use

As properties transition and areas revitalize, there is the potential for new development to provide a mixture of residential and commercial uses within a single structure, on a single parcel, or on adjacent parcels. Through adoption of the Housing Element in 2022, Mixed-Use sites within the Town Center and along Santa Margarita Parkway have been selected to meet the City's RHNA as shown on Figure LU-1.

Reuse and Revitalization

During the approximately 20-year lifespan of this General Plan there will be changes in land use. As described above, the only opportunities for significant new development are identified on the Chiquita Ridge property and within the Northeast Future Planned Community. As communities age and to spur economic development, it may be necessary for existing developments to be redeveloped, reused, and revitalized. Reuse will occur through the change-out of one business for another, and revitalization will occur through modernization of buildings and uses. Additionally, property owners may seek to expand or intensify their existing use, consistent with a parcel's land use designation. Thus, there is the potential for currently developed parcels to undergo intensification and/or revitalization during the General Plan planning period. This could involve expansion of an existing development or removal of existing uses and construction of an entirely new development. Land use changes may involve intensification of land uses, such as expansions of existing shopping centers or business park buildings, or may encompass a change from a single-use type to a mixed-use concept involving retail, office, and residential on a single site. Parcels not currently developed to



the land use designation's maximum allowable density or intensity may result in increased development when compared to existing conditions. The City would review any proposed intensification and/or revitalization of parcels for consistency with the Land Use Plan and to ensure the development enhances the community and complements the small-town village character. It will also be important to ensure that existing public services and facilities can serve, or be expanded to serve, any new or increased development. Revitalization and intensification of the City's shopping centers and business park will be important to the City's growth during the planning period.

Shopping Centers

Shopping Centers throughout Rancho Santa Margarita are located in the GC, NC and MU zoning districts. The centers developed between 1985 and 2002 and are developed at an average FAR of 0.18. Table LU-3 assumes additional development within the shopping centers resulting in an average FAR of 0.20 in the NC district, 0.25 in the GC district, and 0.5 in the MU district. Development at this level would result in approximately 236,000 square feet of new commercial development over the life of the plan. However, additional development up to the maximum allowable FAR is possible. All new development will be dependent upon site- and project-specific characteristics and compliance with the Zoning Code.

Business Park

Properties within the Business Park developed between 1986 and 2007. The average FAR within the Business Park is 0.29 and most properties are built well below the allowable FAR. Accordingly, there is opportunity to increase development within the Business Park. In addition, two small undeveloped pads are located on either side of Avenida de las Banderas at 29977 and 29862, representing approximately three acres for new development within currently developed properties. Table LU-3 assumes additional development resulting in an average FAR of 0.45 over the approximately 20-year life of this plan. Development at this level would result in approximately 994,000 square feet of new business park development over the life of the plan. However, additional development up to the maximum allowable FAR is possible. Additionally, through adoption of the Housing Element in 2022, sites suitable for limited residential development were identified to be designated with Workforce Housing Overlay zoning to create housing opportunities that can co-exist, complement, enhance and support the needs of employees and employers in the Business Park. All new development will be dependent upon site- and project-specific characteristics and compliance with the Zoning Code.

Land Use Plan Development Capacity

The maximum density or intensity permitted for an individual parcel is controlled by the land use designation, unless a density bonus pursuant to CGC Section 65915 et. seq and Section 9.04.040 (Residential Density Bonus) of the RSMZC applies. In addition to the land use designation, development of a parcel is influenced by a variety of factors including the physical characteristics of a parcel, compatibility



with nearby uses, access and infrastructure limitations, market factors, and previous development trends.

Within Rancho Santa Margarita, many of the parcels are not developed to their maximum density or intensity. As previously discussed, there are future land use opportunities that could result in new development or redevelopment within the community. In general, it is anticipated that new development will occur in a similar manner with only a limited number of parcels being developed at the maximum density or intensity. Therefore, the projected future development intensity and density identified in Table LU-3 is based upon existing and historical development as well as anticipated development associated with the future land use opportunities identified above.

Table LU-3
Land Use Plan Development Capacity Summary

Land Use	Existing Dwelling Units	Existing Non-Residential Square Feet	Maximum		Assumed		Acres	Estimated Dwelling Units	Estimated Non-Residential Square Feet
			DU/ Acre	FAR	DU/ Acre	FAR			
Residential Land Use Designations									
LDR Low Density Residential	6,033	--	7	--	7	--	895.5	6,048	--
LMDR Low-Medium Density Residential	2,259	--	11	--	10	--	228.2	2,274	--
MDR Medium Density Residential	4,080	--	18	--	16	--	263.3	4,085	--
HDR High Density Residential	5,396	--	25	--	22	--	251.4	5,401	--
Commercial, and Business Land Use Designations									
C General Commercial	--	728,048	--	1.0	--	0.25	108.6	--	948,213
NC Neighborhood Commercial	--	363,454	--	0.6	--	0.20	43.5	--	378,961
BP Business Park	--	3,384,024	35	1.0	35	0.45	265.5	344	4,377,886
MU Mixed Use	--	326,818	35	1.0	35	0.50	26.6	320	267,987
Public/Quasi-Public Land Use Designation									
CF Community Facility	--	1,207,207	--	0.6	--	0.15	219.4	--	1,432,700
Open Space Land Use Designations									
P Parks	--	3,616	--	0.5	--	0.001	154.0	--	6,706
OS Open Space	--	10,000	--	--	--	--	3,162.6	--	10,000
OSG Open Space Golf	--	67,026	--	0.4	--	0.0035	457.1	--	69,694
ROS Regional Open Space	--	--	--	0.4	--	0.01	1,164.3	--	507,166
Other Land Uses									
Water		--	--	--	--	--	71.2	--	--
Total	17,768	6,090,193					7,311.0	18,472	7,999,313
Note: Acreage does not account for right-of-way and numbers may vary slightly due to rounding. Future mixed-use development would come from capacity within the MDR, HDR, and C designations.									

Table LU-4 summarizes the growth above existing conditions that could occur with implementation of the General Plan Update. As indicated in Table LU-4, the anticipated growth over existing 2022 conditions is 704 additional dwelling units and 1,091,985 additional square feet of non-residential uses based upon the assumed development intensities and densities identified in Table LU-3.



Table LU-4
General Plan Update Net Growth (increase over existing conditions)

Land Use	Estimated Dwelling Units	Estimated Non-Residential Square Feet
Residential Land Use Designations		
LDR: Low Density Residential	15	—
LMDR: Low-Medium Density Residential	15	—
MDR: Medium Density Residential	5	—
HDR: High Density Residential	5	—
Commercial, Business, and Tourist Land Use Designations		
C: General Commercial	—	220,165
NC: Neighborhood Commercial	—	15,507
BP: Business Park	344	993,862
MU: Mixed-Use	320	
Public/Quasi-Public Land Use Designation		
CF: Community Facility	—	225,493
Open Space Land Use Designations		
P: Parks	—	3,090
OS: Open Space	—	—
OSG: Open Space Golf	—	2,668
ROS: Regional Open Space	—	507,166
Other Land Uses		
Water	—	—
Total	704	1,909,120

Control and Direct Future Land Uses

The prior section of this Plan identifies potential future land use changes which may occur during the planning period. Directed by the goals and policies of this Element, future land uses will be guided to ensure that they complement the existing community, and protect and enhance the existing character of Rancho Santa Margarita.

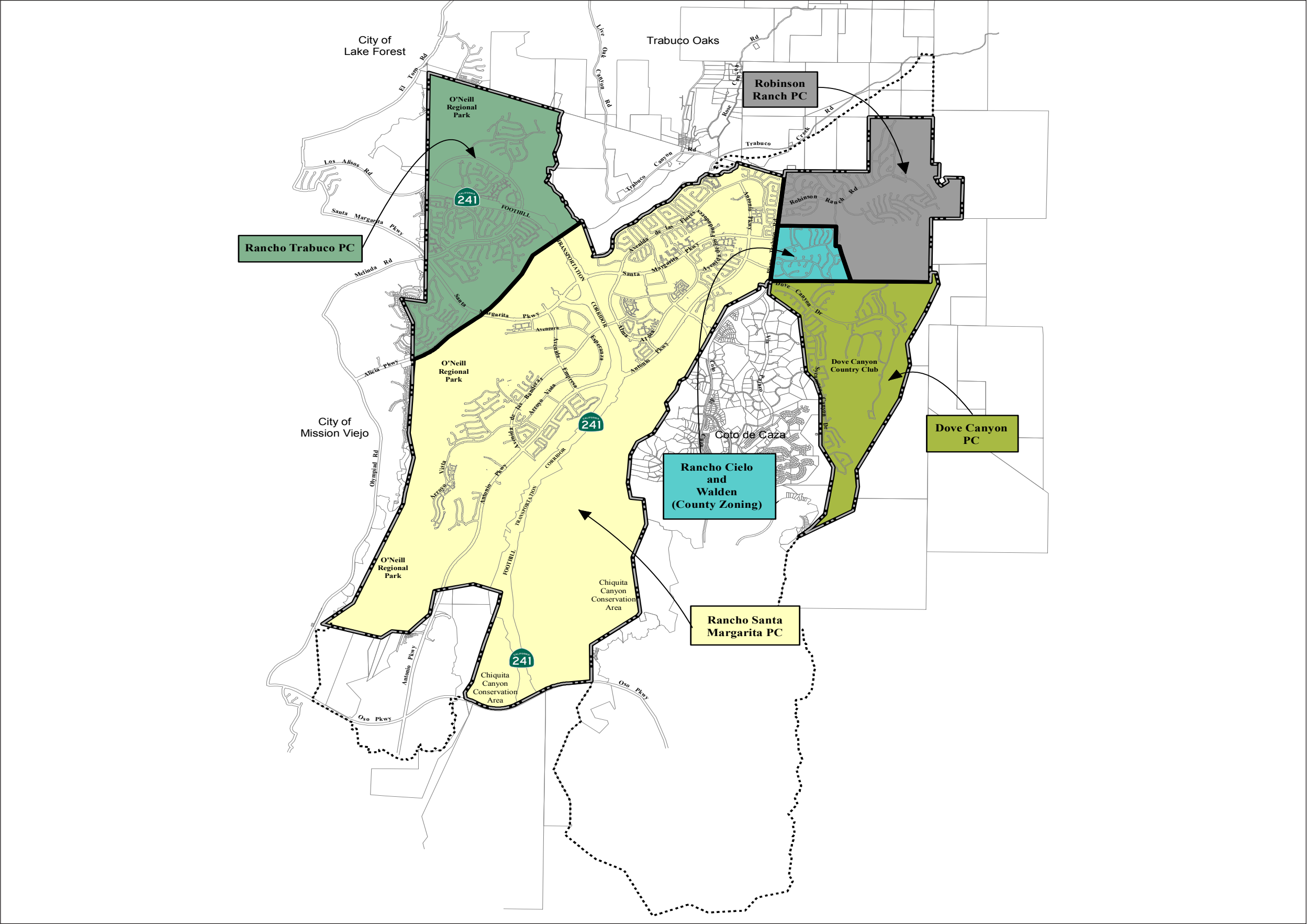
Planned Communities

Rancho Santa Margarita has been primarily developed as a series of Planned Communities prior to incorporation. The Planned Communities comprising the incorporated City include:

- Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community
- Rancho Trabuco Planned Community
- Robinson Ranch Planned Community
- Dove Canyon Planned Community

The area located southwest of the Robinson Ranch Planned Community is referred to as the Rancho Cielo and Walden Communities. These areas were developed consistent with the Orange County development code. Figure LU-2 identifies the locations of all the above listed planned communities within the City.





- LEGEND**
- City Boundary
 - Sphere of Influence
 - Planned Communities Boundary



Sources: City of Rancho Santa Margarita and Orange County Local Agency Formation Commission, 2013.



While the Planned Communities once set forth the zoning and site development standards for specific areas within the City, they were replaced by the Rancho Santa Margarita Zoning Code (RSMZC) in 2007. The Planned Communities now serve as a guide for the character of development in specific geographic areas of the City. At this time, the Planned Communities have been built out, leaving little opportunity for significant new development. Redevelopment or reuse which is consistent with the vision of the Planned Communities may occur during the planning period.

Specific Plans

A Specific Plan is a comprehensive planning and zoning document for a defined geographic area of the City. Specific Plans promote comprehensive planning for new and infill development projects and support the master planned character of the City. Three areas within the City are subject to adopted Specific Plans. Additional specific plans may be adopted in the future for infill development, revitalization and/or new development projects.

Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan

The Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan was prepared by the County of Orange and adopted in 1991 to address areas within Trabuco Canyon located north of the City. The Specific Plan consists largely of rural and open space designations to preserve the existing character of the canyon area. The Plano Trabuco sub-area described in the Specific Plan corresponds to the Northeast Future Planned Community described in the Land Use Plan within this Element. As described above, future development of the Northeast Future Planned Community is expected to occur following annexation of the properties by the City and City approval of a Specific Plan.

RSM Townhomes Specific Plan

The RSM Townhomes Specific Plan was adopted in 2010 and addresses approximately 4 acres of land located near the center of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita adjacent to SR-241. The RSM Townhomes is now known as Tesoro Trails, a multifamily townhome community with 66 attached homes with on-site parking and other amenities.

Plano Trabuco Townhomes Specific Plan

The Plano Trabuco Townhomes Specific Plan was adopted in 2015 and addresses approximately two acres of land located north of Plano Trabuco Road and north of Santa Margarita Parkway. The Plano Trabuco Townhomes is now known as Dahlia Court and contains 36 attached homes with on-site parking and other amenities.



Sphere of Influence

A “Sphere of Influence” (SOI) is defined as a planning boundary outside of an agency’s legal boundary (such as the city limit line) that designates the agency’s probable future boundary and service area. Thus, the establishment of the SOI boundary is necessary to determine which governmental agencies can provide services in the most efficient way to the people and property in any given area, promote orderly land use and service, and protect agriculture and open space.

Rancho Santa Margarita’s SOI includes the Northeast Future Planned Community area, discussed above, as well as Coto De Caza, Las Flores, Stonecliffe, and Wagon Wheel; refer to Figure LU-1.

Land Use and Water Quality

Urban development can affect the environment in many ways, including water quality, which can be impacted by pollutants from urban runoff. Pollutants such as heavy metals, petroleum products, animal waste, and trash can be carried through the storm drain system into receiving waters, such as Trabuco and Tijeras Creeks. These pollutants affect the beneficial uses of these receiving waters including recreation, aesthetic enjoyment, and preservation of fish and wildlife habitat. To address this problem, the CWA was amended in 1987 to include the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). This permit, implemented in south Orange County by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB), requires jurisdictions to enforce requirements reducing polluted urban runoff during all phases of development. Rancho Santa Margarita is a co-permittee of the NPDES permit and will continue to implement the most recent provisions adopted by the SDRWQCB.





Integrate Transportation and Land Use Planning

The Land Use Element and the Circulation Element work together to ensure the transportation system is designed to meet the community's needs based on development assumptions from the Land Use Plan. While single occupancy vehicles are the primary transportation mode, the Land Use Plan encourages greater mobility through integration of various transportation modes. Greater mobility options and comfort for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and personal vehicles provides multiple benefits by decreasing congestion, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and encouraging physical activity. Safe and convenient access between various land uses, including residential, business, commercial, schools/public facilities, and recreational/open space areas further encourage alternative transportation options that are beneficial to the overall health and attractiveness of the community. Integration of transportation into land use planning and opportunities to enhance mobility within Rancho Santa Margarita will continue to be considered as future growth and development occurs.

Provision of Public Facilities and Services

Public facilities and services are provided by the City or other service entities. These facilities and services include:

- 1) Water supply, treatment, and distribution;
- 2) Sewer treatment;
- 3) Solid waste disposal;
- 4) Drainage/flood control;
- 5) Fire protection and emergency services;
- 6) Law enforcement;
- 7) Public education;
- 8) Parks, community centers and recreational opportunities; and
- 9) Libraries.

Other service providers include the Trabuco Canyon Water District (TCWD), Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD), Orange County Flood Control District, Orange County Fire Authority, Orange County Sheriff's Department, various school districts, and the Orange County Public Library system. The provision and maintenance of these services and facilities protect the quality of life and community livability. Such facilities and services will need to be expanded to accommodate future growth and development.

Water and Sewer Service

Adequate municipal water and sewer service is necessary to protect public health in urban settings. The Rancho Santa Margarita planning area is served by two water providers: the SMWD and the TCWD. TCWD serves the eastern part of Rancho Santa Margarita (Robinson Ranch, Trabuco Highlands, Dove Canyon, Rancho Cielo, and Walden Communities) and the Northeast Future Planned Community area. The remaining portions of the incorporated City are served by SMWD.



The SMWD and the TCWD are members of the Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC). The MWDOC is a member of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD). Nearly all of the MWDOC water supply is purchased from MWD, which imports the water from the Colorado River Aqueduct (a small portion comes from Northern California through the State Water Project).

The SMWD and TCWD are also responsible for the collection of wastewater within the City. SMWD owns and operates the Oso Creek Wastewater Reclamation System and the Chiquita Water Reclamation Plant. Additionally, wastewater from SMWD is also treated at the 3A Water Reclamation Plant, J.B. Lathan, and Los Alisos Water Recycling Plant. TCWD collects wastewater and reclaims it at the Robinson Ranch Wastewater Treatment Plant, and also has the capacity to divert wastewater to SMWD Chiquita Water Reclamation Plant. Water reclaimed by both SMWD and TCWD is used for irrigation purposes only.

Both water districts work with MWD to ensure adequate water supplies and sewer services are available to meet the needs of existing development and future growth. As part of this cooperation, the City will provide land use and other necessary data to the districts for use in Urban Water Management Plans as well as other planning documents. The City will also participate in water conservation programs to reduce future water consumption.

Encouraging high quality water and sewer service requires maintaining the existing water and sewer infrastructure and extending new infrastructure to serve new development. Because the incorporated area is almost entirely developed, water infrastructure is in place and few improvements will be required to accommodate new development. Development proposals will be reviewed for consistency with water and sewer infrastructure requirements; the City will rely upon water district assessment of the water and sewer needs of proposed projects and require infrastructure improvements where needed.

Solid Waste Disposal

Sufficient solid waste disposal is necessary to protect public safety and provide for a clean, healthy community. A private sector contractor provides residential solid waste collection services for Rancho Santa Margarita. The City's solid waste is primarily disposed at the County of Orange Integrated Waste Management Department's Prima Deshecha landfill in San Juan Capistrano. The landfill is a permitted Class III landfill accepting only non-hazardous municipal solid waste for disposal (and no hazardous or liquid waste). This landfill is scheduled to remain open until 2067. The City encourages recycling activities and opportunities to provide recycling collection facilities that are convenient to residents and businesses.

Drainage/Flood Control

Flood control systems have been constructed to direct runoff away from developed areas and prevent flooding associated with heavy rains. The two agencies responsible for flood control within Rancho Santa Margarita are the City



- local flood control facilities, and the Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD) - regional flood control facilities.

As new development occurs, increased runoff will occur. New development is required to provide on-site stormwater retention/detention facilities to regulate runoff. The City will continue to require developments to provide adequate stormwater drainage systems concurrently with the construction of new development, including detention/retention facilities. Development proposals will be reviewed for drainage impacts and required facilities. Through continued coordination with OCFCD and review of proposed development, public safety and private property will be protected from flood hazards.

Fire Protection and Law Enforcement

Adequate fire protection and law enforcement are imperative to protect public health and safety. Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) provides fire protection service. OCFA also serves the unincorporated portions of the planning area. OCFA Fire Station 45 is located at 30131 Aventura within the Rancho Santa Margarita Business Park. Three other stations are located just outside the City, including OCFA Fire Station 18 in Trabuco Canyon, OCFA Fire Station 31 in Mission Viejo, and OCFA Fire Station 58 in Ladera Ranch. Other stations located outside of the City may respond to fire and other emergencies.

OCFA provides fire suppression, emergency medical, and rescue services as well as public education programs for schools, businesses, community organizations, childcare providers and other members of the community. In addition, the OCFA works with the City to adopt and enforce codes and ordinances relative to fire and life safety, and reviews development projects within the City for potential impacts on fire protection services. The OCFA has established service goals and response times for emergency calls.

Rancho Santa Margarita contracts with the Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD) for all law enforcement needs. OCSD is responsible for public safety and general law enforcement for both the City and unincorporated areas within the planning area. To serve the public safety needs of the City, OCSD operates a Sheriff's Station at City Hall. Public safety needs of unincorporated areas within the planning area are met by the Sheriff's Southeast Orange County Substation in Lake Forest.

OCSD services include patrol services, traffic enforcement and criminal investigations. The Sheriff's Department also provides a variety of community policing programs for the public, including crime prevention, Business Watch/Neighborhood Watch, and community awareness programs.

For both fire protection and law enforcement, ensuring public safety requires maintaining adequate staffing, equipment, and facilities. The City will work with both OCFA and OCSD response times corresponds with the number of residents and businesses in the City as well as current fire hazards and crime problems. Community-oriented policing will continue to be a centerpiece of the City's approach to crime prevention. The City works with homeowner's associations to



ensure street widths and clearance areas are sufficient to allow these departments to continue to provide valuable, timely service to the community.

Education

Rancho Santa Margarita public schools are operated by two K-12 districts: the Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) and Saddleback Valley Unified School District (SVUSD). In addition, the City is home to several prominent Orange County private schools, including Mission Hills Christian School, Rancho Viejo Montessori School, Santa Margarita Catholic High School, St. Junipero Serra Catholic School, and St. John's Episcopal School. There are no two- or four-year colleges located within the planning area. The closest post-secondary two-year college is Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, and the nearest four-year universities include Concordia University in Irvine and University of California, Irvine.

Capistrano Unified School District

CUSD serves the south and west portions of Rancho Santa Margarita with five schools: Arroya Vista K-8, Tijeras Creek Preschool and K-5 are inside the City of Rancho Santa Margarita, and Las Flores K-5, Las Flores 6-8, and Tesoro High School are outside of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita.

Saddleback Valley Unified School District

SVUSD serves the north and east portions of Rancho Santa Margarita with four elementary schools (Cielo Vista Elementary, Melinda Heights Elementary, Robinson Elementary, and Trabuco Mesa Elementary), one middle school (Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School) is located within the planning area. Although located outside of the planning area, some high school students residing in Rancho Santa Margarita attend Mission Viejo High school.

The City will cooperate with the school districts to update information in their Master Plans and long-range facility plans. Should future development or demographic shifts necessitate new school construction, the City will work with the appropriate district to identify appropriate future school sites that are compatible with surrounding development. Similarly, the City will coordinate with the designated district in the event an existing school property is proposed for a non-education reuse.





Parks, Community Centers and Recreational Opportunities

Parks, community centers, and recreational opportunities are essential public services that help maintain a high quality of life in the community. Rancho Santa Margarita benefits from a variety of unique facilities and services with over 4,800 acres within the City that is comprised of open space and park uses.

The Rancho Santa Margarita park and recreation system consists of neighborhood parks, community parks, O'Neill Regional Park, joint use parks, community services and facilities, an extensive open space system, and the Bell Tower Regional Community Center. All parks in the City (except for Santa Margarita's Dog Park, Skate Park, O'Neill Regional Park, and County trails) are privately owned, operated, and maintained by homeowners' associations. The Open Space and Conservation Element provides a description and map of all parks located in the City; refer to Table COS-2 and Table COS-3.

The City's Land Use Policy Map designates land for parks and open space, including regional open space. These areas are well-distributed throughout the community and provide both active and passive space within walking distance of most neighborhoods. Larger facilities, such as Central Park, serve as a gathering space for community events that foster Rancho Santa Margarita's community spirit. The Bell Tower Regional Community Center also holds a variety of recreational programs for all ages offered by the City's Community Services Department.

The City will promote the value of parkland and recreational opportunities for all residents. The Open Space and Conservation Element establishes community-wide standards for the provision of parklands. The City will continue to work with homeowners' associations and other recreation providers to ensure that a balance of high-quality active and passive public open spaces, a regional trail system, and recreational facilities are provided and maintained. Opportunities to provide additional parks and recreational facilities will be considered in conjunction with the City's ability to finance, construct, maintain and operate any existing and new facilities. Community programs and events will continue to be supported and promoted as an opportunity to serve and gather as a community. Coordination with public, private, and non-profit healthcare and social service providers will also be important to ensure the needs of the community are adequately identified and served.



Libraries

Public libraries serve several community purposes including education, recreation, and dissemination of public information. Orange County Public Libraries is a network of community libraries with a mission to “Empower and Enrich our Communities” that serve the planning area and surrounding communities. The Rancho Santa Margarita Branch Library is located at 30902 La Promesa in the Plaza El Paseo shopping center.

The City continues to work with the OC Public Libraries to provide a level of library facilities and services that meets the needs of the community. The City will work with OC Public Libraries to ensure that library services in Rancho Santa Margarita are high quality, enhance the cultural life of the community, and provide for an information center within the community.

