Executive Summary

THE PROJECT

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.). This document is intended to be a Program EIR pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21094, which allows tiering of EIRs when feasible, and CEQA Guidelines Section 15168, which authorizes and describes the purpose of a Program EIR. A benefit of preparing a Program EIR for the General Plan is that EIRs prepared for later projects which are consistent with the General Plan can concentrate upon environmental effects which may be mitigated or avoided in connection with the decision on each later project.

PROJECT LOCATION

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita contains approximately 13 square miles of land (or about 8,320 acres) and is located in eastern Orange County about ten miles northeast of the Pacific Ocean, in the foothills of the Santa Ana mountains. The community is divided by the Foothill Transportation Corridor, which extends to the north connecting with North County cities such as Yorba Linda and Anaheim, and will extend to the south in the future connecting to San Clemente and offering access to San Diego County. The City is bordered on the west by Mission Viejo, on the east by the Cleveland National Forest, and on the north and south by unincorporated areas.

The project area consists of all properties contained within the City’s corporate limits, the City’s sphere of influence, and beyond the City’s sphere of influence within the Northeast Future Planned Community. The sphere of influence includes unincorporated portions of Orange County located adjacent to the City’s northwestern boundary. The entire project area encompasses 8,647 acres, with approximately 8,320 acres within the City’s corporate limits and an additional 327 acres in the sphere of influence.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The General Plan establishes a comprehensive community vision for Rancho Santa Margarita relative to land use, economic development, circulation, housing, conservation/open space, safety, and noise. Through text and maps, the Plan expresses the community’s long-term goals. The overarching goals set forth in the General Plan include the following:

♦ To protect and enhance the small town character of Rancho Santa Margarita.
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- To promote a family-oriented community with community events and vibrant public gathering places.
- To maintain the community's amenities such as the lake, parks, pools, community centers, and pedestrian/bicycle trails.
- To attract and retain businesses that will be beneficial to and will thrive in the City.
- To coordinate and cooperate with other public and private organizations, such as Homeowner’s Associations and service providers, to benefit the community.
- To provide and maintain public services and facilities to adequately serve the community as the City matures.
- To allow for innovative land planning and building design in the Northeast Future Planned Community that continues Rancho Santa Margarita’s heritage as a planned community with a specified mix of residential, community facility, park, and open space uses.

The General Plan includes policies and programs designed to achieve these goals. The elements contained in the Rancho Santa Margarita General Plan are Land Use, Economic Development, Circulation, Housing, Conservation/Open Space, Safety, and Noise. Additionally, the General Plan includes an Implementation Program that will serve to ensure the overall direction provided in each General Plan element is translated from general terms to specific actions.

As Rancho Santa Margarita is largely a built-out community, little opportunity exists for substantial changes to land use within the City. Within the City’s sphere of influence, the Northeast Future Planned Community Area has 327 acres currently vacant or used for a plant nursery. The General Plan establishes land use policy for future development of this area.

**REQUIRED ACTIONS**

The City will be required to take the following actions to approve the project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Agency or Party</th>
<th>Action(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rancho Santa Margarita City Council</td>
<td>- Adoption of the General Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Adoption of any programs or other mechanisms that implement General Plan policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancho Santa Margarita Planning Commission</td>
<td>- Recommendation to City Council to adopt the General Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Recommendation to the City Council of any programs or other mechanisms that implement General Plan policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SIGNIFICANT, UNAVOIDABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROJECT

Adoption and long-term implementation of the Rancho Santa Margarita General Plan will result in the following significant, unavoidable environmental impact:

Air Quality: Long Term ROC, CO, NOx, and PM10 Levels

Air pollutant emissions associated with new vehicle trips and stationary sources will result in emission levels of reactive organic compounds (ROC), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NOx), and particulate matter (PM10) that exceed the thresholds established by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). (Stationary sources are defined by SCAQMD to be those sources that emit pollution from equipment, or industrial or commercial processes.) Although the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan contains policies directed toward reducing air pollutant emissions and participating in regional programs toward this end, the impact will be significant and unavoidable.

POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS THAT CAN BE MITIGATED

Aesthetics within the City

This section summarizes the potentially significant impacts that can be mitigated. A summary of the mitigation measures, as well as the impacts, is located in Table ES-1 at the end of the Executive Summary.

The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City will occur in established planned communities and is currently surrounded by existing development. This new residential and non-residential development will be subject to the architectural standards outlined in the planned community documents. This will maintain the high-quality design that is characteristic of the community. With implementation of these requirements, impacts that would otherwise be potentially significant, can be reduced to a less-than-significant level or avoided.

Aesthetics within the Northeast Future Planned Community

The majority of development pursuant to the General Plan will occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community. As part of the General Plan Land Use Element, provisions are made for an allowable land use mix in the Northeast Future Planned Community. The land use mix for the area includes 35% open space, including preservation of bluffs located southeast of Trabuco Creek and north and east of the Porter Ranch area. Trail
linkages to the existing trails network are also required. In addition, most of the residential development would be low density (not to exceed 4.0 du/acre and 7.0 du/acre). These guidelines aim for development to blend with the natural landscape to the extent possible. Since this future development cannot be viewed from the majority of the areas within the City, the overall character of Rancho Santa Margarita will not change. However, this development will change the natural landscape of the future planned community area with the introduction of urban uses.

**Aesthetics: Light and Glare within the Northeast Future Planned Community**

Light and glare levels will increase in the Northeast Future Planned Community as development occurs. Existing dark skies in this area could be impacted by vehicle headlights and night lighting for streets, parks, and parking lots.

**Transportation/Traffic: Circulation**

One deficiency exists on the analyzed roadway segments: Santa Margarita Parkway from Alicia Pkwy to Ave. Empresa. This major arterial segment will operate at LOS E; therefore, a significant impact will result.

**Transportation/Traffic: Roadway Design**

The Circulation Plan in the Circulation Element establishes a hierarchical roadway classification system with dimensions and characteristics. Furthermore, the Circulation Plan establishes performance criteria. With adherence to the roadway classification system and performance standards, future roadways in the Northeast Future Planned Community will avoid hazards due to design features, which would be a significant impact.

**Transportation/Traffic: Emergency Access**

General Plan implementation will include construction of new roadways in the Northeast Future Planned Community. Access from the northeast area to the rest of Rancho Santa Margarita is provided at the intersection of Plano Trabuco Road and Trabuco Canyon Road. Emergency access may be provided at the west end of the Future Planned Community to Trabuco Canyon Road, or alternately at the northeast end of the area to Trabuco Creek Road. The circulation plan for the Northeast Future Planned Community is conceptual. Inclusion of an emergency access point will reduce or avoid an otherwise potentially significant impact.

**Transportation/Traffic: Emergency Evacuation**

Emergency evacuation routes have been designated throughout the City in the event of emergency situations and disasters, including earthquakes, floods, hazardous materials release, nuclear power plant emergency, wildland fire and aircraft accident. Future development in Rancho Santa Margarita must be in harmony with the Emergency
Preparedness Plan. Without review of the project and amendment of the evacuation routes, as necessary, impact will be significant.

Transportation/Traffic: Parking within the City

Implementation of General Plan Land Use Policy will result in approximately 687 new dwelling units and 698,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Of the 687 new units, 75 will be located in existing planned communities, as will 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Approved development plans, which address parking standards, exist for each of the planned communities in the City. Future development in these areas will need to be reviewed for consistency with approved development plans. Without review and the requirement of consistency, impacts will be significant.

Transportation/Traffic: Parking within the Northeast Future Planned Community

The Northeast Future Planned Community will accommodate a maximum of 612 new dwelling units and 348,000 square feet of non-residential uses pursuant to General Plan land use policy. A Specific Plan will be prepared for the area prior to annexation to the City. By addressing parking standards in the Specific Plan, future development in the Northeast Future Planned Community will reduce or avoid an otherwise potentially significant impact.

Air Quality: Short-Term Construction

Construction-related air quality impacts will occur continuously over the next 20 years as individual development projects are constructed. Because Rancho Santa Margarita is almost fully developed, many development projects are likely to be small in scale (remodeling, room additions, etc.). Construction activity will primarily generate airborne dust, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide. In addition, volatile organic compounds (VOC) will be released from architectural coatings, exterior paints, and asphalt.

Noise: Short-Term Construction Noise

Implementation of the General Plan will result in additional development within the project area, which will generate noise during construction activity. Construction activity will have the potential to impact noise sensitive land uses located adjacent to construction sites.

Noise: Vehicular Noise

Implementation of the General Plan will allow new development within the project area. Such development will generate additional traffic that will increase noise levels along the roadways. Development in adjacent communities will also generate additional traffic that will utilize roadways in the project area. Future noise levels along major streets in the project area are projected to range from a CNEL of approximately 62.0 dB(A) to 75.5 dB(A). SR-241 will become the primary noise source with noise levels reaching a CNEL
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of 75.5 dB(A) at a distance of 50 feet from the roadway centerline. Certain portions of the City will be subject to noise levels exceeding the City’s noise standards.

Noise: Stationary Noise

Implementation of the General Plan may result in excessive noise generated by non-residential uses such as commercial center, restaurants and bars, religious institutions, and civic centers. These types of uses are allowed throughout the project area.

Biological Resources: Natural Communities within Northeast Future Planned Community

The largest area for future development is located in the Northeast Future Planned Community, currently containing active nurseries and portions of Porter Ranch. The majority of the area is considered urban/developed with respect to the nursery operations and associated nonnative landscape species. Sensitive plant communities are present within the immediate vicinity of this area. Since the actual configuration of the land uses associated with the planned community has not yet been developed, natural communities, such as coastal sage scrub and southern coast live oak riparian forest, may potentially be impacted in the Future Planned Community. This is considered a potentially significant impact.

Biological Resources: Sensitive Plant Species within Northeast Future Planned Community

No federally or state listed threatened or endangered plant species are likely to occur within the vacant parcels of the City or the Northeast Future Planned Community. Three 1B-listed plant species listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), many-stemmed dudleya, three-leaved brodiaea, and intermediate mariposa lily, have a high potential to occur within the vicinity. Since the actual configuration of the land uses associated with the Northeast Future Planned Community have not yet been determined, impacts to sensitive plant species is considered potentially significant.

Biological Resources: Sensitive Wildlife Species within Northeast Future Planned Community

Since the actual configuration of the land uses associated with the Northeast Future Planned Community have not yet been determined, potential direct or indirect impacts to threatened, endangered, or otherwise sensitive wildlife species or any habitat occupied by these species within the planned community is considered potentially significant. Potential impacts to raptor nests and breeding migratory birds are considered significant.
Biological Resources: Jurisdictional Areas within Northeast Future Planned Community

Two main jurisdictional areas are located within Rancho Santa Margarita (Trabuco and Tijeras Creeks). Any impact to Waters of the United States and associated riparian habitat and wetlands is considered to be a significant impact. The Northeast Future Planned Community and the vacant lot east of Antonio Parkway have not been assessed for any jurisdictional areas due to access issues. In the event that jurisdictional areas occur within these sites, impacts will be considered significant.

Cultural Resources: Archaeological and Paleontological Sites

More than 30 archaeological sites and some paleontological sites have been recorded at locations within Rancho Santa Margarita. Some of these sites have been damaged or destroyed by modern development. Any impact to existing sites would be is considered significant.

Geology and Soils: Seismicity and Groundshaking

The City has been developed with strong seismic building codes in force, and as a result, development in the community is anticipated to experience little structural impact should earthquakes occur on nearby faults. The General Plan establishes the review of proposals for new development and redevelopment to include the most up-to-date structural codes to continue to protect the public safety of residents in the City. With implementation of this development review and structural standards, this impact that would otherwise be potentially significant, can be reduced or avoided.

Geology and Soils: Geologic Hazards from Groundshaking

Most of the lowlands in the City have a high liquefaction potential due to shallow ground water. Most areas within the City subject to liquefaction are located in designated open space. Since the location of future development in the Northeast Future Planned Community is not known, the area may be subject to liquefaction.

Some steep slopes within the City would be most vulnerable to seismically induced landslides, due to the steep terrain and the presence of weak sedimentary rock units. Areas on the gentler slopes may also be susceptible where slopes have been undercut by streams or roadcuts.

Geology and Soils: Other Geologic Hazards

The vacant land in the Robinson Ranch area is within the very high category for landslide susceptibility. This very high category also applies to areas within the Northeast Future Planned Community, as well as mapped landslides. Areas in the project area susceptible to collapsible soils and ground subsidence are similar to the liquefaction hazard areas. These areas include portions of the Northeast Future Planned Community. Since the
location of future development in the Northeast Future Planned Community is not known, this area may be subject to collapsible soils and ground subsidence hazards.

**Hydrology/Water Quality: Water Quality**

Existing land uses will continue to create demands for a safe water supply while also resulting in urban runoff that has the potential to pollute receiving waters. Existing requirements for potable water quality and minimizing polluted urban runoff address these potential impacts. With implementation of these requirements, impact on water quality, that would otherwise be potentially significant, can be reduced or avoided.

**Hydrology/Water Quality: Flooding**

Development pursuant to the General Plan in the Northeast Future Planned Community will need to include adequate storm drainage for the area while not impacting the existing system. Additionally, this development has the potential to be impacted by flooding, as the 100-year flood plain is adjacent to Trabuco Creek. The drainage pattern of the Creek should not be altered by future development to avoid a potentially significant impact.

**Hazards & Hazardous Materials: Wildland Fires**

Implementation of the General Plan will result in the development of new residential and non-residential uses in areas of high wildland fire hazard. The interface between the urban areas and natural vegetation will be expanded with the development of the Northeast Future Planned Community, resulting in a greater potential for wildland and urban fires.

**Public Service: Fire Protection**

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the Project Area that will require additional fire protection services. The OCFA has indicated that no new fire facilities are proposed and additional services, if any, would be added to existing facilities.

**Public Service: Police Protection**

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development within the project area that will require additional sheriff services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, to maintain response times. The Orange County Sheriff's Department is considering constructing a station in Lake Forest to service Rancho Santa Margarita, in addition to other southeast Orange County cities. The specific environmental impact of constructing a new sheriff facility in Lake Forest cannot be determined at this level of analysis because a specific site has not been identified and will be subject to separate CEQA review.
Public Service: Schools

Within the incorporated areas, the General Plan will allow up to 75 housing units and 293,000 square feet of commercial uses, which will generate approximately 52 additional students within the Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD). CUSD is currently experiencing overcrowded conditions with limited or no space for additional growth within its existing sites. Therefore, new facilities may be needed to accommodate the 52 students generated by implementation of the General Plan. No currently vacant land within the incorporated portions of the City is designated for school facilities. The specific environmental impact of constructing new school facilities in the incorporated area served by CUSD cannot be determined at this level of analysis and will be subject to separate CEQA review.

In the Northeast Planned Community, which is currently unincorporated, up to 612 housing units will be developed, generating 314 students to be served by Saddleback Valley Unified School District. The General Plan specifies that 20% of the acreage in the Northeast Future Planned Community be used for a joint elementary school and park facility. Annexation of any portion of the Northeast Future Planned Community cannot occur until a Specific Plan which meets this criteria, among others, is completed. The specific environmental impact of constructing new school facilities in the unincorporated area served by SVUSD cannot be determined at this level of analysis and will be subject to separate CEQA review.

Public Service: Libraries

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area and a corresponding increase in the population. This increase in population will increase demand on existing library facilities.

Utilities/Service Systems: Water

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area. New development will include residential, commercial, and office space, as well as institutional and public facilities. This increase in development and population will increase demand for water services.

Utilities/Service Systems: Wastewater

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area. New development will include residential, commercial, and office space, as well as institutional and public facilities. This increase in development and population will increase demand for sewer services.
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Utilities/Service Systems: Solid Waste

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area and an increase in solid waste generation. The waste generated by this development will be disposed of at the Prima Deshecha landfill. Using generation factors from the California Integrated Waste Management Board, development within the City will generate an estimated 89 tons/year, while the Northeast Future Planned Community will generate an estimated 728 tons/year.

Utilities/Service Systems: Energy

Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area and increase the demand for energy. The project demand for electricity service was determined using Southern California Edison’s land use conversion factors. The electricity demand will be expected to peak at an additional 3.5 megawatts per hour when new development planned in the General Plan would be completed. The demand for natural gas was provided by Southern California Gas Company based on the anticipated number of new residences. Residential demand for natural gas is expected to peak at 25,000 cubic feet per hour in 2020 as a result of new development anticipated in the planning area.

Recreation

With development pursuant to the General Plan, the population of the project area will increase about 9 percent from 2000 to 2025. This population increase will place additional demands on existing park and recreation facilities.

IMPACTS CONSIDERED IN THIS EIR BUT FOUND TO BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The analysis contained in this EIR indicates that the project will not have a significant impact with respect to the following:

Land Use: Compatibility/Consistency with Regional Plans

Given that the Southern Subregion NCCP program is in the preliminary planning stages and has not been approved, the General Plan is not in conflict with this program.

Population/Housing

The estimated population for the project area at the time of buildout in the year 2020 is 49,403 living in 17,608 dwelling units. This is an increase of 4.1 percent for population and 4.1 percent for housing units. Impacts associated with population growth without commensurate housing unit construction, such as overcrowding, are not anticipated.
Additionally, an ample amount of vacant land (over 261 acres) exists to accommodate housing unit construction.

**Aesthetics: Light and Glare within the City**

Light levels in the established areas of the City will not substantially increase since little new development is identified in the General Plan. The planned community documents also address ways to reduce lighting impacts on neighboring uses.

**Transportation/Traffic: CMP Roadway Circulation**

In Rancho Santa Margarita, the Foothill Transportation Corridor (SR-241) is a part of the Congestion Management Plan (CMP) network. The Foothill Transportation Corridor was sized to accommodate projected growth in the area as specified by adopted plans, including the CMP prepared by OCTA, and OCP 2000 projection. The General Plan does not intensify uses relative to the adopted plans, and furthermore, it is consistent with those plans. Therefore, adoption and implementation of the General Plan will not increase traffic generation beyond what the Foothill Transportation Corridor was built to accommodate. This impact is less than significant.

**Biological Resources: Natural Communities within City**

Natural vegetation communities occurring within the proposed development sites are limited to designated open space areas and are not planned for development. All vacant lots west of Antonio Parkway that are planned for development are contained within previously disturbed areas. The vacant lot in the northeastern portion of the project site contains mostly nonnative landscape vegetation and would be considered an urban/developed plant community.

**Biological Resources: Sensitive Wildlife Species within City**

No suitable habitat exists within the vacant lots in the City, and therefore, impact to sensitive fauna is considered to be less than significant in these areas.

**Biological Resources: Jurisdictional Areas within City**

Two main jurisdictional areas are located within Rancho Santa Margarita (Trabuco and Tijeras Creeks). Any impact to Waters of the United States and associated riparian habitat and wetlands is considered to be a significant impact. Due to the nature of a General Plan, specific project impacts have not been determined. However, based on the current site conditions of the vacant lots west of Antonio Parkway, no jurisdictional areas in these locations will be impacted and, therefore, this impact is considered less than significant.
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Biological Resources: Regional Connectivity/Wildlife Movement Corridors

Wildlife movement through Rancho Santa Margarita will likely occur through current open space areas. The vacant lot areas west of Antonio Parkway are landlocked by urban development and will not be within a designated movement corridor. The vacant lot east of Antonio Parkway contains urban development on three sides and is not considered to be within a movement corridor. Development of these areas will have no significant impacts with respect to wildlife movement corridors. The Northeast Future Planned Community is located immediately adjacent to a regional corridor (Trabuco Canyon). Due to the nature of a General Plan, specific project impacts have not been determined, however, it is unlikely that the proposed planned community will have any impacts to a regional wildlife movement corridor given the percentage of open space set aside along Trabuco Creek. Impacts to wildlife movement corridors due to the implementation of the General Plan is considered to be less-than-significant.

IMPACTS CONSIDERED IN THE INITIAL STUDY AND FOUND NOT TO BE POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT

The Initial Study (see Appendix A) prepared for the project found that the project poses a less-than-significant impact or no potentially significant impact with regard to:

- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality: Compatibility with Applicable Air Quality Plan; Objectionable Odors
- Geology and Soils: Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map; Septic Tanks
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials: Transport, Use, or Disposal of Hazardous; Release of Hazardous Materials; Hazardous Materials within ¼ Mile of a School; Hazardous Materials Sites pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5; Airport Land Use Plan; Private Airstrip
- Hydrology and Water Quality: Groundwater; Seiche, Tsunami, or Mudflow
- Land Use and Planning: Divide an Established Community; Conflict with Any Land Use Plan
- Noise: Groundborne Vibration; Airport Land Use Plan; Private Airstrip
- Population and Housing: Displace Housing; Displace People
- Transportation/Traffic: Air Traffic Patterns; Alternative Transportation Policies

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROJECT

Through comparison of potential project alternatives to the proposed project, the relative advantages of each can be weighed and analyzed. The CEQA Guidelines require that a range of alternatives addressed be "governed by a rule of reason that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice" [Section 15126.6(a)]. This EIR does not consider an alternate site for the project because the project involves all properties within Rancho Santa Margarita and its sphere of influence.
The following alternatives are examined in this EIR:

**No Project:** This alternative assumes that the General Plan is not adopted and the existing community plans remain as the adopted long-range planning policy documents. Development would continue to occur in the project area in accordance with the existing community plans. Potential buildout within the City pursuant to the existing community plans would be the same as that associated with the General Plan since the General Plan is consistent with the community plans (75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses). However, potential buildout outside of the City, in the Northeast Future Planned Community, may be somewhat different. The Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan is the existing adopted long-range planning policy document for the Northeast Future Planned Community area. The Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan defines the development potential to be 612 units with open space preservation along Trabuco Creek, which is consistent with the General Plan. The Specific Plan does not make allowances for a school or park, nor does it define the mix of residential development, whereas the General Plan does. Therefore, buildout pursuant to the Specific Plan could vary from that pursuant to the General Plan.

The benefits of the General Plan would be eliminated under this alternative. These benefits include protecting and enhancing the small town character of Rancho Santa Margarita; promoting a family-oriented community with community events and vibrant public gathering places; maintaining the community’s amenities such as the lake, parks, pools, community centers, and pedestrian/bicycle trails; attracting and retaining businesses that are beneficial to and will thrive in the City; coordinating and cooperating with other public and private organizations, such as Homeowner’s Associations and service providers, to benefit the community; and providing and maintaining public services and facilities to adequately serve the community as the City matures.

This alternative would result in the City not having an adopted General Plan, which is inconsistent with State law.

**Northeast Future Planned Community Developed as a Resort Area:** This alternative assumes buildout within the City under the proposed General Plan, 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses, and resort uses within the Northeast Future Planned Community. The amount of non-residential use in this area would slightly increase from the 348,000 square feet associated with the General Plan. Trip generation would be non-peak in character. The area would include a golf course, hotel, club house, meeting center, vacation units (such as condominiums), and related uses. Overall, the number of housing units in the Northeast Future Planned Community would be lower than development pursuant to the General Plan. Before the area could be developed as a resort, a Specific Plan would be prepared to address issues such as light and glare, emergency access, and parking standards.

All other elements of the General Plan would remain the same as the proposed project.
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Northeast Future Planned Community Remains in Open Space: This alternative assumes buildout within the City under the proposed General Plan, 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses, and open space within the Northeast Future Planned Community. All other elements of the General Plan would remain the same as the proposed project.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT

The CEQA Guidelines define cumulative impacts as “two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts. The individual effects may be changes resulting from a single project or a number of separate projects. The cumulative impact from several projects... results from the incremental impact of the proposed project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonable foreseeable... future projects. Cumulative impact can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15355).

The Draft General Plan addresses growth throughout the Rancho Santa Margarita project area over a 20-year planning period. Thus, no “related projects” in the community can be considered. Rather, the regional growth projections over the next 20 years are considered along with the General Plan to determine a cumulative context. The project, both by itself and cumulatively, will result in an unavoidable significant impact on long-term air quality.

AREAS OF CONTROVERSY AND ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED

Through the Notice of Preparation process for the General Plan, concerns were raised regarding air quality, long-term traffic, biological resources, hydrology, recreation, and aesthetics. These issues are examined in this EIR.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Table ES-1 beginning on the following page summarizes the environmental effects associated with long-term implementation of the General Plan, the mitigation measure required to avoid or minimize impact, and the level of impact following mitigation.
### Table ES – 1
Summary of Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Category</th>
<th>Potential Environmental Impact</th>
<th>Mitigation Measure</th>
<th>Level of Impact After Mitigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant, Unavoidable Environmental Impact</strong></td>
<td>[Lead Agency must issue “Statement of Overriding Considerations” under Section 15093 and 15126(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines if the agency determines these effects are significant and approves the project.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Quality: Long Term ROC, CO, NOx, and PM10 Levels – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Air pollutant emissions associated with new vehicle trips and stationary sources will result in emissions level of reactive organic compounds (ROC), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NOx), and particulate matter (PM10) that exceed the thresholds established by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD).</td>
<td>Although the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan contains policies directed toward reducing air pollutant emissions and participating in regional programs toward this end, impact will be significant and unavoidable.</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Environmental Impacts That Can Be Avoided or Mitigated</strong></td>
<td>[Section 15126(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics within the City – Program Level</td>
<td>The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City will occur in established planned communities and surrounded by existing development.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program LU-7 which minimizes aesthetic impacts from new development pursuant to the General Plan.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
<td>Development of the Northeast Future Planned Community will change the natural landscape of the area to urban uses.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program LU-10 which minimizes aesthetic impacts from new development pursuant to the General Plan.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics: Light and Glare within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
<td>Existing dark skies in this area could be impacted by vehicle headlights and night lighting for streets, parks, and parking lots.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program COS-5 7, which minimizes light and glare impacts from new development and redevelopment pursuant to the General Plan.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Circulation – Program Level</td>
<td>A deficiency exists on Santa Margarita Parkway from Alicia Parkway to Avenida Empresa.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program C-1 which requires the City to monitor the operation of major streets, which includes Rancho Santa Margarita Pkwy intersections at Alicia Pkwy and Avenida Empresa.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact Category</td>
<td>Potential Environmental Impact</td>
<td>Mitigation Measure</td>
<td>Level of Impact After Mitigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Roadway Design – Program Level</td>
<td>Without adherence to the roadway classification system and performance standards, future roadways in the Northeast Future Planned Community may increase hazards due to design features.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program C-3 in which the City will require future roadways in the Northeast Future Planned Community to meet roadway classification specifications and performance criteria.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Emergency Access – Program Level</td>
<td>The circulation plan for the Northeast Future Planned Community is conceptual. The final plan may not include an emergency access point.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program C-3 which requires emergency access in addition to primary access to the Northeast Future Planned Community.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Emergency Evacuation – Program Level</td>
<td>Waiting for City feedback. Evacuation routes are needed to accommodate new and existing developments.</td>
<td>Waiting for City feedback. The City will implement Implementation Programs S-16, S-17, and S-18 to ensure adequate emergency evacuation routes and procedures.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Parking within the City – Program Level</td>
<td>Future development in the City will need to be reviewed for consistency with approved development plans which address parking standards.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program C-4 which requires the City to review development proposals within existing planned communities for parking standard consistency with approved development plans and agreements.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: Parking within the Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
<td>Parking standards may not be addressed in the Specific Plan for the Northeast Future Planned Community.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10 and C-3 which require the Specific Plan for the Northeast Future Planned Community to address parking standards and for new development to be consistent with those standards.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Quality: Short-Term Construction Impacts – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Construction activity will primarily generate airborne dust, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide. In addition, volatile organic compounds (VOC) will be released from architectural coatings, exterior paints, and asphalt.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program COS-116 which will enforce SCAQMD Rule 403 requiring that during construction measures be implemented to reduce emissions.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noise: Short-Term Construction Noise – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Construction activity will have the potential to impact noise sensitive land uses located adjacent to construction sites.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program N-10 which requires the City to enforce the Noise Control Ordinance with regard to construction activity.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise: Vehicular Noise – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Future development will generate additional traffic that will increase noise levels along roadways. Certain portions of the City will be subject to noise levels exceeding the City’s noise standards.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs N-1 through N-7 which work to reduce noise impacts associated with vehicles.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise: Stationary Noise – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan may result in excessive noise generated by non-residential uses such as commercial center, restaurants and bars, religious institutions, and civic centers.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs N-8, N-9, and N-11 which reduce noise from stationary noise sources.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Natural Communities within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
<td>Sensitive plant communities are present within the immediate vicinity of the Northeast Future Planned Community. Natural communities, such as coastal sage scrub and southern coast live oak riparian forest, may potentially be impacted.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, COS-1 and COS-7 that work to reduce impacts on natural communities.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Sensitive Plant Species within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
<td>Three 1B-listed plant species listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), many-stemmed dudleya, three-leaved brodiaea, and intermediate mariposa lily, have a high potential to occur within the Northeast Future Planned Community. Impacts to sensitive plant species are considered potentially significant.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, COS-1 and COS-2 to minimize development impacts on sensitive plant species.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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## Executive Summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources:</td>
<td>Potential direct or indirect impacts to threatened, endangered, or otherwise sensitive wildlife species or any habitat occupied by these species within the Northeast Future Planned Community is considered potentially significant. Potential impacts to raptor nests and breeding migratory birds are considered significant.</td>
<td>The City will implement Programs LU-10, COS-1, COS-2 and COS-3 to reduce potential impacts on sensitive wildlife species.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitive Wildlife Species within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biological Resources:</td>
<td>The Northeast Future Planned Community and the vacant lot east of Antonio Parkway have not been assessed for any jurisdictional areas due to access issues. In the event that jurisdictional areas occur within these sites, impacts will be considered significant.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, COS-1 and COS-2 in order to identify and mitigate impacts on jurisdictional areas.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jurisdictional Areas within Northeast Future Planned Community – Program Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Resources:</td>
<td>More than 35 archeological sites have been recorded at locations within the City. Any impact to existing sites is considered significant.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-8, LU-9, and COS-23 to minimize development impacts on cultural resources.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archeological and Paleontological Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geology and Soils:</td>
<td>Development in the community is anticipated to experience little structural impact should earthquakes occur on nearby faults due to strong seismic building codes. With implementation of development review and structural standards, impact that would otherwise be potentially significant, can be reduced or avoided.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs S-1 through S-3 and S-5 that work to reduce impacts associated with seismic and groundshaking activities.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seismicity and Groundshaking – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geology and Soils: Geologic Hazards from Groundshaking – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Since the location of future development in the Northeast Future Planned Community is not known, the area may be subject to liquefaction. Some steep slopes within the City would be most vulnerable to seismically induced landslides, due to the steep terrain and the presence of weak sedimentary rock units. Areas on the gentler slopes may also be susceptible where slopes have been undercut by streams or roadcuts.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs S-1 through S-3 (as described above) S-4 and S-6 to reduce impacts associated with geologic hazards from groundshaking.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology and Soils: Other Geologic Hazards – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>The vacant land in the Robinson Ranch area and Northeast Future Planned Community is within the very high category for landslide susceptibility. Areas in the project area susceptible to collapsible soils and ground subsidence are similar to the liquefaction hazard areas. The Northeast Future Planned Community may be subject to collapsible soils and ground subsidence hazards.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs S-1 through S-4 (as described above) to reduce impacts associated with other geologic hazards (landslides, collapsible soils, expansive soils and ground subsidence) in the project area.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrology/Water Quality: Water Quality – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Existing land uses will continue to create demands for a safe water supply while also resulting in urban runoff that has the potential to pollute receiving waters.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs COS-8 and COS-9 to maintain water quality standards.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrology/Water Quality: Flooding – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Development pursuant to the General Plan in the Northeast Future Planned Community will need to include adequate storm drainage, avoid the 100-year flood plain, and avoid changing the drainage pattern of Trabuco Creek.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-7 and LU-10 to address adequate storm drain facilities in the project area, and the City will implement Programs COS-1, COS-20, S-7 and S-8 to minimize flooding risks to the community.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hazards &amp; Hazardous Materials: Wildland Fires – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>The interface between the urban areas and natural vegetation will be expanded with the development of the Northeast Future Planned Community, resulting in a greater potential for wildland and urban fires.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program S-9 which requires the City to work closely with the Orange County Fire Department, coordinate with local water districts regarding water pressure, and implement Uniform Fire Code provisions.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services: Fire Protection – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the Project Area that will require additional fire protection services.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-22 and LU-23 to ensure adequate provision of fire protection services.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services: Police Protection – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the Project Area that will require additional police protection services.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-22, LU-23, LU-24, and S-15 to ensure the adequate provision of police protection services.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services: Schools – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Within the incorporated areas, 75 housing units and 293,000 square feet of commercial uses will be developed requiring Capistrano Unified School District to accommodate 52 additional students. In the Northeast Future Planned Community, which is currently unincorporated, 612 housing units will be developed, generating 314 students to be served by Saddleback Valley Unified School District.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Program LU-25 that requires the City to review development proposals in Planned Communities for consistency with school facility requirements established in approved development plans, review development proposals outside Planned Communities for impacts to school facilities, and assist in collection of impact fees.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services: Libraries – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area and a corresponding increase in the population, thereby increasing demand on existing library facilities.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-27 and LU-28 regarding establishing a library advisory board and collecting library impact fees.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities/Service Systems: Water – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area that will increase demand for water services.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, LU-14, LU-16, LU-17, COS-6, and COS-7 to ensure an adequate provision of water supplies.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilities/Service Systems: Wastewater – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of development in the project area that will increase demand for wastewater services.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, LU-17, and LU-18 to ensure an adequate provision of wastewater treatment.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities/Service Systems: Solid Waste – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase of 817 tons per year of solid waste generation to be disposed of at the Prima Deshecha landfill.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, LU-19, and LU-20 to ensure adequate provisions for solid waste disposal.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities/Service Systems: Energy</td>
<td>Implementation of the General Plan will result in an increase in electricity demand of 3.5 megawatts per hour and natural gas demand of 25,000 cubic feet per hour.</td>
<td>The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-10, COS-15, COS-16, COS-17a, and COS-18 to ensure adequate supplies and to encourage energy conservation.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>With development pursuant to the General Plan, the population of the project area will increase about 9 percent from 2000 to 2025, which will place additional demands on existing park and recreation facilities.</td>
<td>The City will undertake Implementation Programs LU-3, LU-27, COS-2 and COS-4 to maintain and enhance existing park and recreational facilities.</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Impacts Considered But Found To Be Less Than Significant**

- **Land Use: Compatibility/Consistency with Regional Plans – Program Level and Cumulative**
  - Given that the Southern Subregion NCCP program is in the preliminary planning stages and has not been approved, the General Plan is not in conflict with this program.
  - No mitigation is required.
  - Less than Significant

- **Population/Housing – Program Level and Cumulative**
  - The projected increase in population and housing units is closely matched. Additionally, an ample amount of vacant land (over 261 acres) exists to accommodate housing unit construction.
  - No mitigation is required.
  - Less than Significant

- **Aesthetics: Light and Glare within the City – Program Level and Cumulative**
  - Light levels in the established areas of the City will not substantially increase since little new development is identified in the General Plan.
  - No mitigation is required.
  - Less Than Significant
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<tr>
<td>Transportation/Traffic: CMP Roadway Circulation – Program Level</td>
<td>Adoption and implementation of the General Plan will not increase traffic generation beyond what the Foothill Transportation Corridor, a CMP roadway, was built to accommodate.</td>
<td>No mitigation is required.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Natural Communities within the City – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>All vacant lots west of Antonio Parkway that are planned for development are contained within previously disturbed areas. The vacant lot in the northeastern portion of the project site contains mostly nonnative landscape vegetation and would be considered an urban/developed plant community.</td>
<td>No mitigation is required.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Sensitive Wildlife Species within the City – Program Level and Cumulative</td>
<td>No suitable habitat exists within the vacant lots in the City, and therefore, impact to sensitive fauna is considered to be less than significant in these areas.</td>
<td>No mitigation is required.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Jurisdictional Areas within the City – Program Level</td>
<td>Based on the current site conditions of the vacant lots west of Antonio Parkway, no jurisdictional areas in these locations will be impacted.</td>
<td>No mitigation is required.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Resources: Regional Connectivity/Wildlife Movement Corridors – Program Level</td>
<td>The vacant lots within the City are not considered to be within a movement corridor. The Northeast Future Planned Community is located immediately adjacent to a regional corridor (Trabuco Canyon). It is unlikely that the proposed planned community will have any impacts to a regional wildlife movement corridor.</td>
<td>No mitigation is required.</td>
<td>Less Than Significant</td>
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</table>
### Impacts Considered in the Initial Study But Found Not To Be Potentially Significant

(Section 15128 of the State CEQA Guidelines)

The Initial Study prepared for the project, contained in Appendix A of this EIR, indicates that the project has no potential to result in significant effects on the following:

- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality: Compatibility with Applicable Air Quality Plan; Objectionable Odors
- Geology and Soils: Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map; Septic Tanks
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials: Transport, Use, or Disposal of Hazardous; Release of Hazardous Materials; Hazardous Materials within ¼ Mile of a School; Hazardous Materials Sites pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5; Airport Land Use Plan; Private Airstrip
- Hydrology and Water Quality: Groundwater; Seiche, Tsunami, or Mudflow
- Land Use and Planning: Divide an Established Community; Conflict with Any Land Use Plan
- Noise: Groundborne Vibration; Airport Land Use Plan; Private Airstrip
- Population and Housing: Displace Housing; Displace People
- Transportation/Traffic: Air Traffic Patterns; Alternative Transportation Policies
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