4.0 Alternatives

The following discussion considers alternatives to the General Plan and examines potential environmental impacts resulting from each alternative. Through comparison of these alternatives to the Plan, the relative advantages of each can be weighed and analyzed. The CEQA Guidelines require that a range of alternatives be addressed, "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[f]).

The Guidelines state that the discussion of alternatives must focus on alternatives capable of either eliminating any significant environmental effects of the project or reducing them to a less-than-significant level, while achieving most of the major project objectives. According to the analysis presented in the prior sections, buildout pursuant to General Plan policies will result in unavoidable significant impacts with regard to air quality.

The following project alternatives are considered:

Alternative 1: No Project
Alternative 2: Northeast Future Planned Community Developed as a Resort Area
Alternative 3: Northeast Future Planned Community Remains in Open Space

None of the above alternatives involves an alternative location. The goals and objectives of the proposed project are specific to the geographic context of the General Plan project area. Buildout of the General Plan at an alternative location would not achieve the following goals and objectives of the Plan:

♦ To protect and enhance the small town character of Rancho Santa Margarita
♦ 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 alternatives analyzed in this EIR are general in nature, as is the proposed project. The degree of specificity used in the alternatives analysis is related to the programmatic
4.0 Alternatives

approach used in the analysis of the General Plan. Development across the entire project area is addressed in the alternatives analysis, rather than specific development projects.

Table 24 at the end of this section compares the environmental impacts of General Plan implementation to those associated with each project alternative. Table 24 indicates whether the impacts are lesser than, greater than, or comparable to the impacts associated with the General Plan.

4.1 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 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.

Land Use/Planning

Given that the Southern Subregion NCCP program is in the preliminary planning stages and has not been approved, the existing community plans would not be in conflict with this program. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

Population/Housing

Implementation of the existing community plans would result in an increase of housing units and population in the project area similar to that pursuant to the General Plan. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics: The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City would occur in established planned communities and surrounded by existing development. This new residential and non-residential development would be subject to the architectural standards outlined in the planned communities documents. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

The majority of development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community pursuant to the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan. The Specific Plan contains development and design guidelines to ensure that future development is rural in nature, respecting the diverse terrain and significant biological resources. Therefore, impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Light and Glare: Light levels in the established areas of the City would not substantially increase since little new development is identified pursuant to existing community plans. Light and glare levels would increase in the Northeast Future Planned Community as development occurs. The Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan does not address ways to reduce lighting impacts. This impact would be greater than the proposed project.

Transportation/Traffic

Circulation: This alternative would result in the same level of development as the General Plan, 687 housing units and 698,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Therefore, Santa Margarita Parkway from Alicia Parkway to Avenida Empresa would operate at LOS E, a similar impact to that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Emergency Access: The Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not address emergency access to the Northeast Future Planned Community. This impact would be greater than the proposed project.

Emergency Evacuation: The City’s Emergency Preparedness Plan includes emergency evacuation routes for the area where the Northeast Future Planned Community is located. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Parking: Existing community plans address parking standards from the 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential development within the City. However, the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not address parking and no other mechanism would
be in place to ensure that parking is adequately addressed. Therefore, impact would be greater than that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

**Air Quality**

*Construction-related emissions:* This alternative would result in the same level of development as the General Plan, 687 housing units and 698,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Therefore, construction-related air quality impacts would be similar to those associated with the proposed project.

*Operational emissions:* This alternative would result in the same number of net new housing units and nonresidential development. This development would generate emissions from stationary sources and vehicle trips similar to those associated with the proposed project.

**Noise**

*Short-term Construction Noise:* The level of development associated with the No Project Alternative would be the same as that pursuant to the General Plan. Construction equipment would generate intermittent noise resulting in a significant impact where noise sensitive land uses adjoin construction sites. This impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

*Vehicular Noise:* Implementation of the No Project Alternative would allow the same level of development in the project area as the proposed project. This development would generate additional traffic that would increase noise levels along roadways. These noise impacts would be similar to those of the proposed project.

*Stationary Noise:* Implementation of the No Project Alternative could result in excessive noise generated by non-residential uses such as commercial centers, restaurants and bars, religious institutions, and civic centers. These types of uses would be allowed throughout the project area. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Biological Resources**

*Natural Communities:* Development within the City under the No Project Alternative would occur on vacant lots within previously disturbed areas. Sensitive plant communities are present within the Northeast Future Planned Community. Since the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not specify the configuration of uses, impact could be potentially significant. This is similar to the impact associated with the proposed project.

*Sensitive Plant Species:* No federally or state listed threatened or endangered plant species are likely to occur within the vacant parcels within the City. Three 1-B listed plant species have a high potential to occur within the vicinity. Since the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not specify the configuration of uses in the Northeast Future
Planned Community, impacts to sensitive plant species would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

**Sensitive Wildlife Species:** One federally listed threatened wildlife species and two species of concern have been recorded to occur within the City. However, no suitable habitat exists within the vacant lots within the City. Therefore, impact would be less than significant, similar to that of the proposed project. Since the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not specify the configuration of uses in the Northeast Future Planned Community, impacts to sensitive wildlife species would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

**Jurisdictional Areas:** Two main jurisdictional areas are located within Rancho Santa Margarita. No jurisdictional areas would be impacted by the development within the City. Since the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan does not specify the configuration of uses in the Northeast Future Planned Community and the presence of jurisdictional areas has not been ascertained due to access issues, impacts to jurisdictional areas would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

**Cultural Resources**

Over 30 prehistoric archaeological sites have been recorded in Rancho Santa Margarita. Paleontological resources have also been recorded. However, many of these sites have been destroyed or damaged by modern development. Other important sites survive and these deserve careful treatment. Development under the No Project Alternative would occur and could potentially impact recorded and unrecorded archaeological sites. Under this alternative, a professional cultural resources survey of all undeveloped property prior to the issuance of a grading permit would not occur. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

**Geology/Soils**

**Seismicity and Groundshaking:** Development pursuant to the No Project Alternative would result in the addition of 687 housing units and 698,000 square feet of non-residential development. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for the most up-to-date structural codes would not be required under City regulations. However, this would still take place pursuant to Orange County Building Code, which adopts the 1997 Uniform Building Code and 1998 California Building Code by reference and allows for updates per most recent codes. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

**Geologic Hazards from Groundshaking:** Most of the lowlands of Rancho Santa Margarita have a high liquefaction potential. Areas in Trabuco Canyon, Live Oak Canyon, and in flatter areas along these drainages are subject to seismically induced settlement. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for geotechnical issues would not be required under City regulations. However, grading permits would be required for almost any project in these areas, including geotechnical
4.0 Alternatives

study requirements. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Other Geologic Hazards: Northern portions of the project area are within areas designated as very high susceptibility for landslides. In addition northern portions of the project area are subject to collapsible soils and ground subsidence. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for adequate geologic investigation would not be required under City regulations. However, grading permits would be required for almost any project in these areas, including geotechnical study requirements. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Hydrology/Water Quality

Water Quality: Development of 687 housing units and 698,000 square feet of non-residential development will result in urban runoff that has the potential to pollute receiving waters. Pursuant to the No Project Alternative, goals and policies of the General Plan to minimize the impact of development on water quality would not be implemented. However, the city is still required to implement a stormwater management plan with or without a General Plan. This impact would be similar to that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Flooding: The local and regional drainage facilities that serve the City were designed for adequate capacity and service for construction and operation of the planned communities. No homes or structures within the City are located within the 100-year or 500-year flood plains. The Northeast Future Planned Community currently does not include drainage facilities. Development in the Northeast Future Planned Community may be impacted by flooding of Trabuco Creek. Pursuant to the No Project Alternative, goals and policies of the General Plan to provide adequate infrastructure to the Northeast Planned Community and avoid alteration of Trabuco Creek would not be implemented. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Hazards & Hazardous Materials

Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in the development of new residential and non-residential uses in areas of high wildland fire hazard. The Orange County Building Code includes provisions to reduce the risk of wildland fires. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Public Services

Fire Protection: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, additional fire protection services, and potentially expanded facilities, would be required. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that fire protection services are provided at acceptable levels. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.
Police Protection: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, additional sheriff services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, would be required. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that police protection services are provided at acceptable levels or to reduce the risk of exposure to criminal activity. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

Schools: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in 52 new students in the Capistrano Unified School District and 314 new students in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District, the same student generation associated with implementation of the General Plan. However, the No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that public education is provided at acceptable levels to meet the community's needs. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

Libraries: Based on Orange County Public Library adopted standards, buildout of the project area pursuant to the No Project Alternative would generate a need for 2,984 additional books and approximately 400 square feet of additional library space. Currently, the Rancho Santa Margarita Branch Library exceeds the standards by almost 16,450 books and 7,000 square feet. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Utilities/Service Systems

Water: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, additional water services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, would be required. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that an adequate, deliverable water supply is provided or to implement water conservation measures where possible. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

Wastewater: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, additional wastewater services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, would be required. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that adequate wastewater infrastructure and treatment facilities are provided to meet the community needs. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

Solid Waste: Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, additional solid waste services would be required. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure the provision of
4.0 Alternatives

adequate solid waste services or implement source reduction and recycling measures. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

**Energy:** Implementation of the No Project Alternative would result in an increase of development within the project area. With the increase in population and new development, there would be additional demand for electricity and natural gas service. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to ensure that energy conservation policies are implemented. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

**Recreation**

Development pursuant to the No Project Alternative would result in a population increase of about 9 percent from 2000 to 2025, the same as pursuant to the General Plan. This increase would place additional demands on existing park and recreation facilities. The No Project Alternative would not include General Plan goals and policies to provide adequate park facilities; establish an active parkland standard for future development (including the Northeast Future Planned Community); and coordinate the system of City, school district, and homeowner association recreation facilities. Therefore, this impact would be greater than that associated with the proposed project.

**Conclusion**

The No Project Alternative would not reduce the significant and unavoidable air quality impact associated with the General Plan. Furthermore, aesthetic, traffic, hydrology (flooding), public services, and recreation impacts would be greater than those associated with implementation of the General Plan.

4.2 NORTHEAST FUTURE PLANNED COMMUNITY DEVELOPED AS A RESORT AREA

This alternative assumes the General Plan is adopted with the Land Use Element reflecting buildout within the City the same as that proposed by the General Plan, 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Furthermore, the Land Use Element would reflect buildout outside the City, within the Northeast Future Planned Community, with resort uses. The amount of non-residential use 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.
Land Use/Planning

Given that the Southern Subregion NCCP program is in the preliminary planning stages and has not been approved, development of the Northeast Future Planned Community as a resort area would not be in conflict with this program. Therefore, the impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Population/Housing

Buildout under this alternative would result in an increase of housing units and population within the City similar to that pursuant to the General Plan. However, buildout outside of the City, within the Northeast Future Planned Community, would presumably result in fewer housing units and population than that pursuant to the General Plan, and those units would accommodate visitors, rather than permanent residents. This would prevent the City of Rancho Santa Margarita from accommodating the OCP-2000 projected housing unit and population increases. Therefore, this impact would be greater than the proposed project.

Aesthetics

*Aesthetics:* The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City would occur in established planned communities and surrounded by existing development. This new residential and non-residential development would be subject to the architectural standards outlined in the planned communities documents. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

The majority of development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community. The resort development would also be required to preserve existing bluffs and trail or blend with the natural landscape. This impact would be similar to the proposed project.

*Light and Glare:* Light levels in the established areas of the City would not substantially increase since little new development would be built. Light and glare levels would increase in the Northeast Future Planned Community as development occurs. The Specific Plan prepared for implementation of the resort concept would address ways to reduce light and glare impacts. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Transportation/Traffic

*Circulation:* This alternative would result in fewer housing units and a similar square-footage of non-residential uses. Trip generation from the resort development in the Northeast Future Planned Community would not be peak hour trips. Therefore, Santa Margarita Parkway from Alicia Parkway to Avenida Empresa would probably operate at a better level of service than under the General Plan. This impact is less than the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

Emergency Access: Development of the Northeast Future Planned Community as a resort would presumably include adequate emergency access. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Emergency Evacuation: Development of the Northeast Future Planned Community as a resort would not be expected to interfere with emergency evacuation routes. These routes already incorporate the Northeast Future Planned Community. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Parking: Parking standards for the 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential development within the City would still be addressed by existing community plans. Plans for development of the Northeast Future Planned Community as a resort would presumably include parking standards for that use. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Air Quality

Construction-related emissions: This alternative would result in fewer housing units and a similar level of non-residential development. Construction-related air quality impact would be slightly less than that associated with the proposed project.

Operational emissions: This alternative would result in fewer housing units and a similar level of nonresidential development. This development would generate lower emissions from stationary sources and vehicle trips than that associated with the proposed project. However, due to the City being located within a non-attainment area for monitored pollutants, addition of any emissions to the basin is considered significant and unavoidable.

Noise

Short-term Construction Noise: The level of development associated with this alternative would be less than that pursuant to the General Plan. While the amount of construction would decrease, the construction equipment required to implement the Resort Area Alternative would still generate intermittent noise resulting in a significant impact where noise sensitive land uses adjoin construction sites. This impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Vehicular Noise: Implementation of this alternative would result in less development in the project area than the proposed project. This lower level of development would still generate additional traffic that would increase noise levels along roadways. These noise impacts would be less than those of the proposed project.

Stationary Noise: Implementation of this alternative could result in excessive noise generated by non-residential uses such as commercial centers, restaurants and bars,
religious institutions, and civic centers. These types of uses would be allowed throughout the project area. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Biological Resources**

*Natural Communities:* Development within the City under this Alternative would occur on vacant lots within previously disturbed areas. Sensitive plant communities are present within the Northeast Future Planned Community. Impact associated with development of a resort area could be potentially significant. This is similar to the impact associated with the proposed project.

*Sensitive Plant Species:* No federally or state listed threatened or endangered plant species are likely to occur within the vacant parcels within the City. Three 1-B listed plant species have a high potential to occur within the vicinity. Impacts to sensitive plant species within the Northeast Future Planned Community would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

*Sensitive Wildlife Species:* One federally listed threatened wildlife species and two species of concern have been recorded within the City. However, no suitable habitat exists within the vacant lots within the City. Therefore, impact would be less than significant, similar to that of the proposed project. Impacts to sensitive wildlife species within the Northeast Future Planned Community would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

*Jurisdictional Areas:* Two main jurisdictional areas are located within Rancho Santa Margarita. No jurisdictional areas would be impacted by the development within the City. The presence of jurisdictional areas has not been ascertained within the Northeast Future Planned Community due to access issues; however, impacts to jurisdictional areas would be considered potentially significant, similar to those of the proposed project.

**Cultural Resources**

Under this alternative, development would occur on previously vacant land. This land could potentially contain historic archaeological or paleontological resources. Development of the Northeast Future Planned Community would be required to conduct a professional cultural resources survey of all undeveloped property prior to issuing a grading permit, as would all development projects if the General Plan were implemented. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Geology/Soils**

*Seismicity and Groundshaking:* Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for the most up-to-date structural codes would be required, as it is pursuant to the General Plan. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

Geologic Hazards from Groundshaking: Most of the lowlands of Rancho Santa Margarita have a high liquefaction potential. Areas in Trabuco Canyon, Live Oak Canyon, and in flatter areas along these drainages are subject to seismically induced settlement. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for geotechnical issues would be required, as it is pursuant to the General Plan. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Other Geologic Hazards: Northern portions of the project area are within areas designated as very high susceptibility for landslides. In addition, northern portions of the project area are subject to collapsible soils and ground subsidence. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for adequate geologic investigation would be required as it is pursuant to the General Plan. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

Hydrology/Water Quality

Water Quality: Development of fewer housing units and similar amount of non-residential development as pursuant to the General Plan would result in urban runoff that has the potential to pollute receiving waters. Goals and policies of the General Plan to minimize the impact of development on water quality would be implemented. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Flooding: The local and regional drainage facilities that serve the City were designed for adequate capacity and service during construction and operation of the planned communities. No homes or structures within the City are located within the 100-year or 500-year flood plains. The Northeast Future Planned Community currently does not include drainage facilities. Development in the Northeast Future Planned Community may be impacted by flooding of Trabuco Creek. Goals and policies of the General Plan to provide adequate infrastructure to the Northeast Planned Community and avoid alteration of Trabuco Creek would be implemented. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

Hazards & Hazardous Materials

Implementation of this alternative would result in development in areas of high wildland fire hazard. The General Plan would include goals and policies to reduce the risk of wildland fires. This impact would be similar to that associated with implementation of the proposed project.

Public Services

Fire Protection: Implementation of this alternative would result in fewer residential units and a similar amount of non-residential use as the proposed project. With the increase in population and new development, albeit less than that associated with the proposed project, additional fire protection services, and potentially expanded facilities, would be required. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that fire
protection services are provided at acceptable levels or to reduce the risk of exposure to criminal activity. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

**Police Protection:** Implementation of this alternative would result in fewer residential units and a similar amount of non-residential use as the proposed project. With the increase in population and new development, albeit less than that associated with the proposed project, additional sheriff services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, would be required. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that police protection services are provided at acceptable levels or to reduce the risk of exposure to criminal activity. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

**Schools:** Implementation of this alternative would result in 52 new students in the Capistrano Unified School District, the same student generation associated with implementation of the General Plan. The number of students would be lower than the 314 associated with implementation of the General Plan because the number of residential units in the Northeast Future Planned Community would be lower. This alternative would include goals and policies to ensure that public education is provided at acceptable levels to meet the community’s needs. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

**Libraries:** Based on Orange County Public Library adopted standards, buildout of the project area pursuant to this alternative would generate a need for fewer additional books and square feet of additional library space than that associated with the General Plan due to the decrease in housing units. Currently, the Rancho Santa Margarita Branch Library exceeds the standards by almost 16,450 books and 7,000 square feet. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Utilities/Service Systems**

**Water:** Implementation of this alternative would result in fewer residential units and a similar amount of non-residential use as the proposed project. The Northeast Future Planned Community area would include a golf course, hotel, club house, meeting center, vacation units (such as condominiums), and related uses. This alternative would include goals and policies to ensure that an adequate, deliverable water supply is provided or to implement water conservation measures where possible. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Wastewater:** Under this alternative, wastewater demand would result from residential Units (fewer than the proposed project), commercial uses, a golf course, hotel, club house, meeting center, vacation units (such as condominiums), and related uses for the resort. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that adequate wastewater infrastructure and treatment facilities are provided to meet the community needs. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

**Solid Waste:** Implementation of this alternative would result in fewer residential units and a similar amount of non-residential use as the proposed project. The increase in population and new development, albeit less than that associated with the proposed project, additional solid waste would be generated, potentially affecting landfill space. Goals and policies would be included to ensure the provision of adequate solid waste services or implement source reduction and recycling measures. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Energy:** Implementation of this alternative would result in less residential units and similar amount of non-residential use as the proposed project. Although the increase in population and new development would be less than the proposed project, additional electric and natural gas utility service would be required. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure adequate energy supply and implement energy conservation measures. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Recreation**

Development pursuant to this alternative would result in a smaller population increase than that associated with implementation of the General Plan. Nonetheless, this increase would place additional demands on existing park and recreation facilities. This alternative would include goals and policies to provide adequate park facilities; establish a parkland standard for future development (including the Northeast Future Planned Community); and coordinate the system of City, school district, and homeowner association recreation facilities. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

**Conclusion**

This alternative would result in environmental impacts comparable to those associated with the General Plan with respect to land use, aesthetics, biology, cultural resources, geology, hydrology, hazards, public services, utilities and recreation. Air quality impacts would be reduced but not avoided. While long-term air quality emission would be lower due to reduced traffic volumes, the impact would remain significant given existing poor air quality conditions. Noise impacts would also be reduced. Population/housing impact, however, would increase.

4.3 NORTHEAST FUTURE PLANNED COMMUNITY REMAINS IN OPEN SPACE

This alternative assumes the General Plan is adopted with the Land Use Element reflecting buildout within the City the same as that proposed by the General Plan, 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential uses. Furthermore, the Land Use Element would reflect land uses outside the City, within the Northeast Future Planned Community, as open space.
All other elements of the General Plan would remain the same as the proposed project.

**Land Use/Planning**

The Southern Subregion NCCP program is in the preliminary planning stages and has not been approved. Leaving the Northeast Future Planned Community in open space presumably would be consistent with the goals of the NCCP program. The impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

**Population/Housing**

Buildout under this alternative would result in an increase of housing units and population within the City similar to that pursuant to the General Plan. However, buildout outside of the City, within the Northeast Future Planned Community, would result in no housing units or population increase. This would prevent the City of Rancho Santa Margarita from accommodating the OCP-2000 projected housing unit and population increases. Therefore, this impact would be greater than the proposed project.

**Aesthetics**

*Aesthetics*: The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City would occur in established planned communities and surrounded by existing development. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community. This impact would be less than the proposed project.

*Light and Glare*: Light levels in the established areas of the City would not substantially increase since little new development would be built. No light and glare issues would exist in the Northeast Future Planned Community as no development would occur. This impact would be less than the proposed project.

**Transportation/Traffic**

*Circulation*: This alternative would result in fewer housing units and non-residential uses. Therefore, Santa Margarita Parkway from Alicia Parkway to Avenida Empresa would operate at a better level of service than under the General Plan. This impact would be less than the proposed project.

*Emergency Access*: No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community and therefore emergency access to protect new structures would not be needed. This impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

*Emergency Evacuation*: No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community and therefore emergency evacuation routes for this area would not be needed. Other development that would occur in the City would be incorporated into
4.0 Alternatives

existing emergency evacuation routes. The impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

Parking: Parking standards for the 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential development within the City would still be addressed by existing community plans. No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community and therefore parking standards would not be needed. This impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

Air Quality

Construction-related emissions: This alternative would result in fewer housing units and non-residential uses. The construction-related air quality impacts would be less than those associated with the proposed project.

Operational emissions: This alternative would result in fewer housing units and non-residential uses. This development would generate lower emissions from stationary sources and vehicle trips than that associated with the proposed project. However, due to the City being located within a non-attainment area for monitored pollutants, addition of any emissions to the basin is considered significant and unavoidable.

Noise

Short-term Construction Noise: The level of development associated with this alternative would be less than that pursuant to the General Plan. While the amount of construction would decrease, the construction equipment required to construct the 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential development within the City would still generate intermittent noise resulting in a significant impact where noise sensitive land uses adjoin construction sites. This impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Vehicular Noise: Implementation of this alternative would result in less development in the project area than the proposed project. This lower level of development would still generate additional traffic that would increase noise levels along roadways. These noise impacts would be less than those of the proposed project.

Stationary Noise: Although no development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, 75 housing units and 350,000 square feet of non-residential development within the City would occur. Implementation of this alternative could result in excessive noise generated by non-residential uses such as commercial centers, restaurants and bars, religious institutions, and civic centers. These types of uses would be allowed throughout the project area. This impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.
Biological Resources

Natural Communities: Development within the City under this Alternative would occur on vacant lots within previously disturbed areas. No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community which contains sensitive plant communities. This impact would be less than that associated with the proposed project.

Sensitive Plant Species: No federally or state listed threatened or endangered plant species are likely to occur within the vacant parcels within the City. Three 1-B listed plant species have a high potential to occur within the vicinity. No impact to sensitive plant species within the Northeast Future Planned Community would result.

Sensitive Wildlife Species: One federally listed threatened wildlife species and two species of concern have been recorded to occur within the City. However, no suitable habitat exists within the vacant lots within the City. Therefore, impact would be less than significant, similar to that of the proposed project. No impact to sensitive wildlife species within the Northeast Future Planned Community would result.

Jurisdictional Areas: Two main jurisdictional areas are located within Rancho Santa Margarita. No jurisdictional areas would be impacted by the development within the City. The presence of jurisdictional areas in the Northeast Future Planned Community has not been ascertained due to access issues; however, no impact would result.

Cultural Resources

Historic archaeological and paleontological sites have been recorded within the City limits. Although the Northeast Future Planned Community would not be developed under this alternative, development would continue to occur on other vacant lots in Rancho Santa Margarita. Therefore, undiscovered archaeological and paleontological sites could still be impacted during construction activities. Although reduced, this impact would still be potentially significant, similar to that of the proposed plan.

Geology/Soils

Seismicity and Groundshaking: Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for the most up-to-date structural codes would be required, as is required pursuant to the proposed General Plan. With the Northeast Future Planned Community as open space, less development would be subject to seismic hazards and groundshaking. Therefore, this impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

Geologic Hazards from Groundshaking: Most of the lowlands of Rancho Santa Margarita have a high liquefaction potential. Areas in Trabuco Canyon, Live Oak Canyon, and in flatter areas along these drainages are subject to seismically induced settlement. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for geotechnical issues would be required, as is required pursuant to the proposed General Plan. With the Northeast Future Planned Community as open space, less development
would be subject to geologic hazards from groundshaking. Therefore, this impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

**Other Geologic Hazards:** Northern portions of the project area are within areas designated as very high susceptibility for landslides. In addition, northern portions of the project area are subject to collapsible soils and ground subsidence. Under this alternative, reviewing new development proposals for adequate geologic investigation would be required, as is required pursuant to the proposed General Plan. With the Northeast Future Planned Community as open space, less development would be subject to landslides, collapsible soils, and subsidence. Therefore, this impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

**Hydrology/Water Quality**

**Water Quality:** Development of fewer housing units and non-residential development would result in proportionally less urban runoff and would reduce the potential to pollute receiving waters. Goals and policies of the General Plan to minimize the impact of development on water quality would be implemented for future development in the City. However, no development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, avoiding hydrology and water quality impacts. Therefore, this impact would be less than that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

**Flooding:** The local and regional drainage facilities that serve the City were designed for adequate capacity and service during construction and operation of the planned communities. No homes or structures within the City are located within the 100-year or 500-year flood plains. No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, and therefore drainage facilities would not be required and Trabuco Creek would not be impacted. This impact would be less than that associated with implementation of the General Plan.

**Hazards & Hazardous Materials**

Implementation of this alternative would not result in development of high wildland fire hazard areas. This impact would be less than that associated with the proposed project.

**Public Services**

**Fire Protection:** Implementation of this alternative would result in fewer residential units and less non-residential use than the proposed project. With the increase in population and new development, albeit less than that associated with the proposed project, additional fire protection services, and potentially expanded facilities, would be required. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that fire protection services are provided at acceptable levels. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

**Police Protection:** Implementation of this alternative would result in less residential units and non-residential use than the proposed project. The increase in population and new development would be substantially less than that associated with the proposed project. Additional sheriff services, and potentially new or expanded facilities, would be probably not be required. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that police protection services are provided at acceptable levels or to reduce the risk of exposure to criminal activity. Therefore, this impact would be less than that associated with the proposed project.

**Schools:** Implementation of this alternative would result in 52 new students in the Capistrano Unified School District, the same student generation associated with implementation of the General Plan. No students would be generated in the Northeast Future Planned Community which is served by the Saddleback Valley Unified School District. This alternative would include goals and policies to ensure that public education is provided at acceptable levels to meet the community’s needs. This impact would be less than that associated with the proposed project.

**Libraries:** Based on Orange County Public Library adopted standards, buildout of the project area pursuant to this alternative would generate a need for fewer additional books and square feet of additional library space than that associated with the General Plan due to the decrease in housing units and non-residential use. Currently, the Rancho Santa Margarita Branch Library exceeds the standards by almost 16,450 books and 7,000 square feet. This impact would be less than that of the proposed project.

**Utilities/Service Systems**

**Water:** The development of the 29 acres of vacant land within the City would occur in established planned communities, however, this development would increase demand on water service. This alternative would include goals and policies to ensure that an adequate, deliverable water supply is provided or to implement water conservation measures where possible. However, because no development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, this impact would be less than the proposed project.

**Wastewater:** Development within the City would be the same as the proposed project and would increase the need for wastewater infrastructure and treatment capacity. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure that adequate wastewater infrastructure and treatment facilities are provided to meet the community needs. However, because no development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, this impact would be less than the proposed project.

**Solid Waste:** Under this alternative, demand for solid waste services in the incorporated city would be the same as the proposed project. Goals and policies would be included to ensure the provision of adequate solid waste services or implement source reduction and recycling measures. However, because no development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community, this impact would be less than the proposed project.
4.0 Alternatives

Energy: Development within the City would be the same as the proposed project under this alternative. The demand for energy would be increase as a result of new development. The General Plan would include goals and policies to ensure adequate energy supply and implement energy conservation measures. Impact would be similar to that of the proposed project.

No development would occur in the Northeast Future Planned Community. Impact would be less than the proposed project.

Recreation

Development pursuant to this alternative would result in a smaller population increase as compared to that associated with implementation of the General Plan. This increase, albeit much smaller than that associated with the General Plan, would place additional demands on existing park and recreation facilities. This alternative would include goals and policies to provide adequate park facilities; establish a parkland standard for future development (including the Northeast Future Planned Community); and coordinate the system of City, school district, and homeowner association recreation facilities. Therefore, this impact would be similar to that associated with the proposed project.

Conclusion

This alternative would result in environmental impacts comparable to the proposed project with respect to land use, cultural resources, and recreation. Long-term air quality, traffic, noise, aesthetic, biology, geology, hydrology, public services, and hazards impacts would be reduced. Although reduced, air quality impacts would remain significant and unavoidable due to existing poor air quality conditions. Impacts to population/housing would be greater.

4.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Given the citywide scope of the General Plan and the long-term nature of implementation, none of the development alternatives analyzed has the potential to reduce the significant and unavoidable traffic impact to a less-than-significant level, as shown in Table 26. Alternative 1 – No Project does not reduce any impacts, and aesthetics, traffic, hydrology (flooding), public services, and recreation would be greater. Alternative 2 – Resort Use in the Northeast Future Planned Community and Alternative 3 – Northeast Future Planned Community in Open Space both reduce traffic and thereby long-term air quality impacts. However, the air quality impacts remain significant due to Rancho Santa Margarita’s presence in a non-attainment area. In order to avoid a significant air quality impact, a moratorium on new development would need to be instituted. Alternative 3 – Northeast Future Planned Community in Open Space is the alternative that reduces the most impacts compared to the proposed project: aesthetics, traffic, air quality, noise, biology, hydrology, hazards, and public services. For this reason, Alternative 3 appears to be the environmentally superior alternative. However,
Alternative 3 would not achieve the City’s goal of allowing 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.

Table 26  
Comparison of Alternatives’ Impacts to Project Impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Category</th>
<th>Alternative 1 No Project</th>
<th>Alternative 2 Resort NEFPC</th>
<th>Alternative 3 NEFPC in Open Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land Use</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population/Housing</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less, but still significant and unavoidable</td>
<td>Less, but still significant and unavoidable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Resources</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology/Soils</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrology</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazards and Hazardous Materials</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities/Service Systems</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Greater</td>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>