

**CHAPTER 2**

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**EXISTING CONDITIONS**





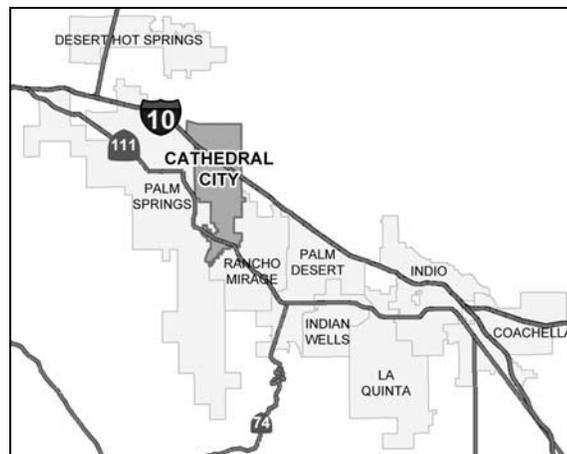
## Existing Conditions

### A. Regional and City Context

Cathedral City is located in Riverside County approximately 115 miles from Los Angeles, 150 miles from San Diego, and 60 miles from the City of Riverside, the County seat. It is strategically located in the Coachella Valley, with land on both sides of Interstate 10 (I-10). Cathedral City ranks in the top three cities in the Coachella Valley in terms of population, retail sales, and total taxable sales.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Palm Springs borders the City to the west and southwest; the City of Rancho Mirage to the east and southeast; and unincorporated Riverside County to the north and east (north of I-10), with the City of Desert Hot Springs farther to the northwest. Figure 2-1 illustrates the City's location within the Coachella Valley.

With direct access to I-10 and Highway 111, as well as the Union Pacific Railroad's transportation corridor, the City is easily accessible to industrial and commercial businesses. In addition, there are high volumes of through traffic along I-10, particularly from weekend travelers between the Southern California region, the Colorado River, Arizona and beyond. Cathedral City's regional accessibility and mid-Valley position give it a locational advantage for homebuyers, retailers, and employers from San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties.



**Figure 2-1: City Setting within the Coachella Valley**

<sup>1</sup> City of Cathedral City Website, <http://www.cathedralcity.gov/index.aspx?page=116>



## B. Current Setting

The Specific Plan area is nearly 5,000 acres in size and includes significant views and wide open spaces, as well as several physical constraints, such as slopes, open sands, and drainage courses, all of which will influence the ultimate land uses and circulation patterns. The two significant topographical features in the Specific Plan area are Edom Hill and Flat Top Mountain. The two major watersheds that flow through it are Morongo Wash in the western portion and Long Canyon/Willow Hole in the eastern portion.



*View of Edom Hill looking north from I-10.*



*View of the Specific Plan area looking north from Date Palm Drive.*

## I. Existing Land Use

The Specific Plan boundary encompasses all land north of I-10 within the City limits of Cathedral City, including 1,300 acres of recently annexed land. The majority of the Specific Plan area is undeveloped. Various regional utility lines and associated easements traverse the Specific Plan area from northwest to southeast. Existing roads within the



*I-10 provides regional access to the Specific Plan area.*

Specific Plan area include Date Palm Drive, Varner Road, Edom Hill Road, Mountain View Road and Palm Drive. The existing roads currently lack landscape and streetscape features. I-10 parallels the Specific Plan area to the south.

A portion of the Western Coachella Valley Regional Trails System goes through the Specific Plan area, making it a part of a regional recreation amenity. According to the Coachella Valley Community Trails Alliance, a multi-use trail is proposed near Varner Road. There are no existing or planned parks within the Specific Plan area per the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2005).

## 2. Climate and Landscape

According to the Coachella Valley Water District's *Lush & Efficient Landscape Gardening Guide* and the *Sunset Western Garden Book*, the climate of the Coachella Valley is classified as a subtropical desert with average summer high temperatures of 107°F and winter lows ranging from 36°F to 42°F. The majority of the days in the City are sunny; making the use of solar energy for providing electricity to homes feasible and efficient. Average annual rainfall is just over five inches. Wide varieties of native and drought tolerant landscape plants thrive in this desert climate.

Soils in the area tend to be shallow and covered with hardpan or *caliche*, a cement-like layer that accumulates below the surface. These poor draining soils are often present in upland and slope areas, such as the Specific Plan area, causing intense runoff and flooding events in storms.

There are high winds in the Specific Plan area that generally blow from northwest to southeast. Blowing sand constitutes a significant local environmental hazard as it abrades and damages buildings and motor vehicles, fills drainages, driveways and yards, limits visibility on roadways, and requires substantial expense for sand removal and clean-up. Wind erosion and blowing sand also contribute to a significant health threat associated with the suspension of fine particulate matter in the air.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the high and sustained winds provide the opportunity to harness wind energy to generate electricity.

The abundance of aeolian (wind-blown) sand in the area provides prime habitat for the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard. One of the intents of the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), discussed in Chapter 1, is to preserve this habitat through the establishment of Conservation Areas in which development and activities that block the movement of wind and sand are limited.

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<sup>2</sup> Cathedral City General Plan, pp. V-5 – V-7.



## C. Ownership Patterns

The Specific Plan area contains 367 parcels with a variety of landowners, including private individuals and entities, public agencies, non-profit organizations and utility companies. The types of ownership entities and landholdings are listed in Table 2-1 below. The most feasible parcels for development are those outside of the MSHCP Conservation Area. These 131 primarily privately-owned parcels total 1,728 acres of land. There are several large areas of contiguous parcels adjacent to I-10 under single ownership. Approximately 241 acres of the privately-owned land is reservation land of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Approximately 328 acres is owned by city, county, state and federal public agencies. Table 2-2 below provides a breakdown of land ownership within the portion of the Specific Plan area that excludes the MSHCP Conservation Area.

**Table 2-1: Ownership within the Specific Plan Area** <sup>3, 4</sup>

	<b>Net Area (acres)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Private</b>	2,793	60%
<b>Public</b>	1,247	27%
<b>Nonprofit</b>	482	10%
<b>Utilities</b>	141	3%
<b>Total Area</b>	4,663	100%

**Table 2-2: Ownership within the Specific Plan Area – Excluding MSHCP Conservation Area** <sup>3, 4</sup>

	<b>Net Area (acres)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Private</b>	1,376	80%
<b>Public</b>	328	19%
<b>Nonprofit</b>	18	1%
<b>Utilities</b>	6	< 1%
<b>Total Area</b>	1,728	100%

<sup>3</sup> Cathedral City GIS data.

<sup>4</sup> Net area excludes roads.

