

**CHAPTER 4**

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**OPEN SPACE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**





## Open Space and the Environment

### A. Introduction

Creating the North City Specific Plan represents an exciting opportunity for Cathedral City to guide future growth and development in the largely undeveloped area north of Interstate 10 (I-10). This Specific Plan provides significant opportunities for new development while also protecting Cathedral City's cohesive community character, scenic desert environment, and critical natural habitat.

As described in Chapter 1, more than half of the nearly 5,000 acres in the Specific Plan area will be preserved as open space through the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). This provides a fundamental open space framework around which the Specific Plan land uses have been developed. This open space framework achieves several goals:

- Maintains existing General Plan open space designations in North City.
- Recognizes and enhances natural drainage channels and existing utility rights-of-way.
- Enhances open space connections and views from the freeway.
- Captures the potential for water features in the Specific Plan area.
- Implements the "90 percent conservation goal" of the MSHCP within the Conservation Area.

The open space framework emphasizes the importance of the natural environment, which was also highlighted as a key consideration at the public workshops held during the planning process. This includes taking advantage of open space and views, maintaining large areas of undeveloped land for habitat preservation and recreation, using water features to create a bold statement, and creating oasis-like settings in new developments to make the North City Specific Plan area unique and desirable.

### B. Environmental Setting

#### I. Topography

The Specific Plan area is primarily undeveloped. It has an outstanding backdrop of natural landforms, including Flat Top Mountain and Edom Hill. Edom Hill offers one of the most dramatic topographic features within the Cathedral City limits. The views from it are spectacular; there is a 360-degree view of the Coachella Valley cities; the Santa Rosa, San Jacinto, San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino mountains; and Joshua Tree National Park.



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These views are an important asset of the Specific Plan area and should be preserved. The hillside portions of Flat Top Mountain are also highly visible from parts of the City to the south. Future development on Flat Top Mountain should be sensitive of these views, as any development will affect the character of Cathedral City.

## **2. Climate Considerations**

There are high winds in the Specific Plan area that generally blow from northwest to southeast. In addition, there are extremely high temperatures in the summer months. In contrast, the mild desert environment is attractive in winter months. The overall design, uses, and siting of development need to be sensitive to all of the natural factors present; including wind, sun exposure, drainage, and shallow hardpan soils that need to be augmented for landscape planting.

## **3. Connections to the Rest of the City**

While the area's proximity to the I-10 freeway is a tremendous opportunity for commercial viability, it presents some challenges in terms of making the new development look and feel like an integrated part of Cathedral City. Freeways are physical, psychological and visual barriers that bisect communities. The location of the freeway, combined with the undeveloped land to the south, could give development in the Specific Plan area a sense of being something separate from the rest of the City. Landscape treatment of the freeway frontage and the provision of continual landscape treatments along the major corridors (Palm Drive, Date Palm Drive, and ultimately DaVall Drive and Landau Boulevard) north and south of the freeway will help provide connectivity.

## **4. Parks**

According to the Cathedral City Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the City is currently well below its established goal of three acres of parkland per thousand residents. The Specific Plan area has great potential for open space, parks, and walking and cycling paths that take advantage of the views and augment the existing trail system. The MSHCP Conservation Area within the North City establishes a significant amount of open space as described in the next section.

## **5. MSHCP Conservation Area**

As identified in Chapter 1, approximately 2,800 acres of land within the North City Specific Plan area are designated as a conservation area per the MSHCP. The MSHCP is a conservation plan that aims to preserve over 240,000 acres of open space and protect 27 plant and animal species in the Coachella Valley. The MSHCP Conservation Area contains core habitat for several animal species as well as several important plant communities and essential ecological processes. It also provides biological corridors and linkages for a variety of animal species.



**(a) Environmental Benefits**

The MSHCP is a regional vision for balanced growth that conserves Coachella Valley's natural heritage while allowing for a strong economy for Coachella Valley's future. Other environmental benefits include:

- Conserves 240,000 acres of open space.
- Protects 27 sensitive plant and animal species.
- Incorporates the Fringe-toed Lizard permit.
- Combined with the existing national parks and monuments, creates a system of open space, parks, and trails for present and future generations.
- Preserves the Coachella Valley's native desert wildlife and creates a magnificent system of open space, parks, trails and reserves.
- Safeguards significant habitat linkages and wildlife corridors that enable animals to move safely from one habitat to another.

**(b) Infrastructure Benefits**

The MSHCP provides comprehensive compliance with the Endangered Species Act and transfers permitting authority to local government. It also:

- Allows local transportation projects to be permitted and constructed without costly delays.
- Assures that critical freeway and freeway interchange projects can be built without delays resulting from endangered species on or near the project location.
- Provides for road improvements in Coachella Valley's regional road network that include:
  - 75 years worth of Caltrans projects.
  - I-10 interchange projects.
  - Construction of new roads, such as Valley Center Boulevard.
  - Widening of existing streets, such as Varner Road and Mountain View Road.
- Ensures water infrastructure to meet the needs of Valley growth.

**(c) Economic Benefits**

The MSHCP provides development certainty, making the region attractive to new businesses and improving Coachella Valley's economy. The MSHCP also:

- Offers certainty for the business community, ultimately making the Coachella Valley a more attractive place for businesses to relocate or expand.
- Reduces cost and uncertainty of meeting requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.
- Permanently protects the Coachella Valley's pristine open space, strengthening the region's ecotourism industry.



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Development that is allowed in and adjacent to the MSHCP Conservation Area will be required to adhere to strict guidelines for non-native and invasive plant species, and the location of wind barriers and other such construction, to minimize impacts of development on the fragile ecosystem of the habitats. Landscape edge conditions between developed areas and conservation areas will need to be addressed with utmost care to prevent visual jarring and to fulfill habitat conservation requirements.

## C. Open Space Framework

The open space framework for North City is based on the presence of the MSHCP Conservation Area, the incorporation of sustainable design practices within development projects, and the creation of an overall landscape design theme for the Specific Plan area. These are described in more detail below.

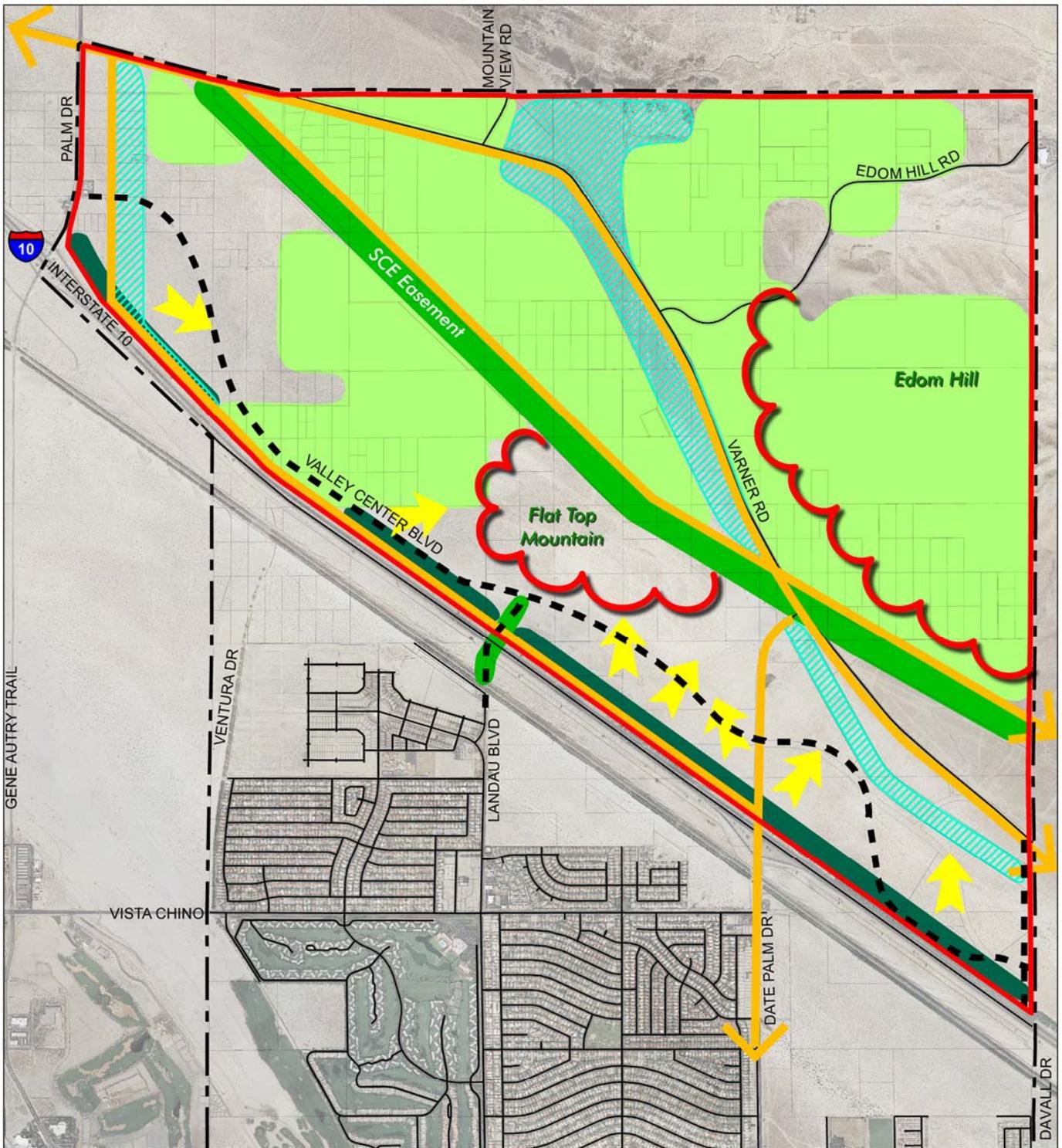
### I. MSHCP Conservation Area

Development in the Specific Plan area will be surrounded by the open space of the MSHCP Conservation Area. This open space will give new development a unique relationship with its setting that is characterized by open desert scrub and sand fields juxtaposed with built forms and planted park spaces.

As illustrated in Figure 4-1, the MSHCP Area forms the foundation of the network of open spaces in the Specific Plan area. The open spaces should be connected with an integrated trail and bikeway system that will offer a variety of experiences ranging from remote natural desert to urban destinations. The trails and bikeways should accommodate handicapped users, walkers, and cyclists. By creating this interconnected open space network, the Specific Plan area will:

- Provide an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle for its residents.
- Retain space in which to preserve the hydrologic functions of the land, i.e., maintain drainage patterns and facilitate storm water infiltration.
- Fulfill adjacency and habitat continuity requirements of the MSHCP.
- Create windscreens, planted buffers, and shaded areas to help mitigate natural environmental factors, such as wind and heat, and human impacts such as noise and vehicular traffic.
- Establish connectivity with regional trails and provide a variety of destinations for the regional trails system.
- Create parks for activities and community gathering.





**Figure 4-1: Open Space Framework**

- Specific Plan Area
- City Boundary
- MSHCP Conservation Area
- Open Space
- Open Space Corridors
- Major Water / Drainage Courses (schematic)
- Freeway Buffer
- ➔ Protect Views
- ⤿ Natural Landmarks
- Future Road (approximate alignment)

➔ Potential Network of North City and Regional Trails



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## 2. Sustainable Site Design

The Specific Plan provides a sustainable approach to site development and landscape design. Current technologies and best management practices should also be followed to create projects that are responsive to environmental conditions and assure that development respects the natural systems present and minimizes long-term negative impacts.

Examples of sustainable landscape practices applicable to the area are:

- Preserving natural drainage processes to the extent possible.
- Retaining storm water on site allowing for percolation into aquifers.
- Minimizing cut and fill of slopes.
- Using efficient irrigation systems and recycled water in the landscape.
- Respecting the climatic conditions in landscape plant choices.

MSHCP standards shall be used within the MSHCP area. Guidelines set forth by state and local government agencies, national organizations such as the U.S. Green Building Council and the Sustainable Sites Initiative should guide the approach to site planning and development throughout the North City area.

## 3. Overall Landscape Design Theme

Cathedral City's dramatic physical setting and topography inspire design elements that build upon the characteristics of the desert environment – sand, surrounding mountains and views, wind, etc. The Coachella Valley also contains four spring-fed palm oases, which are unusual in the world. The concept and symbolism of oases in the Specific Plan area could be captured through landscaping and other design features.

Landscape design has the crucial role of performing many ecological functions and creating a visually integrated cohesive community with a strong sense of place. A desert oasis landscape theme that mimics the naturally occurring palm oases found in the Coachella Valley should be used to unify the Specific Plan area. Oasis design features include: landscape compositions that may feature higher densities of plant material to provide a lush look as well as shade; accents of unique color or form; and water features using reclaimed water or captured site drainage.



*The spring-fed palm oases in the Coachella Valley provide inspiration for landscape design.*

Oasis landscape elements should be located at:

- High traffic, highly visible locations as a focal landscape element
- Gateways and entries throughout the Specific Plan area as described in Section D of this chapter
- Major commercial/mixed use centers at entryways, pedestrian promenades, and/or plazas
- Vehicle and pedestrian entries to housing developments
- Public park and recreation center frontages
- Industrial park entries

The oasis compositions should be scaled according to surrounding land uses and for intended visual impact. A gateway element located within the right-of-way of a major arterial will need to be simple and bold for visual impact as seen from a car. An oasis element created as part of a commercial gateway or plaza presents the opportunity to create a highly textured appealing space to be experienced at close proximity. The oasis theme establishes materials and design features that can be carried throughout the landscape design of streetscapes and master planned development projects to create continuity and visual unity.

Inherent in the oasis theme is the contrast to the arid expanses around the oasis. Landscaping outside the oasis elements should be composed of sparse planting and naturalistic hardscape, thus reflecting the surrounding desert landscape.

All landscape design will be required to use drought tolerant, native and adapted plant species listed in the Coachella Valley Water District's *Lush and Efficient Landscape Gardening Guide* and in the North City Specific Plan recommended plant palette (Table 12-1, Chapter 12), which includes MSHCP-approved plants. The use of indigenous and adapted plant material brings the desert to the built environment and makes visual connection to the surrounding natural landscape.

## D. Open Space Elements

The key elements of the open space framework are illustrated in Figure 4-1 and described below.

### I. View Corridors

Flat Top Mountain and Edom Hill are important features in North City that lend identity and character to North City and to Cathedral City as a whole. These are also prominent landmarks for travelers on I-10. Preservation of views to these focal points is an important goal of the community. The City's natural scenic beauty, as viewed from public thoroughfares and private lands, provides residents and visitors with a direct encounter with the breathtaking landforms that define the character of North City. Views to Flat Top Mountain and Edom Hill must be



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preserved from I-10, as well as from south of I-10, and from the other major streets in the Specific Plan area, such as Date Palm Drive and Palm Drive, and the future Landau Boulevard extension, DaVall Drive extension and Valley Center Boulevard.



*Views to and from Flat Top Mountain and Edom Hill must be protected.*

## 2. Drainage Courses

The topography and soil condition of the area create significant runoff and drainage issues but also offer the opportunity for creative approaches to site drainage, such as creating active and passive water elements for the area. Drainage courses or flood control channels are viewed not



*Drainage courses can be incorporated into new development as beautiful passive open space areas.*



only as storm drains but also as opportunities for development of wildlife corridors and as improved open space for hikers and cyclists. They can be beautiful site amenities with naturalized edges planted with riparian vegetation. Any development proposal for property through which drainage courses pass should incorporate them into the overall site design, while disturbing the existing natural drainage patterns as little as possible.

### 3. Water Features

Water in the Specific Plan area presents an exciting opportunity to provide for an ecologically sound design approach that also results in a beautiful landscape element. Water can be showcased in the landscape as part of a permanent feature or as a seasonal event that is channeled into a landscaped swale and/or basin, then allowed to percolate into the Coachella Valley Aquifer. Water features located in developments within North City should use water from site drainage or filtered reclaimed water. The use of reclaimed water is a safe and sensitive practice that allows for the beauty and natural appeal of water features while respecting the scarcity and value of water as a resource. Features using reclaimed water are required to post prominent signs informing the public about the source of the water and that it is not permitted for swimming in or drinking.



*Large-scale development projects should incorporate appropriately and sensitively designed water features to emphasize the desert oasis theme.*

### 4. Parks and Open Space

The City's goal is to provide at least 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, as evidenced in the 2005 Cathedral City Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the City's adoption of the State of California Quimby Act Ordinance. At this level of service, a minimum of 87 acres of land in the Specific Plan area will need to be dedicated to park and recreation facilities at build out of the Specific Plan area. Park land should be obtained and recreation facilities built through a combination of land dedications and developer in-lieu fees established as a condition of subdivision map approval per the Quimby program outlined in the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.



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Park land and recreational facilities dedicated within the Specific Plan area should be located, planned, and funded based on the following community service standards, functional considerations, community needs, and urban design spatial relationships:

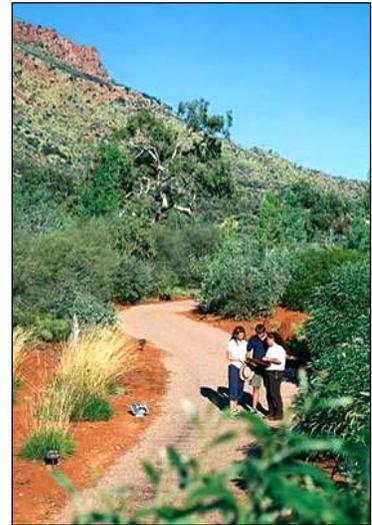
- Proximate to, or as part of, an existing or planned local or regional bikeway or trail system.
- To fulfill distribution, size and service radii for neighborhood and community parks according to Cathedral City General Plan Guidelines.
- Where they can best serve the area’s hydrologic processes by providing water filtration in wetlands, storm water catchment areas, and/or retention basins.
- To fulfill MSHCP adjacency requirements, which include space for buffers, berms and walls at the boundaries of development zones.
- Contiguous to larger parcels of dedicated open space, when possible, for increased views, improved ecological function and positive environmental impact.
- Where they can mitigate development impacts by providing drainage catchment areas, planted screens, and/or buffers between different types of land uses.
- To preserve view corridors.



*Parks provide much needed recreation amenities to residents. Turf grass will be limited to areas used for field play and recreation.*

## 5. Bikeways and Trails

The bikeway and trails network is described in Chapter 5 as a circulation element, but it is also a vital part of the open space framework. Bikeways and trails provide the connectivity that brings increased recreational and ecological value to open space. Pathways and bikeways should have landscape treatments that provide shaded rest stations, seating and wayfinding elements, as appropriate.



*Bikeways and trails in the various linear easements and along open space corridors can create a well-connected network.*



## 6. Parkway along Interstate 10

North City's adjacency to the I-10 freeway presents an opportunity to create a unique, visually appealing and inviting environment along the freeway frontage. In addition, new development would benefit from a buffer that allows views of development while providing protection from freeway traffic. This can be accomplished by creating a landscaped parkway along the length of I-10 within the Specific Plan area.

This public parkway shall be established in two ways: 1) as a requirement of developing land near the freeway (i.e., the provision of a setback as described in Chapters 5, 8 and 10 of this Plan to allow for public improvements), and 2) through City coordination with Caltrans to improve the land within the I-10 freeway right-of-way for the length of the Specific Plan area.



*A multi-use recreation trail in the parkway along I-10 will be an important amenity in the Specific Plan area.*

The parkway will enhance the Cathedral City section of the freeway corridor, making it an interesting and memorable feature and establishing the character of North City as a beautiful, environmentally-sensitive place that fits well within its topography and ecological setting. A naturalistic landscape scheme comprised of irregular clusters of trees, shrubs, grasses, and native rock should be placed in the parkway to create a strong visual statement when viewed from the freeway. The landscape should allow views to and from development in North City, while buffering the noise and visual impact of the freeway.

Features of the parkway shall include:

- A multi-use recreation trail
- Shaded rest stations for trail users
- Naturalistic drainage channels
- Native plants
- View preservation and screening where necessary
- A protective barrier from freeway traffic with the arrangement of trees and stones.

In addition, commercial sponsorship may be possible along the parkway, with associated trailside signage, as a mechanism funding trail maintenance (i.e., a 'trail adoption' program). The design criteria for the parkway along I-10 are described in more detail and illustrated in Chapter 5 (Circulation and Streetscape Improvements).



## 7. Gateways and Entryways

Gateways and entryways note the entry point of distinct environments. They are marked by unique design features that clearly communicate identity for an area, such as varying combinations of the following: landscaping, public art, signage, special lighting, and paving treatments. A hierarchy of gateways and entryways is proposed to be established in the North City Specific Plan area as follows:

- (a) A primary gateway at the I-10 off-ramp and Date Palm Drive.
- (b) Secondary gateways at I-10 off-ramps at Palm Drive, future DaVall Drive, and future Landau Boulevard, and the entries to Valley Center Boulevard at Palm Drive and future DaVall Drive.
- (c) Entries to major developments.

The gateways will feature oasis-themed streetscape treatments and signage, with development frontages at a scale appropriate to both their intended impact as a gateway statement and to the street in which they are located.

### **(a) Primary Gateway**

The primary gateway landscape treatment at the I-10 off-ramp and Date Palm Drive is proposed to be large-scale, to the point of monumental. It is intended to make a dramatic impact in relation to both the freeway and Date Palm Drive, signifying entry into the heart of North City. As illustrated in Figure 4-2, the landscape concept is to create a desert oasis feature in the street median design consisting of large boulders in a naturalistic arrangement that supports a 'waterfall'. The 'waterfall' could be interpreted figuratively or literally. It could be an actual water feature that uses re-circulated water or harvested and reclaimed run-off water from the North City area such that it would "run" only when water is present in the environment. The other option could be a dry 'waterfall' where water is implied in the design's composition of boulders, river rock and stone, and plant materials. Small desert trees in a silver and blue-gray color palette, such as Blue Palo Verde and Velvet Mesquite, should be planted to provide a backdrop to the "water" feature. Colored paving should be used to mark where the multi-use trail crosses Date Palm Drive.



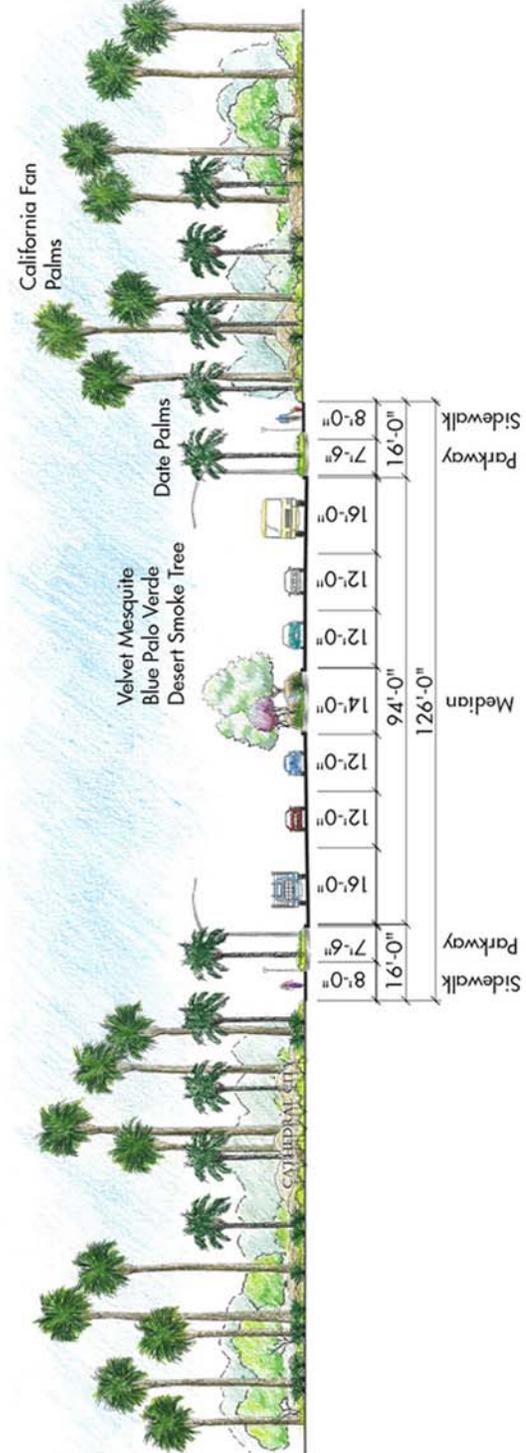
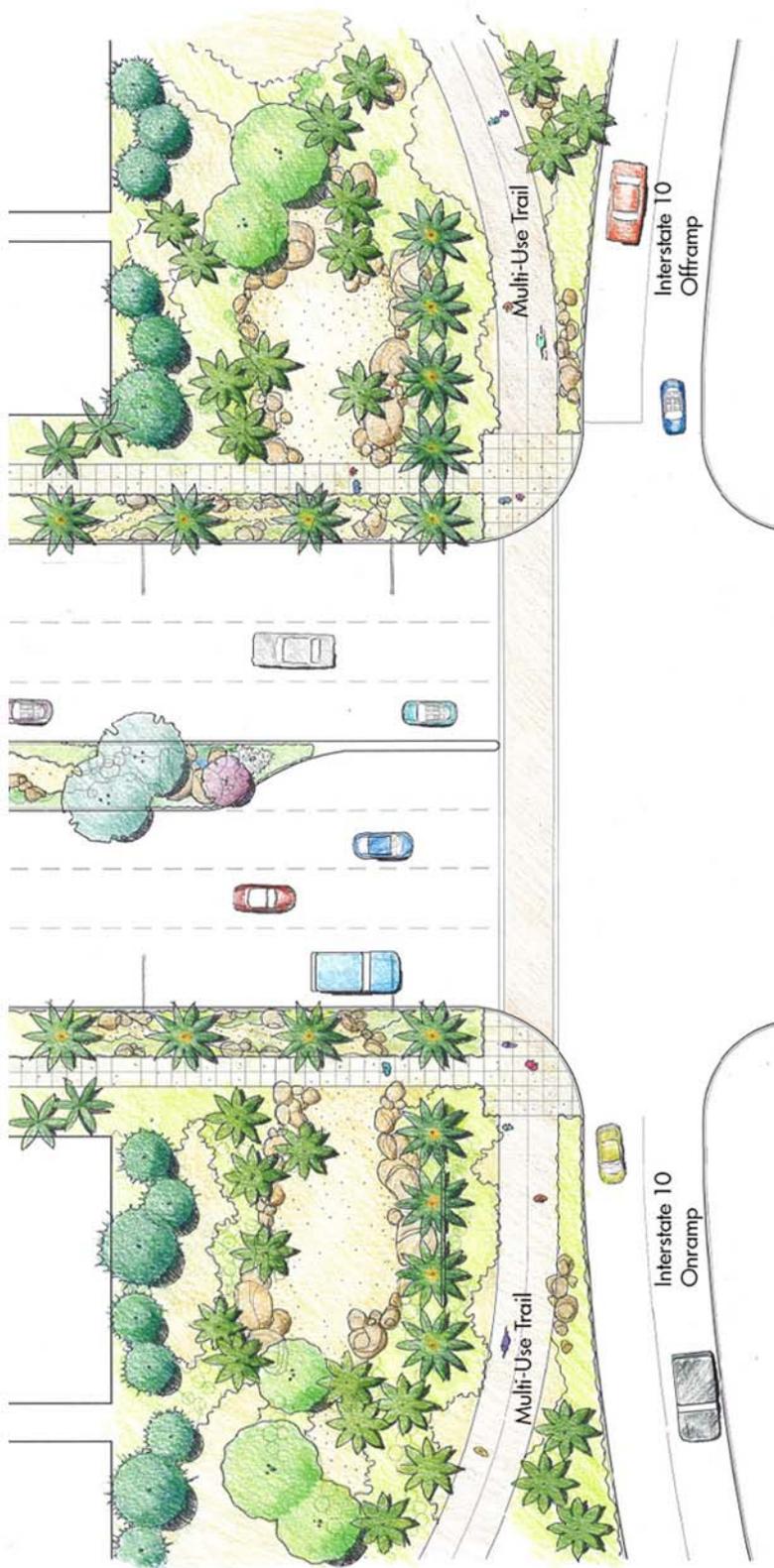


Figure 4.2: Primary Gateway at Date Palm Drive

The gateway treatment should be carried into the freeway buffer area on both sides of Date Palm Drive with a dry stream bed of light colored cobblestones delineated by darker colored boulders. This would suggest water and function as a retention basin for freeway and street storm water runoff. It should be planted with grasses, shrubs, groundcovers and groves of California Fan Palms. Brightly colored metal letters spelling 'CATHEDRAL CITY' should be placed so as to appear to float above the boulders. The letters should be visible from the freeway, be lit at night, and be coordinated with the signage on the future Date Palm freeway bridge.

Low voltage landscape lighting fixtures should be hidden among the boulders and planting. The lighting should be subtle and only highlight signage and key features at night. All landscape lighting fixtures should be on the approved list as compiled by the International Dark Sky Association.

An accent landscape scheme using the same material palette should be located at the intersection of Date Palm Drive and Valley Center Boulevard to 'echo' the thematic elements of the primary gateway feature.

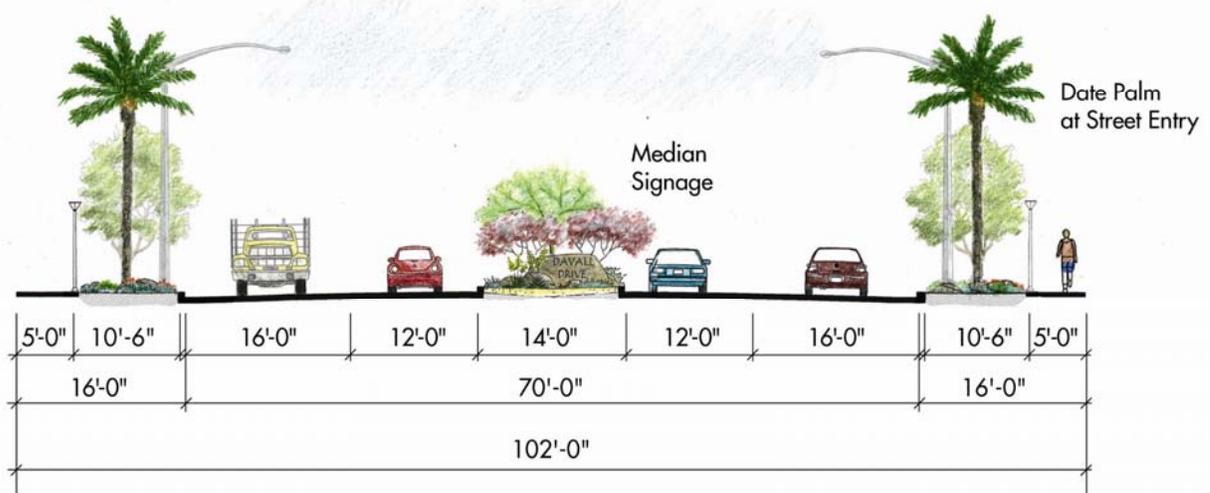
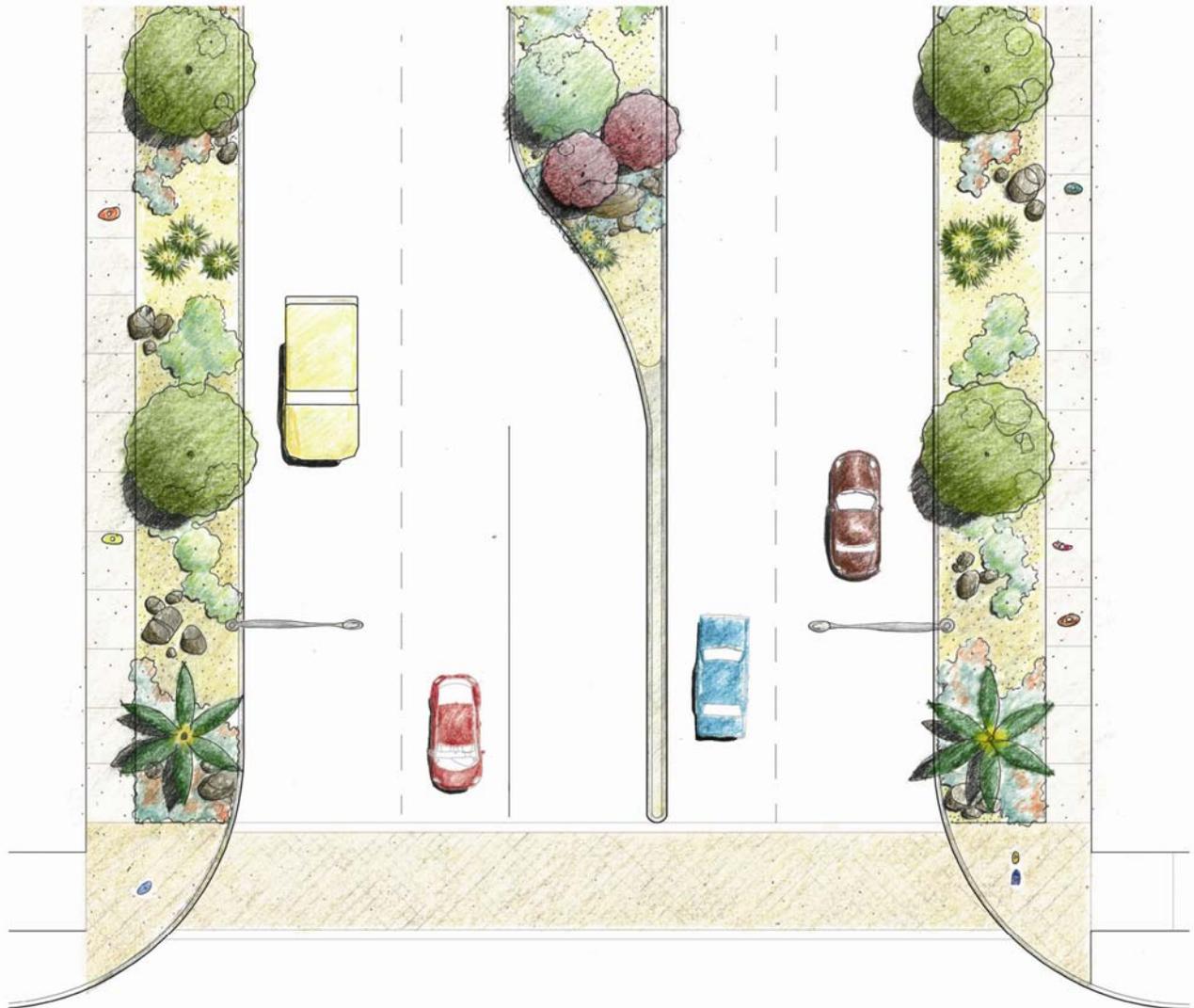
#### **(b) Secondary Gateways**

Secondary gateways should be located near the freeway off-ramps at Palm Drive, the future DaVall Drive, the future Landau Boulevard, and at each end of Valley Center Boulevard at Palm Drive and DaVall Drive. They should feature Date Palm trees aligned in the parkways on each side of the street and an oasis planting composition in the medians and flanking parkways (Figure 4-3). The oasis planting treatment should consist of clustered stones, shrubs, and accent trees in the two secondary gateways along DaVall Drive. At the two secondary gateways along Palm Drive (at the freeway off-ramp and at Valley Center Boulevard), stones and crushed glass elements will replace the shrubs and accent trees that will not be used due to the strong winds and blowsand activity.

Sculptural City logo entry monument signage should be framed by accent plants in the medians with low voltage lighting located in the landscaping for signage visibility at night. Enhanced paving should mark the intersection crosswalks to add color and texture and to calm traffic.

Secondary gateways are not proposed for Mountain View Road, Varner Road or Edom Hill Road, as these are not primary entry points into the areas proposed for development within North City.





**Figure 4-3: Typical Secondary Gateway**

### **(c) Entries to Major Developments**

Commercial, mixed use and residential development entries shall include landscaped entry treatments located in the development frontage. Entry treatment design should be comprised of thematic elements, such as monument signage, stone groupings, and native plant palettes that should be continued throughout the public spaces within the respective developments.

Entries from public streets to dedicated pedestrian paths and bikeways should be marked with a signage station that features maps of the local and regional pathway systems, MSHCP Area information, and amenity locations. A nominal amount of parking spaces should be provided, as appropriate.

## **8. Development Buffer Edges**

The interface between the various zoning districts and the MSHCP Area will require sensitive treatment. Buffer zones, terraced walls and native planting should be among the elements used to sensitively address adjacency issues between development and MSHCP Areas. The elements can also be used to create wind screens for development, and prevent unauthorized trespass, and light and noise pollution into the MSHCP Area.



*Landscaping can be used to buffer sensitive open space areas in North City from new development.*



