

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

A. What is a Specific Plan?

A Specific Plan is a regulatory tool that local governments use to implement their General Plan and to guide development in a localized area. While the General Plan is the overall guide for growth and development in a community, a Specific Plan is able to focus on the unique characteristics of a special area by customizing the planning process and land use regulations to that area.

B. Regulatory Authority

The North City Specific Plan (Project Number SPL 07-001) has been prepared pursuant to the provisions of the California Government Code, Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8, Sections 65450 through 65457. The California Government Code authorizes jurisdictions to adopt specific plans by resolution, as policy documents or by ordinance as regulatory documents. The law allows adoption of Specific Plans as may be required for the implementation of the General Plan. Chapter 9.60 (Specific Plans) of the City of Cathedral City Municipal Code (CCMC), Title 9, identifies the procedures for the processing of Specific Plans in the City.

C. North City Specific Plan Area

The North City Specific Plan area includes nearly 5,000 acres of mostly undeveloped land north of Interstate 10 (I-10), and is illustrated in Figure I-1. Its general boundaries are I-10 to the south, Palm Drive to the west, and City limits to the north and east. It also includes approximately 1,300 acres recently annexed (December 2007) to Cathedral City from unincorporated Riverside County.

D. Purpose and Objectives of the Specific Plan

Since its incorporation in 1981, Cathedral City has grown in population to over 53,000 and is home to a wide range of commercial land uses and residential neighborhoods. Development in the City



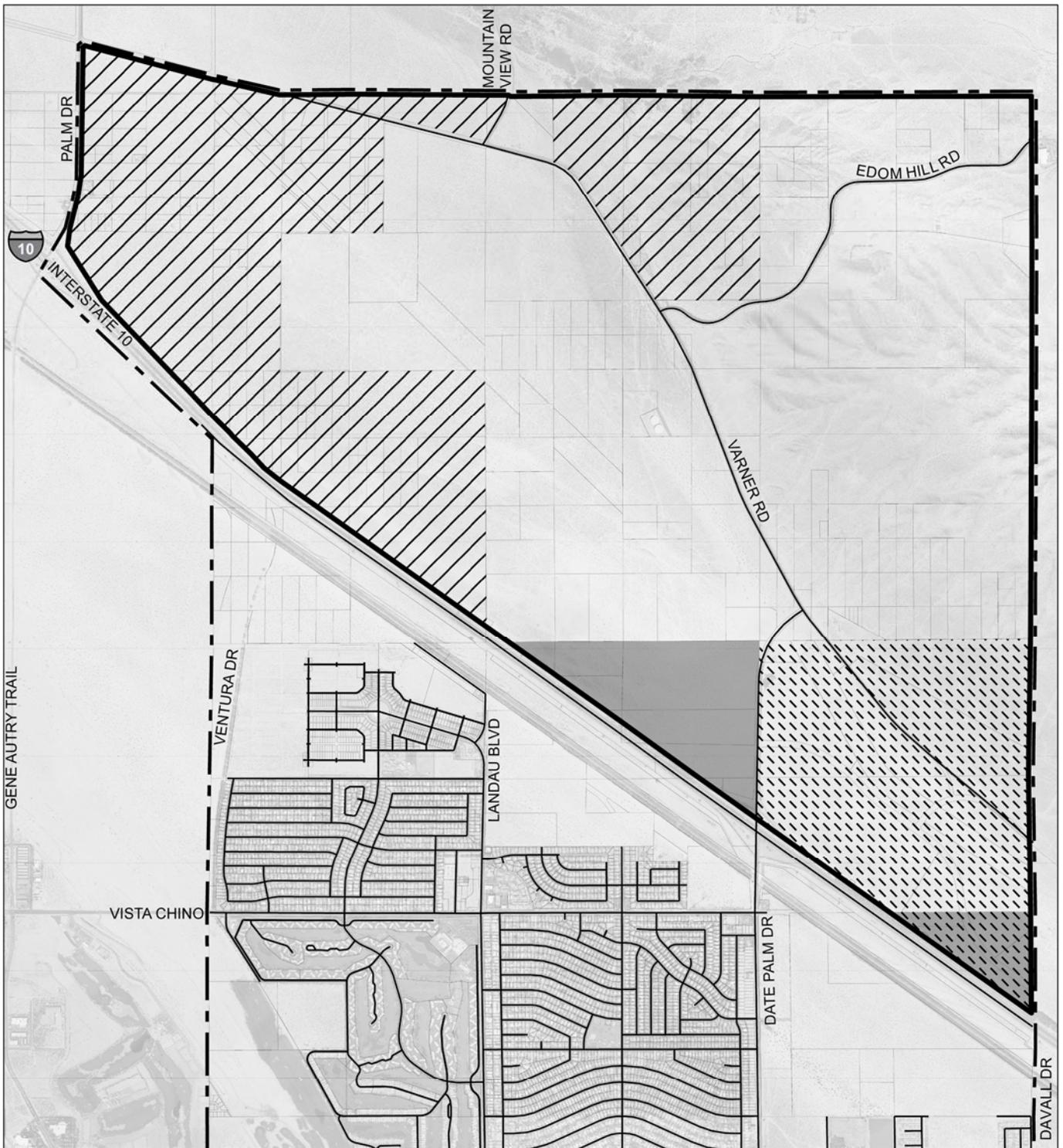


Figure 1-1: Specific Plan Area

-  Specific Plan Area
-  City Boundary
-  Annexation Area (December 2007)
-  2006 Merged Redevelopment Project Area (within Specific Plan Area)
-  Aqua Caliente Reservation Land (within Specific Plan Area)



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has occurred almost entirely to the south of I-10, which is largely built-out. Significant growth is expected to continue in the City and the region. The Coachella Valley is one of the fastest growing areas in Riverside County, with a projected population growth of approximately 600,000 over the next decade.

This increasing population growth creates development pressure on the vacant land north of and along the I-10 Freeway corridor, necessitating a Specific Plan for this area. The City is interested in taking a long-term view of what land uses are appropriate for this key area, as well as maintaining a jobs-housing balance within the community. This Specific Plan provides the City with the opportunity to expand its economic base and create a high quality of life for decades to come by planning now for future development and public improvements in the largely vacant northern portion of the City.

The purpose of this Specific Plan is to establish a development framework for the North City Specific Plan area. This Specific Plan is intended to facilitate and encourage development and improvements to help realize the community's vision for the area, which is described in Chapter 3 of this Plan. It is a tool to help City staff and decision makers plan public improvement projects, promote cohesive development, and evaluate development proposals. New construction on private property will be regulated through the land use policies, development standards, and design standards and guidelines in this Specific Plan. The Specific Plan also sets forth a strategy for financing and construction of public improvements including circulation, infrastructure, parks and streetscape improvements.

The objectives of the Specific Plan are to:

1. Direct the location and intensity of new development.
2. Guide associated infrastructure and public services.
3. Balance the provision of job creation and housing opportunities.
4. Implement the conservation criteria established under the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).
5. Guide all elements of design for appropriate use in the unique desert environment.
6. Capitalize on the natural resources that exist in the Specific Plan area.
7. Encourage sustainable, energy-efficient development.

E. Applicability and Conformity of Development

The provisions of this Specific Plan shall apply to all properties included in the North City Specific Plan area. No construction, modification, addition, or placement of any building or structure shall occur, nor shall any new use commence on any lot, on or after the effective date of this Specific Plan that is not in conformity with the provisions of this Specific Plan. If the City Planner or his/her



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designee determines that an existing use or structure in the Specific Plan area is an existing nonconforming use that does not have to be brought into conformance with the Specific Plan, the regulations and standards of the CCMC shall apply.

The provisions of this Specific Plan shall not apply to development projects for which a complete application has been received by the appropriate City office on or before the effective date of this Specific Plan. However, applicants for such projects may elect to comply with the provisions herein in lieu of the former provisions. Applications for projects whose entitlements and/or permits have expired or were denied will be required to conform to this Specific Plan.

F. Relationship to the General Plan

A General Plan amendment (Project Number GPA 08-005) has been initiated concurrent with this Specific Plan (Project Number SPL 07-001) to ensure consistency between the North City Specific Plan and the Cathedral City General Plan.

The Specific Plan is supportive of General Plan policies and programs that provide for the use of "Community, Area, Specific and Precise Plans" as part of the General Plan to address detailed design, land use and policy direction for a particular area within the City and as a method of detailed and systematic implementation of the General Plan (General Plan, Administration Element, Policy 2 and Program 2A).

G. Relationship to the Zoning Ordinance

Adoption of this Specific Plan establishes new zoning designations for the Specific Plan area (Project Number CZ 08-004), which incorporate all of the standards for land use and development set forth in this Plan. The regulations of this Specific Plan replace those set forth in the planning and zoning provisions of the CCMC, and any other applicable ordinances. Where land use regulations and/or development standards of Planning and Zoning Ordinance (Title 9) of the CCMC are inconsistent with this Specific Plan, the standards and regulations of the Specific Plan shall prevail and supersede the applicable provisions of the Planning and Zoning Ordinance.

The Specific Plan does not convey any rights not otherwise granted under the provisions and procedures contained in the Zoning Code and other applicable ordinances, except as specifically provided herein. Any issue not specifically covered in the Specific Plan shall be subject to the CCMC. The Code provides for City Planner and/or Planning Commission interpretations.



H. Relationship to the Recently Annexed Areas

As illustrated in Figure I-1, approximately 1300 acres of land within the Specific Plan area was annexed into Cathedral City from unincorporated Riverside County in December 2007. Per Government Code Section 56375(e):

“No subsequent change may be made to the general plan for the annexed territory or zoning that is not in conformance to the pre-zoning designations for a period of two years after the completion of the annexation, unless the legislative body for the city makes a finding at a public hearing that a substantial change has occurred in circumstances that necessitate a departure from the pre-zoning in the application to the commission.”

Therefore, City zoning established at the time of the annexation will remain in force for the annexation areas until December 2009, at which time the Specific Plan zoning will take effect unless otherwise determined by the City’s legislative body. The zoning in place until December 2009 for these lands may be obtained from the City’s Planning Department.

I. Relationship to the Redevelopment Project Area

Approximately 650 acres of land in the southeast corner of the Specific Plan area are within the City’s 2006 Merged Redevelopment Project Area (Figure I-1). The Plan generally provides the Agency with powers, duties and obligations to implement and further the program for the continued redevelopment, rehabilitation, and revitalization of the 2006 Merged Redevelopment Project Area. The principal goals and objectives of the 2006 Merged Redevelopment Project are to eliminate all remaining blight and complete all Agency-assisted redevelopment activities as quickly as possible consistent with the needs of identified projects and the availability of financial resources to fund them.

J. Relationship to Agua Caliente Reservation Land

Approximately 241 acres of land in the southern portion of the Specific Plan are within the boundaries of the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation (Figure I-1). The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians provided input on the Specific Plan at key stages in the planning process. The Tribe has land use authority over lands within Reservation boundaries; however, in the interest of uniform and unified land use planning and development, has delegated its land use authority to the City of Cathedral City for Reservation lands within City limits.



K. Relationship to the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)

More than half of the land in the Specific Plan area will be preserved as an open space conservation area through the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The Coachella Valley MSHCP is an adopted, regional 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 not only safeguards the desert's natural heritage for future generations, but also allows for more timely construction of roads and other infrastructure needed to accommodate population growth in the Coachella Valley. The MSHCP provides comprehensive compliance with state and federal Endangered Species Acts and transfers permit authority to local government, a significant departure from the previous process that required state and federal permits for each individual property on which development is proposed.

As illustrated in Figure I-2, the Specific Plan Area contains two conservation areas within the MSHCP boundaries: Willow Hole Conservation Area and Edom Hill Conservation Area. The majority of the land falls within the Willow Hole Conservation Area (Table I-1). Both conservation areas contain critical habitat for several animal species, including the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, as well as several important natural plant communities, essential ecological processes, and biological corridors and linkages for a variety of animal species. Per the MSHCP, development that is allowed in and adjacent to these conservation areas will be required to adhere to strict guidelines for non-native and invasive plant species, and for locating wind barriers, to minimize impacts of development on the fragile ecosystem of the habitats.

Table I-1: Conservation Land within the Specific Plan Area^{1,2}

	Net Area (acres)	Percentage of NCSP
Edom Hill Conservation Area	338	7%
Willow Hole Conservation Area	2,508	54%
Total Conservation Land	2,846	61%

The Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), in administering the MSHCP, is targeting 90% conservation within these areas and will give consideration to developing limited portions, as provided under the MSHCP. In addition, certain projects, such as the construction of a frontage road north of and parallel to I-10, are permitted with conditions.

Zoning within the MSHCP Conservation Area is discussed in Chapter 7 of this Specific Plan.

¹ Cathedral City GIS data.

² Net area excludes roads.





Figure 1-2: Coachella Valley MSHCP Conservation Areas

-  Specific Plan Area
-  City Boundary
-  MSHCP Conservation Area
-  Edom Hill Conservation Area
-  Willow Hole Conservation Area



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L. Relationship to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Adoption or amendment of a specific plan constitutes a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In accordance with CEQA (Section 15168), an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was required to analyze the environmental impacts of the North City Specific Plan (See Appendix D). A Program EIR, prepared in conjunction with the preparation of this Specific Plan, established the existing, on-site environmental conditions and evaluated the potential impacts posed by this Plan.

The EIR contains a series of mitigation measures (see Chapter 13) that are either: 1) design features of the Specific Plan; or 2) will be imposed on subsequent projects in the Specific Plan area consistent with the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program via conditions of project approvals.

M. Community Participation

The North City Specific Plan was created with extensive Steering Committee involvement and public outreach and participation. Input to the Specific Plan was obtained through a series of public workshops, where residents, property owners, affected agencies, and interested parties provided ideas and refinements to the project team through group discussion and feedback on the topics and direction of the Plan. Four public workshops, well advertised through press releases, public notices, flyers and the City's website, were held over the course of the project at key stages in the planning process.

Four meetings at these same key stages were also held with the North City Specific Plan Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consisted of over 20 members, including several landowners in North City and representatives from the City's Commissions, Council, and other involved agencies. The role of the Steering Committee was to bring the community's values, knowledge and ideas into the planning process, and to provide continuity and feedback throughout the duration of the project. These sessions with the public and Steering Committee generated significant dialogue and provided valuable direction for the North City Specific Plan. For a detailed description of each session, please refer to Appendix A.



The community provided extensive input to the future of North City at several public workshops held during the Specific Plan process.



N. Support Documents

Several documents were prepared as background information during the analysis phase and support the recommendations of this Specific Plan. These supporting documents are listed in Appendix B and are available at the Cathedral City Planning Department. Other documents prepared in conjunction with the Specific Plan, such as the Program EIR, are also listed in the appendices.



