

CHAPTER 2 **Background Information and Key Issues**

2.1 SITE CHARACTERISTICS

The Specific Plan area includes over 315 acres, is almost 2 miles long, and varies from 0.1 to 0.6 mile at its widest point at Crown Valley Parkway. It is characterized by a series of roadways, railway, utilities, and drainage facilities that substantially affect the cohesion of the area. The Gateway area is physically separated from the rest of the City by the SR-73 toll road, which serves as the westerly boundary of the area. The roadways are not fully connected which limits access to, and circulation within, the Gateway area. The area includes diverse topography, including slopes associated with the Oso Creek drainage channel that traverses the area in a north/south direction along the westerly side of Forbes Road. The flood control channel provides a significant open space amenity within the project area.



2.2 EXISTING LAND USES

The Gateway area is predominately developed with a variety of commercial service, light industrial, auto sales and services, retail, and office uses. A majority of the existing commercial and industrial buildings within the Specific Plan area predate City incorporation and were constructed in the late 1970s and early 1980s and are clustered primarily along the north/south roadways including Camino Capistrano, Cabot Road, and Forbes Road. Most of the industrial and service commercial uses are characterized by low-rise, one-story buildings and/or multi-tenant structures such as the business park on Forbes Road north of Crown Valley Parkway. There is the six-story Crown Cabot Financial office building on Cabot Road and a large retail/warehouse (Costco) on Crown Valley Parkway. Auto dealerships are located on Camino Capistrano and Star Drive. Vacant properties within the area are generally located along Cabot Road.

Some of the major existing businesses in the Specific Plan area include: Mercedes-Benz of Laguna Niguel and Allen Cadillac/GMC/Hyundai car dealerships; Costco Wholesale Warehouse; The Crown Cabot Financial office building; Sepulveda Building Materials; and the Three Flags Center, a mixture of industrial uses, professional offices, and community commercial uses. There are currently no residential uses located within the

Gateway area. Figure 2-1 (Existing Land Uses) depicts the existing land uses within the Specific Plan area.

2.3 PREVIOUS GENERAL PLAN LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The Laguna Niguel General Plan Land Use Map was previously amended to provide consistency with the 1999 Laguna Niguel Gateway Specific Plan. As part of that process, properties within the Specific Plan area were designated with the following Land Use designations:

- Community Commercial
- Industrial/Business Park; Professional Office; Community Commercial
- Community Commercial; Professional Office
- Public/Institutional; Professional Office
- Open Space

The General Plan Land Use Element was also amended at that time to provide for increased densities, up to a Floor Area Ratio of 1.0 in some cases, based upon certain lot sizes, as an incentive to implement the Specific Plan. In addition, the statistical summaries for the Community Profile Areas, which establish the buildout capacities for the City, were amended to reflect the anticipated new development identified in the Specific Plan. The Gateway Specific Plan previously included a portion of Community Profile 3 and all of Community Profile Area 4 and allowed up to 3,777,000 square feet of non-residential development.

2.4 ZONING

The Zoning designation for the entire Specific Plan area is “S—Laguna Niguel Gateway Specific Plan.” The 1999 Laguna Niguel Gateway Specific Plan created six land use designations and one overlay designation applicable to properties within the Specific Plan area, which included:

- **Automotive Commercial (CA):** This Zone accommodated new and used automobile sales and other uses generally related to the rental, repair, storage and operation of automobiles and other vehicles.
- **Hospitality Commercial (CH):** This Zone provided for restaurants, hotels, motels, service stations and other uses intended to serve the motoring public.

- **Commercial/Light Industrial (C/LI):** This Zone provided for a wide variety of retail, general/highway commercial services, light industrial, manufacturing, and warehousing uses.
- **Mixed Use (MU):** This Zone provided for a cohesive mix of various retail, entertainment, commercial services, hotels, and office uses and would accommodate the most intense land uses within the Specific Plan area.
- **Public/Institutional (PI):** This Zone provided for public and quasi-public utility uses, such as the existing San Diego Gas & Electric substation facility on Camino Capistrano.
- **Open Space (OS):** This Zone provided for areas and slopes that were to remain undeveloped, trails, the Oso Creek drainage channel, the Galivan detention basin, freeway overpasses, and utility lines.
- **Transit Overlay (T):** This Zone provided an additional overlay zone to properties that were designated Mixed Use to accommodate transit-oriented uses related to the Metrolink station, including other public transit and parking facilities.

2.5 INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES

The major existing infrastructure and utilities in the Laguna Niguel Gateway Specific Plan area include facilities related to roadways, water, wastewater management, electricity, natural gas, storm drainage, and solid waste management.

2.5.1 Roadways

The Specific Plan area is bounded on its eastern edge by I-5, while the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor (SR-73) crosses the site diagonally in a northwest-southeast swath. Regional access to the area is available directly from I-5 at Crown Valley Parkway and Avery Parkway. Indirect access to the Specific Plan area from the San Joaquin Hills Transportation corridor is available via Greenfield Drive to Crown Valley Parkway. Direct local access to the site is available from both Crown Valley Parkway and Avery Parkway, as well as from Paseo de Colinas, Cabot Road, and Camino Capistrano.



Cabot Road

2.5.2 Water

Moulton Niguel Water District (MNWD) provides water service in the Specific Plan area. The major sources of water within the Specific Plan area are imported and reclaimed water. Imported water comes

from the State Water Project (the California Aqueduct) and supplied to MNWD by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWDSC).

Water transmission lines exist in Cabot Road, Crown Valley Parkway, Forbes Road, and Camino Capistrano. The area is also serviced by the City's reclaimed water distribution system, with lines running along Cabot Road, Paseo Del Colinas, and southward along the Oso Creek drainage channel.

2.5.3 Wastewater Management

MNWD owns and operates the sewer collection system within the Specific Plan area. Sewer lines exist throughout the area, and pump stations exist on the south side of Crown Valley Parkway, adjacent to Costco Wholesale, and on the west side of Oso Creek, adjacent to Mercedes-Benz of Laguna Niguel.

2.5.4 Energy

Electrical service is provided to the City of Laguna Niguel through two carriers: San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), and Southern California Edison. Service to the Specific Plan area is provided by SDG&E through a main transmission line which runs northward from San Juan Capistrano along the west side of Camino Capistrano, to the Trabuco Substation located on the east side of Camino Capistrano, north of Crown Valley Parkway. From there, utilities are distributed throughout the Specific Plan area. Although the main transmission lines on Camino Capistrano and on Crown Valley Parkway are overhead, the lines providing individual service to the properties within the Specific Plan are generally underground.

The Southern California Gas Company provides natural gas service to the properties within the Specific Plan area.

2.5.5 Storm Drainage

The Specific Plan area is located within the San Juan Creek Watershed and drains into the Oso Creek, which runs north to south through the area. Portions of the Specific Plan area are within FEMA Flood Zone Designation Zone X. These areas have been identified in the community flood insurance study as areas of moderate or minimal hazard from the principal source of flood in the area. However, buildings in these zones could be flooded by severe, concentrated rainfall coupled with inadequate local drainage systems (FEMA). The Oso Creek drainage channel parallels Forbes



Oso Creek drainage channel

Road and crosses underneath Crown Valley Parkway. It is designed to accommodate flooding associated with the 100-year storm. The Oso Creek drainage channel is owned and maintained by Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD). The Galivan Basin which is a part of the Oso Creek is located in the northern portion of the Specific Plan area, between Cabot Road and Camino Capistrano. It is a retarding basin that has been designed to adequately handle overflow from Oso Creek. The Specific Plan area is within the jurisdiction of the municipal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater permittees within the San Diego Region.

2.5.6 Solid Waste

Waste generated within the Specific Plan area is collected by CR&R, a company that contracts with the City of Laguna Niguel to service all residential, commercial, and industrial areas of the City. An automated refuse collection and recycling program was implemented in early 1993 and is currently achieving waste disposal diversion of 72 percent. Solid waste is transported to the Prima Deshecha Landfill in San Juan Capistrano that is operated by the Orange County Integrated Waste Management Department (OCIWMD). This landfill is anticipated to reach its capacity by the year 2067.

2.6 DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

The Specific Plan area has a long, linear configuration that poses several potential obstacles to new development including access to the area. The area is fragmented by the bisecting freeways, disconnected arterial streets; the Oso Creek flood control channel, a major electrical transmission corridor, and the rail line. Other factors affecting development in the area include the lack of a cohesive development pattern and identity for the areas as well as physical constraints related to parcel sizes and configuration, as further discussed below. Each of these factors is a constraint in and of itself, and the combination of these factors in the Specific Plan area require innovative approaches and features to minimize the effect of the fragmentation and enhance connectivity.

- **Physical fragmentation.** The area is split into three separate north/south corridors (Camino Capistrano, Forbes Road, and Cabot Road) with limited access between each corridor. These corridors are separated by the railroad tracks, Oso Creek drainage channel, and topographical change.

- **Accessibility and Wayfinding.** Access to the Gateway area and to all properties is limited by the lack of connectivity between the major streets that serve the area. Crown Valley Parkway is the primary access to the area, but it does not provide direct access to all properties in the area. Secondary access is provided by Avery Parkway, which also does not provide direct access to all properties in the Specific Plan area. Minor roadways such as Cabot Road and Paseo de Colinas provide secondary access to the area, but also do not provide direct access to all properties in the area. These accessibility issues are compounded by the lack of directional signage to facilitate wayfinding within the Specific Plan area.
- **Traffic volumes.** Existing traffic volumes contribute to congestion on Crown Valley Parkway and act as a barrier that limits the connection between the properties north and south of this corridor.
- **Auto-dominant land use and development pattern.** Land uses in the Specific Plan area are predominantly auto-oriented, with little to no accommodation or amenities for pedestrians or cyclists.
- **Fragmented Land Ownership.** Land ownership is highly fragmented, with small parcel sizes, often held by trusts. This factor, combined with strong rental income from existing uses, makes it difficult for developers to assemble suitable sites for new uses.
- **Lot sizes and configuration.** Numerous lots within the Specific Plan area are too narrow and/or shallow to adequately accommodate identified market capture opportunities for new development, particularly with larger retail, office, or business park uses. Because many of the lots along Forbes Road are small and/or shallow in dept, the Specific Plan encourages lot consolidation, and provides incentives for doing so, to support larger buildings and more intensive land uses such as residential mixed-use developments, and retail/entertainment centers.
- **Lack of economic investment.** The Specific Plan area has not achieved the development scale and uses envisioned by the 1999 Specific Plan. Floor Area Ratios up to 1.0 and buildings heights up to 80 feet were permitted in that Specific Plan, but the majority of existing development ranges between one and two stories. There is a decrease in building quality along Camino Capistrano, as the distance from Avery Parkway increases, due in part to lack of visibility and access which affects economic vitality.

Also, there is a lack of tools/incentives to encourage revitalization of existing land uses which are viable, but not thriving.

- **Lack of design character and quality.** Currently there are few building types within the Specific Plan area that would qualify as having a unified architectural style or thematic design that relates to the site and area characteristics. Most of the buildings that existed when the 1999 Specific Plan was adopted still exist today, and are generally characterized as concrete tilt-up and stucco-clad buildings with few decorative façade treatments.
- **Lack of “image” or “iconic” element.** The Specific Plan area lacks an identifiable image or unique iconic element such as could be achieved with a pedestrian bridge over Crown Valley Parkway, visually and physically connecting north and south Forbes Road.
- **Lack of a unifying landscape treatment.** The Specific Plan area lacks unified landscaping treatments at the following locations:
 - > Along Crown Valley Parkway
 - > At the Crown Valley Parkway/I-5 intersection
 - > Crown Valley Parkway/Cabot Road intersection
 - > Crown Valley Parkway/Forbes Road intersection
 - > Along Camino Capistrano
- **Lack of Useable Open Space.** The Specific Plan area lacks usable open space for recreational purposes. Such amenities are critical to attract users for leisure activities and to act as a community gathering space.