

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREFACE

The *Hecker Pass Specific Plan* is the result of a nearly three-year effort by community members, property owners and City officials to create a plan that will provide the framework for future growth and development within approximately 423 acres at the western gateway to the City of Gilroy, commonly referred to as the "Hecker Pass Area". The *Specific Plan* provides a comprehensive land use program for the Hecker Pass Special Use District of the *City of Gilroy General Plan*. For the purposes of this document, the Hecker Pass Special Use District will be referred to as the "Specific Plan Area". The *Specific Plan* also provides goals, policies and development standards to guide the future decision-making processes for the Specific Plan Area's development as well as the conservation of natural resources and preservation of open space. In addition, the *Specific Plan* includes detailed information on infrastructure improvements and a strategy for ensuring the *Specific Plan*'s implementation.

1.2 DESIGN THEMES

The *Hecker Pass Specific Plan* reaches far beyond a land use policy document. The *Specific Plan* establishes design themes that have been woven into the fabric of the land use policies and design standards. The basic design themes include:

1. Environment
2. History
3. Agriculture
4. Livable Communities

Hecker Pass contains some of the City's most valuable environmental resources within the Uvas Creek corridor and the hillsides north of Highway 152. The environmental design theme may be implemented through trails, kiosks, monuments, and restoration and enhancement projects. Hecker Pass also played an important role in the City's history and remnants of this rich history still exist in the area today. The historic design theme may be implemented through historic walks, cultural resource preservation, historic education programs or the development of a historic center. Agriculture has historically been and continues to be the predominant use in the area and provides the scenic



landscape and historical setting for this special area. Agricultural themes can be implemented through working farms, a viticulture center, farmer's markets and other agriculture related activities and uses. Finally, "Liveable Community" principles are utilized throughout the *Specific Plan* to encourage the compact land use patterns that ensure a mix of uses, minimize the impact of the automobile, and promote walking, bicycling, and transit access in order to protect the environment and increase quality of life, neighborhoods, and communities. Together, these themes combine to preserve the Hecker Pass Area as "The Jewel of Gilroy". These design themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 7: Community Design.

1.3 LEGAL CONTEXT

1.3.1 AUTHORITY TO PREPARE

A "specific plan" is a planning and regulatory tool made available to local governments by the State of California. By law, specific plans are intended to implement a city's general plan through the development of policies, programs and regulations that provide an intermediate level of detail between the general plan and individual development projects. State law stipulates that specific plans can only be adopted or amended if they are consistent with the city's adopted general plan.

The authority to prepare and adopt specific plans and the requirements for its contents are set forth in California Government Code Sections 65450 through 65457. The law requires that the specific plan include text and diagrams specifying:

- The distribution, location and intensity of land uses and open space within the plan area;
- The distribution, location and capacity of infrastructure including transportation, water, storm drainage, sanitary sewer and other utilities;
- Design standards and criteria for development and use of natural resources; and
- An implementation program including regulations, financing strategies and capital improvements plans.

1.3.2 RELATIONSHIP TO THE GENERAL PLAN

Together, the *City of Gilroy General Plan* and the *Hecker Pass Specific Plan* provide a framework to guide the future land use and development decisions in the Specific Plan Area. The *General Plan* has established the following goals for the Hecker Pass Area (See *City of Gilroy General Plan* page 3-33):

- Protect the area's rural and agricultural character and scenic qualities, including its view corridors and natural features.
- Provide for an economically viable use of land for property owners.
- Capitalize on the area's unique potential as a year-round tourist draw.
- Ensure that the design of new developments respects and reflects the rural character of the area.

- Pursue designation of Hecker Pass Highway (State Route 152) as a State Scenic Highway, and establish roadside development controls to protect its scenic qualities.
- Extend the Uvas Creek Park Preserve and trail to serve as part of the regional trail network and eventually connect with the Bay Ridge Regional Trail.

The *Specific Plan* is consistent with and serves as an extension of Gilroy's *General Plan* and can be used as both a policy and regulatory document. When private development proposals for the Specific Plan Area are brought before the City, the planning staff will use the *Specific Plan* as a guide for project review. Proposed projects will be evaluated for consistency with the intent of the *Specific Plan*'s policies and for conformance with development standards and design guidelines. In situations where policies or standards relating to a particular subject have not been provided in the *Specific Plan*, the existing City policies and standards will continue to apply.

1.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the *Hecker Pass Specific Plan* is a project subject to evaluation of potential adverse impacts to the environment. The information obtained in a project's environmental review provides decision makers with the insight necessary to guide policy development, thereby ensuring that the *Specific Plan*'s policies will address and provide the means to avoid potential environmental impacts.

The Hecker Pass Special Use District originally was evaluated as a component of the master Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared as part of the City's adoption of the *General Plan* update in 2002. The *Specific Plan* provides much more detail than the *General Plan* regarding the nature and extent of development in the Hecker Pass Special Use District. Therefore, to evaluate potential environmental impacts arising from the more detailed *Specific Plan*, additional environmental review, in the form of a new EIR, was prepared concurrent with the *Specific Plan* and certified by the City Council on January 18, 2005.

The first phase of the *Specific Plan* includes construction of the South Valley Community Church and School Facilities. To accommodate construction after *Specific Plan* approval, the new EIR provides a project level analysis of the proposed church and school. All other phases of the *Specific Plan* were analyzed at a program level. As specific development projects are proposed within the Hecker Pass Specific Plan Area, the City will evaluate what additional environmental review is required under CEQA in addition to the *Specific Plan EIR* to fully evaluate all details of the proposed construction. The exact document and process required will depend on the nature of the project and circumstances at the time. For additional information relating to the environmental analysis of the *Specific Plan*, refer to the *Hecker Pass Specific Plan/South Valley Community Church Draft Environmental Impact Report* and *Hecker Pass Specific Plan/South Valley Community Church Final Environmental Impact Report*, dated May 24, 2004 and August 2004 respectively, prepared by EMC Planning Group, Inc.

Although the *EIR* and the *Specific Plan* are separate documents, it is important to note that the environmental review process has been an integral component of the planning process to ensure the *Specific Plan*'s sensitivity to critical environmental concerns. Notwithstanding that the *EIR* considers the church/school project in more detail, the *Specific Plan* was reviewed as a single



overall project consisting of several distinct areas with different property owners that are anticipated to be developed over an extended period of time. This approach enables the City to comprehensively evaluate the cumulative impacts of the *Specific Plan* and consider broad policy alternatives and area-wide mitigation measures prior to adoption of the *Specific Plan*.

1.4 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The *Hecker Pass Specific Plan* is the mechanism designated by the *City of Gilroy General Plan* for implementing the goals and policies for the Hecker Pass Area. While the *General Plan* provides guidance for establishing specific zoning and development controls, the City's Zoning Ordinance does not include zoning districts that allow for the clustered residential and agri-tourist uses envisioned for this unique area. Additionally, City standards do not provide for the rural road design guidelines shown in the *Specific Plan*. The intent of this *Specific Plan* is to establish use controls, density limits, and development standards and guidelines for uses that do not fall under existing zoning designations. The goals, policies, and standards of the *Specific Plan* will be implemented through Hecker Pass Special Use District\ Planned Unit Development (HPSUD\PUD) rezoning, tentative maps, and architectural and site approvals.

In order to preserve agricultural uses in the Specific Plan Area, the *Specific Plan* has created a special "Hecker Pass Agriculture (HPA)" land use designation which restricts uses to limited types of agriculture and other agricultural related ancillary uses (see Chapter 3 Land Use for detailed land use descriptions). By establishing permanent land use boundaries for agriculture and development clusters, the *Specific Plan* will preserve the rural agricultural character and scenic qualities of Hecker Pass.

The Land Use Diagram in Chapter 3 (Figure 1-3) shows the distribution and location of the various land use components that comprise the Specific Plan Area. Together with the development policies and design standards of the *Specific Plan*, the "Land Use Diagram" will implement the following design principles that form the foundation of the *Specific Plan*:

- Preservation of agricultural lands along the Hecker Pass Corridor;
- Buffering of future development both visually and physically from Hecker Pass Highway;
- Preservation of key view corridors, protection of environmentally sensitive habitats and the establishment of cohesive and interconnected open space areas;
- Establishment of a development pattern that is consistent with the rural agricultural setting of the Hecker Pass Area;
- Connection of all land uses through an extensive public trail system;
- Alignment and traffic calming design of the Third Street extension; and
- Creation of a financially feasible development plan that maximizes agricultural land and open space areas.

Through implementation of the Land Use Chapter and application of the Community Design guidelines within this document, the *Specific Plan* will ensure that the *City of Gilroy General Plan* goals for the Hecker Pass Special Use District will be achieved.