
III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. PROJECT LOCATION

The Canyon Hills project site includes approximately 887 acres of land and is located at 8000 West La Tuna Canyon Road in the City of Los Angeles. The project site is located entirely within the Verdugo Mountains in the northeastern San Fernando Valley. The Verdugo Mountains are geographically defined by the San Fernando Valley to the west, the Los Angeles Basin to the south, the San Gabriel Valley to the east, and the communities of Sunland and Tujunga to the north (see Figure II-1 in Section II (Environmental Setting)).

B. PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

The proposed Canyon Hills project consists of the development of 280 single-family homes on subdivided residential lots, an equestrian park and approximately 693 acres of open space. Site development consists of (1) grading for building pad sites, access and other necessary improvements, (2) the construction of homes, storm drainage facilities and access improvements, (3) the installation of utilities (e.g., water lines, fire hydrants, and sewers), and (4) the landscaping of common areas. The Site Plan and Site Plan Detail for the proposed project are illustrated in Figures III-1 and III-2, respectively.

The proposed 280 single-family homes would be clustered on approximately 194 acres of the 887-acre project site. Approximately 211 homes would be constructed on approximately 142 acres of land on the portion of the project site located north of Interstate 210 (“Development Area A”). The remaining 69 homes would be constructed on approximately 52 acres of land on the portion of the project site located south of Interstate 210 (“Development Area B”).¹ Table III-1 summarizes the number of residential lots and building pad sizes proposed in Development Areas A and B. Approximately 693 acres (78 percent) of the project site, including a large swath of land west of the two Development Areas, would be permanently preserved as open space.

¹ *The Development Areas include the area covered by roads and spanned by bridges, the entire area of residential lots, whether graded or not graded, the areas where the proposed community recreational facilities, water tanks and/or other above-ground infrastructure would be located, and a 50-foot wide area around the perimeter of the lots where there is no road or adjacent lot.*

Figure III-1, Site Plan

Figure III-2, Site Plan Detail

**Table III-1
Residential Lots and Pads
Canyon Hills Project**

Building Pad Size	Lots		
	Development Area A	Development Area B	Subtotal
Custom	33	7	40
90 x 115 feet	67	62	129
80 x 115 feet	69	0	69
70 x 115 feet	42	0	42
Total	211	69	280

Construction of the proposed project is estimated to begin in 2004, with completion in 2009. However, actual completion of the proposed project is dependent upon local economic conditions.

The proposed homes would average approximately 4,000 square feet in size, on lots ranging between approximately 9,000 and 39,000 square feet. The 211 homes (including 33 custom homes) proposed in Development Area A and the 69 homes (including seven custom lots) proposed in Development Area B would include a variety of lot sizes and an eclectic mix of architectural styles.

As shown on Table III-1, the 40 custom lots would be located throughout the project site. These custom lots would be constructed on mostly downhill sloping terrain (with a few on uphill sloping terrain). The architecture, building forms and foundations of the proposed homes on the custom lots would be more varied than the proposed homes on the other lots.

The proposed project would also include an equestrian park on approximately three acres of land adjacent to La Tuna Canyon Road in the southwestern portion of the project site, which would be available for public use. It is anticipated that the City's Department of Recreation and Parks or a nonprofit organization would operate the equestrian park. It is likely that the proposed equestrian park would include a staging area for horses, an equestrian arena, a parking area for approximately two cars with trailers and potable water facilities.

Additional open space (as discussed below) and recreational facilities would be provided throughout the project site, which would be owned and maintained by the local homeowners association(s). The proposed private recreational facilities, which would be available for local residents, include tot lots, active play areas, passive open space areas, a vista point with picnic area and gazebo, and a pool with a jacuzzi, restroom building and barbeque area.

All proposed development would be located on the portion of the project site within the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan area. However, approximately 61 percent of the land in this portion of the project site would be preserved as open space. The entire portion of the project site located in the Sun Valley Community Plan area (approximately 250 acres) would be permanently preserved as open space.

The proposed Community Plan designations for the project site are shown on Figure IV.G-6 (see Section IV.G (Land Use)) and summarized in Table III-2, below. The proposed Community Plan designation for the Development Areas is Low Residential, which is consistent with the clustering permitted in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan. In addition, the Community Plan designation for the approximately 80 acres that is currently designated as Very Low I Residential or Very Low II Residential in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan, but is not located with the proposed Development Areas, would be re-designated to Minimum Residential. The other Community Plan designations would remain unchanged.

**Table III-2
Proposed Community Plan Designations
Canyon Hills Project**

Plan Designation	Number of Acres
Minimum Residential	650
Low Residential	237
Total	887

The proposed zoning designations for the project are shown on Figure IV.G-7 (see Section IV.G (Land Use)) and summarized below in Table III-3, below. Approximately 147 acres (16.6 percent) in the Development Areas would be located in the RE9-1-H zone (Residential Estate, Height District 1, Hillside Area) and approximately 90 acres (10.1 percent) in the Development Areas would be located in the RE11-1-H zone (Residential Estate, Height District 1, Hillside Area). The existing A1 zoning designation for the proposed equestrian park along La Tuna Canyon Road would remain unchanged. The other existing A1 and A1-K zoning designations would also remain unchanged.

**Table III-3
Proposed Zoning Designations
Canyon Hills Project**

Zone	Acres
A1 Agricultural	626
A1-K Equestrian	24
RE9-1-H Estate (9,000 square feet)	147
RE11-1-H Estate (11,000 square feet)	90
Total	887

Access Improvements

Vehicular access to and from the project site would be provided from La Tuna Canyon Road. Development Areas A and B would have separate and independent site access and internal circulation schemes.

Development Area A would be accessed by a proposed roadway that connects to La Tuna Canyon Road at its intersection with Interstate 210. The new roadway would parallel Interstate 210 from the La Tuna Canyon Road off-ramp westward approximately one-half mile to the proposed homes and associated internal roadways. Emergency (only) access to and from Development Area A would be provided via this proposed roadway and the existing Verdugo Crestline Drive or Inspiration Way. The emergency access that would be provided by either Verdugo Crestline Drive or Inspiration Way would connect to Hillhaven Avenue and Alene Drive (both publicly dedicated local streets), which in turn connect with Foothill Boulevard. The proposed project would include only one of these two options for emergency access (i.e., Verdugo Crestline Drive or Inspiration Way), as determined by the City. Inspiration Way is the preferred option for emergency access to and from Development Area A.

Development Area B would be served by two access points, each with a traffic control signal, along La Tuna Canyon Road, one approximately one mile west of the Interstate 210/La Tuna Canyon Road off-ramp and the second approximately 0.2 miles further west. Full left-turn and right-turn ingress and egress movement from La Tuna Canyon Road are proposed at these signalized intersections. Two bridges, one for each Development Area B access point, would span La Tuna Canyon Wash that would separate the proposed homes from La Tuna Canyon Road. Further west on La Tuna Canyon Road, a separate driveway would be provided for the proposed equestrian park.

Circulation within each Development Area would be provided by internal two-way roadways. The internal roadways would be privately owned by the homeowner association(s) and maintained with gate-controlled entries. The project site would not be fenced, although security walls would be installed in association with the gated entrances to restrict unauthorized entry. Also, individual homeowners may choose to use fencing or walls to enclose their yards or properties. There would be no roadway connections between Development Areas A and B.

Grading and Construction

Site preparation for the proposed project would involve conventional cut and fill grading techniques. Site grading would be required to prepare the proposed single-family residential lots for construction. Grading would also be required in order to construct the proposed private roads, driveways and drainage improvements, and install utilities. The combined grading operations for the entire project site would affect a total area of approximately 240.23 acres, and would involve a total earthwork quantity of approximately 4.6 million cubic yards (plus 20 percent for remedial grading). Grading would be

balanced within each Development Area and for the overall project site. Therefore, no off-site export or import of fill material is expected.

As currently proposed, Development Areas A and B would be graded and constructed independently. A construction-phasing schedule has not been developed at this time, since the timing is a function of demand in the marketplace at the time of construction. However, for planning purposes, the following discussion represents current scheduling expectations for grading and construction. It is anticipated that construction of the proposed project would last approximately 60 months (beginning in 2004 and completing in 2009). This 60-month construction period would be divided into three major phases: (1) grading, (2) foundation preparation/road building and (3) home building. Grading is further divided into four sub-phases within each Development Area. The first sub-phase of grading would require the use of Cat 657 twin-diesels, off-highway trucks, Cat loaders, D-8/9/10s and water trucks. The second sub-phase of grading is expected to consist of operation of rubber-tired dozers. After the dozers, a blade vehicle would be used in Development Area A, comprising the third sub-phase of grading. The fourth and final sub-phase of grading is expected to consist of finish tractor operation.

Grading relating to Development Area A would affect approximately 175.5 acres (or 36 percent of the project site north of Interstate 210). This grading operation would be balanced, and would involve the movement of approximately 3.4 million cubic yards of earth (plus 20 percent remedial grading). It is anticipated that grading relating to Development Area A would be completed within 19 months. The duration of the first sub-phase would be approximately seven months. Approximately 16,072 cubic yards per lot would be graded with respect to Development Area A. The construction equipment staging area and construction employee parking for Development Area A would be located off of La Tuna Canyon Road near the Interstate 210 interchange during the initial phases of construction grading. After the start of construction grading, the equipment staging and construction employee parking for Development Area A would be moved onsite as space allows.

Grading relating to Development Area B would consist of a balanced cut and fill grading operation in which approximately 1.21 million cubic yards of earth would be moved (plus 20 percent remedial grading). With respect to Development Area B, an area of approximately 64.7 acres (or 16 percent of the portion of the project site south of Interstate 210) would be affected by grading. It is anticipated that the grading with respect to Development Area B would be completed in approximately nine months. The duration of first sub-phase would be approximately five months. The average volume of earth moved per lot would be approximately 17,526 cubic yards. Development Area B grading would be completed in a single phase, and would take up to nine months to complete. The equipment staging area and construction employee parking for Development Area B would be located onsite off of La Tuna Canyon Road near the easterly proposed Development Area B access point (west of the Interstate 210 interchange with La Tuna Canyon Road) during the initial phases of construction grading. After

the start of construction grading, the equipment staging and construction employee parking for Development Area B would be moved further onsite as space allows.

Open Space

As shown on Figure III-1, the proposed project includes the permanent preservation of 693 acres of open space (approximately 78 percent of the project site). The open space includes both “modified open space” and “natural open space.”

Approximately 582 acres of the approximately 693 acres of the preserved open space on the project site would consist of natural open space. Natural open space would include approximately 559 acres of the project site that would not be graded or subject to fuel modification in connection with the proposed development, together with approximately 23 acres of the project site that would be subject to remedial grading in connection with project development, but would subsequently be revegetated with native plantings that could mature without irrigation. Incidental public improvements and planting enhancements may occur within natural open space areas, including passive recreational areas, hiking and equestrian trails, public utilities, and native vegetation and tree plantings where the landscape is sustainable without irrigation or fuel modification.

Approximately 111 acres of the 693 acres of the preserved open space on the project site would consist of modified open space. Modified open space would include ungraded areas that would be subject to fuel modification and areas that would be graded but remain open space. The fuel modification zone for the proposed project includes approximately 167 acres, of which approximately 94 acres would be ungraded and approximately 73 acres would be graded. All fuel modification areas, whether graded or ungraded, are included as modified open space because they are subject to ongoing brush clearance and the thinning or removal of certain volatile native plants would reduce the volume of dry or combustible plant material (i.e., fuel) that otherwise poses a wildland fire hazard. It should be noted, however, that with respect to approximately 47 ungraded acres in the fuel modification zone that would be subject to brush thinning, the biological impact of such brush thinning would effectively be limited to 50 percent of that land (see Section IV.D (Biological Resources)). Modified open space includes public and private parks, including the equestrian park, detention/retention basins, landscaped areas above underground water and drainage infrastructure, parkways and other streetscape landscaped areas, areas of irrigated native revegetation, including oak tree and sycamore tree planting areas.

To ensure protection of the natural open space, it would be donated or dedicated to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or another qualified entity to further conservation efforts within the Verdugo Mountains. The modified open space areas would be owned and maintained by the homeowner association(s).

Views/Scenic Qualities

The proposed project has been designed to minimize visual intrusion into the area's scenic resources. This has been achieved by clustering residential development in the two Development Areas to maximize open space and retain large hillside areas. The proposed residential lots have been located in a manner that would prevent future homes from obstructing views of the "Prominent Ridgelines" designated in the Draft Specific Plan, as seen from Interstate 210 and La Tuna Canyon Road. Furthermore, open space throughout the internal residential street network would be maximized. Section IV.N (Aesthetics) provides a full presentation of the impact of the proposed project on existing views.

C. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The applicant's objectives for the proposed Canyon Hills project are:

- To provide a substantial amount of high-quality housing for local and area residents to meet existing and future needs of those desiring to live in the northeast San Fernando Valley and to help alleviate the substantial housing shortage in the City.
- To provide greater regional housing opportunities for homebuyers and assist in satisfying the housing needs for the region.
- To invigorate the local economy by providing employment and business opportunities associated with the construction, use, and occupancy of the proposed project.
- To permanently preserve over 75 percent of the project site as open space.
- To provide ample equestrian and other recreational amenities, as well as significant passive open space and landscaping areas.
- To establish a low-density residential community that avoids the crowded appearance of a typical subdivision.
- To provide a peaceful, attractive residential development within the context of the surrounding man-made and natural environment, and separate and shield the development to maximize environmental and land use compatibility with surrounding uses.
- To locate the residential development in proximity to existing infrastructure and services where possible.
- To provide safe, efficient and aesthetically attractive streets in the residential development with convenient connections to adjoining arterials and freeways, while minimizing traffic impacts on existing residential neighborhoods.

- To minimize impacts to important natural landforms and significant natural resources.
- To develop a residential project on the project site that is financially viable and thereby permits (1) the donation or dedication of all of the project site located outside the Development Areas to an appropriate public agency or nonprofit entity and (2) the development of public and private equestrian and other recreational amenities on the project site.

D. DISCRETIONARY/MINISTERIAL ACTIONS AND APPROVALS

The applicant seeks approval of the following entitlements from the City of Los Angeles:

- Major Plan Review.
- General Plan Amendment to change the land use designation in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan on a portion of the project site from Minimum Residential, Very Low I Residential, Very Low II Residential and Open Space to Minimum Residential and Low Residential (see Figure III-6).
- Zone changes to change the zoning designations for portions of the project site from A1 (Agricultural) and RE11 (Residential Estate) to RE9-H (Residential Estate) and RE11-H (Residential Estate) (see Figure III-7).
- Vesting Tentative Tract Map(s).
- Conditional Use Permit for the equestrian park.
- Development Agreement.
- Oak Tree Removal/Relocation Permit.
- Haul Route Permit.
- B-Permit for necessary street, sewer, storm drain and lighting improvements.
- Grading Permits.
- Building Permits.
- Any other necessary discretionary or ministerial permits and approvals required for the construction or operation of the proposed project.

In addition, the applicant may also be seeking the following certifications, agreements, and/or permits from other governmental agencies:

- Section 401 Water Quality Certification(s) from the California Regional Water Quality Control Board.

- Section 1603 Streambed Alteration Agreement(s) from the California Department of Fish and Game.
- Section 404 Individual Permit(s) from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- Encroachment Permit from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

E. INTENDED USES OF THE EIR

This Draft EIR will be used by the City in determining whether to grant the permits and approvals described in the preceding Section. Subsequently, (1) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may use this Draft EIR when assessing the approval of a Section 404 Permit, (2) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may use this Draft EIR in conjunction with any required consultation under Section 9 of the Federal Endangered Species Act, and (3) the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region, may use this Draft EIR with regard to a Section 401 Water Quality Certification.