

## Section Six

### 6.0 OPEN SPACE

The purpose of this section is to summarize findings and recommendations of various recent documents and to clarify the current status of open space planning.

The City has been involved with the production of several recent documents establishing goals for open space and evaluating opportunities to maximize open space preservation. The City's Open Space Acquisition Plan (2002), the Open Space Acquisition Implementation Work Program (2008), the 2007 Community Strategic Plan, and the Open Space Preservation District Engineer's Report make clear the importance of open space in protecting visual, recreation, cultural and environmental resources in Santa Clarita. Additionally, the OVOV Vision and Guiding Principles document and the OVOV Technical Background Report emphasize the role of open space in the area.

The fact that property owners in the City voted overwhelmingly last year to support a new Open Space Preservation District and related assessment is a reflection of the community's interest in moving forward toward continued open space preservation. Moreover, results from the needs assessment process of this Master Plan (Section Three) indicate that open space preservation and enhancement continues to be of significant interest to Santa Clarita residents and community leaders.

It should be noted that, at the time of this Master Plan report, the City is developing an open space management plan that will provide a guide for the management, maintenance, and development of natural open space areas and natural open space parks. The open space management plan recognizes the importance of creating a park ranger system to help manage, use, and control the City's open space. This master plan recommends that the open space management plan looks at the feasibility of a park ranger system to help manage, use, and control the City's open space.

#### 6.1 Open Space Definition

This Master Plan brings together various discussions and definitions of open space, including the following:

*"Open Space is vacant, undeveloped land in its natural state as well as both active and passive park space." "...In order for park space to be considered open space the park needed to be of [significant] size." (Proposed Open Space Acquisition Implementation Work Program)*

*"[Regionally significant] parkland is open space."* (Open Space Acquisition Plan)

*"Vacant, undeveloped land in its natural state is open space."* (Open Space Acquisition Plan)

*"Landscaped areas within developments, paseos, and bike paths are not open space."* (Open Space Acquisition Plan)

*"This category refers to private or public lands that are essentially free of structures or roads and are maintained in an open, natural state."* (Regarding the Open Space land use designation, City of Santa Clarita Land Use Element)

For the purposes of this report, the broad definition of open space found in the General Plan's Land Use Element (L-53) is not used herein. That designation includes most publicly-owned land within the City, including fire stations, corporate yards, and other public facilities not generally perceived to be open space. Small parks or even landscaped portions of projects may be zoned or described as open space but for this report we are dealing with a concept of open space that relates to recreation, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and/or viewsheds – large scale open spaces having community-wide significance. A working definition for the purpose of this Section is:

***"Open Space" shall mean improved, unimproved, or natural land [of significant size or impact] where development activity is limited in an effort to preserve natural areas and protect sensitive habitat. Passive recreational opportunities may be encouraged in open space.***

## 6.2 Open Space Related Documents

### City of Santa Clarita General Plan - Open Space and Conservation Element

Each City in California is required by State law to adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for its own physical development. The General Plan includes mandatory elements including land use, circulation and transportation, housing, conservation, noise, safety, and open space. The current adopted version of the Open Space and Conservation Element was created in 1991 and amended in 1999. Findings include:

- Five (5) Significant Ecological Areas are designated in the Valley area: Santa Clara River, Santa Susana Mountains SEA, San Francisquito Canyon SEA, Lyon Canyon SEA, and Valley Oaks SEA.

## City of Santa Clarita Open Space Acquisition Plan

The Open Space Acquisition Plan was developed by the City in 2002, and serves as a tool to help maximize the preservation of open space. The document strives to:

- Assist in the creation of a greenbelt surrounding the City.
- Provide a framework for the City to evaluate, acquire, and maintain the most beneficial parcels.
- Allow the City to maximize the expenditure of funds by targeting parcels that present the greatest economic, strategic, and natural resource value.
- Create and enhance partnerships between the City and other agencies.
- Provide an objective, systematic format for evaluating property.
- Promote, protect, and preserve open space within the City to enhance overall quality of life.
- Enhance the City's ability to secure grant funding.

Findings include:

- The City will continue to receive significant dedications of open space from developments within the City and throughout the Santa Clarita Valley
- 600 acres of parkland are needed to meet the needs of the community (2002 estimate)
- In ranking the value of potential open space, open space outside the City should be given priority

## One Valley One Vision Valleywide General Plan

*One Valley One Vision* is a current joint effort between the County of Los Angeles, the City of Santa Clarita and Santa Clarita Valley residents and businesses to create a single vision and guidelines for the future growth of the Santa Clarita Valley and the preservation of natural resources. The result will be a General Plan document and Environmental Impact Report for a planning area that includes the City as well as other areas such as Stevenson Ranch, Castaic, Val Verde, Agua Dulce, and the future Newhall Ranch. The General Plan, in Phase IV of its development at the time of this report, will be based on Vision and Guiding Principles and on the Technical Background Report.

*Phase II Vision and Guiding Principles.* A vision statement and a set of 36 guiding principles were developed from extensive public feedback efforts early in the General Plan process.

*Phase III Technical Background Report.* Phase III of the General Plan effort established a database of existing Santa Clarita Valley features important in development of the land use map and associated policies. Open space findings include:

- More than 77% of the OVOV unincorporated area surrounding Santa Clarita is designated open space, mostly Angeles National Forest
- Designated open space within the City is approximately 7% of the total land area in the City
- Visual open space resources in the OVOV planning area include ridgelines, canyons, woodlands, scenic drives, rivers/streams/water bodies, and recreation areas
- Four State parks are located within the OVOV planning area and total approximately 12,950 acres
- Santa Clara River is a Significant Ecological Area and a designated State Recreation Trail Corridor
- The OVOV Technical Background Report identifies several historic sites within the Santa Clarita Valley, including: one listed on the National Register of Historic Places, eight listed as California Registered Historic Landmarks, and four as State Points of Historic Interest. Additionally, there are 69 identified archaeological sites within 1/4 mile of the Santa Clara River.

### **Open Space Preservation District**

The City's preservation district is designed to preserve natural land from development, create more parks, and protect biological and geological resources. The District will also assist in completing the greenbelt buffer of open space around the City of Santa Clarita. Established in 2007 by a vote of property owners, the District provides a mechanism to assess properties a fee for open space purposes. Aspects of the District include:

- The benefit area includes lands within a 3-mile radius of City boundaries.
- At least 90% of future open space purchased will be preserved for natural open space; no more than 10% can be used for active, improved parkland.
- The District is expected to generate an additional \$1.5 million annually for acquisition.
- The assessment is proposed to be in place for 30 years.

## **6.3 Open Space Goals and Objectives**

### **City of Santa Clarita General Plan - Park and Recreation Element (1991)**

Selected goals and policies include:

**Policy 1.6:** Use every opportunity to obtain land and facilities as it becomes available and/or ahead of need and hold, or landbank, for subsequent improvement to meet future park and recreation needs. Establish an open space district for the purpose of acquiring park and open space lands.

**Goal 4:** Aggressively pursue acquisition of future parkland

**Goal 5:** Utilize the Santa Clara River as a central recreational corridor and identify other significant natural features to be designated as open spaces, parks, and recreational opportunities.

## **City of Santa Clarita General Plan - Open Space and Conservation Element (1999)**

Selected goals and policies include:

**Goal 1:** To preserve the special natural features which define the Santa Clarita planning area and give it its distinct form and identity.

**Policy 1.5:** Investigate, develop, and prepare a long term plan to consolidate and acquire open space using one or more of the following options to maintain viable natural ecosystems in conjunction with the orderly development of the planning area: open space easements; dedication of development rights; joint powers authority; open space district; City ownership and management by the Parks and Recreation Department; Homeowners' Associations; and/or Landscape Maintenance Districts

**Policy 1.9:** Establish the Santa Clara River and its tributaries, when appropriate, as a major centralized open space corridor linking a variety of public recreation and open space uses

**Policy 1.14:** Encourage the preservation of the National Forest and open spaces surrounding the City through regular meetings with Los Angeles County Regional Planning Department, alliances with other cities and environmental groups and utilizing our congressional and state legislative delegations.

**Goal 2:** To preserve designated natural ridgelines in the planning area to maintain the aesthetic character of the Santa Clarita Valley.

**Policy 2.3:** Identify and incorporate the dominant and special scenic topographic features, landmarks, and other physical characteristics in each community as a component for developing a community image.

**Goal 3:** To protect significant ecological resources and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, sensitive flora and fauna habitat areas.

**Goal 4:** To preserve open space areas for recreational use as a natural buffer to more intensive land uses.

**Policy 4.4:** Encourage the cohesive development of trails and open space as a unified system, contiguous throughout the City and planning area with linkages to county, state, federal, and other parklands and trail systems.

**Policy 4.5:** Utilize the Santa Clara River as a focal point for development of an integrated system of bikeways, trails, parks, water features, and open space

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**Policy 4.10:** Support the acquisition and preservation of the Santa Clarita Woodlands State Park in the Santa Susana Mountains.

**Policy 4.16:** Seek park sites and open space areas having areas of natural scenic beauty which can be conserved and enjoyed by the public, as well as areas having recreational opportunities.

**Policy 4.18:** Maintain public access to open space areas, where appropriate.

### **Community Strategic Plan (2004-2007)**

Selected action plan items include:

**Page 14:** Acquire 1,000 acres of additional open space lands within the Santa Clarita Valley, including lands that will help complete the greenbelt around the City through developer acquisition or joint powers authorities.

**Page 14:** Place a high priority on increasing parkland/open space dedications when negotiating new development agreements.

**Page 14:** Develop a City of Santa Clarita Open Space Management Plan in consultation with Open Space partners such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy

**Page 14:** Bring Elsmere Canyon into public ownership

**Page 14:** [Continue] development and implementation of the Master Plan for Discovery Park, a 24-acre site located adjacent to and within the Santa Clara River.

**Page 15:** Implement the Open Space Acquisition Plan through identifying desirable open space property in the Santa Clarita Valley, making a list of parcels that have the highest priority to acquire and develop a plan to bring the lands into public ownership.

**Page 15:** [Continue] acquisition of the Santa Clara River Corridor

**Page 15:** [Continue] preservation of the Angeles National Forest

### **Open Space Acquisition Plan (2002)**

Selected goals and policies include:

**Page 3:** The natural buffer area surrounding the entire Santa Clarita Valley, which includes the Angeles National Forest, Santa Susanna, San Gabriel, Sierra Pelona, and Del Sur mountains, shall be preserved as a regional recreational, ecological, and aesthetic resource.

**Page 3:** The Santa Clara River corridor and its major tributaries shall be preserved as open space.

**Page 3:** The Santa Clarita Valley's prominent ridgelines shall be preserved and hillside development shall be limited to protect their valuable aesthetic and visual qualities intrinsic to the Santa Clarita Valley landscape.

**Page 3:** Development shall be located and designed to protect Oak, Sycamore, and other significant indigenous woodlands.

**Page 8:** New parklands will be developed throughout the Santa Clarita Valley, with priority on locations that are not now adequately served. These shall encompass a diversity of park types and functions, including passive and active areas, in consideration of the recreational needs of the residents to be served.

## **6.4 Existing Permanent Open Space**

Given the definitions of open space described above, we can begin to list and map existing permanent open space. Permanent open space is land that is either owned publicly as open space or has been zoned or otherwise designated as such.

Exhibit 6.4-1 lists existing parks by type and the corresponding parkland acreage that is applied toward the acreage standard calculation (5 acres per 1,000 residents; see also Section 3.5 Acreage Analysis) and also shows how much acreage is considered to be open space as defined in this section. The purpose of the exhibit is to provide a current benchmark for how much parkland and open space exists in the City and within the Open Space District. The exhibit is helpful because not all parkland is open space (as defined herein) and not all open space is parkland.

**Exhibit 6.4-1: Open Space Acreage**

	Santa Clarita Parkland Credit		Open Space*	
	Credit	Acres	Credit	Acres
<b>Parks within the City</b>				
Regional Parks	Yes	100	Yes	100
Community Parks	Yes	73.7	Yes	73.7
Neighborhood Parks	Yes	59.1	No	0
Natural Open Space Parks	No	0**	Yes	0
Special Use Parks	Yes	5.0**	No	0
<b>Parks outside the City but within the Open Space District</b>				
Regional Parks	No	0	Yes	unknown
Community Parks	No	0	Yes	unknown
Neighborhood Parks	No	0	No	0
Natural Open Space Parks	No	0	Yes	unknown
Special Use Parks	No	0	No	0
Other Open Space outside the City (natural with no recreation elements)	No	0	Yes	unknown
*Using the limited definition as used in this section of the Master Plan				
**Using the park type definition in Section 2.3				

## 6.5 Potential Permanent Open Space

Based on Section Five of this Master Plan and on other open space documents, we can list and map potential permanent open space that may become publicly owned or which may become zoned as such. The Exhibit shows that there are significant open space opportunities in and around Santa Clarita.

	Santa Clarita Parkland, if developed		Open Space	
	Credit	Acres	Credit	Acres
<b>Proposed Parks within the City</b>				
Regional Parks				
<i>Rivendale</i>	Yes	60	Yes	60
Community Parks				
<i>Soledad and Bouquet Open Space</i>	Yes	235	Yes	235
<i>Discovery Park</i>	Yes	10	Yes	24
<i>Norland Avenue</i>	Yes	58	Yes	58
<i>Round Mountain</i>	Yes	10	Yes	142
<i>Wiley Site</i>	Yes	7	Yes	14
Neighborhood Parks				
<i>Bridgeport Marketplace</i>	Yes	4.8	No	0
<i>Keystone Park</i>	Yes	6	No	0
<i>Mancara</i>	Yes	5	No	0
<i>River Village Park</i>	Yes	5	Yes	28.2

<i>South Fork Corridor</i>	Yes	10	Yes	106
Natural Open Space Parks				
<i>Quigley Canyon Park</i>	10%	16	Yes	158
<i>Lost Canyon</i>	10%	4	Yes	41
<i>Gate King Industrial Park</i>	10%	21	Yes	208
<i>Whitney Canyon</i>	10%	44	Yes	442
Special Use Parks				
<i>Chevron Pioneer</i>	Yes	4.6	Yes	4.6
Acquisition Targets				
<i>Beales Cut</i>	10%	6	Yes	60
<i>Bouquet Canyon School</i>	Yes	5	No	0
<i>Canyon Country Site</i>	Yes	3	No	0
<i>Quigley Canyon Expansion</i>	Yes	2	Yes	20
<i>Summerhill Lane Park</i>	Yes	3.5	No	0
<i>Via Princessa/MetroLink</i>	Yes	11	Yes	11
<i>Whitaker-Bermite Property</i>	10%	99	Yes	996
Other Open Space within the City (natural with no recreation elements)	No	0	Yes	unknown
Total, potential within the City		629.9		2607.8

If new open space is acquired under the provisions of the Open Space District, then the quantity of developed area is limited to 10% of the total.

Detailed descriptions of each potential/opportunity site can be found in Section 2.8.