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III. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This section contains a brief summary of the environmental setting for the proposed project. Detailed descriptions of the site's specific existing environmental characteristics are presented by subject area in **Section IV**. A discussion of related projects, that forms the background for cumulative impacts analyses, follows the overview in this section under the heading **B., Related Projects**.

A. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

1. Project Site and Surrounding Areas

As described in **Section II, Project Description**, of this Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), the 449±acre project site is part of the 870-acre Mountaingate Community. Mountaingate is situated south of Mulholland Drive, west of the Sepulveda Pass and east of Mandeville Canyon. The Sepulveda Pass links the San Fernando Valley and the Los Angeles basin and includes two major transportation routes, the I-405 (San Diego Freeway) and Sepulveda Boulevard. Due to its location and level of importance, the character and overall environmental setting of the Sepulveda Pass has been altered over the past 25 to 30 years to accommodate population growth and development of the Los Angeles area. For example, the master tract for the 870-acre Mountaingate Community was approved by the City Council in 1974 to allow up to 870 residential units. Since that time, nearly 300 units have been approved and/or built on approximately 165 acres. Other projects in the Sepulveda Pass include church and synagogue development and construction of the University of Judaism. In recent years, other residential projects have been built in the area, including the 286 residential unit subdivision of Bel Air Crest on the east side of the Sepulveda Pass, as well as other non-residential projects such as the Getty Center, Milken High School, and the Skirball Cultural Center.

Approximately 165 acres of the 870-acre Mountaingate Community are currently developed with residential units, while approximately 255 acres are presently devoted to passive and active open space uses. These uses include two golf courses and associated country club and vacant, undeveloped open space. The proposed project would dedicate 424± acres of permanent open space, and development would be limited to 25.4 acres of land that included both single-family homes as well as streets located immediately adjacent to the existing 165-acre residential development. North and northeast of the project site are the existing low density Mountaingate Community neighborhoods of the Crest, Promotory and Crown, and the Mountaingate Country Club South Golf Course. Undeveloped hillsides are found south, southeast and west of the project site.

The Canyonback and Stoney Hill Ridges are located within the project boundaries and have been partially graded. The City's Department of Water and Power (DWP) has partially graded the Canyonback Ridge within the project site boundaries to provide an access road to the on-site DWP water tank. The Stoney Hill Ridge has been modified with a dirt access road that leads south from the existing Mountaingate Crest and Promotory neighborhoods. This dirt access road connects to Mission Canyon 8 Landfill. The area in between these ridges, as well as the project site area west of the Mountaingate Crown neighborhood, is composed of undisturbed steep slopes and narrow canyons. South of the South Golf Course is Mission Canyon 8 landfill, which is part of the project site. Other modifications to the Canyonback Ridge top area include Edison Company roads and tower pads along the western perimeter of the site.

As previously discussed in **Section II, Project Description**, of this Draft EIR, local access to the project site is along the southern extensions of Canyonback Road and Stoney Hill Road. Regional access to the site vicinity is provided by the San Diego Freeway, located east of the site and running north-south in the project locale. The Ventura Freeway (US-101) also is located within the project vicinity, north of the site and running east-west in the San Fernando Valley. Another major access route is Sepulveda Boulevard, which is a major north-south roadway. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has established an extensive grid system of bus routes throughout the San Fernando Valley, West Los Angeles and other areas of the Los Angeles basin. While these routes typically provide little service in the hillside areas around Los Angeles, there is one bus line that provides service near the project vicinity, which is bus Line 560. This bus line provides service between Lakeview Terrace, at the north end of the San Fernando Valley, and Los Angeles International Airport to the south.

2. Plans and Policies

Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District Plan and Zoning

Mountaingate is located within the Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District Plan area of the City of Los Angeles. In accordance with this plan, the 449±acre project site is designated for residential, public facilities and open space land uses. The majority of the residential lot area (i.e., proposed development area) of the project site is designated as Minimum Density Residential (0.5 to 1 dwelling unit per net acre). Corresponding zones for this land use designation include Residential Estate with a minimum lot area of 40,000 square feet (RE-40-1-H), Agriculture (A1/A2), and Open Space (OS).¹

¹ Brentwood-Pacific Palisades Community Plan, *General Plan Land Use Map*, City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, June 17, 1998.

The portions of the project site zoned for agricultural uses ([Q] A1-1) are designated as open space on the District Plan. Land immediately west of the site is vacant and would remain as such under the proposed project plan. Land located east of the site is occupied by the Mountaingate Community Golf course; land located south of the site is vacant with a Metropolitan Water District (MWD) easement, while the Getty Center is situated to the south. For a more detailed discussion regarding community plan goals, objectives and policies, please refer to **Section IV.H, Land Use**.

The Citywide General Plan Framework

The City's General Plan Framework Element (GPFWE) establishes a vision for the long-term development and physical form and character of Los Angeles. It defines citywide policies that will be implemented through subsequent amendments of the City's community plans, zoning ordinances, and other pertinent programs. The GPFWE establishes development policy at a citywide level and within a citywide context, so that both the benefits and challenges of growth are shared.

The GPFWE is population growth neutral, in that it is not the intent of the GPFWE to cause any specific level of population growth to occur. It is a plan to accommodate whatever growth does occur in the future, which could include loss of population. The year 2010 is used as the planning "horizon" to facilitate comparability with regional growth forecasts of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). SCAG is a regional planning agency and serves as a forum for regional issues relating to transportation, the economy, community development, and the environment. The SCAG population and household forecasts for the City of Los Angeles for the year 2010 are used in the GPFWE. Employment forecasts have been adjusted to maintain the existing jobs-housing ratio, which is considered important in maintaining the City's fiscal stability. The estimates are not intended to represent maximum or minimum levels of development to be permitted. Rather, they will be monitored annually by City staff as a basis for the implementation of infrastructure and services to support growth.

According to growth projections in the GPFWE, the theoretical capacities of the existing *General Plan* (e.g., Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District Plan) are adequate to accommodate growth to the year 2010. At the same time, the GPFWE acknowledges that the impact assessments of the current *General Plan* indicate that if all lands were to be developed with the uses at the maximum densities permitted, an unrealistic jobs/housing relationship would result and supporting infrastructure and public services

would be unable to support this level of growth.² The existing *General Plan*'s housing capacity is more constrained than commercial and industrial uses.

A complete description of the environmental setting of the project site is included in the setting subsections of each impact area addressed under **Section IV** of this Draft EIR.

B. RELATED PROJECTS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that all Environmental Impact Reports consider the environmental impacts of a project, along with the impacts from other projects in the vicinity. CEQA refers to these impacts as cumulative impacts, which is defined as the "effects of two or more individual effects that, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts".³ Cumulative impacts result from the combined effects of a proposed project with other projects, and the general growth that will occur over time within the same area. Implementation of Vesting Tentative Tract No. 53072 would not only affect the physical environment within the project site, but would also contribute to cumulative effects with other development projects and growth in the immediate area. The CEQA *Guidelines* state that an adequate assessment of cumulative impacts must include either a summary of the projections used to evaluate area-wide conditions, or a list of other known development projects in the area.

In order to provide an assessment of potential cumulative impacts, a list was reviewed of current construction projects and development proposals within a one mile radius of the proposed project which have been approved, are pending approval, or are proposed and on file with the City. Listings obtained from the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation indicated that there is one active development project within the one-mile project study radius area. This project is the 286 single-family home development located east of Sepulveda Boulevard on Bel Air Crest Road. The location of this project is presented in **Figure III-1**. The Traffic Report prepared for the proposed project indicated that as of November 2000, there were approximately 35 homes remaining to be constructed and/or occupied within this development. This project is continuing to develop estate-style homes similar to those of the proposed project.

² City of Los Angeles *General Plan*, The Citywide General Plan Framework, p. 2-1, Los Angeles City Planning Department, December 1996.

³ California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) *Guidelines*, Section 15355, January 2001, p.187.

**Figure III-1
Location of Related Projects**

III. General Description of Environmental Setting

A number of other development projects are currently planned, pending, or approved outside of the one mile radius but within the general site vicinity. These include several projects in the Westwood area that represent 21,800 square feet of retail, 35,000 square feet of office, 13,000 square feet of restaurant and fast food uses, along with 186 condominiums. In addition, a number of projects are proposed west of I-405 along Barrington Avenue near the Veterans Administration Complex. Uses in this area include 226 condominium units, 25,699 square feet of retail space, 13,544 square feet of restaurant, and 13,000 square feet of office related use. All of these projects along with others located outside of the one mile radius are accounted for in a two percent ambient growth factor that is used for considering future conditions without the proposed project in **Section IV.N, Transportation and Circulation**, of this EIR.