



Crest-Dehesa-Harbison Canyon-Granite Hills Community Plan

County of San Diego General Plan

**Working Draft
March 2002**

This document is for review by the Crest-Dehesa-Harbison Canyon-Granite Hills community as part of the community plan update segment of the General Plan 2020 update. The format or any edits suggested by this document are draft and open for public comment and have not been formalized by either the Crest-Dehesa-Harbison Canyon-Granite Hills Community Planning Group or the County of San Diego Department of Planning and Land Use. Any questions or comments should be forwarded to Neal LaMontagne at (858) 694-3710, nlamonpl@co.san-diego.ca.us, or 5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B, San Diego, CA 92123.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The term "goal" as used herein refers to aims and purposes which are general and timeless and do not readily lend themselves to measurement.

The term "policy" as used herein refers to those principles which guide the allocation of County resources toward prescribed outcomes consistent with the goals.

The goals and policies which follow reflect a thoughtful analysis by the Ramona Community Planning Organization. They are a statement by the citizens and the Board of Supervisors as to the kind of total living environment that should be achieved.

It is recognized that legal and economic limitations may hinder the complete attainment of these goals. The fact that the goals may not be completely achieved should in no way hinder every effort to achieve them to the greatest extent possible.

There are 12 elements of the General Plan. They are Regional Land Use, Housing, Circulation, Safety, Seismic Safety, Scenic Highways, Open Space, Recreation, Noise, Conservation, Energy, and Public Facility. These subject areas provide the basic structure by which this Plan is organized.

Each chapter of the Plan represents a subject area which coincides with an adopted element of the General Plan. The purpose of addressing these elements within this Plan is to ensure that the goals and policies formulated by the community will be compatible with those found in the General Plan, or, if conflicts exist, they can be readily identified and reconciled. In addition, some policies found in the General Plan elements can be more relevant for one community than for others, and further elaboration or refinement may be appropriate in one case while in another the existing policies might be adequate.

The policies contained in this Community Plan should be regarded as applications of broad General Plan policies which have been designed to fit the specific or unique circumstances existing in the individual communities. Where the existing element adequately addresses an individual community's situation, the subject area may be omitted or a notation to reference the element may be included so that the adopted goals and policies relating to the subject area may be taken into account.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Crest/Granite Hills, Dehesa, Harbison Canyon Subregion is located in the southwest quadrant of San Diego County. The area consists of approximately 33 square miles including the communities of Crest, Granite Hills, Dehesa and Harbison Canyon. Included within the area, but autonomous, is the 640 acres Sycuan Indian Reservation.

The subregion is bordered by Lakeside to the north, Alpine to the east, Jamul to the south and El Cajon to the west. The area is geographically diverse, containing within its boundaries, steep mountains, massive rock formations, rolling hills, open valleys and deep canyons. The Sweetwater River system with its tributaries (North Fork, Sycuan Creek, Harbison Canyon Creek) as well as Forester Creek, which drains to the San Diego River, are all within the Plan Area. A variety of flora and fauna exists and archaeological formations, especially those relating to Indian settlements, abound.

Dehesa was originally homesteaded in the 1860s and became known for its extensive production of grapes, olives and fruits. The ridge-top community of Crest was developed as a planned cabin subdivision (Suncrest) in the 1920's. Harbison Canyon, located in the upper reaches of Dehesa Valley, was developed as a recreational subdivision in 1926. Granite Hills is almost built-out at semi-rural densities and it forms an effective transition between the estate and rural uses in the Subregion and the highly urbanized City of El Cajon.

CONTENTS

The Crest/Granite Hills, Dehesa, Harbison Canyon Subregional Plan consists of a text and the Land Use Map, the Recreational Element Map, the Circulation Element Map and the Resource Conservation Map. The plan is intended to guide development in keeping with the distinct physical, cultural and historical characteristics of the subregion. This plan was prepared by the members of the Crest/Granite Hills, Dehesa, Harbison Canyon Subregional Planning Group, together with interested citizens of the Subregion, and staff assistance from the County Department of Planning and Land Use.

This plan supplements all existing elements of the San Diego General Plan with emphasis on the specific planning of the subregion.

In order to ensure that the communities which emerge in the future are compatible with the natural strengths, beauty and variety of the subregion, it is imperative that the goals set and the policies adopted for the Subregion are implemented and enforced.

1.1 COMMUNITY CHARACTER

San Diego County has experienced a rapid rate of growth in rural unincorporated areas which has diminished the identity of these areas. There exists a need to preserve a rural form of lifestyle within San Diego County in spite of pressures to urbanize rural areas, particularly those within the urban fringe.

The Crest, Dehesa, Harbison Canyon and Granite Hills Subregion contains four separate communities that exhibit, to varying degrees, a physical, social and cultural environment which provides relief from the growth taking place, mainly in the City of El Cajon to the west but also to the north in the unincorporated community of Alpine.

Crest

Crest is a unique mountain-top community that overlooks the Dehesa Valley to the south, Lakeside to the north and El Cajon to the west. During the 1920's, the area of the current Country Town was planned and subdivided into resort-style developments.

The historic townsite of Crest is, today, an area of single-family homes built at densities typical of suburban areas. There are many constraints to development within the Country Town. There are no sewers, consequently, lots must be large enough to accommodate adequate septic systems. The topography isolates Crest from the urbanized areas to the north and west while giving the residents convenient access to urban amenities via La Cresta Road. Many of the residential streets in Crest are narrow and unpaved which is consistent with the rural character of the area.

The landscape within the Crest Country Town is varied with introduced species mixed in with the indigenous oak and coastal sage scrub. Many stands of eucalyptus trees, which have existed since the early days of the settlement, continue to thrive. Large groupings of granite rocks are another important element in the aesthetics of Crest.

The townsite of Crest contrasts with the area of estate development which spreads out to the north. Lot sizes of greater than two acres are the rule in this area with many large undeveloped but heavily constrained tracts of land to the south, east and west.

It is important that the historic townsite in Crest remain the focus of the community.

The steep slopes that surround the Crest Country Town are mostly exposed granite. Suncrest or Dehesa Mountain to the south, Ironside Mountain to the northeast and El Capitan, in the distance to the north, are highly significant scenic resources. Also, these massive granite formations are somewhat unstable and large boulders occasionally separate and roll down the slopes. Thus development, both on the slopes and at their base, can impact scenic resources and is potentially hazardous.

Certain types of small businesses are allowed in the A70 Limited Agriculture Use Regulation and it is important to the community that this feature be retained in the future zoning for the land located outside of the Crest Country Town.

Dehesa

The Dehesa Valley is a picturesque, pastoral, agricultural area located along the upper reaches of the North Fork of the Sweetwater River and along the lower portions of Harbison Canyon Creek. It was originally homesteaded in the 1860's and it eventually became known for production of grapes, olives and deciduous fruits. Today, Dehesa remains primarily agricultural/residential. Agriculture has all but disappeared from the Dehesa Valley today but its distinctive rural character still remains.

Mountains rising up on all sides of Dehesa help keep development contained and separated from the neighboring communities of Alpine, Crest, Harbison Canyon and Granite Hills.

The uses taking place on the Sycuan Indian Reservation which is located immediately southeast of the Dehesa Country Town generate considerable traffic along Dehesa Road. Continued expansion of these enterprises may foster more development on the reservation which could have an impact upon the availability of groundwater resources in Dehesa. Downstream, impacts to the water quality of the Sweetwater River could result if liquid waste disposal systems located on the Indian reservation are not carefully monitored.

Architecturally the Dehesa area is a diverse mixture of farm houses and estate-sized residences with no specific style predominating. Uniform, production-like housing would be inconsistent with the existing character of Dehesa.

Horseback riding is an important pastime in Dehesa and trails exist throughout the area. Since horse traffic is likely to be a popular recreation for some years to come, it is important to provide public trails for horses along existing Circulation Element roads.

Sloan Canyon is formed by the main channel of the Sweetwater River and it is located between Loveland Reservoir and where the river turns west to parallel Dehesa Road. The landscape is rugged and very scenic with steep slopes covered with oaks, chaparral and scenic rock outcroppings. With the exception of the portion of the channel that is currently being mined for construction quality sand, the canyon remains in its natural state.

Harbison Canyon

Harbison Canyon is a small community along an oak-lined mountain valley. First subdivided in the early 1900's, the intent was to provide a destination for those seeking some relief from the heat and pressures of the urbanizing areas of San Diego. The original lots were very small and offered little opportunity to

accommodate, what might be considered today, a full-sized single-family residence. Most of the initial development was comprised of small cottages or cabins in keeping with the concept of a weekend retreat.

Development progressed slowly and in most cases the small lots were combined into areas of between one-third and one-half acres to provide building sites that would meet Health Department requirements for septic systems. Over the years the lack of large scale development in Harbison Canyon has given the community a pleasingly eclectic appearance and the need to customize building sites creates a positive sense of closeness. In addition, the need to carefully pick building sites has resulted in the kind of residential development that fits in with the major physical elements of the community that have been identified as:

- vegetation and natural habitat that includes oak, pepper, pine, china berry, ceanothus and a wide variety of wildflowers;
- the creekbed with its lush, overgrown and natural appearance;
- the steep walls of the canyon with massive rock outcroppings; and
- the ridgetops above the canyon which, when silhouetted against a clear night sky, provide an important aesthetic resource.

The roads in Harbison Canyon are tree-lined country lanes. Some are not paved and many simply appear to end up as private driveways. Even Harbison Canyon Road, despite ever-increasing traffic, retains the same winding, tree-lined appearance.

Granite Hills

Granite Hills is located in the western portion of the Subregion. It is split into north and south sections by a finger of land that is within the jurisdiction of the City of El Cajon which penetrates in a west-to-east direction. The northern portion is primarily accessed via Greenfield Drive while the southern portion is accessed via Dehesa Road.

Development within the County's jurisdiction generally blends in well with the development within the city. One main difference is that sewer service is available to the residents within the city, and consequently, lot sizes can be smaller. While smaller lots do exist, especially in the northern section of Granite Hills, the prevailing lots size is about one acre. Another typical difference between city and County development is that streets within the city have curbs, gutters and, sometimes, sidewalks and the County does not. The absence of these types of street improvements enhances the semi-rural ambience of Granite Hills. In spite of being within the Sphere-of-Influence of the City of El Cajon, residents of the northern portion of Granite Hills have shown little interest in annexing.

While Granite Hills have been gradually changing from agriculture to residential uses some small scale agricultural operations remain. Horse ownership is common and there is a frequently used equestrian facility on Greenfield Drive.

The topography is gently rolling in character, gradually increasing in elevation to the east where it rises abruptly along a ridge covered in chaparral and granite rock outcroppings. The base of the ridge generally coincides with the boundary of the County's Current Urban Development Area. The predominant feature of the Granite Hills area is the semi-rural settlement pattern set against a background of chaparral covered granite ridges.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER VISION

DEVELOP LAND IN A MANNER THAT REINFORCES THE IDENTITY OF THE EXISTING COMMUNITIES OF CREST, DEHESA, HARBISON CANYON AND GRANITE HILLS, WHILE MAINTAINING EACH AREA'S RURAL, RUSTIC CHARACTER.

2 LAND USE

2.1 General

The population of the Subregion is expected to grow from approximately 9,355 in 2000 to some 10,700 persons by 2020, and there is need to provide sufficient land area and density to accommodate this projected growth within the Subregion.

The location and relationship of the Subregion to the Current Urban Development Area is such that one of the expressed goals of this plan is to retain the rural character of the Subregion.

The Crest/Dehesa/Harbison Canyon/Granite Hills Subregion has three primary focal points of land use activity. These are comprised of the three Country Towns of Crest, Dehesa, and Harbison Canyon. Granite Hills is an active, developed area but it lies at the eastern fringe of the City of El Cajon and as such relates more as a transition area between urbanized El Cajon and the rest of the more rural Subregion.

Crest and Harbison Canyon are both communities which retain fairly high residential densities despite the lack of essential services such as sewer. Both are surrounded by areas of conventional lower density estate development and large areas of vacant land much of which is constrained from development. Sewers are not expected nor desired in the Subregion, and, due to the regional scope of the sewage disposal problem in San Diego, it is highly unlikely that sewer will be available to the Subregion even in the long-term.

Granite Hills is mainly in the Current Urban Development Area (CUDA) Regional Category east of El Cajon. It is largely built-out with the area to the south being planned and developed at about a density of one dwelling unit per acre. The area to the north is at slightly higher overall density.

Generally, the topography and the nature of existing development within the Subregion offer an opportunity to retain the established communities as separate entities surrounded by areas of very low density development and open space. It is essential that the design of large-scale development be such that it will enhance rather than detract from the important role that these three communities play as focal points of land use activity within the Subregion.

GENERAL LAND USE GOAL

PROVIDE A LAND USE PATTERN CONSISTENT WITH THE SUBREGIONAL POPULATION FORECAST OF 15,300 PEOPLE BY THE YEAR 2010 WHILE PERPETUATING AND ENHANCING THE SUBREGION'S RURAL CHARACTER

POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Retain the Current Urban Development Area boundary line in its present configuration.

2. Permit urban development only within the existing Current Urban Development Area and Country Towns.
3. Development proposed as part of a change to the (21) Specific Plan Area Land Use Designation should not have a density or intensity of use that is significantly higher than what can be achieved through the Land Use Designations that exist on the area proposed for change.

2.2 Residential

The most intensely settled portions of the Subregion are the Country Towns of Crest and Harbison Canyon; the Current Urban Development Area of Granite Hills and the Singing Hills Specific Plan Area. Also, the area north of the Crest Country Town is gradually developing at typical estate residential densities. Due to physical, environmental and service constraints, most of the Subregion remains largely undeveloped or in scattered low-intensity agricultural uses. Nonetheless, the scenic qualities of the Subregion combined with its proximity to urban areas make it desirable for residential uses.

SANDAG forecasts a 71.3 percent increase in the population from 1986 to the year 2010. Almost all of this will take place as the result of the development of single-family, estate-sized homes. Although this type of development is not likely to have a major impact on the natural or social environment, it is important that it takes place in a manner that will not detract from the Subregion's scenic resources.

Development within the Dehesa Country Town will be subject to the county Groundwater Policy until such time as imported water is available. The need to utilize groundwater is expected to result in lot sizes of about two acres or greater. Finally, some of the granite slopes within the Subregion are unstable and may be hazardous to structures below.

Clustering

Clustering may be appropriate in the Crest/Dehesa/Harbison Canyon/ Granite Hills Subregion because of the generally rugged terrain and other environmental constraints.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE GOAL

ENHANCE THE PRESENT LIVING ENVIRONMENT WHILE ACCOMMODATING GRADUAL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT HARMONIZES WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preserve the rural atmosphere of the community by blending roads into the natural terrain and minimizing the type of improvements normally associated with urban developments.
2. Residential development density within the Crest and Dehesa Country Towns and within the Current Urban Development Area of Granite Hills shall not exceed one dwelling unit per one, two or four acres.
3. Residential lots within the (1) Residential land use designation should not be less than one acre net; and should have imported water
4. New residential development is expected to preserve open space areas such as steep slopes and canyons, floodplains, agricultural lands, ridgetops and unique scenic views in order to reinforce the rural character of the Subregion.
5. Preserve indigenous plant life and encourage the planting of drought resistant plants in residential developments.
6. New residential development shall provide buffer areas in order to separate residential uses from incompatible activities that may create heavy traffic, noise, lighting, odors, dust and unsightly views.
7. Restrict extensive or severe grading for development and preserve the natural terrain.