

SECTION 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The information in this section is provided pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (Section 15124) governing the identification of the proposed Project’s location, features, and project objectives at a level of detail sufficient to evaluate environmental impacts.

2.1 Project Location and Setting

The proposed Project lies on a 4.2-acre property and is located on Crown Valley Parkway at Playa Blanca in the City of Laguna Niguel (City) in Orange County, CA. Previously referenced Figure 1.1 shows the regional location and Project vicinity. The property is comprised of one lot, Assessor’s Parcel Number (APN) 656-321-02. Previously referenced Figures 1.A and 1.B show an aerial view of the Project location. The topography of the site is generally sloping downward from west to east. Elevations on-site range from approximately 450 feet above mean sea level (msl) at the westerly boundary to approximately 360 feet msl along the east boundary.

2.2 City of Laguna Niguel

The City was incorporated in 1989 as one of the first major planned communities in Southern California and covers approximately 14.72 square miles in the southwestern area of Orange County. The City is described as a “Sea Country” atmosphere because of its coastal orientation and its early development of planned communities. The Laguna Niguel General Plan (LNGP) preserves and enhances this unique identity by guiding land use and establishing goals and policies. The City consists of both residential and commercial development residing within an attractive suburban landscape and extensive open space with a variety of features such as parks, trails, landscaped slopes, and highways, and large open space parcels.

2.3 Project Site History

The Project site was originally graded and developed in 1979 as a 10-building townhome project with 41 condominiums. On March 19, 1998, a large landslide destroyed part of the former 41-unit condominium development on the site, as well as nine (9) single-family homes located above the site.

Following the landslide, the entire 41-unit condominium project was demolished to perform grading necessary to stabilize the former landslide. The landslide was repaired between 1998 and 2000 and involved installation of a caisson wall with tieback anchors, removal of the 10 condominium buildings and associated structures, partial removal of the landslide mass, installation of subdrains, and construction of a compacted fill buttress. The work included an application by the Niguel Summit Community Association to re-grade the hillside, re-compact and re-contour the slope and to construct a buttress at the base of the slope, and the associated site development permit was approved by the City in 1999. The repair work was overseen by the City

and a variety of consultants, including American Geotechnical, Inc. (American Geotechnical) representing the Niguel Summit Homeowners Association. American Geotechnical developed the plans for construction including refinements, calculations, detailing, structural analysis and the preparation of the repair plans and provided the field services during the construction of the stabilization measure for the landslide.

The City of Laguna Niguel was awarded \$5.6 million of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist in disaster recovery efforts by purchasing landslide damaged properties resulting from the 1998 El Niño winter storms. The HMGP funds are administered by the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (OES) in conjunction with FEMA. The purpose of the HMGP is to purchase private property subject to future hazards and to avoid future property damage by holding the property in perpetual open space.

In order to receive the HMGP funds, FEMA and OES required the City change the land use designation of the effected properties to open space and acquire a conservation easement over the subject properties in order to restrict the use of the land to open space in perpetuity.

Resolution 2002-703, which granted approval of the General Plan Amendment and Zone Change included a “sunset provision,” which stated:

“GPA 02-03 shall become void and of no force and effect, and the subject properties shall revert to their former land use designations, if the HMGP funding is materially reduced, deobligated, or otherwise required to be returned. Additionally, should the “sunset provision” take effect and the subject properties revert to their former land use designations and zoning districts, any new development project proposed on the subject properties shall require that the Planning Commission approve a Site Development Permit or other applicable discretionary actions, including compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and the preparation of other technical studies such as geotechnical reports.”

Following adoption of Resolution 2002-703, the “sunset provision” was enacted because the HMGP funds were never received, and the Project site reverted back to its prior land use designations and GPA 02-03 designating the property Open Space became null and void.

The Project site has remained vacant since the landslide repair. In 2012 and 2013, American Geotechnical prepared feasibility reports and then conducted a preliminary geotechnical investigation for a proposed 38-unit condominium complex on the Project site, where residential units were proposed throughout the 4.2-acres on both the lower eastern portion of the Project site and upper western portion of the Project site . Although the proposal was never approved, the findings and recommendations contained in American Geotechnical’ s feasibility reports and

preliminary geotechnical investigation was conditionally approved by the City’s geotechnical reviewer, Goffman, McCormick, and Urban Geotechnical Inc. (GMU).

2.4 Existing Site Conditions

The topography of the site is generally sloping downward from the west to the east. The site is planted with Acacia species and scattered laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*) planted for erosion control. Existing site improvements include the caisson wall and tieback anchors, subdrains, and the compacted earthen fill buttress. Access to the Project site is currently provided via an existing driveway on the west frontage of Crown Valley Parkway located opposite Paseo Del Niguel.

Crown Valley Parkway along the Project site is at an elevation of approximately 360 feet msl. From Crown Valley Parkway, a 2:1 fill slope approximately 10 feet in height forms the east property boundary along the Crown Valley Parkway frontage. A relatively flat, rectangular-shaped area exists farther west into the site and above the Crown Valley Parkway slope. This relatively flat portion of the site ranges in elevation from approximately 370 feet msl to 380 feet msl. Farther west, an east-facing fill slope of varying steepness rises approximately 160 feet in height to more gently sloping terrain with an elevation ranging from approximately 440 msl to 450 feet msl at the western property boundary.

2.5 Site Vicinity

The Project site is surrounded by residential uses, including single family homes to the west and north, La Vista Condominiums to the south, and Crown Valley Parkway on the east. Previously referenced Figures 1.A and 1.B show an aerial view of the site and the surrounding built environment.

2.6 Existing General Plan Land Use and Zoning

Figure 2.A shows the existing General Plan land use designations for the Project site and surrounding properties. As shown in the figure, the Project site contains a Residential Attached land use designation. The proposed Project is consistent with the existing General Plan land use designation.

Existing zoning for the Project site is Multi-family District, (RM). The purpose of the RM zone is to provide for the development and preservation of low- and medium-density neighborhoods with multi-family residences or attached dwelling units constructed on common lots. The RM residential development standards are detailed in Section 9-1-33 of the Laguna Niguel Zoning Code (LNZC). The existing zoning designations for the site and surrounding area are shown on Figure 2.B. The proposed Project is consistent with existing zoning for the site.

2.7 Project Description

2.7.1 Overall Development

The proposed Project will result in the construction of 22 three-story condominium style homes configured in 6 triplex and 2 duplex buildings on approximately 2 acres, and approximately 2.2 acres of open space. The 4.2-acre Project site is designated as APN 656-321-02. The property will be subdivided into two lots, Lot 1 and Lot A. Lot 1 includes the 2-acre residential area and Lot A, a lettered lot on the tentative tract map, does not permit residential home construction¹. As noted previously, the Project is consistent with the existing Residential Attached General Plan land use designation (previously referenced Figure 2.A) for the site and the existing Multi-Family District, RM zoning (previously referenced Figure 2.B) for the site.

In accordance with Sections 15050 and 15367 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the City as Lead Agency has principal authority and jurisdiction for CEQA actions. The discretionary actions to be considered by the City as part of the proposed Project include: a Tentative Tract Map (TTM 17721); Alternative Development Standards; Minor Adjustment; and a Site Development Permit (SP 16-04). There are no other legislative or discretionary approvals required by Responsible or Trustee Agencies for the proposed Project.

2.7.2 Tentative Tract Map

The Project requires City approval of a Tentative Tract Map TTM 17721 to form two lots within APN 656-231-02. Lot 1 would encompass the relatively flat, rectangular-shaped, approximately 2-acre portion of the parcel in the eastern portion of the site. Lot A would encompass the steeper hillside and flat areas in the western approximately 2.2-acre portion of the parcel. Lot 1 would be developed with the proposed 22 condominium style homes and ancillary development and utility improvements. Lot A, a lettered lot on the tentative tract map, does not permit residential home construction. Proposed TTM 17721 is shown in Figure 2.C.

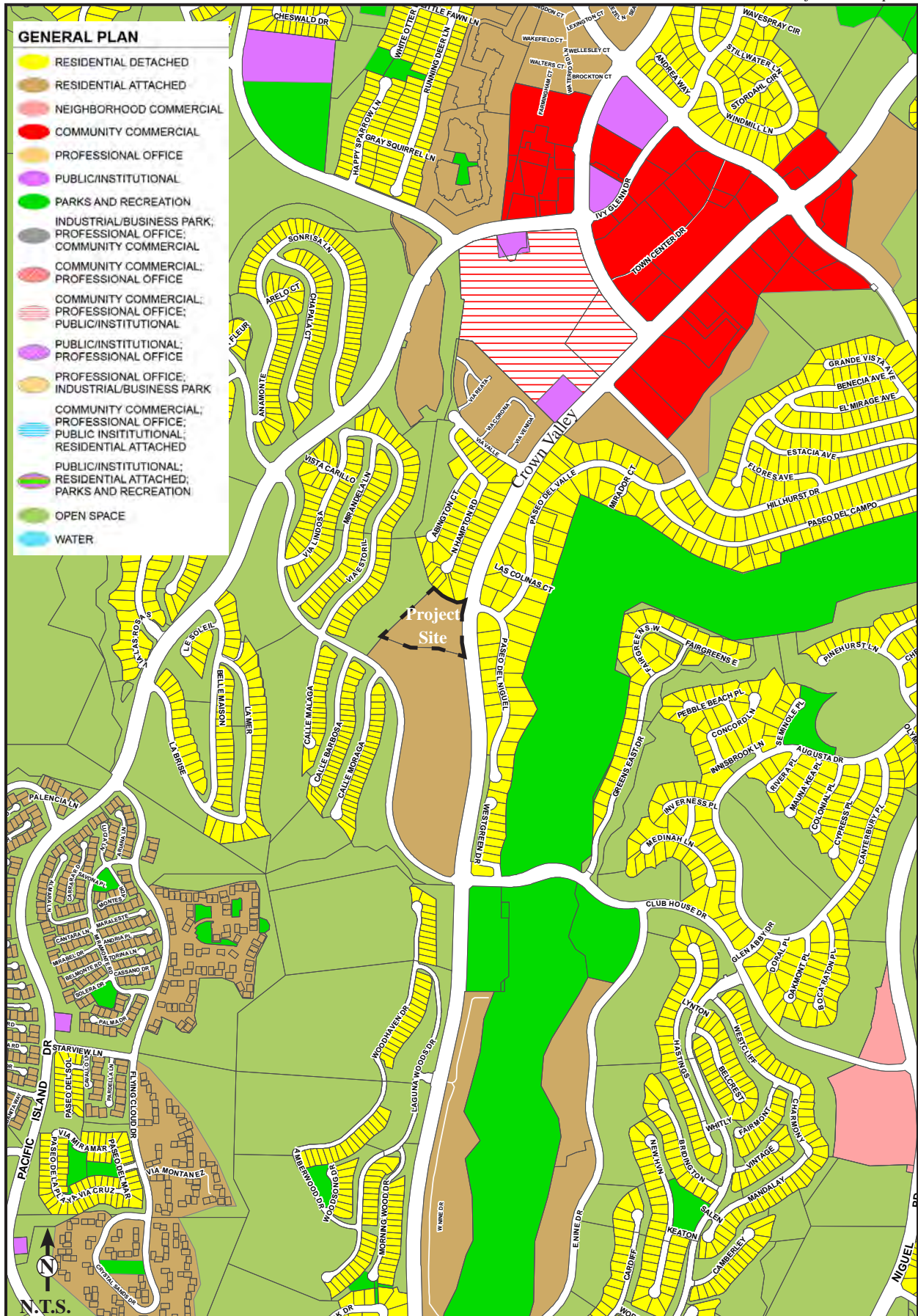
2.7.3 Alternative Development Standard

Three alternative development standards are being requested: common open space, active recreation, and building heights.

2.7.4 Minor Adjustment

Minor Adjustment provides an adjustment for retaining walls that exceed the 12-foot height limit established in the Zoning Code. The tallest wall found on the Project site is located in the northern portion and measures approximately 15.5 feet.

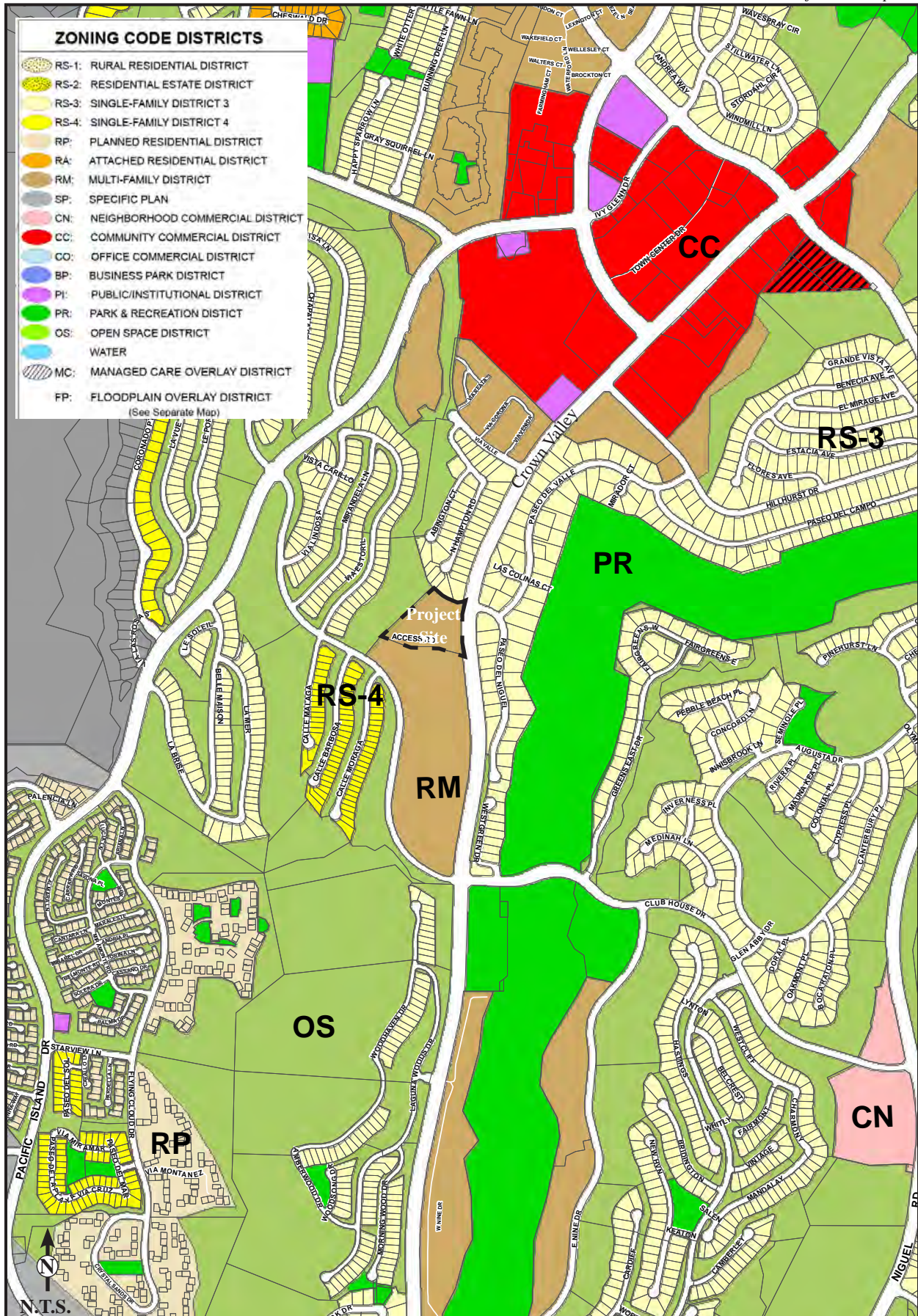
¹ Residential home construction is not permitted within Lot A. Minor disturbance within Lot A is permitted to support residential development on Lot 1, such as installation of utilities, or similar. Lot A will remain as open space, however this area is not protected or conserved as biological habitat.



Source: City of Laguna Niguel (2012).

Figure 2.A Existing General Plan Land Use

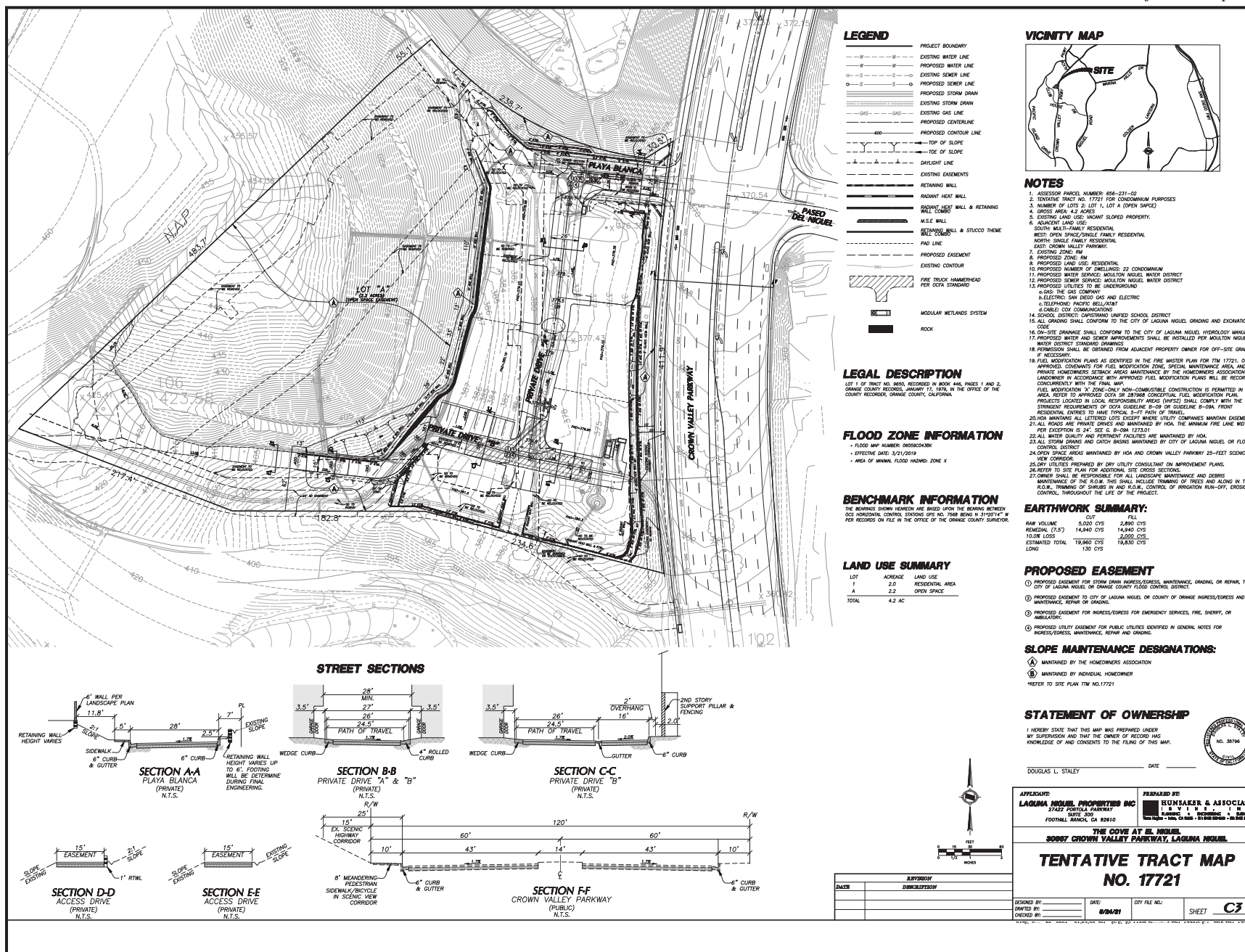
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Source: City of Laguna Niguel (2012).

Figure 2.B Existing Zoning Map

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Source: Hunsaker&Associates (8/24/2021).

The Cove at El Niguel
Admin Draft EIR – April 2022

Figure 2.C Tentative Tract Map

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2.7.5 Site Development Permit

Site Development Permit (SDP) number SDP 16-04 contains the details of the proposed Project improvements and is shown in the conceptual Project site plan shown in Figure 2.D. The proposed SDP would allow the construction of the 22 condominium style homes configured into 6 triplex and 2 duplex 3-story buildings on 2 acres. Approximately 2.2 acres would remain open space. The proposal is supported by the existing General Plan and Zoning for the site.

The Project will feature two different architectural building designs. The duplex buildings are referenced on the architectural plans as Building 1 and are comprised of two mirrored floor plans, Plan 2 (left) and Plan 2R (right). Each of these floor plans are identical in size with 1,937 square feet (sf) of total livable space, a 205-sf porch, a 94-sf deck, and a 644 sf two-car garage. The triplex buildings are referenced as Building 2 and are comprised of three floor plans, Plan 2 (left), Plan 1(middle), and Plan 2R (right). Three-story Plan 2 and Plan 2R are as described above for the duplex Building 1. Plan 1 has 1,808 sf of total livable space, a 68-sf porch, a 98-sf deck, and a 707 sf two-car garage.

The proposed condominiums would reflect a Spanish architectural theme as commonly seen throughout the City, with updated design elements. The basic design elements are simple asymmetrical forms, arched entries, predominantly stucco wall finishes, and shallow gabled ‘S’ tile roofs that animate building elevations. Grouping of accent windows and vertical forms of openings would reinforce this design character. Material blending of slump stone, simulated wood corbels, shutters, shaped wood trims and posts, decorative metal railings and downspouts are purposefully composed to enhance the overall design character on all sides of every building.

In attempt to distinguish the proposed residences from others within the City, the Project proposes community features not typically found in Laguna Niguel. For example, the product floor plans would accommodate work from home occupants and each unit would contain an oversized garage enabling in-home exercise and recreation equipment. Each dwelling unit would also contain a fenced usable backyard larger in size than typically seen in other townhome designs, which provides each residence with outdoor entertaining and recreation space.

As shown on the proposed site plan, the 22 condominium units would be developed on the eastern, flatter half of the site while leaving the upper, western half of the site undeveloped. This footprint would maintain the previously installed geotechnical and drainage improvements including the caisson wall and tieback anchors, subdrains, and the compacted earthen fill buttress that was installed during the remediation of the prior landslide. As a result of leaving the geotechnical remediation area intact, open space would be provided between the proposed condominiums and the existing homes to the west.

Proposed construction would include approximately 19,960 cubic yards (cy) of cut and 19,830 cy of fill to create eight buildable pads, the Playa Blanca entrance from Crown Valley Parkway, and two interior streets. No import or export soil is anticipated because the excess 130 cy of soil will likely shrink during soil compaction. Pads will include mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) walls up to 15.5 feet high along the west perimeter of Lot 1 at the toe of the compacted fill buttress slope and up to 6 feet high along the east perimeter of Lot 1. On the north perimeter of Lot 1, a two-tier retaining wall is proposed with the upper tier up to 6 feet high and the lower tier up to 6.6 feet high. Figures 2.D (Conceptual Site Plan) and 2.E (Site Plan Sections) show the site cross sections including the proposed MSE and retaining walls.

Additional walls up to 6.5 feet high are proposed surrounding Buildings 4 and 5 located on the south portion of Lot 1. A 6-foot-high radiant heat wall would also be installed around Buildings 4 and 5, in some places constructed on top of the retaining wall. Up to a 6.5-foot-high retaining wall is proposed on the west side of Building 5, and up to a 2-foot high retaining wall is proposed along the 15-foot wide access road located on the southeast side of Lot A adjacent to the proposed MSE walls along the west perimeter of Lot 1. All of the proposed slopes will have a ratio of 2:1 (horizontal:vertical). Additional work will include relocating the existing storm drain, and the removal and/or relocation of easements on Lot 1 and Lot A. Figures 2.D (Conceptual Site Plan) and 2.E (Site Plan Sections) show the site cross sections including the proposed MSE, retaining, and radiant heat walls.

The Project would be connected to water, sewer, drainage, and other public utilities readily available within the Project site.

Construction of the proposed Project is anticipated to start in the first quarter of 2023 and would be completed and operational by 2024.

2.7.6 Project Objectives

The following intended specific objectives have been developed for The Cove at El Niguel to assist decision-makers in their review of the Project and its associated environmental impacts.

- Provide new for-sale housing that is responsive to market conditions and provides a uniquely designed product type that is currently limited elsewhere in the City.
- Design the grading and geotechnical stabilization to ensure site stability consistent with City codes and minimize grading into the existing previously stabilized landslide mass.
- Design the grading and geotechnical stabilization to minimize off-site grading and balance the earthwork on site to minimize import/export, which would reduce air quality, noise, and traffic impacts from truck traffic on adjacent residential uses and City roadways.

- Redevelop the previously existing residential site with a residential project consistent with existing General Plan and Zoning designations that provides an updated housing product to meet the City’s growing population and further address the City’s and state’s housing needs.
- Create a financially successful development that is fiscally responsible by equitably contributing to the expansion and operation of the public services and facilities impacted by the project through the payment of fees.
- Improve the aesthetic character along Crown Valley Parkway through enhanced landscaping consistent with General Plan policies.

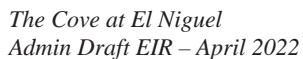
2.8 Discretionary Actions

As described above, the Project requires approval of several discretionary actions by the City. These include the following:

- Tentative Tract Map
- Site Development Permit, including Alternative Development Standards
- Minor Adjustment

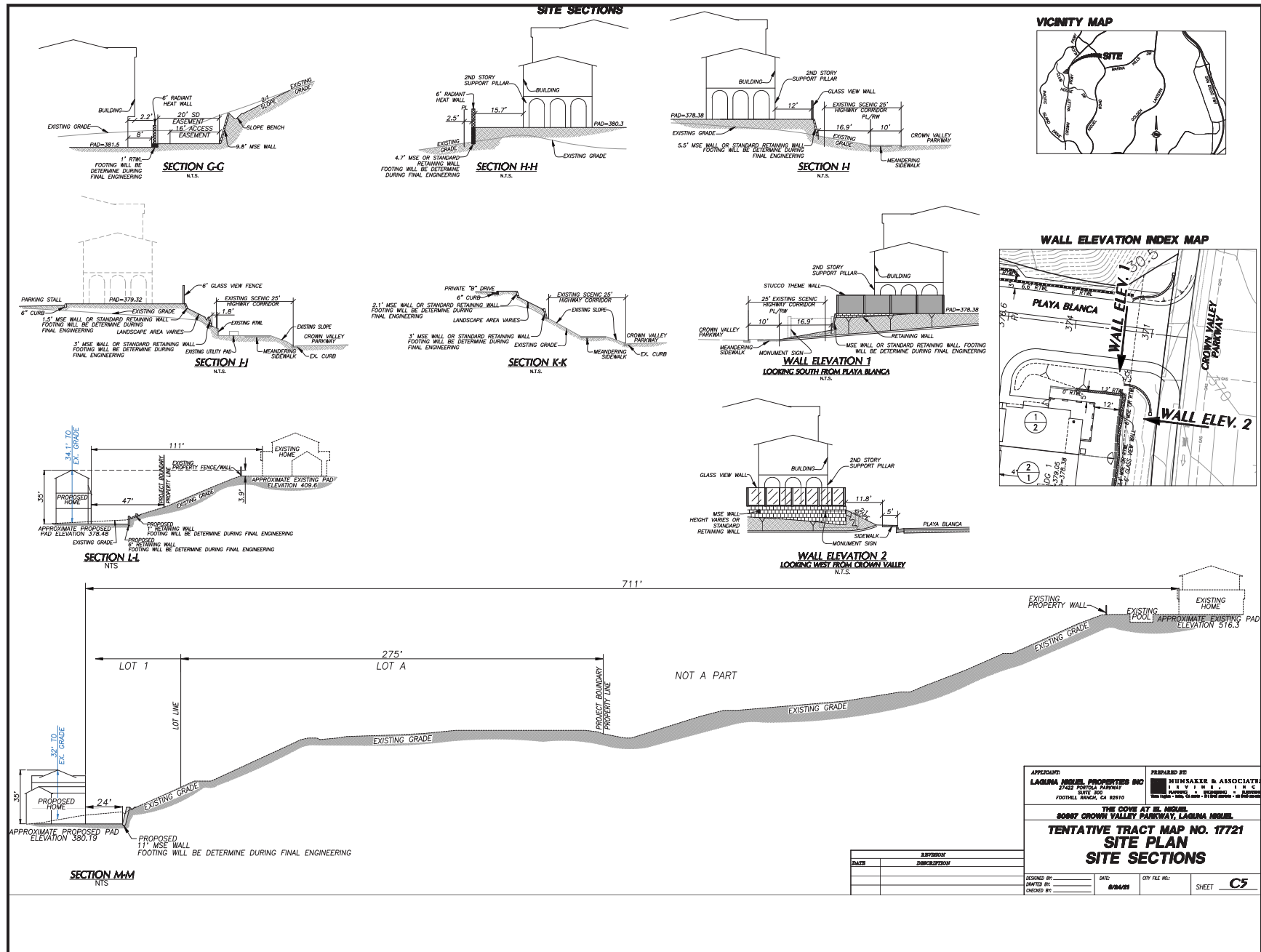
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Source: Hunsaker&Associates (8/27/2021).

Figure 2.E Site Plan Sections

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