

The Cove at El Niguel is a 22 townhome-style proposed residential development that seeks to attract a younger demographic to the city at the site of a previously existing 41-unit development. Designed to live like single-family homes – with backyards and oversized garages to accommodate home gyms, bikes, surfboards and the like – the architecture is consistent with the city's existing homes, with an edge towards more contemporary living. The plan is limited to a 2-acre area along Crown Valley Parkway, dedicating the remaining approximately 2.2 acres of the site as open space. The open space will not have any homes on it.

[Learn More About The Project](#)

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Project Information



1. No change to General Plan or Zoning designations.
2. Project Cut in Size: 22 units versus 41.
3. Half the Density as Previous: 5.2 DU/Acre vs. 9.8 DU/Acre
4. Avoids placing any buildings on the Via Estoril landslide repair earthen buttress.
5. Designed to Avoid Impacts to Niguel Summit—Approximately 700' from existing homes to the west and 130' lower in elevation.
6. Over Half Dedicated Open Space.
7. Designed for Young and Active Families:
 - a. Live and Work at Home
 - b. 3-Bedroom(1,944 s.f.) –16 Units.
 - c. 2-Bedroom (1,861 s.f.) –6 Units.
8. Parking Meets all Code Requirements.
9. Scenic Corridor along Crown Valley Parkway preserved with enhanced landscaping and split retaining wall.
10. Geotechnical Issues Extensively Studied to Avoid Any Hazards.

Via Estoril Landslide and Remediation:

1. Via Estoril Landslide (March 19, 1998) – Destroyed 9 homes above and a portion of the 41-unit Crowne Cove condominium development, leading to the demolition of the entire Crowne Cove neighborhood.

2. Site remediated as Cooperative Effort with input of four geotechnical consulting firms:

1. American Geotechnical.
2. Lockwood-Singh.
3. Agra Earth and Environmental.
4. Lejman Geotechnical Group.

3. Removal of the landslide mass (approximately 100,000 cubic yards) in the upper reaches of the Via Estoril landslide area;

1. Constructing and installing structural restraint systems including:

- Retaining Walls,
- Soil Nails,
- High-Capacity Tieback Systems (Tied Back into the Earth), and
- The Installation of Approximately 110-foot Deep Steel Reinforced Caissons (Structural Beams).

2. Importing and Compacting Soil to Create a Earthen Buttress;

3. Providing Subsurface Drainage Systems to Limit the Accumulation of Groundwater; and

4. Improving Surface Drainage Systems to Limit Water Introduction into the Hillside.

Approval History:

1. In 2013 a 38-unit development was proposed, a Geotechnical Feasibility Study prepared by AMGT and conditionally approved by the City's geotechnical consultant.
2. In 2016 the project was revised and reduced to 23 units, a 2nd Geotechnical Feasibility Study prepared by AMGT, and reviewed by the City's geotechnical consultant.

3. In 2020 the project was revised and reduced to 22 units, a 3rd Geotechnical Feasibility Study prepared by AMGT and conditionally approved by the City's geotechnical consultant.

Key Conclusions:

1. Extensive review and continuing study show the Via Estoril landslide area was stabilized and is suitable to accommodate the plan as currently proposed.
2. Homes in the proposed redevelopment are beyond the limits of the past Via Estoril landslide.
3. No significant movement would be anticipated to occur during the construction life of the project.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Cove at El Niguel Project?

The Cove at El Niguel (the "Cove" or "Project") is a 22 town home-style proposed residential development that seeks to attract a younger demographic to the city. Designed to live like single-family homes – with backyards and oversized garages to accommodate home gyms, recreation equipment, bikes, surfboards and the like – the architecture is consistent with the city's existing homes, with an edge towards more contemporary living. The plan is limited to a 2-acre area along Crown Valley that is proposed below the prior Via Estoril landslide area, dedicating the balance of approximately 2.2 acres as open space. The open space will not have any homes on it.

What approvals are being sought by The Cove at El Niguel?

The City's zoning for the property allows for residential development up to 9.8 dwelling units per acre. The Project is planned at approximately 5.2 units per acre and does not require a zone change or general plan amendment. Accordingly, the Project is seeking a Site Development Permit (SP 16-04) and Tentative Tract Map (17721).

What has happened in the Process so far?

Plans for the Cove at El Niguel have been in process with the City since March 2014.

- March 2014: Initial submittal of 38-unit project, including housing development on the "buttress" portion of the hillside.
- 2015 & 2016: Neighbors clearly voiced comments at community meetings regarding homes extending up onto the hillside buttress. In response, the project was scaled back from 38 to current 22 home proposal, limiting the development to the lower section of the hillside adjacent to Crown Valley Parkway. The scaled back proposal avoids placing homes on the earthen buttress.
- 2016 – 2019: Additional neighbor outreach and communications.

• November 17, 2021: City hosted CEQA Scoping Meeting and Community Workshop, with participation of developer and technical consultants, including geotechnical consultant, civil engineers, and architect.

• April 11, 2022: City distributed Draft Environmental Impact Report.

What is the next step of the Process?

The Cove at El Niguel's Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was noticed and made public on April 11, 2022 and concluded its public comment period on May 27, 2022. The City will respond to all comments received during the comment period and will be presented to the Planning Commission at a public hearing for consideration.

Information related to Project processing and more is available on the City's Project website.

How did the Via Estoril landslide happen 24 years ago?

In 1997 homes along Via Estoril in the Niguel Summit Community Association were found to be experiencing slight movement consisting of various cracks, separations, and wall tilt. In 1998, after record rainfall with an "El Nino" event, a landslide (known as the Via Estoril Landslide) occurred. It affected the homes along Via Estoril and caused damage down hill to a 41-unit townhome project known as "Crown Cove." Nine homes along Via Estoril and the entire Crown Cove project were demolished. After the Via Estoril landslide, an extensive investigation that included city, technical experts and geotechnical studies identified the cause of the slide as a "slip surface fault" that was originally misidentified or misinterpreted when the homes along Via Estoril were constructed. As shown in the attached [CLICK HERE](#) and [CLICK HERE](#) the Via Estoril landslide occurred up the hill from where the proposed Cove homes are proposed. No homes are proposed where the Via Estoril landslide occurred nor is any development occurring over any of the remaining landslide debris material.

How was the Via Estoril landslide fixed?

In 1999, the Niguel Summit Community Association applied to the City to remedy the Via Estoril landslide and repair the slope's stability. See the attached application approval, [LINK](#). Several independent and licensed geotechnical engineering firms were involved with the repair and agreed to the proposed remedial plan. This included:

• Removal of the Via Estoril landslide mass (approximately 100,000 cubic yards) in the upper reaches of the landslide area;

- Constructing and installing structural restraint systems including:
 - Retaining Walls,
 - Soil Nails,
 - High-Capacity Tieback Systems (Tied Back into the Earth), and
 - The Installation of Approximately 110-foot Deep Steel Reinforced Caissons (Structural Beams)

- Importing and Compacting Soil to Create a Earthen Buttress;

- Providing Subsurface Drainage Systems to Limit the Accumulation of Groundwater; and
- Improving Surface Drainage Systems to Limit Water Introduction into the Hillside.

These repairs were permitted and overseen by technical experts and the City, at a cost of approximately \$16 million. An application was made to the Federal Emergency Management Association for funding, but the funding was ultimately denied. Per the Via Estoril landslide repair's overseeing geotechnical consultant's (American Geotechnical, Inc.) November 22, 2000, report, landslide repairs stabilized the landslide in accordance with current industry standards and grading was performed in accordance with the recommendations of American Geotechnical, with the latest edition of the Uniform Building Code and local agency requirements.

How does the City determine the Project can meet State requirements for geotechnical safety?

The City relies on its licensed technical experts for many aspects of residential and commercial development, such as traffic, seismic factors, biology, drainage, and geotechnical issues. The City's geotechnical consultant has reviewed this Project in detail over the course of several years.

The former Via Estoril landslide area has been studied and monitored for more than 2 decades. These include geologic borings, slope monitoring devices (inclinometers), and groundwater monitoring devices (piezometers) to monitor slope movements and the efficacy of the geotechnical repairs. All indications are that the stability and drainage improvements appear to be functioning properly.

Both the City's and the Applicant's geotechnical expert reached the conclusion that this project, with appropriate conditions on development (e.g., grading and compaction techniques) exceeds the required factor of safety for residential development. It should be noted that an earlier proposed version of the Project including 38 units extending well into the earthen buttress was previously studied and found to conditionally meet the required safety factors. The current project proposes no homes on the buttress. The supporting data based on the underlying geology of the proposed Project further supports the ability to develop the site.

Does the Project remove or change any of the Via Estoril landslide repair improvements?

The Project **does not remove or amend** any of the retaining walls, soil nails, a high-capacity tieback system, and 110-foot-deep steel reinforced caissons. These improvements are owned by Niguel SummitCommunity Association, not on land where the Project is proposed.

The Project **does not remove or amend** the subsurface or surface drainage improvements that extend to both the Niguel Summit Community Association and Cove properties.

The Project **does include** an engineered Mechanically Stabilized Earth (MSE) wall that varies up to 15.5' tall on its western border with the earthen buttress.

- The MSE wall is on the Cove property and cuts into the toe of the earthen buttress to an average of approximately 8.7feet.
- Understanding the scale and nature of the earthen buttress is important. It is approximately 735 feet long and ranges from approximate elevations of 360 feet to 515 feet. It is made up of approximately 440,000 cubic yards of compacted earth. The proposed retaining wall only removes approximately 760 cubic yards of earth, roughly 0.17% of the buttress fill material, and replaces it with the MSE wall.

The City's geotechnical consultant has reviewed the proposed MSE wall, and conditionally approved the Applicant's geotechnical consultant's analysis that the construction and placement of the engineered MSE wall, as verified by the geotechnical analysis, will have no adverse impact on site stability. The City's geotechnical consultant has also conditioned that precise plans for grading and MSE wall plans and calculations be reviewed prior to issuance of a grading or construction permit.

Is it true the City's Zoning Code allows for more units that is currently proposed by the Project?

Yes. The Cove at El Niguel project site has been zoned for up to 9.8 units per acre in City planning documents as reflected in the City's Housing Element. It shows the Project site is designated for up to 41 units (the same amount of units that previously existed at the site). Recent changes in State law would potentially allow the developer to construct a much higher density affordable housing project under Density Bonus Law (Government Code sections 65915 through 65918) that would yield over 70 units (Gov. Code, § 65915.) The State law also provides developer incentives, such as reduced parking requirements, set backs and height limitations to incentivize affordable housing.

Currently, the Applicant is not requesting any density bonus or "developer incentives" and is not proposing an affordable housing project.

How does the City determine if a project meets State requirements for Fire Safety?

The Project is subject to both State and local requirements regarding fire protection. This includes such topics as emergency access, safe construction requirements, fuel (vegetation) management, construction materials, and building features. The City is a member agency of the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and works with the OCFA to ensure compliance for all new development, including this Project. The Project has been reviewed by OCFA and has been approved for development. Specifically, the OCFA approved plans (Fire Protection, Fuel Modification, and Fire Master Plans) that address:

- Construction materials and building design, reviewing items such as the design and materials used for roofs, exterior walls, decks, and vents.
- Emergency vehicle access, including turnarounds and hose-pull distances.
- Requirements for automatic residential fire sprinkler systems in every home.
- Fuel modification (vegetation management) which regulates the types, spacing and irrigation of plant material adjacent to the homes as well as fire-resistant hardening.

OCFA will continue to play a role for inspections during construction and after construction. It is important to note that in 2008 the State amended the California Building Code to require new fire resistance measures, including exterior construction materials used for roofs, exterior walls, decks, and vents for certain residential projects. Unlike older homes, this Project is conditioned to comply with these requirements, as well as other safety requirements imposed by the City and OCFA.

Does The Cove at El Niguel provide adequate parking?

Yes, the Cove meets City residential development parking requirements.

How do I provide input to the City of Laguna Niguel regarding the proposed Cove at El Niguel Project?

Comments/questions can be submitted to:

Amber Gregg

Community Development

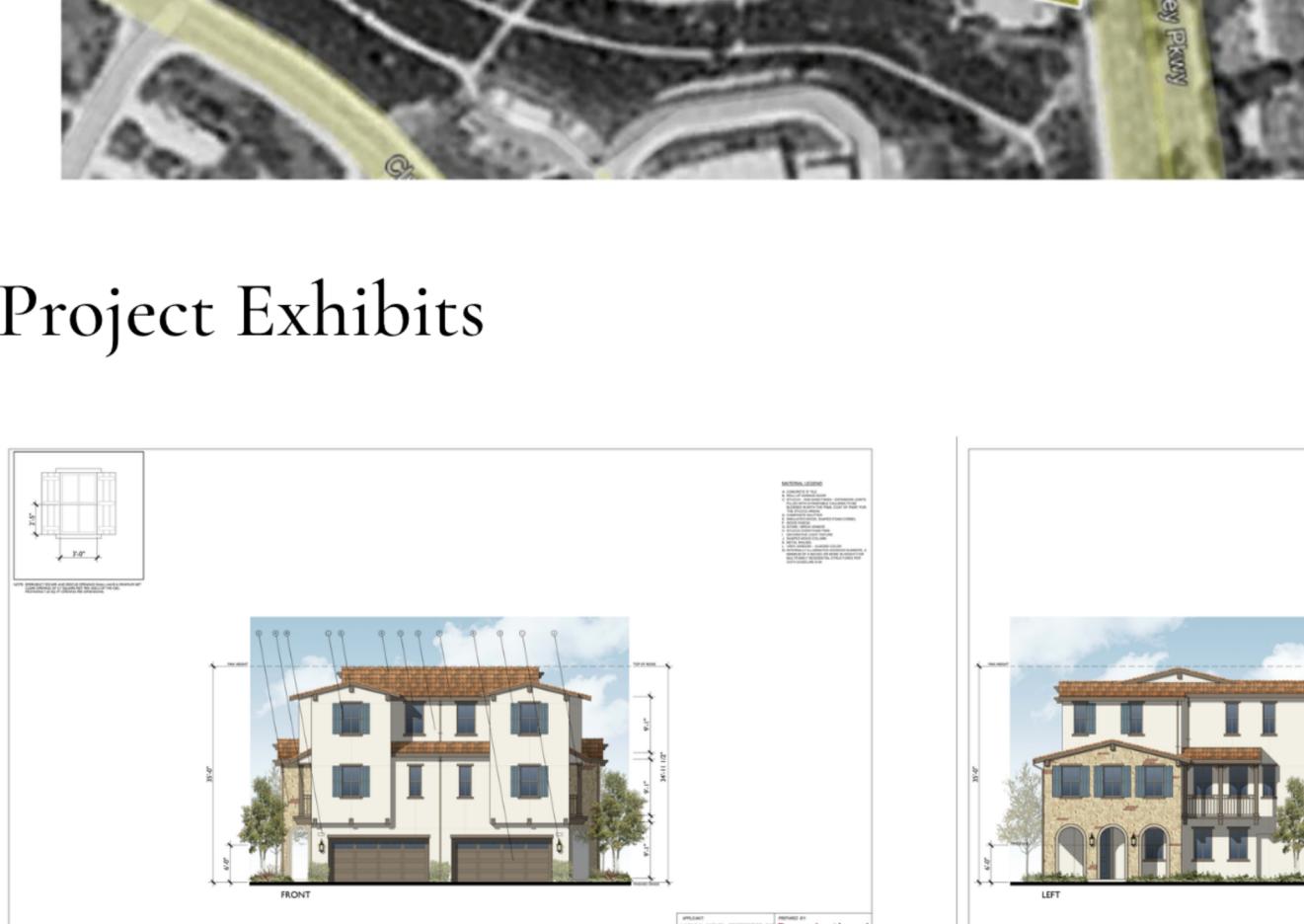
Department Contract Planner

30111 Crown Valley Parkway

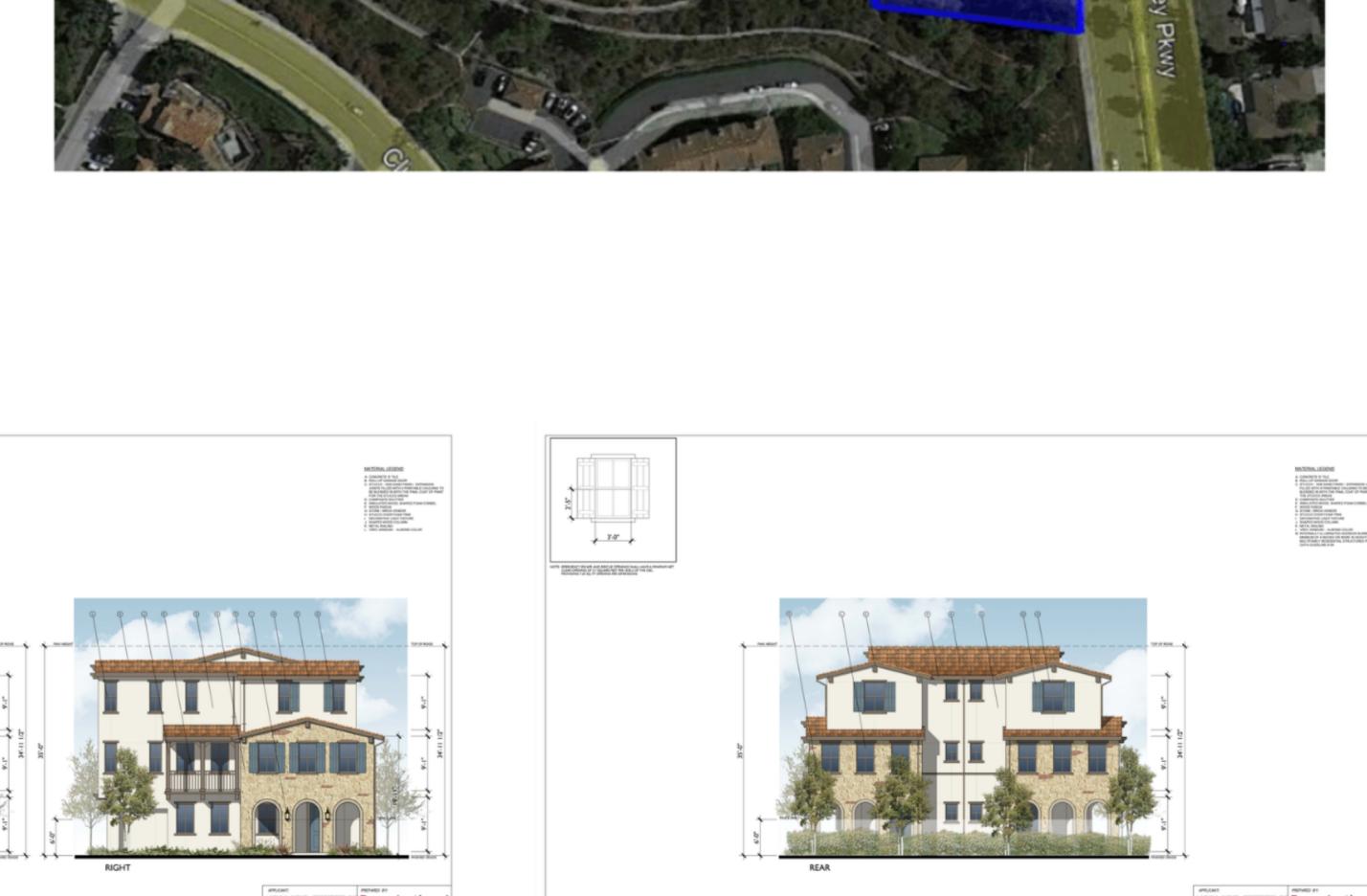
LagunaNiguel,CA92677

Email: aggregg@cityoflagunaniiguel.org

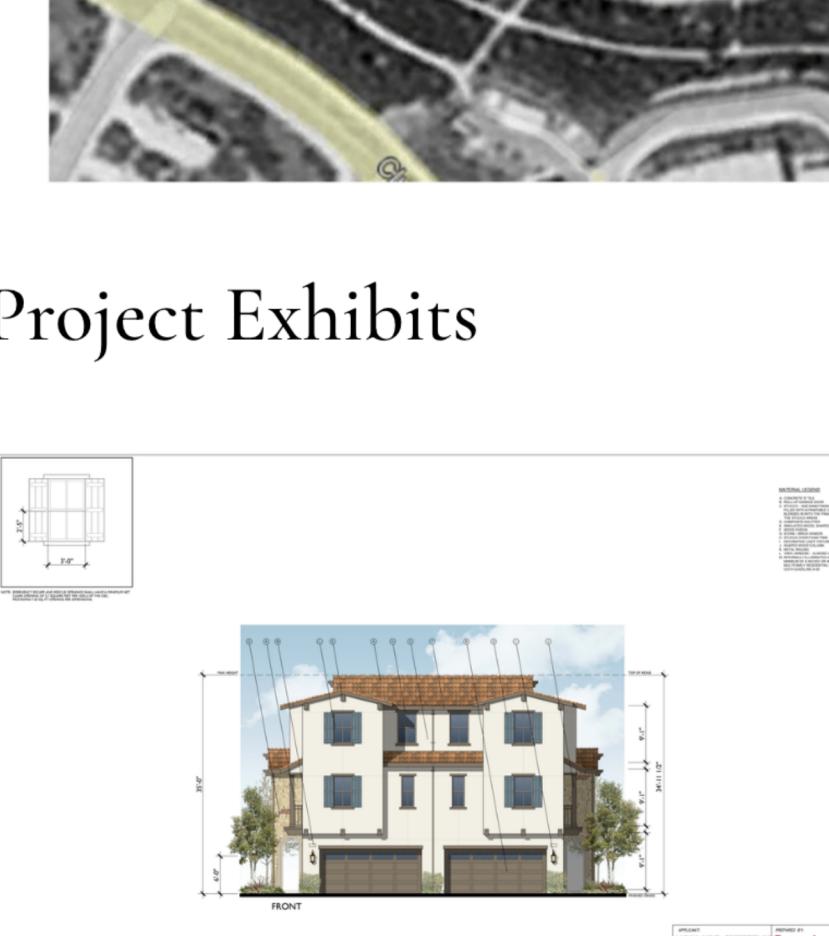
Cross Sections



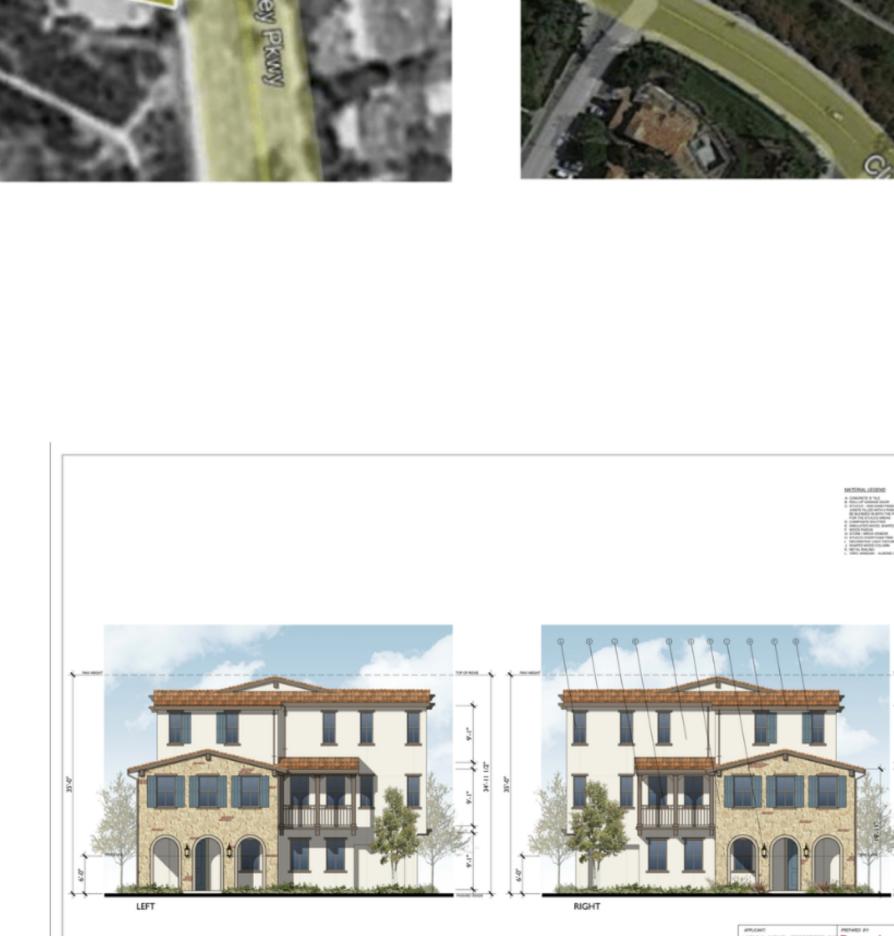
Geotechnical Exhibits



Open Space



Drainage Area



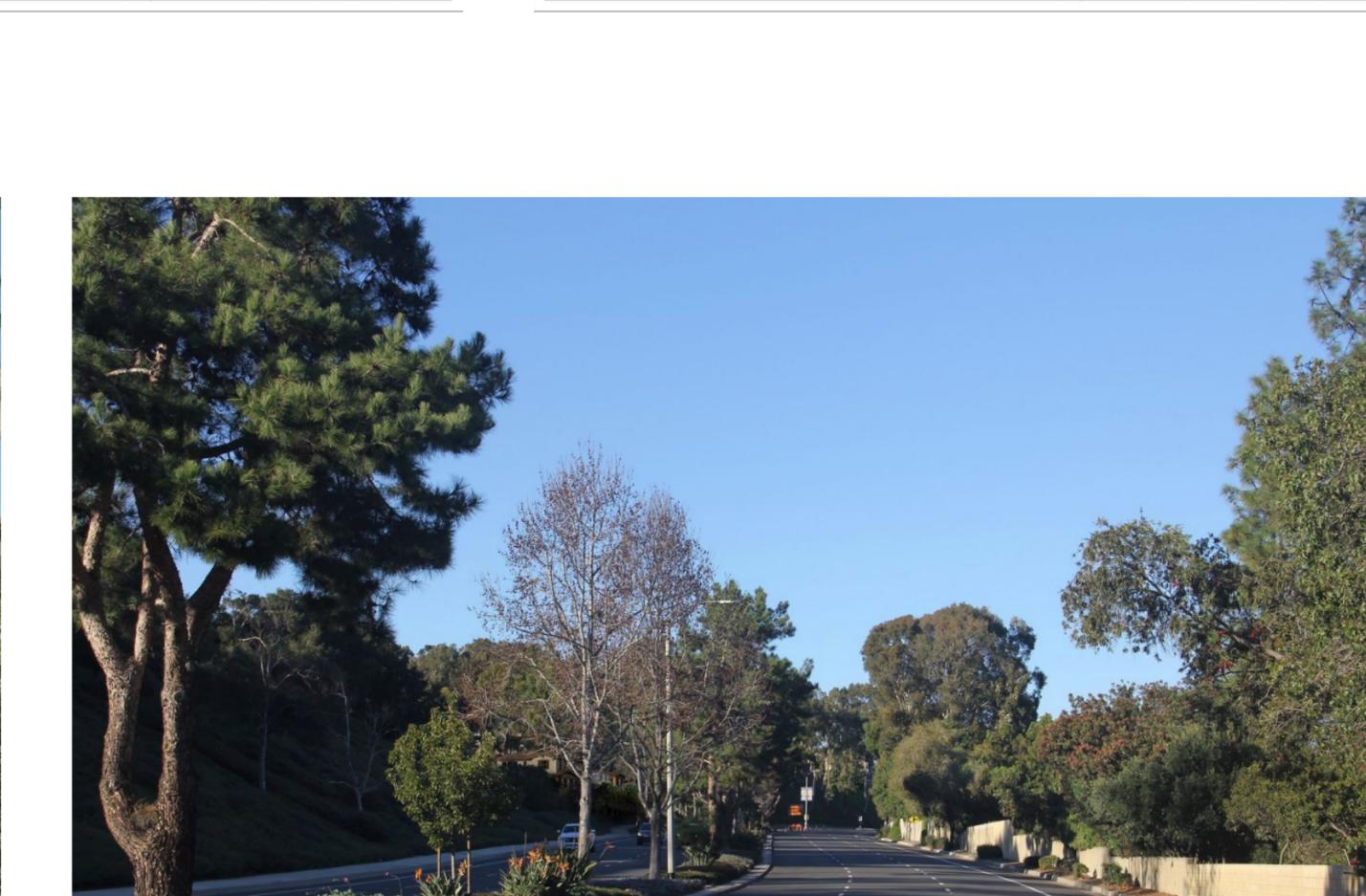
Via Estoril Landslide Exhibit

Project Comparison

Previously Existing Project (41 Units)

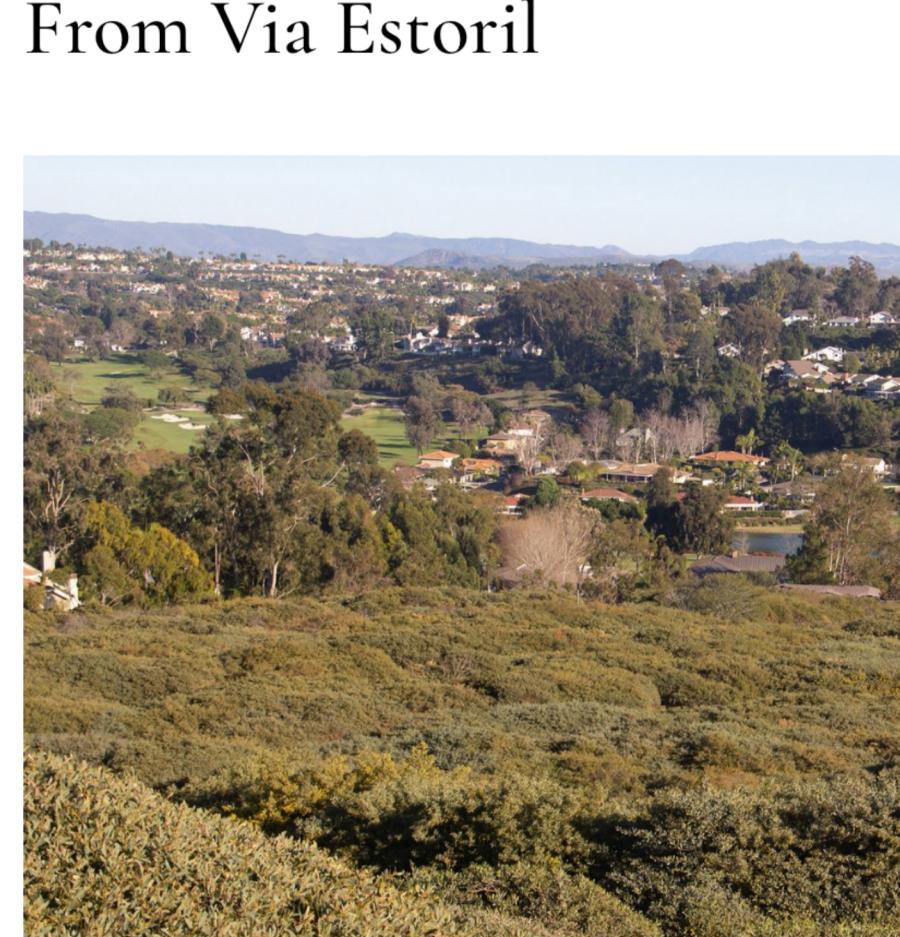


Proposed Project (22 Units)

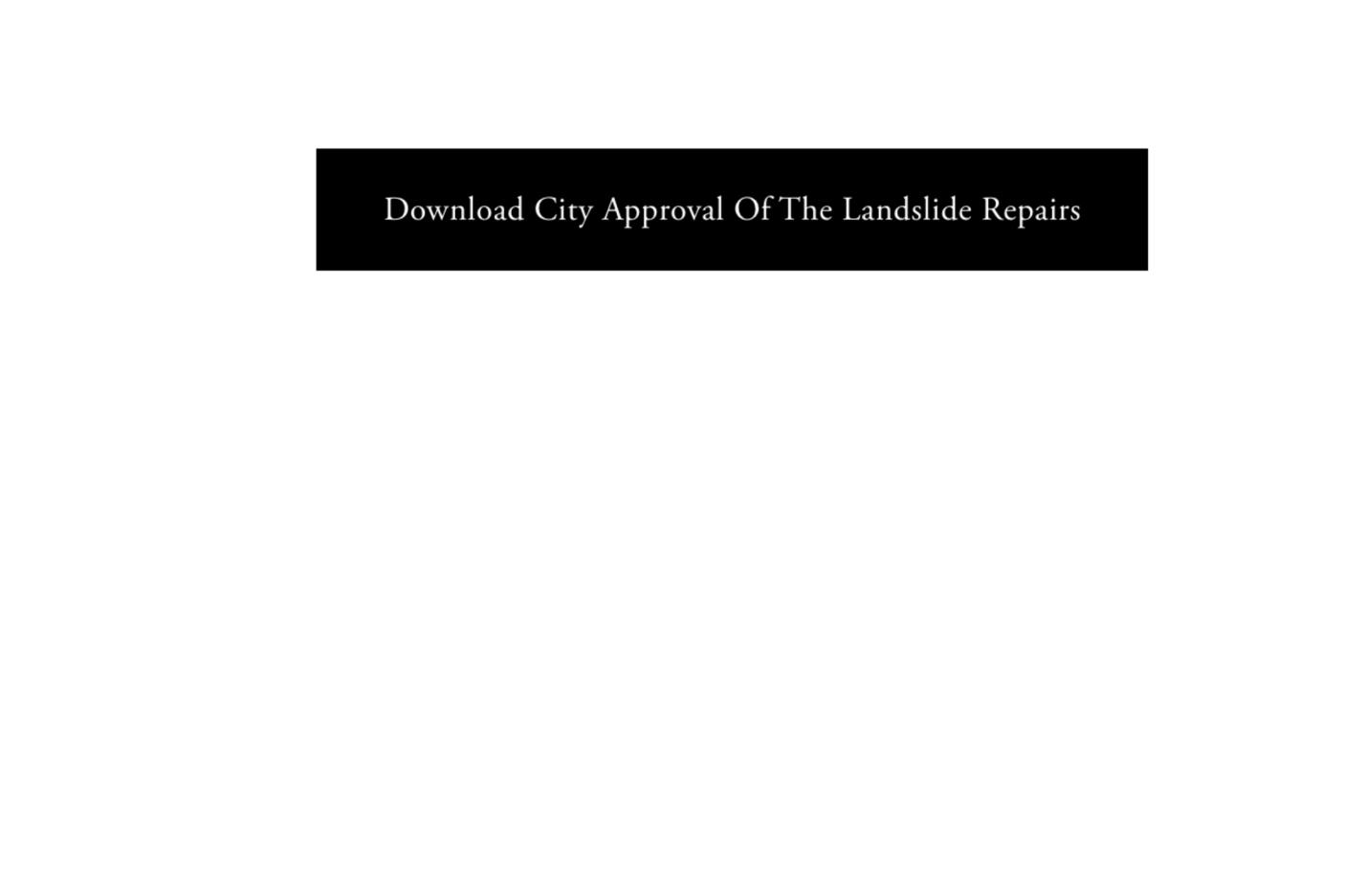


Project Exhibits

Cross Sections



Geotechnical Exhibits



From Crown Valley Parkway

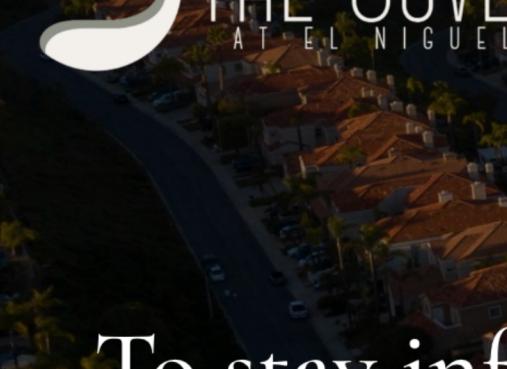


From Via Estoril



[Download City Approval Of The Landslide Repairs](#)

[The Cove](#)



To stay informed about the project, please fill out the form below:

Contact us.

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Last Name

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