

Chapter I - Introduction

Growth History

Santa Paula has had a long history of slow, but steady, growth. The community has never experienced the unchecked urban growth that is so characteristic of most of Southern California. It is possible to see the results of this slow expansion in the diversity of building styles and the mix of land uses found throughout the city. The reason for this slow growth is that Santa Paulans have made their livings from the land; from agriculture and from oil. These industries did not experience the large postwar expansion that propelled Southern California growth elsewhere.

Santa Paula has always recognized its dependence on agriculture and the need to protect that agriculture. The Santa Paula - Ventura green belt was adopted in 1967, thirty-two years ago. In 1978, Santa Paula adopted a General Plan that put the brakes on outward growth. The sphere of influence was retracted and infilling became the dominant means of growth. Population densities increased to the point that they are now the highest in the county. Nearly all of the vacant land within the city has developed. There is now a shortage of buildable land. The few vacant parcels that remain are mostly held by owners who choose not to sell or develop.

Santa Paula's historic growth pattern has been predominantly westward. The hills to the north, Santa Paula Creek to the east and the Santa Clara River to the south have all made westward growth the easiest and most cost-effective. Unfortunately, the best agricultural land also lies to the west. The new General Plan recognizes this problem and is attempting to redirect growth onto less productive lands into the canyons.

1998 General Plan

Santa Paula adopted a new General Plan last year after several years of study and community involvement. The plan recognizes a need for room to grow and it directs that growth toward the least productive agricultural land.

The planning process examined all contiguous growth possibilities around the city. These included lands on the valley floor to the east and west of town and across the Santa Clara River on the lower slopes of South Mountain. To the north, Adams Canyon, Fagan Canyon and Santa Paula Canyon were examined. (See map)

Santa Paula Canyon was eliminated from consideration, in large measure, because of the 700 acres of irrigated farm land. This land receives most of its water from a single, city-owned irrigation system. This system will soon be owned and operated by the farmers themselves. The financial health of this irrigation system requires the continued farming of all 700 acres. The city could not risk the failure of agriculture in Santa Paula Canyon through any additional urban encroachment.

Another agricultural area that the city determined to avoid was called West Area 1. This area is bounded by Foothill Road on the north, Peck Road on the east, Adams Barranca on the west and existing development on the south. The area contains over 200 acres of prime and near-prime farm land. This land was not included for development even though the land is not in the greenbelt. The logical use for this area would have been residential development. Santa Paula is not willing to use such high quality agricultural land for houses.

After excluding Santa Paula Canyon and West Area 1, the General Plan was adopted. It included Adams Canyon, Fagan Canyon, East Area 1, East Area 2, South Mountain and West Area 2. These areas admittedly include agriculture, but to a far lesser extent than the rejected areas. Continuing concerns about agriculture preservation have prompted the City Council to continue its review of the matter. The Council has placed East Area 1 and South Mountain on hold for a possible amendment to the General Plan. Much of the land in East Area 1 is "unique farm land." This is a lesser classification below "prime" and below "statewide importance." It is very rocky, being located adjacent to Santa Paula Creek. It is well-suited to lemons and avocados, but it would not be suitable for row crops because of the rocks. Much of the land at the toe of South Mountain is prime farm land. This application to LAFCO for amendment of the sphere of influence does not include either of these areas, although they are discussed in some measure in this report due to LAFCO Director Dowdy's request to discuss these areas. The lands that are included in this LAFCO application therefore include just Adams Canyon, Fagan Canyon, East Area 2 and West Area 2.

Future Planning

Adams Canyon and Fagan Canyon have been selected to be the principal residential growth areas for the city. East Area 1 would also include significant residential growth. Their canyon settings make them ideal locations for a quality lifestyle. Opportunities abound for such amenities as riding and hiking trails, golf, park land and scenic home sites. The final plan for each canyon has not yet been prepared. The General Plan and the Environmental Impact Report cover these canyon areas at a program level only. Another more detailed plan is required before any development can begin. The next step after inclusion in the sphere of influence will be preparation of a Specific Plan in accordance with California Government Code Section 65480 et. seq. The specific plans for each canyon and the subsequent environmental reports must be completed before the canyons can be annexed to the city. At the same time, the City is working on a number of studies to

prepare for the proposed land development. These include detailed infrastructure planning and impact analyses across the boards. The City Council has already approved conceptual plans for impact fees in the following areas:

- Water Capital Facilities
- Water Resources
- Sewer Capital Facilities
- Transportation Capital Facilities
- Drainage Capital Facilities
- Park and Recreation Capital Facilities
- General Services Capital Facilities

These will assure that each project pays its appropriate share of capital costs. In addition, each specific plan will be subject to an independent City study to determine its overall financial impact on the City. The plans will not be approved if they have an adverse impact on the City's financial condition.

East Area 2 and West Area 2 are located along the Route 126 entrances to the city. They have been included in the General Plan because of the pressing need for commercial and industrial sites. These areas will also have specific plans; however, given the relatively small size of these areas, the planning process will not be as great. However, the annexations cannot proceed until the plans and environmental documents are prepared and fully reviewed.

The pending application for an expansion of the Sphere of Influence raises a number of issues relating to City services and the infrastructure needed to serve the proposed land development. This report is intended to give an overview of how Santa Paula will solve some of the more pressing issues. There are many other, more mundane issues that will not be discussed here. These include such things as telephone, cable TV, natural gas and electricity that is routinely provided to land development projects without much question or concern. Each of these utility systems is important and will require careful planning, but there are few questions about the city's ability to provide them.

The City has been contacted by two major developers, one in Adams Canyon and one in West Area 2, who are ready to initiate the development process after the sphere application is approved by LAFCO.

