

Chapter 3

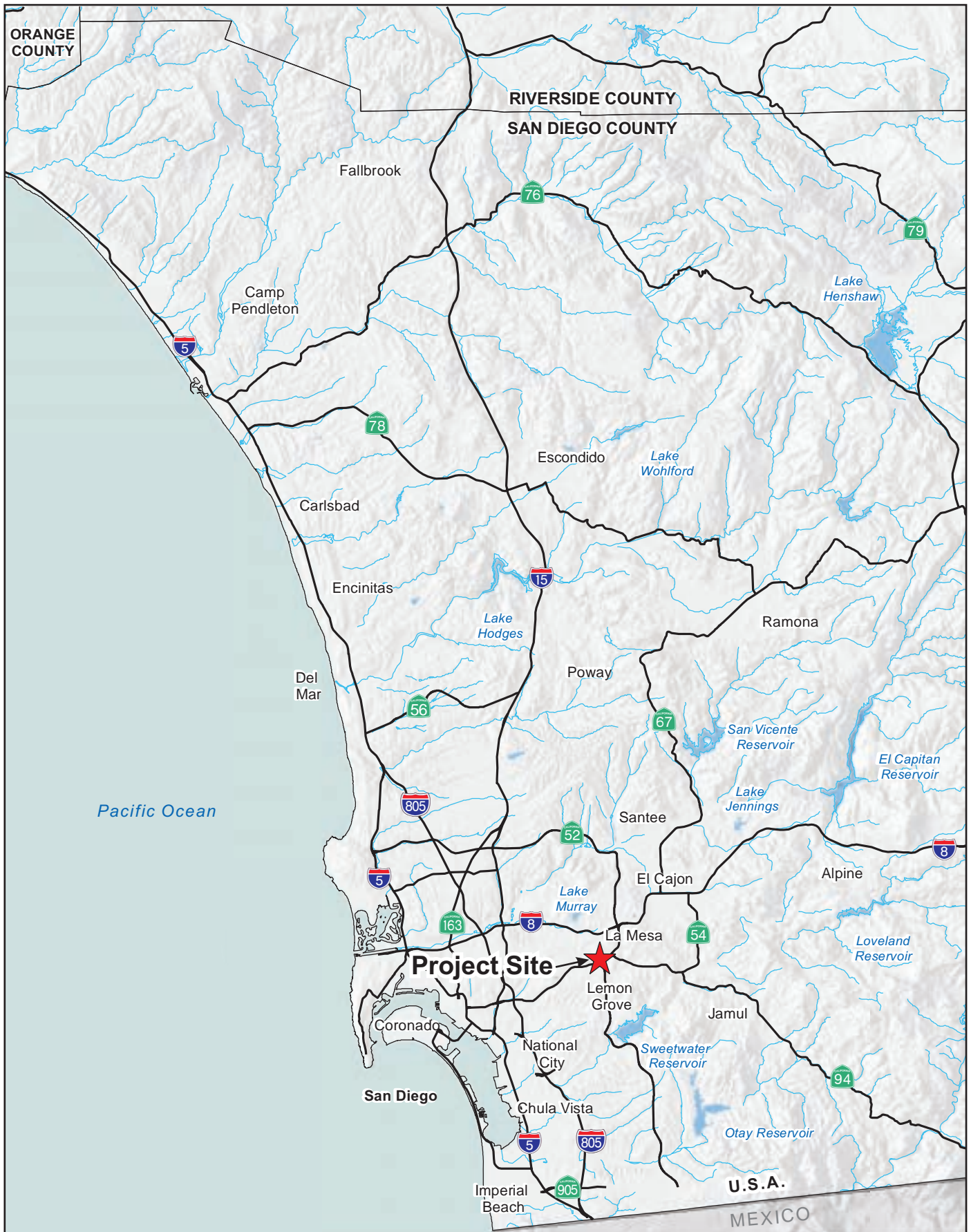
ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This chapter of the EIR contains a general description of the environmental setting for the proposed Collier Park Renovations Project. A specific description of the environmental setting pertinent to each environmental topic is provided in Chapter 5, Existing Conditions, Impacts, and Mitigation. According to Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of a project to provide the baseline condition against which project-related impacts are compared. Normally, the baseline condition is the physical condition that exists at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The baseline condition for analysis of the proposed project is the environmental condition of the Collier Park project site and vicinity on October 17, 2011, when the NOP for this EIR was published. This chapter also provides a general overview of the regional and local plans that are applicable to the proposed project and the proposed project's consistency with those plans.

3.1 Project Location

Collier Park is located at 4401 Palm Avenue in the City of La Mesa, San Diego County, California (see Figure 3-1). The 7.7-acre park is situated between Palm Avenue to the west and 4th Street/Upland Street to the east, approximately one-half mile south of La Mesa Village and La Mesa Boulevard (see Figure 3-2). A segment of Pasadena Avenue bisects the park and is used as a through street between Palm Avenue and 4th Street/Upland Street to access surrounding residences. Pasadena Avenue provides the only vehicular access to the existing parking lot, which is located in the southwestern corner of the park.

The City of La Mesa is situated approximately 12 miles inland (east) from the Pacific Ocean, and is bordered by the City of San Diego to the north and west, the City of Lemon Grove to the south, the City of El Cajon to the northeast, and unincorporated areas of San Diego County to the southeast. La Mesa encompasses nine square miles and is transected by two freeways: Interstate 8 running east/west and State Route 125 running north/south. State Route 94 runs east/west and forms the southern boundary of the City. The population of La Mesa is estimated at 57,065 people (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).



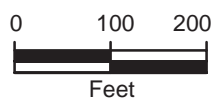
Source: SanGIS, 2009; CASIL, 2009



REGIONAL LOCATION MAP
FIGURE 3-1



Source: Google Map 2010



**PROPOSED PROJECT SITE
FIGURE 3-2**

3.2 Land Use and Built Environment

The adopted La Mesa General Plan (City of La Mesa 1996) land use designation for Collier Park is neighborhood park. Land use designations surrounding the park include multiple unit residential to the north, suburban residential (single-family homes) to the east, and a combination of multiple unit residential and mixed use urban to the south and west.

Collier Park is the oldest municipal park in the City of La Mesa, dating back to 1915. Only the southern and western portions of the park, referred to as the Panhandle area, have been developed. Existing recreational use facilities in the Panhandle area include a lit tennis court, tot lot playground, restrooms, picnic area with several tables and barbeques, and parking lot for 25 cars. In addition, a Spring House and drinking fountain are located adjacent to the Panhandle area. Collier Park and the Spring House are designated as a La Mesa Historical Landmark, but the Spring House has suffered considerable structural damage over the years and has been closed for occupancy since 1981 due to its deteriorated condition.

3.3 Landform and Vegetation

The topography of Collier Park ranges from relatively flat, primarily in the developed southern and western portions of the park (Panhandle area), to steep hillsides sloping up to the primarily undeveloped northern and eastern portions of the park (History Hill and Collier Club House areas). Elevations range from approximately 500 feet above mean sea level to approximately 545 feet above mean sea level, generally from south to north. A concrete-lined drainage channel transects the southern half of Collier Park, running from Pasadena Avenue to just north of the existing playground, where it discharges into an underground storm drain line. The drainage channel, which is approximately five-feet wide, conveys nuisance runoff and storm water flows discharging from a storm drain inlet on Pasadena Avenue and from the surrounding parkland. A natural spring, emanating from beneath the Spring House, also discharges into the drainage channel through a small pipe just east of the Spring House.

Three general vegetation communities or land use types occur within Collier Park: urban/developed land, non-native vegetation/ornamental, and disturbed habitat. The non-native vegetation/ornamental community type occurs as ornamental plantings and recruits associated with the park's landscaping and undeveloped areas. Notable non-native and ornamental species observed within this vegetation community include pine (*Pinus* spp.), blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), queen palm (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*), Canary Island palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), bottlebrush (*Callistemon* sp.), Peruvian pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), Brazilian pepper tree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), olive (*Olea europaea*), oleander, golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), great bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*), giant reed (*Arundo donax*), pride of Madeira (*Echium candicans*), African fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), red apple ice plant (*Drosanthemum hispidum*), freeway ice plant (*Carpobrotus edulis*), Mission cactus (*Opuntia ficus-indica*), yucca (*Yucca* spp.), and turf grasses, among others. A few, isolated native species were observed scattered throughout the non-native vegetation, including telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), California everlasting (*Gnaphalium californica*), laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), and chaparral mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*). In addition, a single coast live oak tree (*Quercus agrifolia*) was observed in the northern-central portion of the park.

3.4 Regional and Local Planning Context

3.4.1 SANDAG Regional Comprehensive Plan

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is the San Diego region's primary public planning, transportation, and research agency, providing the public forum for regional policy decisions regarding population growth, transportation planning and transit construction, environmental management, housing, open space, energy, public safety, and bi-national topics. The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) for the San Diego Region, adopted by SANDAG in 2004, is a long-range planning document for the which establishes a strategic planning framework for decision-making with respect to anticipated regional growth, and the effect of regional growth on housing, economics, transportation, environmental planning, and overall quality of life needs. The RCP balances regional population, housing, and employment growth with habitat preservation, agriculture, open space, and infrastructure needs. The goal of the RCP is to increase the region's sustainability and encourage "smart growth" while preserving natural resources and limiting urban sprawl.

The proposed project would be consistent with the goals and the approach of the RCP because Collier Park is an existing neighborhood park within a developed urban area of La Mesa and would not contribute to urban sprawl. In addition, the proposed project would implement improvements to the park that would create a more effective use of open space and increase opportunities for recreational facilities, thereby addressing the public facilities and quality of life needs of the community.

3.4.2 SANDAG Regional Transportation Plan

SANDAG, as the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Regional Transportation Planning Agency for the San Diego region, develops the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The 2050 RTP (SANDAG 2011) is the blueprint for a regional transportation system that further enhances our quality of life, promotes sustainability, and offers more mobility options for people and goods by developing an integrated, multimodal transportation system. The RTP is a long-range plan built on a set of integrated public policies, strategies, and investments to maintain, manage, and improve the transportation system so it meets the diverse mobility needs of our changing region through 2050. The goals of the RTP are structured into two overarching themes: 1) Quality of Travel and Livability; and 2) Sustainability. Quality of Travel and Livability relates to how the transportation system functions from the customers' perspective, and focuses on providing mobility, reliability, and system preservation and safety. Sustainability relates to making progress simultaneously in promoting social equity, a healthy environment, and a prosperous economy from a regional perspective. The RTP's vision for transportation supports the region's comprehensive strategy to promote smarter, more sustainable growth.

The existing pedestrian facilities in and around Collier Park are considered deficient. The proposed project would enhance the alternative transportation facilities at the project site, including pedestrian, bicycle and bus facilities, thereby encouraging alternatives to driving, which would be consistent with the goals of the RTP.

3.4.3 San Diego Regional Air Quality Strategy

The San Diego Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) is the local agency responsible for the administration and enforcement of air quality regulations for San Diego County. The SDAPCD and SANDAG are responsible for developing and implementing the clean air plan for attainment and maintenance of the ambient air quality standards in the San Diego Air Basin (SDAB). The San Diego County Regional Air Quality Strategy (RAQS) was initially adopted in 1991, and is updated on a triennial basis, most recently in April 2009. The RAQS outlines the SDAPCD's plans and control measures designed to attain the more stringent California Ambient Air Quality Standard (CAAQS) for ozone. The SDAPCD has also developed the SDAB's input to the California State Implementation Plan (SIP), which is required under the federal Clean Air Act (CAA) for pollutants that are designated as being in non-attainment of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for the basin.

The RAQS relies on information from the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and SANDAG regarding mobile and area source emissions and projected growth in the County. This information is used to project future emissions and develop appropriate strategies for the reduction of emissions through regulatory controls. The CARB mobile source emission projections and SANDAG growth projections are based on population and vehicle trends and land use plans developed by the cities and the County as part of the development of their respective general plans. As such, a project that proposes development that is consistent with the growth anticipated by the applicable general plan would be consistent with the RAQS. Because the proposed project would be consistent with the La Mesa General Plan (described below), it would also be consistent with the RAQS.

3.4.4 San Diego Basin Plan

The Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin (San Diego Basin Plan), adopted by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) in 1994, is designed to preserve and enhance water quality and protect the beneficial uses of all regional waters. Specifically, the San Diego Basin Plan: 1) designates beneficial uses for surface and ground waters; 2) sets narrative and numerical objectives that must be attained or maintained to protect the designated beneficial uses and conform to the state's anti-degradation policy; 3) describes implementation programs to protect the beneficial uses of all waters in the region; and 4) describes surveillance and monitoring activities to evaluate the effectiveness of the Basin Plan.

The proposed project would comply with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase I and II regulations and the City's Storm Water Best Management Practices (BMPs) Manual, which would prevent water quality impacts to receiving waters. Thus, the proposed project would not result in an impairment or exceedance of water quality standards and would be consistent with the San Diego Basin Plan.

3.4.5 City of La Mesa General Plan

The adopted La Mesa General Plan (City of La Mesa 1996) is a long-term planning document that guides growth and development in La Mesa by establishing goals, policies, and objectives that reflect the City's vision for the future. The General Plan is required to include a Land Use Element, which designates the proposed general location and distribution of land uses for housing, business, industry, open space,

education, public buildings and grounds, and other public and private uses of land. Other elements of the General Plan include the Circulation Element, Conservation and Open Space Element, Historic Preservation Element, Noise Element, Safety Element, Public Services and Facilities Element, and Housing Element. The consistency of the proposed project with respect to the specific elements of the General Plan is discussed in the various sections of Chapter 5, Existing Conditions, Impacts, and Mitigation, of this EIR.

The La Mesa General Plan land use designation for Collier Park is neighborhood park. The proposed project would be consistent with the General Plan because it consists of park improvements that would enhance the ability to utilize Collier Park for its intended recreational use, thereby encouraging the continued use of the property as a neighborhood park.

The City Council authorized a comprehensive update to the General Plan to be completed by the City's centennial celebration in 2012. The draft 2012 General Plan (City of La Mesa 2012), if adopted, would continue to designate Collier Park as a neighborhood park. In addition, the draft 2012 General Plan contains a Recreation and Open Space Element which discusses Collier Park and identifies citywide goals, objectives, and policies regarding public parks.

3.4.6 City of La Mesa Parks Master Plan

The primary purpose of the La Mesa Parks Master Plan (City of La Mesa 2012) is to identify park and open space improvements that will carry the City into the next century. The Parks Master Plan creates a roadmap for upgrades, expansions, and potential additions to the City's parks system to meet both current and future community needs for parks, open space, and urban respite areas that contribute to the public's health. It includes an overview of the existing parks and policies of the City, in addition to recommendations that will improve access to parks, improve park facilities, and identify funding sources to implement the plan.

The La Mesa Parks Master Plan recommends the following facilities at Collier Park to enhance the City's recreational opportunities: running or walking trail; tennis courts; horseshoes, shuffle board, or bocce courts; and an amphitheater. The proposed project would be consistent with Parks Master Plan because it would develop many of the recommended facilities at the park.

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