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Introduction



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Las Virgenes Road and Ventura Freeway interchange area has historically served as a rest stop and crossroads for travelers. This area is at the western edge of the San Fernando Valley and has been a gateway to the beaches along the Pacific Ocean and the beachfront cities. More recently, this corridor serves the neighborhoods in western Calabasas, as well as a route to Pepperdine University, Malibu Creek State Park and the Santa Monica Mountains.

Visually, the area contains some of the most scenic and diverse topography in the region. Calabasas has always been identified with the beauty of its natural environment: the rolling hills, oak woodlands, canyons, creeks and wildlife. While the rural character and natural beauty are still apparent, the encroachment of urban development has threatened to destroy much of this natural rural character.

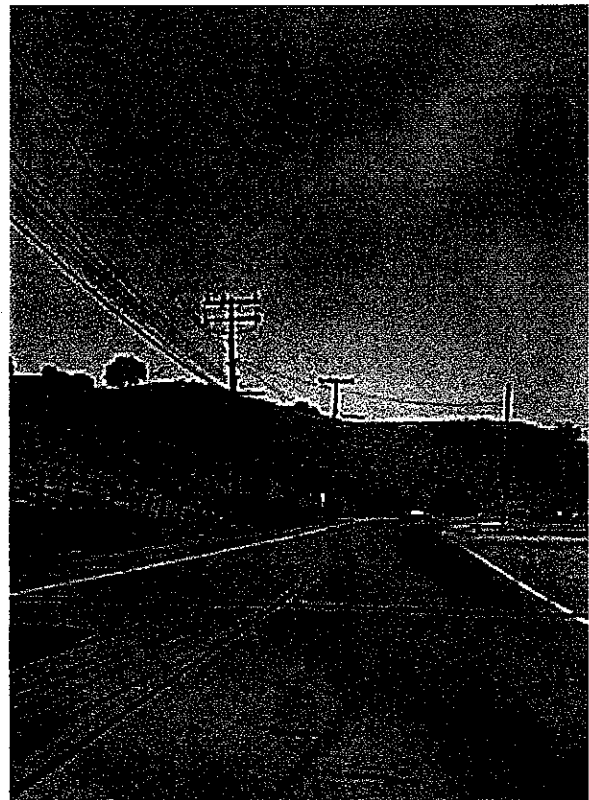
This threat occurs in the Las Virgenes interchange area that has seen a confluence of land uses, businesses and freeway-oriented roadway designs over the years. These uses developed first to serve the traveling public and secondarily the residents who moved into the adjacent neighborhoods. Much of this development occurred prior to the incorporation of the City of Calabasas and therefore, was done without the City's vision for its future. A lack of cohesive standards has led to visual clutter from too many driveways and commercial signs, a lack of landscaping and unaesthetic roadways and sidewalk areas.

This area could be jeopardized by pending development entitlements approved years ago by the County of Los Angeles. Some of this potential development appears to conflict with the General Plan vision for Calabasas as a rural, residential community. Such development could significantly alter the character of the area if allowed to develop independent of an overall vision for the area.

Some land owners in the gateway area recognize the need for planning and renovations to provide a safe and desirable area for residents and visitors. These land owners wish to develop the abandoned commercial sites and to make improvements to out-of-date commercial spaces. A cohesive plan to guide private property development is currently lacking and could provide a blue print for these renovations.

The City has always noted the value and the vulnerability of the Las Virgenes Road corridor. In the General Plan process, Las Virgenes

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Road was identified as a “scenic corridor” and the City developed special regulatory measures to promote protection of its scenic qualities. After completion of the General Plan, the City Council recognized the need for additional planning for the Las Virgenes Road area and initiated the *Las Virgenes Road Corridor Design Plan*. This study was completed in January 1998 and addressed public improvements for roadways and sidewalks. That document identified the necessity for additional planning to address land uses and private property development/design standards. In April 1998, the City Council initiated this planning study to investigate the complex private land use and design issues that are encompassed within the gateway area.

This plan is intended to address the following issues:

- ♦ Provide proper urban design standards within the Plan boundary.
- ♦ Support neighborhood serving uses.
- ♦ Clarify land uses for the eastern hillside area.
- ♦ Regulate the mix of auto-oriented and neighborhood serving commercial land uses.
- ♦ Coordinate transportation planning in the corridor.
- ♦ Formalizing streetscape and public improvements in the Plan area.

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The General Plan's vision for Calabasas is to maintain its traditional role as a refuge from the congestion of the San Fernando Valley and the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Thus, the General Plan's Land Use Plan calls for a primarily low intensity residential community nestled in a natural setting. Urban development should not extend beyond the areas that are now developed or committed to urban uses. Rural residential uses should be located adjacent to the urban uses and should transition to open space uses. A key concept is that the rural, open character of lands be preserved. It is the City's vision that any new development within the rural and open areas fit in with rather than replace the area's natural environment.

For the Las Virgenes Road area, it is the General Plan's intent that the natural hillsides dominate the freeway corridor at the Las Virgenes road interchange. The General Plan calls for development of the northwest quadrant to be limited to the lower portions of the hills so as to preserve oak woodlands and not dominate the views from the freeway. Freeway oriented commercial uses should continue in the southern quadrants of the Las Virgenes freeway interchange, focusing on urban design improvements to reduce visual clutter. New commercial development is called for along the east side of Las Virgenes Road at Agoura Road. A transition from commercial to

business park is called for along Agoura Road.

The dominant themes expressed in the City's General Plan are reinforced in the Las Virgenes Gateway Master Plan:

Environmental Responsibility - Preserving the area's remaining natural environment and living within the limits imposed by available resources. The Master Plan sets forth standards for preservation of open space, hillsides and creek areas. Also, traffic and circulation safety issues are addressed.

Local Management and Control - Accepting responsibility for managing Calabasas' affairs and its future in accordance with local values. The Master Plan establishes a vision and a clear set of rules by which development proposals will be reviewed.

Community Image - Protecting Calabasas' distinctive image. The Master Plan addresses the degradation that has occurred along this roadway through a proliferation of commercial signs, nondescript architecture and minimal landscaping. The Plan aims to enhance the natural beauty and improve the built environment along this scenic corridor.

The Las Virgenes Gateway Master Plan carries out the General Plan vision for this segment of the City while providing more specific land use and development criteria. The Master Plan recommends several General Plan land use designation amendments that are in keeping with the overall vision and the policies of the General Plan. After careful study of the land use issues in the Las Virgenes Road area, refinements to the original General Plan designations were developed, consistent with the vision and intent of the General Plan. In some cases, the Master Plan provides more specificity for new land uses and future development than was outlined in the General Plan.

As noted in the City's General Plan, "Calabasas was founded as a separate community, away from the urbanization and congestion of the Los Angeles metropolitan area." However, the City has inherited some elements of "urbanization and congestion" at its western gateway along the Las Virgenes Road intersection with the Ventura Freeway. The Las Virgenes Gateway Master Plan was formulated to reduce these negative attributes and provide a memorable gateway experience for local residents and visitors.

This Master Plan is intended to inspire and encourage renovation and appropriate new development opportunities. This Plan establishes a foundation upon which renovation and revitalization can occur within the rural context of Calabasas. Concepts are shown for streetscape refurbishment, facade renovations and new develop-

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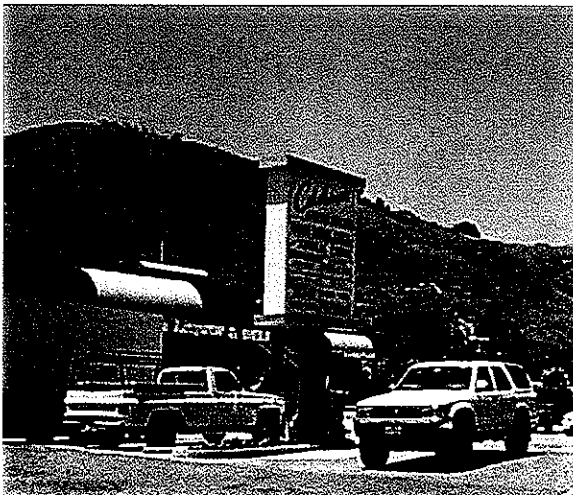


ment at key sites. The Master Plan enhancement strategies are balanced with development standards and restrictions that will provide land use compatibility and environmental protection.

This document augments the City's General Plan goals and policies and the Development Code standards. In some cases, General Plan and zoning designation changes are recommended by the Master Plan due to changes in development circumstances since the General Plan was adopted. These General Plan Amendments contained in the Master Plan will be concurrently adopted upon adoption of the Master Plan. Development standards presented in this Master Plan may be more restrictive than those required by the Development Code. In all cases, the standards set forth in this document will take precedence over those in the Development Code for properties in the Master Plan area.

This Plan plays an important role in the future of the Las Virgenes Gateway area by providing the following benefits:

- * A community vision for the area using realistic development scenarios;
- * A long-range blue print for appropriate change, eliminating uncertainty for decision-makers and property owners;
- * A tool for promoting revitalization of the existing commercial properties. The plan can be a marketing tool to attract desired development such as a neighborhood shopping center;
- * A tool in obtaining grants for public improvements, streetscape improvements, trail construction and creek restoration; integration of guidelines for public and private property architectural and landscape design.



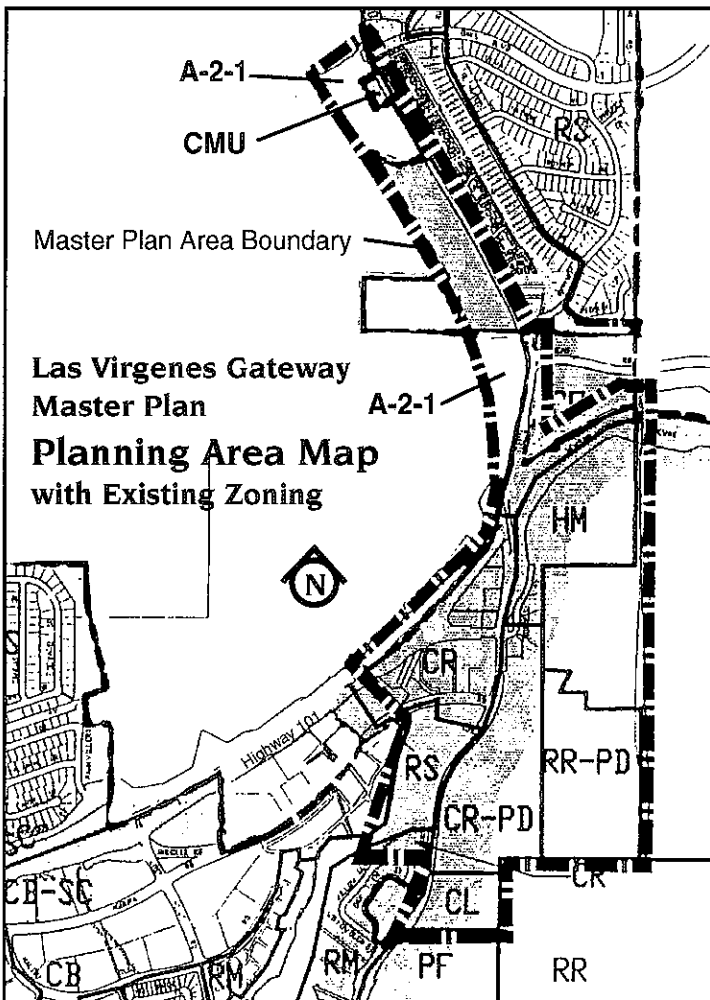
THE PLANNING AREA

The City of Calabasas is located in western Los Angeles County, at the edge of the San Fernando Valley. The Ventura Freeway (Highway 101) runs east/west through the middle of the City. Neighboring cities include Agoura Hills, Hidden Hills and Los Angeles. A portion of the City's western boundary abuts the Los Angeles County border and a portion of the northern boundary abuts Ventura County.

The Las Virgenes Gateway Master Plan encompasses the lands immediately adjacent to the Las Virgenes Road corridor. The area extends along Las Virgenes Road from the Water District Headquarters on the south side to Thousand Oaks Blvd on the north side. The eastern boundary is approximately along the hillside ridge top

for the area south of the freeway. To the north of the freeway, the eastern boundary runs along Las Virgenes Road. The west side boundary is at Malibu Creek in the area south of the freeway and the top of the western ridgeline for the lands north of the freeway. Some of the lands north of the freeway are not within the City boundaries. While the City has no decision-making authority for development proposals in either Ventura or Los Angeles County, these lands are an integral part of the community and should reflect the quality and character of the City's vision. As the City intends to influence the design and development of these lands, during development review for County projects, the City will recommend that the standards contained in this Plan be adhered to.

The planning area encompasses the Ventura Freeway (Highway 101) on and off ramps and a small commercial area with highway and auto-oriented uses including gas stations, fast food and a sit-down restaurant. A large vacant commercial parcel and several



vacant gas station sites are located adjacent to the highway oriented businesses. To the east of Las Virgenes Road and the commercial area are undeveloped hillsides that have been the subject of various development proposals over the years. To the north of the freeway, lands are developed with multi-family housing on the east side of Las Virgenes Road. Large tracts of undeveloped hillsides rise above Las Virgenes to the west. A small neighborhood commercial center is located just south of Thousand Oaks Blvd.

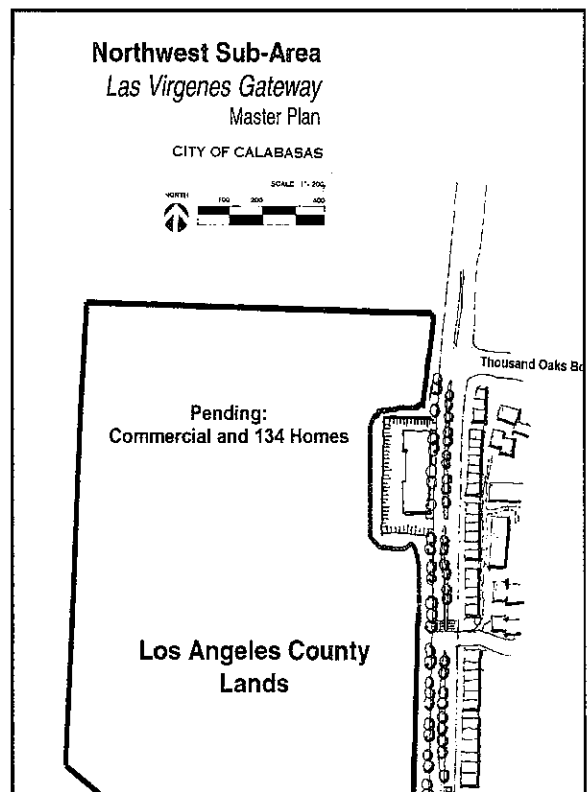
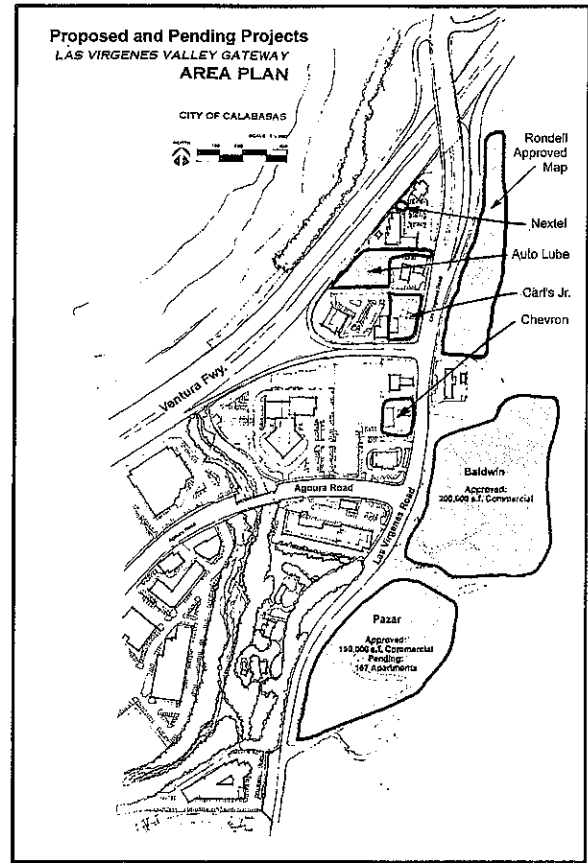
OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The Las Virgenes corridor has been shaped by both natural and man made forces. Geography has a strong influence on the form of the corridor. High hills rise above the roadway with steep green valleys and prominent ridgelines. This provides a striking backdrop for the man made elements that line the roadway. At the same time, the hillsides present challenges for development including geologic instability, erosion, access and view preservation. The Malibu Creek traverses along the western edge of the study area forming a natural boundary for the Plan. A portion of this creek has been channelized with concrete thereby preventing the development of creekside habitat and recreational amenities.

The opportunities apparent in the Master Plan area include the following attributes:

- ♦ Large undeveloped parcels of land.
- ♦ Hillsides that provide a majestic and rural backdrop.
- ♦ The contrast between the intensity of urban development and the openness and scenic beauty of the surrounding hillsides, canyon and creek areas.
- ♦ The Las Virgenes Creek corridor.
- ♦ The vacant seven acre auto dealership parcel on Agoura Road.
- ♦ The compact development of existing businesses.
- ♦ Freeway visibility.
- ♦ Land owners that are willing to work together to enhance the area.

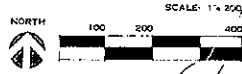
The following list of issues represent concerns or constraints expressed at the Community workshops and public hearings, as well as issues identified by the Project Team:



Existing Opportunities for Change

LAS VIRGENES VALLEY GATEWAY AREA PLAN

CITY OF CALABASAS



Gateways

Auto-related
Uses

Opportunity Site

Freeway
Landscaping

Ventura Fwy.

Agoura Road

Las Virgenes Road

Gateways

Las Virgenes Road
Master Plan Improvements

- ♦ Visual clutter along Las Virgenes Road between the freeway and Agoura Road.
- ♦ Lack of a cohesive design statement for private property.
- ♦ Steep, unstable slopes where topography acts as a limitation on various land uses and types of development.
- ♦ Vehicle safety issues due to poorly coordinated ingress and egress along Las Virgenes Road between the freeway and Agoura Road.
- ♦ Poorly coordinated parking areas for business along Las Virgenes Road.
- ♦ Prior entitlements for large commercial developments on the east hillsides.
- ♦ Large parcels of land that are under Los Angeles County jurisdiction along the west side of Las Virgenes Road, north of the freeway.
- ♦ Current applications for development that seem inappropriate or improperly designed for the area.
- ♦ Excessive numbers of auto-oriented land uses.

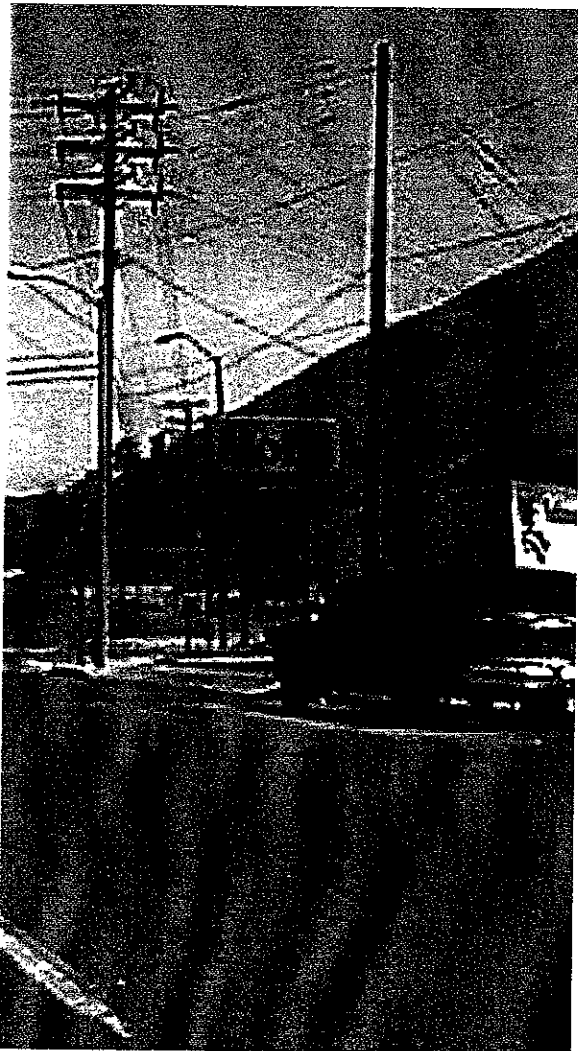
PLANNING ISSUES AND COMMUNITY INPUT

This Master Plan was created from an open public forum using many public outreach opportunities. The Project Team held two public workshops that encouraged community interactions and “brainstorming” sessions for creative solutions. Four public hearings were held by decision makers; two by the Planning Commission and two by the City Council. The results of the preliminary workshops and public hearings are presented in Appendix A. The City also mailed a survey to over 11,000 property owners and residents in the City. Over 630 survey forms were returned and the results were tabulated by City staff. The input received from the surveys was very similar to the comments received at the workshops and hearings. Survey respondents indicated that they frequently used the existing gas stations and fast food restaurants, however, they were not in favor of having more of this auto-oriented commercial development in the Las Virgenes gateway area. Respondents were in favor of adding a grocery store, drug store and upscale restaurant. The majority of survey responses indicated a desire to protect the east

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The majority of survey responses indicated a desire to protect the east hillsides from intense development.



hillsides from intense development. The preferred hillside land uses were open space, public park, and grazing. If new development were to occur, there was a preference that it be restricted to one story heights and a design that blends into the hillside environment. A summary of the survey results is presented in Appendix B.

The major land use and design issues raised during the community workshop, public hearings and through mail-in surveys are as follows:

- ♦ Auto/highway related uses should be limited to the area adjacent to the freeway.
- ♦ A master internal parking/circulation plan is needed for the commercial areas.
- ♦ A common architectural theme should be developed that emphasizes rural/rustic styles.
- ♦ A common landscaping theme should be developed that is coordinated with the public improvements specified in the Las Virgenes Corridor Plan.
- ♦ Fast food uses are okay but should be limited to the area adjacent to the highway and these uses should not involve drive-through service.
- ♦ The visual clutter along Las Virgenes Road from the freeway to Agoura Road should be reduced.
- ♦ Signage needs to be centralized and consistent with the design theme.
- ♦ The views of the hillsides need to be preserved.
- ♦ Driveways should be provided to the Land Conservancy open space lands.
- ♦ Driveway access should be limited off of Las Virgenes Road.
- ♦ Open space should be retained on the hillsides.
- ♦ Environmental issues need to be addressed for any development on the hillsides.
- ♦ Development on the East Hillsides should be low profile residential uses.
- ♦ New development off Agoura Road should orient to the creek.

- ♦ The natural creek banks and habitat should be restored.
- ♦ Trails are desirable along the creek and to connect the residential areas to the commercial area.
- ♦ Local residents need neighborhood serving uses such as a grocery store, library, coffee shop, bookstore and pharmacy. This will reduce the need for residents to travel out of the area to shop.
- ♦ Streets and intersections need to be pedestrian friendly.
- ♦ Thousand Oaks Blvd should not be extended to the west.
- ♦ The County lands along the Las Virgenes corridor should be considered for annexation. Possible uses include low density residential, a public school and recreation fields.
- ♦ The Northside neighborhood commercial area should remain.
- ♦ Overhead utility lines should be removed.
- ♦ Senior housing is needed in the area, especially a "continuum of care" type complex.
- ♦ Telecommunication antennas are needed in the area however they need to be sensitively designed and located.

The Master Plan encompasses the issues raised in the planning process. Existing land use incompatibilities and proposed projects that may require Zoning or General Plan changes are addressed through a revised land use plan for the area. A scheme for coordinated internal circulation and access issues is presented. The Plan also sets forth an appropriate architectural and landscaping theme for private property in this area of the City.