

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



NORTHWEST SPECIFIC PLAN
CITY OF SAN RAMON

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BACKGROUND

The Northwest Specific Plan (Plan) provides the vision for guiding the development of approximately 350 acres in the City of San Ramon. The Plan addresses development opportunities for residential neighborhoods and community serving facilities, as well as preservation of natural resources and open space, in accordance with the City of San Ramon’s voter-approved General Plan.

This Plan provides the vision for creating a balanced community composed of public facilities, open space, and residential neighborhoods within an overall 354-acre Northwest Specific Plan Area (Plan Area). The Plan provides guidance for the creation of distinctive residential neighborhoods emphasizing affordable housing opportunities, accommodation of important public facilities, and preservation of open space amenities. The Plan integrates open space, public trails, and a riparian corridor with the development of a community park, a house of worship, an educational use facility, and five residential neighborhoods with densities ranging from 1.5 units per acre, to just over 40 units per acre. Overall, the Plan furthers a wide range of General Plan policies, including preserving at least 75% of the site area for public amenities and open space uses.

The City’s General Plan, which was adopted in 2002, serves to guide future growth and development patterns within San Ramon in order to address growth pressures and housing shortages that many Bay Area communities have been facing over the past decade. The General Plan addressed these challenges in part through the establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), which directs where future growth should occur and defines the City’s extent of development. Additionally, the General Plan identifies opportunity sites for residential development to meet the needs of existing and future populations, and sets forth quantified affordable housing objectives to ensure that San Ramon provides its fair share of the region’s affordable housing.



The Northwest Specific Plan furthers a wide range of General Plan policies, including preserving at least 75% of the site area for public amenities and open space uses

The General Plan identifies the Northwest Specific Plan as an area for future development, specifically:

“compact urban neighborhoods offering a mix of housing types, including workforce housing, public and semi-public uses, and significant park and open space area.”

The General Plan identifies a development potential of up to 830 residential units within the Plan Area, including an affordable housing component, and a range of public amenities. In addition, the General Plan requires that 75% of the Plan Area be set aside for open space, parks, and public or quasi-public uses, including a house of worship and an educational use.

The physical setting of the Plan Area, combined with the policy direction in the General Plan, presents many challenges as well as opportunities for directing future development within the Plan Area. The physical setting of the Plan Area and its General Plan policy direction are described in greater detail later in this Plan. The Plan Area contains several distinctive natural characteristics, such as rugged topography, major and minor ridgelines, creeks and riparian corridors, and native oak woodlands.

The site also presents several challenges in the form of natural hazards, such as the presence of the Calaveras Fault zone, steep slopes, landslides, and a 100-year flood plain. It is understood that in order to implement the policies for the Plan Area included in the General Plan, development of this site would require significant earthwork and grading, while also maintaining and preserving the site’s natural and visual resources.

The Plan document provides a policy framework and implementation measures to guide future development in the Plan Area in a manner that addresses the challenges and opportunities presented by the physical environment, while simultaneously responding to the policy direction established in the General Plan.

PLANNING PROCESS

During the planning process, several community workshops were held, as well as Planning Commission and City Council meetings. Meetings and interviews were also held with interested stakeholders, such as residents of the surrounding neighborhoods and property owners. Additionally, meetings were held with City committees, such as the Housing Advisory Committee and the Open Space Advisory Committee, to incorporate their views on the future patterns of development that they would like to see in the Plan Area.

VISION STATEMENT

The Plan envisions an attractive planned community with a diversity of residential neighborhoods, a range of housing types and densities, open space preservation, and community amenities. Development of the neighborhoods will be integrated with and sensitive to the surrounding natural and built environments, with an emphasis on preserving open space and biological resources, and protecting identified ridgelines and visual quality. The Northwest Specific Plan will help implement the City of San Ramon's General Plan, by guiding development in a manner that will provide opportunities for well-balanced neighborhoods and community amenities.



A diversity of neighborhoods are found within the Plan Area

PLAN AREA LOCATION

As the name indicates, the Northwest Specific Plan Area is located immediately northwest of the City of San Ramon in Contra Costa County, immediately south of the town of Danville, as shown in Figure 1-1. The Plan Area is located just west of Highway 680 and north of Crow Canyon Road within the 644-acre Bollinger Canyon Subarea of San Ramon. The Plan Area is approximately 354-acres, and is served by Crow Canyon Road, Deerwood Road, and Purdue Road; as well as Bollinger Canyon Road, which bisects the Plan Area in a north-south direction.

There are several different jurisdictional boundaries which apply to the Plan Area, as illustrated on Figure 1-2. The entire Plan Area is located within the City's Planning Area Boundary, which consists of land within the City and "any land outside its boundaries that, in the planning agency's judgment, bears relation to its planning." The City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and UGB also encompass the entire Specific Plan Area. The SOI is the probable ultimate physical boundary and service area of the City as determined by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The City's UGB is a line that is intended to contain all future urban development in the City's Planning Area, and was established during the 2002 General Plan Update process. Figure 1-3 depicts an aerial image of the Plan Area and its surroundings.

There are two major properties within the Plan Area, the Faria property and the Chang property. The Faria property is located east of Bollinger Canyon Road, and is approximately 291-acres in size. The Chang property consists of approximately 61-acres on the west side of Bollinger Canyon Road. There is also a small (2.5-acre) parcel at the northwest corner of the intersection of Bollinger Canyon Road and Crow Canyon Road, which is referred to as the Panetta property. Property ownership is indicated in Figure 1-4.

EXISTING SETTING

The Plan Area is currently undeveloped, with sporadic clusters of native trees (oak woodlands) located on the site. The vegetation within the Plan Area consists of a mixture of annual grassland, valley foothill riparian, oak woodland, and chaparral. Some of the most defining features of the Plan Area include its topography, creeks, and views, which are outlined in the following overview, and depicted in Figures 1-5 and 1-6.

Topography. A prominent characteristic of the Plan Area is the rugged topography as Figure 1-6 indicates, a large portion of the Plan Area has a slope greater than 20%. There are three major ridgelines located within the Plan Area, as seen in Figure 1-5, which run in a northwest-southeast direction and are over 500' in elevation.



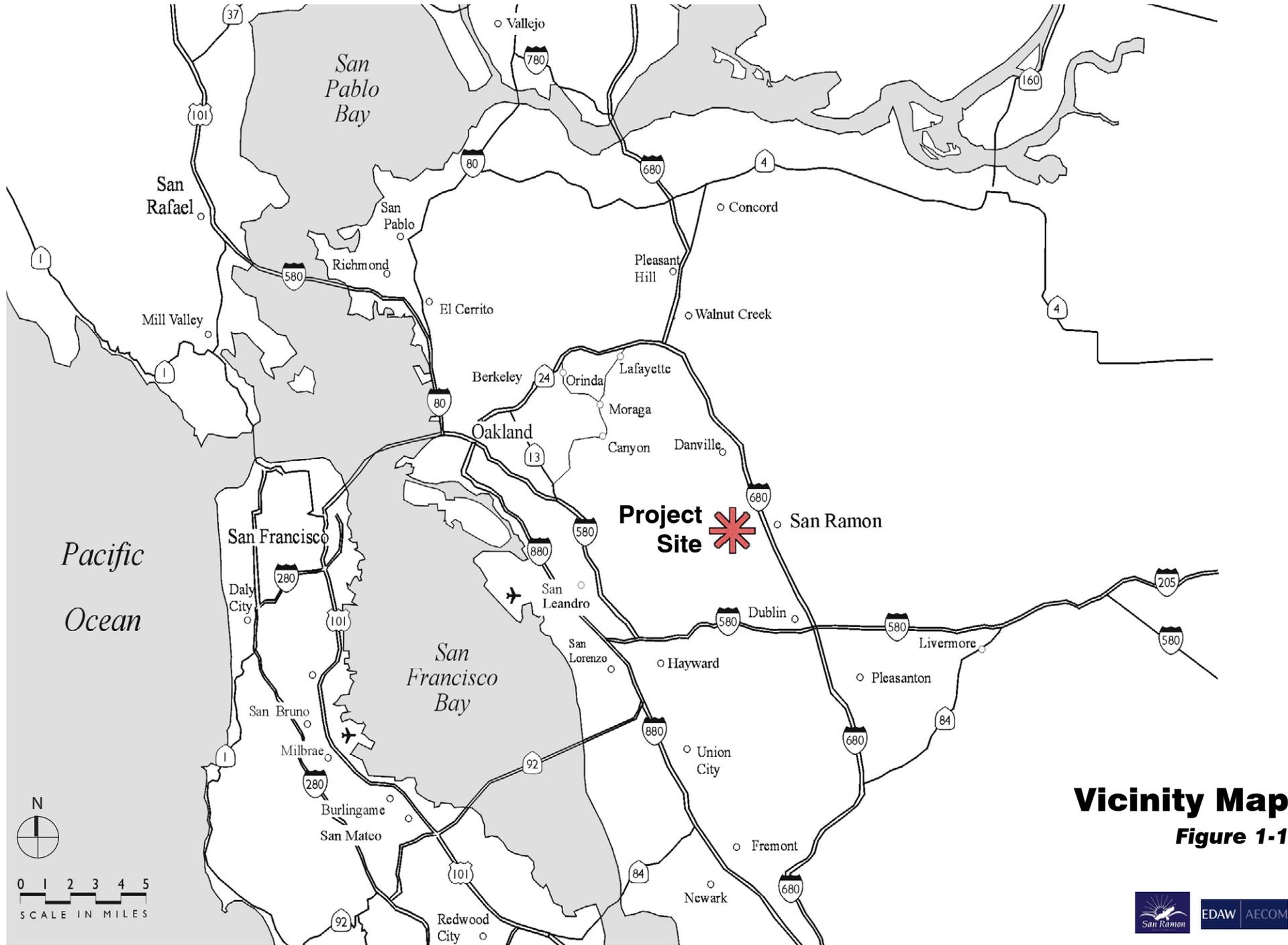
Vegetation surrounding Bollinger Creek

Creeks. Another major site characteristic is Bollinger Creek, the only creek flowing through the Plan Area, and one of the few creeks within the vicinity. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year floodplain surrounds the Bollinger Creek corridor on the western portion of the site. Bollinger Creek runs in a north-south direction through the center of the western portion of the site, and eventually converges with San Catanio Creek just south of Crow Canyon Road. The convergence of Bollinger and San Catanio Creeks forms San Ramon Creek, which flows northeast of the Plan Area. San Ramon Creek runs along San Ramon Valley Boulevard and has several drainage corridors which flow across the eastern portion of the Plan Area.



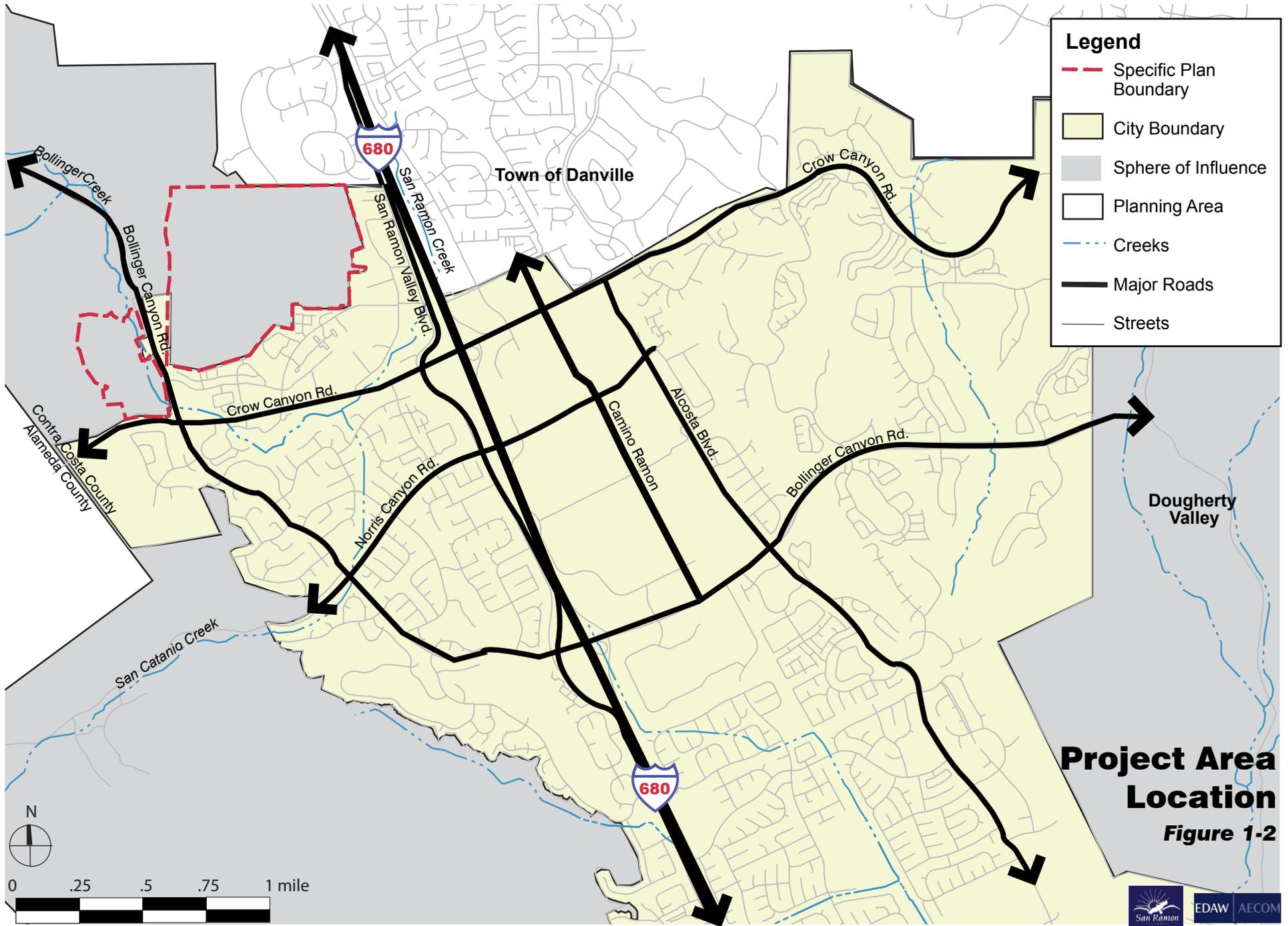
Visual elements in the Plan Area

Views. Major visual elements in the Plan Area include ridgelines, hillsides, oak woodlands, the East Bay Municipal District (EBMUD) reservoir tank, and open space areas. Views from onsite provide panoramic vistas of the Central San Ramon and the Town of Danville, and the surrounding mountain ranges; all of which can be seen from the peaks of the ridgelines. A full view of Mt. Diablo, a regional landmark, can also be seen to the east.



Vicinity Map
Figure 1-1

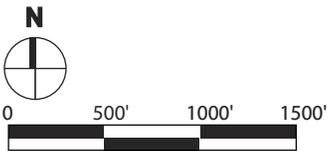




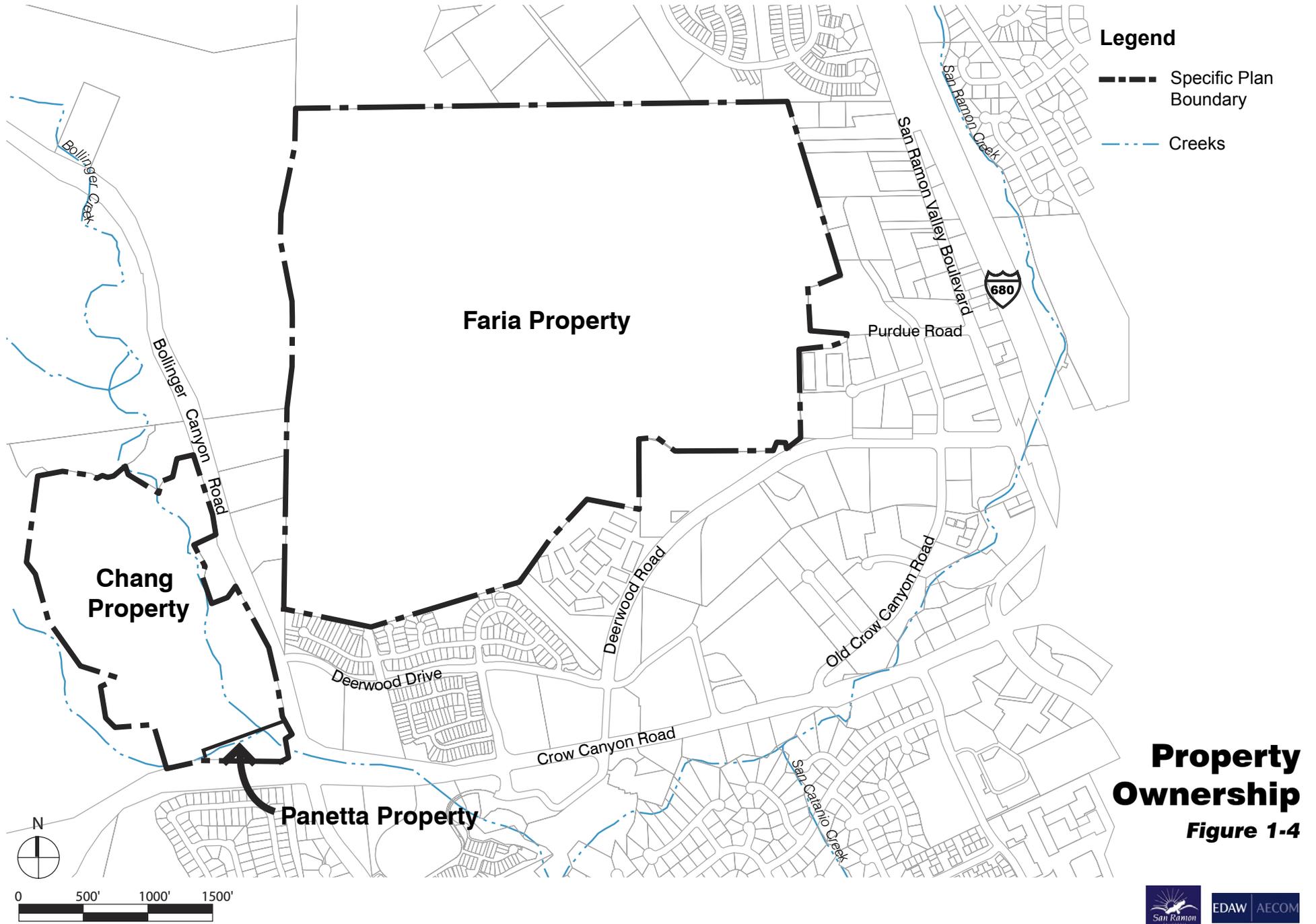


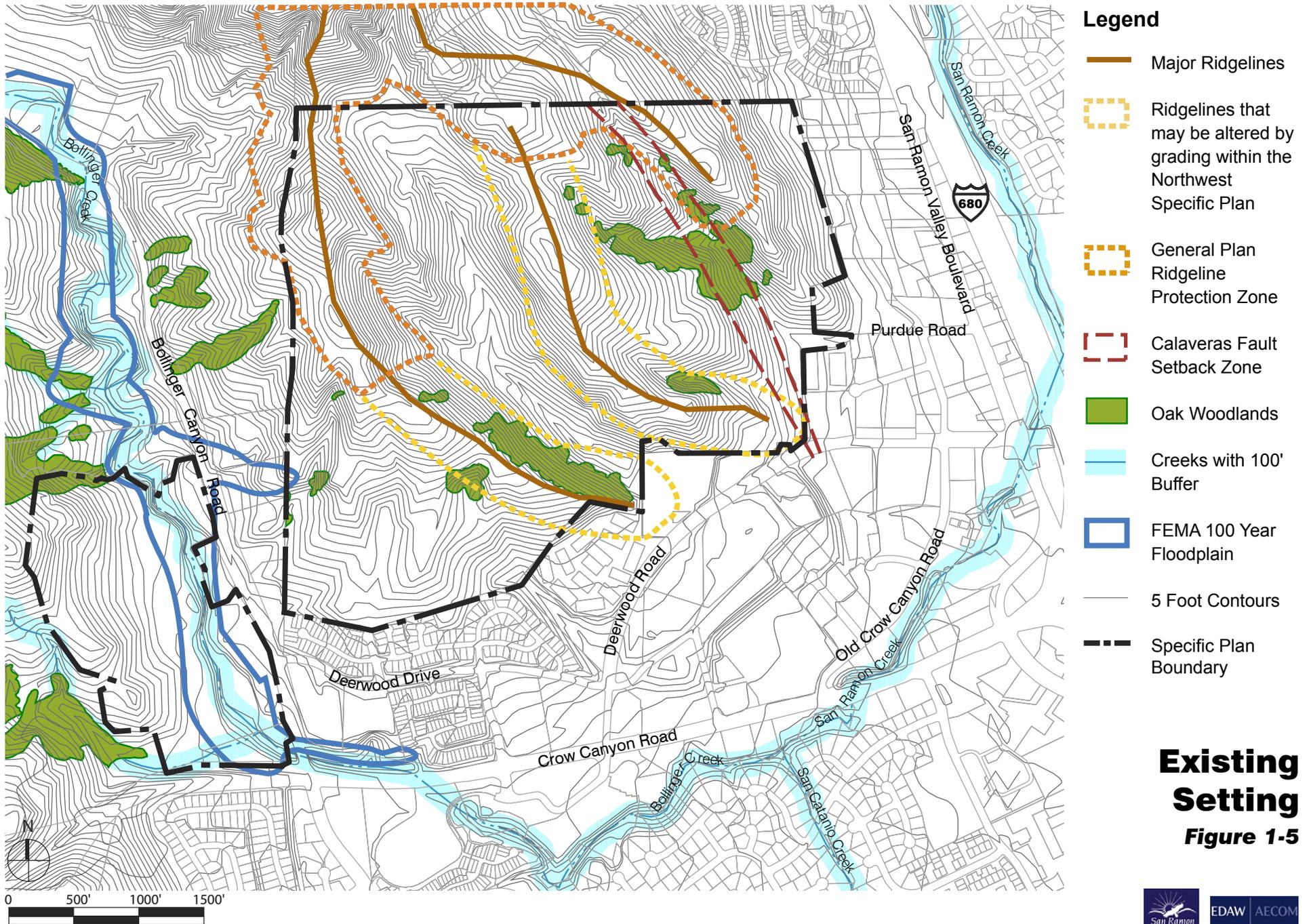
Legend

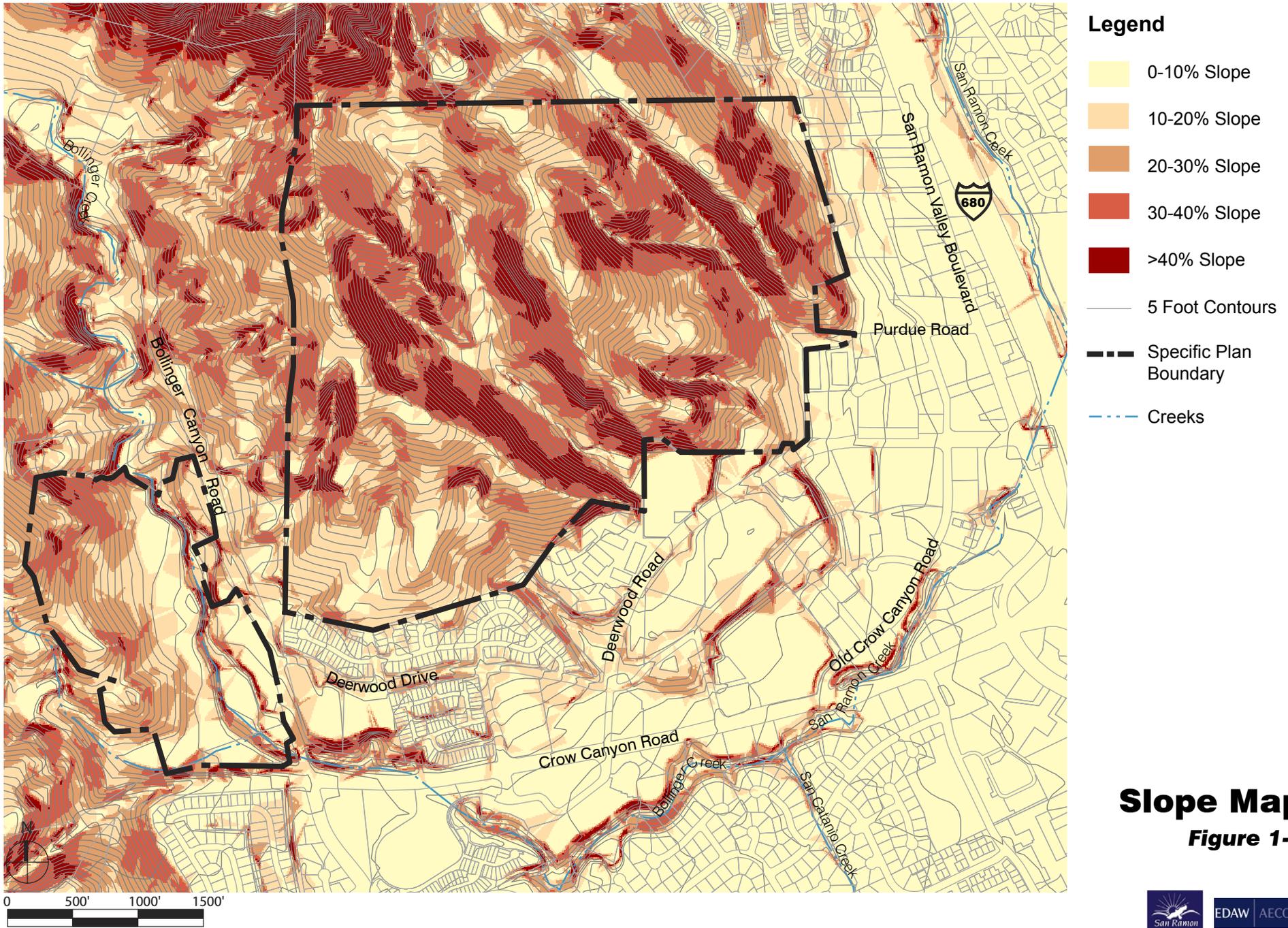
- Specific Plan Boundary
- Creeks



Aerial View
Figure 1-3







SURROUNDING LAND USES

Both residential and commercial development has occurred on the eastern and southern boundaries of the Northwest Specific Plan Area. Additionally, the Plan Area borders the Crow Canyon Subarea to the east and south, which encompasses the Crow Canyon Specific Plan Area. Residential development has also occurred in the area separating the eastern and western portions of the Plan Area, and immediately north of a portion of the Plan Area in the Town of Danville. The surrounding existing land uses, along with the open spaces that can be found in the vicinity, are outlined below and also shown in Figure 1- 7.

Residential neighborhoods. The residential neighborhoods south of the Plan Area include Promontory View, Pinnacle Crow Canyon, Deerwood Ridge, California Sunrise, and Deerwood Highlands. These consist of both single family and multi-family homes. Single family residences within the Town of Danville adjoin a portion of the northern Specific Plan boundary.

Further residential development is located in the parcels which create a pie-shaped wedge between the eastern and western portions of the Northwest Specific Plan Area, along Bollinger Canyon Road. Several of these parcels are developed, including Merrill Gardens, a 99-bed assisted residential senior housing development; a private school; and several single-family residential properties.

Rural and undeveloped areas. The land northwest of the planning area is primarily undeveloped and is part of the Bollinger Canyon Subarea, which includes preserved open space areas. According to the City’s General Plan, there are approximately 120 large lot homes in this Subarea. This land is located outside the UGB and is not planned for further growth and development. This area is known for its rugged natural beauty and is expected to remain rural in character, while accommodating some additional very low density single-family residential development in the future.

Crow Canyon Subarea. Adjacent to the Plan Area to the east is the Crow Canyon Subarea which includes the Crow Canyon Redevelopment Area. This 610-acre area incorporates industrial, office, and commercial uses. Currently, the Crow Canyon Specific Plan process is underway, with the goals of redeveloping and recycling underutilized land, and creating a pedestrian oriented community with retail shops, restaurants, a town center, housing, and mixed use.

Existing community parks. There are two City parks that are within close proximity to the Plan Area. Mill Creek Hollow Park is located on Deerwood Road, directly south of the Plan Area, and serves as a community gathering area



Single-family residential neighborhood to the south of the Plan Area



Merrill Gardens, a senior housing development

for local residents. Crow Canyon Gardens is a public park located south of Crow Canyon Road, approximately ½ mile south of the Plan Area. This park offers community gardens, a demonstration kitchen garden, classes, and tours. Additionally, the East Bay Regional Parks District (EBRPD) currently owns land contiguous to the northern border of the Plan Area located east of Bollinger Canyon Road.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Northwest Specific Plan sets forth a development program that incorporates a variety of residential neighborhoods with community open spaces and facilities, and provides for the enhancement of wildlife and riparian habitats. The Specific Plan land use program includes five distinct neighborhoods that are interconnected by a public trails and open space system, and linked to new community and public facilities. These five neighborhoods could accommodate a total of up to 830 housing units, including 238 affordable housing units, meeting the requirements of the City of San Ramon General Plan regarding housing affordability.

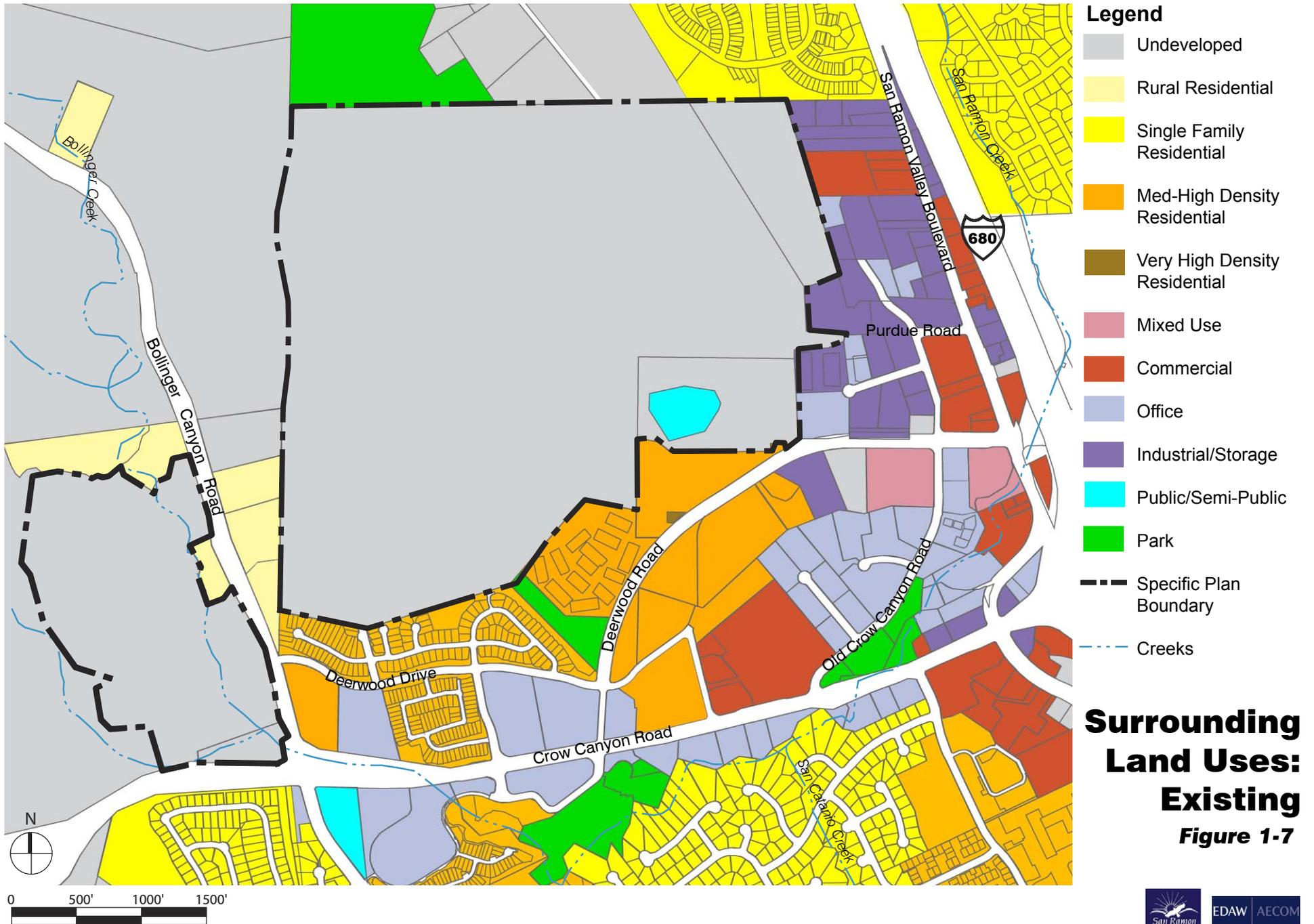
A prominent component of the land use program is the provision of several new community amenities in the form of an active community park, a rose garden, a house of worship, an educational site, a public trails system and passive open space areas. The proposed community park includes soccer and softball facilities, basketball courts, picnic and play areas, and parking facilities. The park facilities will be easily accessible by neighboring properties and all neighborhoods via its central location and a public trails system. The educational site is designed to accommodate an educational museum or outreach facility, and will have an adequate parking supply.



*Las Trampas Ridge
Trail*

Another characteristic of the Plan is linkages with surrounding neighborhoods and uses. The project includes a public trails system which originates from the community park and links to adjoining passive open space areas and to Mill Creek Hollow Park to the south. The proposed public trails system will also establish new connections to existing trails within the vicinity, including the East Bay Regional Park District trail along Bollinger Canyon Road and the Las Trampas Ridge trail.

Open space and resource conservation are integral elements of the Plan, with the creation of a riparian and wildlife corridor along a meandering drainage



swale containing a series of small wetland habitat areas and connecting ponds. Additionally, as required by the General Plan, at least 75% of the Plan Area must be designated for schools, parks, common and public open spaces uses, ownership and maintenance of public and private open space, and design of open space amenities, such as staging areas, trails, and connections. The Plan Area's open space system is also intended to serve as a visual and noise buffer between the proposed Specific Plan development and existing residential neighborhoods.

In order to achieve the City's desired vision for the Plan Area, a hierarchy of community design elements is proposed. The underlying community design principles focus on creating a distinct community identity through unique design features, such as community and neighborhood gateways, an extensive open space system, pedestrian trails, distinct neighborhoods, and community amenities. These principles are described and illustrated in the Land Use, Parks and Open Space System, and Community Facilities Chapters of this Plan. Additionally, each development application within the Plan Area will be required to submit detailed Design Guidelines, illustrating how future development will incorporate the desired community design goals and vision.

LAND USES

A variety of land uses are incorporated into the Plan to produce a community with carefully integrated open space, residential neighborhoods, and public areas. The following is a brief description of each land use:

Residential. As required by the City of San Ramon's General Plan, the Plan Area's residential neighborhoods will accommodate a range of households and incomes, including market rate, senior, and affordable housing types. As required by the General Plan, the Northwest Specific Plan contains a workforce housing program, providing 238 units available for households of very-low, low, or moderate income. The allocation of affordable units is detailed in Chapter 7, Implementation.

Five residential neighborhoods (referred to as A, B, C, D, and E as shown in Figure 2-1 in the Land Use Chapter) are included in the Plan Area, consisting of detached single family units, townhomes, attached multi-family units, and large lot homes. Densities will range from 1.5 dwelling units per acre for single-family homes to over 40 dwelling units per acre for senior housing.

Community Park. An approximately 12.7-acre active community park is designated within the Plan Area and includes soccer and softball facilities,

basketball courts, picnic areas, playgrounds, open space areas, tennis courts, an amphitheater, an interpretive center, and parking facilities. A rose garden site may also be incorporated into the community park. In the western portion of the Plan Area, a two acre neighborhood park is envisioned to be integrated into Neighborhood E.

House of Worship. An approximately 6.1-acre site has been provided in the Plan Area to accommodate a house of worship with a day care use and neighborhood serving recreational facilities. Parking will be accommodated on-site. The maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for this facility is .35, and the maximum height is 32 feet (not including a steeple or similar architectural projection).

Educational Site. In the eastern portion of the Plan Area is an approximately 1.6-acre site, planned for an educational use. The site is intended to accommodate an educational museum, educational outreach use, or similar facility. Development on this site will provide a two-story facility up to 25,000 square feet (based on a .35 FAR), together with supporting parking facilities, and landscaping improvements integrated with the adjoining community park uses.

Open Space. A variety of open space areas are included within the Plan Area, encompassing permanently preserved open space areas, a restored and enhanced riparian and wildlife corridor, and a drainage swale and detention/retention system. Additionally, 144-acres of off-site open space contiguous to the Plan Area will be recorded under a permanent conservation easement, in order to provide an overall ratio of open space and non-residential uses to housing development on the Faria Preserve site of 80%. The conservation easement will be detailed in an agreement with the Faria Ranch property owners and the City of San Ramon.

CIRCULATION OVERVIEW



Bollinger Canyon Road

There are two primary access points to the Plan Area, one from Bollinger Canyon Road and one from Purdue Road. The General Plan requires a collector level street connection between Bollinger Canyon Road and Purdue Road. In accordance with this requirement, automobile access into the Plan Area will occur through Bollinger Canyon Road from Crow Canyon Road, with a main internal roadway extending west from Bollinger Canyon Road into Neighborhood E and east providing access to Neighborhoods A, B, C and D. The access for

Neighborhood E will consist of a new street with a bridge crossing at Bollinger Creek, providing both pedestrian access and allowing for wildlife movement. The access for Neighborhoods A through D are also configured with a new internal roadway and neighborhood streets branching off into each neighborhood.

Automobile access will also occur from Purdue Road, which connects to San Ramon Valley Boulevard, a major thoroughfare for the City of San Ramon. Purdue Road also provides access to Old Crow Canyon Road and Deerwood Road. It is anticipated that Neighborhood C will use the Purdue Road entrance as a primary access point. The Crow Canyon Specific Plan Area is located southeast of the Plan Area, and will be accessible via the Purdue Road entryway.

Three gated emergency vehicle access (EVA) connections are contemplated in the Plan Area: one to the south of Neighborhood E connecting to Crow Canyon Road, one near the house of worship and Neighborhood D connecting to Claremont Crest Way, and one in the southeast corner of the site connecting to Deerwood Road. All EVA points also provide pedestrian walkway connections.

The streets within the Plan Area are designed to be pedestrian and bicycle friendly with sidewalks separated from curbs and traffic calming devices at major intersections and at neighborhood entries. Design guidelines, submitted as part of development applications for future development within the Plan Area, will also contain comprehensive discussions of traffic calming measures.

All paths within the Plan Area will be linked to an extensive trail system that internally links open spaces and park areas to the neighborhoods, and connects the Plan Area to adjacent open space areas and nearby City parks. The Circulation Chapter of this Plan will further detail the circulation patterns, and guiding circulation policies within the Plan Area.

SPECIFIC PLAN REQUIREMENTS

Under the California Government Code Sections 65450 through 65457 and the State General Plan Guidelines prepared by the Office of Planning and Research (OPR), a Specific Plan may be used to implement a general plan and its policies/programs. Specific plans must be consistent with the applicable elements of the jurisdiction's general plan. Cities and counties may use specific plans to develop policies, programs, and regulations to implement the jurisdiction's general plan.

California Government Code Section 65451(a) defines the following content requirements for specific plans include text and a diagram or diagrams, which specify all of the following:

- 1) The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.
- 2) The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
- 3) Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.
- 4) A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3).

In 1999 the voters of San Ramon approved the City Council sponsored initiative Measure G which required that a citizens' commission develop a new general plan for submittal to the voters for approval. Measure G further provided that once the new general plan received voter approval the plan could only be amended by a 4/5 vote of the Planning Commission and a 4/5 vote of the City Council in favor of the amendment following a minimum of three public hearings before each body. The current General Plan is the result of the Measure G process.

Because Government Code section 65453(a) requires that a specific plan be adopted or amended in the same manner as a general plan, the Northwest Specific Plan required a 4/5 vote from both the Planning Commission and the City Council following the requisite public hearings.

The Northwest Specific Plan has been prepared in accord with state law and with Measure G. The Plan complies with all requirements of both.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR), pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has been prepared to provide an analysis of the potential impacts of this Specific Plan and to recommend

appropriate mitigation measures as policies and features of the plan. The Specific Plan and the EIR were prepared in close coordination with one another; mitigation measures have been incorporated into the Specific Plan where possible.

The EIR prepared for the Northwest Specific Plan evaluates impacts from implementation of the Specific Plan at a programmatic level. Because a development application for development of the Faria Preserve project on the Faria Property was submitted before work on the EIR had begun, a single EIR analyzes development of the Faria Preserve at a project level and of implementation of the Specific Plan at a programmatic level. Therefore, development of the Faria Preserve will require no further environmental review unless the project is modified in ways that generate new or increased environmental effects not studied in the EIR and requiring supplemental environmental review under CEQA. Development other than the Faria Preserve project within the Plan Area will be subject to future development entitlements and environmental review.

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

The City of San Ramon's General Plan (San Ramon 2020) sets the overall land use and planning policy affecting development in the City, including the Northwest Specific Plan Area. The General Plan serves as the City's vision for long-range physical growth, economic development, and resource conservation. The Northwest Specific Plan will help achieve the vision established by the policies and implementation program of the General Plan through the preservation of valuable natural resources, expanding public access to open space opportunities, providing a range of housing opportunities including affordable housing, a house of worship, an educational site and a community park for the City.

The City of San Ramon General Plan contains policies requiring that at least 75% of the Plan Area is designated for non-residential uses, including schools, parks, common and public open space uses, ownership and maintenance of public and private open space, and design of open amenities such as staging areas, trails, and connections. As a result of these policies, a large portion of the Plan Area is designated as open space, with the remainder being designated for residential development.

The land uses included within the Plan Area are consistent with General Plan requirements. As specified by the General Plan, the land use designations within Specific Plan Areas on the General Plan Diagram are illustrative:

“The final land use plan for the Northwest Specific Plan Area may deviate from the General Plan Diagram, provided it is faithful to representations of land use relationships and meets the criteria and standards of the Specific Plan policies contained in the General Plan.”

Ordinance 197, which was adopted by the City Council in 1990, requires that land above the 500 foot elevation limit be subject to the Resource Conservation Overlay District (RCOD). The entirety of the Plan Area is located within the RCOD. According to the RCOD, development is not permitted within 100 vertical feet of a major ridgeline, within 50 feet of a minor ridgeline, or within 100 feet of a creek or a stream channel.

Elsewhere in the RCOD, a slope density formula applies:



- Where the slope exceeds 20% only 1 dwelling unit/320-acres is allowable, and that density must be transferred to a developable area
- Where the slope is between 15-20%, the maximum density is 1 dwelling unit/5-acres
- Where the slope is between 10-15%, the maximum density is 1 dwelling unit/acre



According to Ordinance 197 text, this measure is not intended to prevent the City from processing General Plan Amendments, Specific Plans, or other development plans for specific areas which differ from its terms. However, such development plans shall only take effect if elements of plans that do not adhere to Ordinance 197 requirements are approved by the majority of voters of the City of San Ramon. The Implementation Chapter of this Plan addresses consistency with RCOD policies and Ordinance 197.



Topography within the Plan Area

Another consideration for site development is ridgeline preservation policies within the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan, which stem from the Measure G Open Space Preservation Action Plan. Measure G is a City Council sponsored initiative approved by the voters in 1999 which mandates “a plan for the acquisition of ridgeline lands, contiguous to the City of San Ramon, to be preserved for open space purposes in perpetuity.” The guiding policy of the Measure G Open Space Conservation Plan states the following intention:

- Policy 8.4-G-1: Expand the ridgeline and hillside open space

system in the City's Planning Area by joint efforts with East Bay Regional Parks District, Contra Costa County and nonprofit trustee agencies.

The Open Space Conservation Plan also contains implementation policies giving ridgelines and viewsheds over 650 feet elevation greater priority for open space preservation and acquisition. This policy is relevant to the Plan Area because it contains ridgelines over 650 feet in elevation.

The Plan Area falls entirely within the UGB, designating it as an appropriate area to carry out general plan policies to develop in a more compact form by preserving open space and natural resources, and limiting the extent of urban development and services outside of the boundary.

