1 INTRODUCTION

No other community is exactly like ours. The Town of Yucca Valley is the economic hub of the Morongo Basin, rich with history, culture and art, and attractive to many for its desert environment, welcoming neighborhoods, dark skies, topography, and small town atmosphere. This General Plan is a comprehensive, long range planning document that celebrates and preserves the unique qualities that make Yucca Valley a desirable place to live, work, and recreate.

A historical view of Yucca Valley.

1.1 Town History and Regional Context

Yucca Valley can trace its earliest inhabitants back to the Serrano and Chemehuevi Indians. These nomadic tribes occupied the San Bernardino Mountains during the summer and Coachella Valley in the winter. Artifacts and petroglyphs from the natives can still be found in the Yucca Valley area today.

A well dug in the 1880s established a critical water source that helped the area transform into an important stop for ranchers, miners, and horse-drawn supply trains. During the 1920s and '30s, the area continued to be an important stop for travelers and WWI veterans who sought the desert climate for its healing properties. In 1949, the Town's forefathers purchased 3,000 acres of land, installed water lines, and named the area Yucca Valley. The Town was incorporated in 1991 with a population of 16,000 people.

Today the Town of Yucca Valley is the center of business for the Morongo Basin. The Town dually serves the needs of visitors to nearby Joshua Tree National Park and provides residential housing in proximity to Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. A map of the region is provided in Figure I-1.

With State Routes 247 and 62 intersecting in Yucca Valley, the Town is a popular stop for visitors traveling to Palm Springs, Joshua Tree National Park, Big Bear, Las Vegas, and the Colorado River. Its central location also means Town residents have access to diverse amenities including ski resorts, beaches, and major cities.

Over the course of several decades, Yucca Valley has transformed from a small frontier settlement into a thriving, contemporary desert community offering low density and a high quality of life. That being said, the community still faces many challenges as it accommodates growth in future decades. Infrastructure needs will continue to be one of the largest challenges that must be addressed by the community.

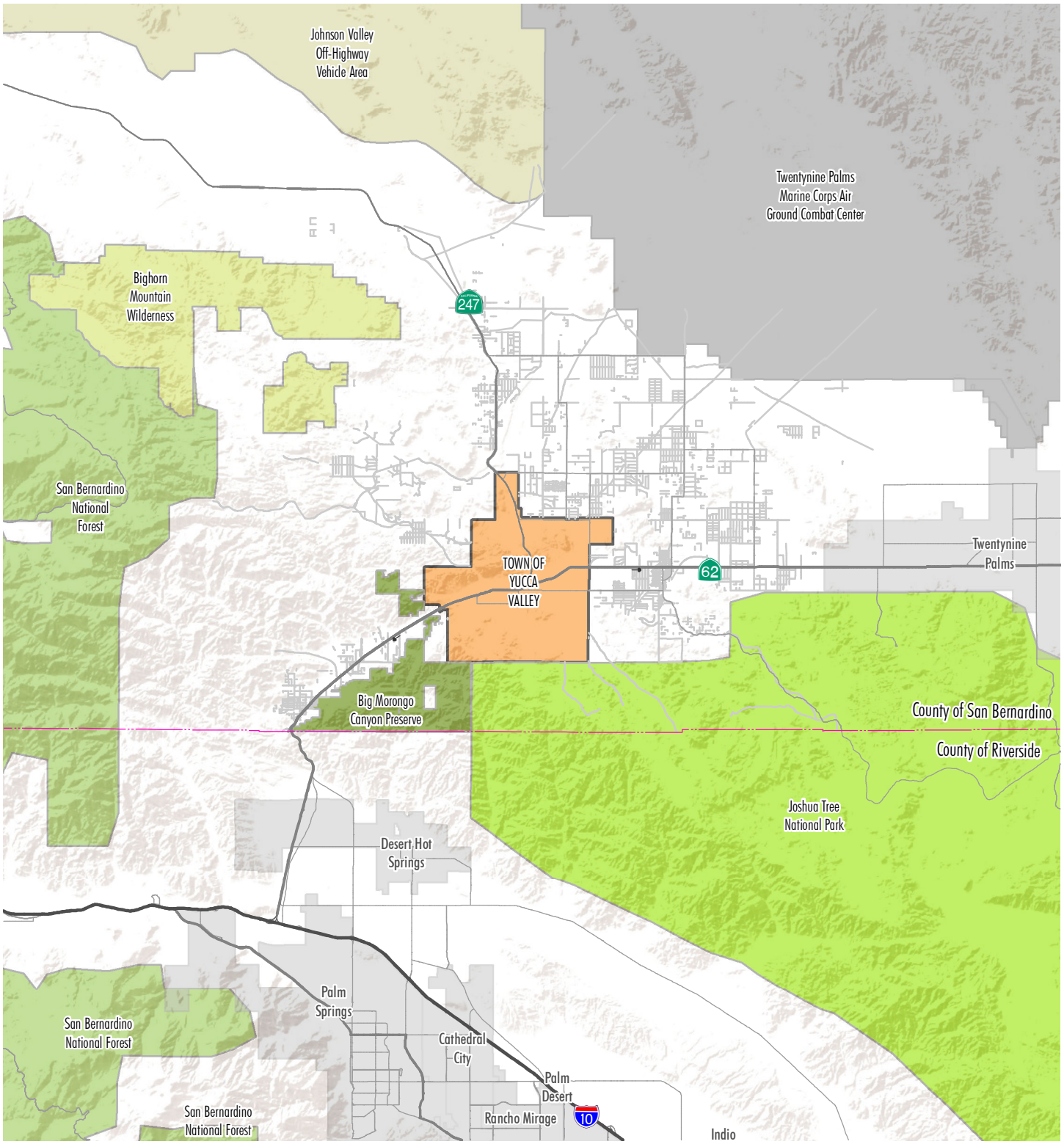
Circulation-related infrastructure will need to be expanded as traffic volumes increases from both regional and local growth. Unpaved dirt roads significantly contribute to air quality degradation, and

future upgrades, including paving of dirt roads, may be necessary to comply with regional and state air quality requirements. The Hi Desert Water District is continuing to address water and wastewater service delivery to the community. Flood control and drainage infrastructure improvements are necessary to protect public and private properties from flood damage. Park and recreation facilities are necessary to serve all segments of the community, and future growth will result in the need for additional park lands.

These challenges are not different from those faced by other communities in the Morongo Basin. Although a centralized wastewater treatment facility and additional roadway improvements may seem daunting, Yucca Valley has overcome many hurdles by coming together as a community.

Figure I-1

REGIONAL LOCATION



YUCCA VALLEY
GENERAL PLAN

THE PLANNING CENTER DC&E

TYV-01 7.09.13

0 14,000 28,000 Feet

Legend

San Bernardino & Riverside County Line

Town Limits

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1.2 General Plan Vision and Values

The Town's vision is a statement of desired future conditions and characteristics to be achieved or reinforced by this General Plan. The vision reflects a set of values that are important to the community as a whole. Values express beliefs that should apply to many aspects of the Town in both short- and long-range decision making. The vision and associated community values influenced the preparation of the goals, policies, and implementation actions of this General Plan.

Not only are the vision and values the building blocks of the goals and policies, but they are also intended to guide the future actions of the community's decision makers. It is important that all new projects and programs support the vision and values. The General Plan 2035 Vision and Values are provided on the following page.

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TOWN OF YUCCA VALLEY

GENERAL PLAN VISION AND VALUES

VISION 2035

While maintaining our small town atmosphere, the Town of Yucca Valley is a unique, desirable place to live, the economic hub of the Morongo Basin, and a sought after place to visit.

As a destination, visitors are drawn to our desert environment, arts and culture, recreation, history, night skies, active open space, and shopping and hospitality opportunities.

Our range of community services and facilities, efficient infrastructure, safe and established neighborhoods, unique character, and diversity define our community and quality of life.

Our commitment to balanced growth, environmental stewardship, fiscal sustainability, active citizen participation, and property rights are the cornerstones of our community.

COMMUNITY VALUES

- Small town atmosphere
- Balanced growth
- Safe and established neighborhoods
- Fiscal sustainability
- Diverse range of community services
- Efficient infrastructure
- Strong economy
- Desert environment and natural resources
- Arts and culture
- Community pride and participation

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ADMINISTRATION

1.3 Purpose of the General Plan

The purpose of the General Plan is to provide a blueprint for how the community should improve, grow, and conserve resources to ensure that we are a thriving and healthy Town well into the future. California state law requires each town, city, and county to adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan. The Town Council, Planning Commission, and other authoritative bodies will use the goals and policies of this General Plan as a basis on which to make land use–related decisions.

This General Plan is considered comprehensive since it includes the territory within the Town's boundaries and addresses a wide variety of local and regional issues. These issues range from the physical development of the Town, such as general location and extent of land uses and supporting infrastructure, to social concerns such as accommodating housing for a diverse population of Town residents. The state-mandated elements of a General Plan are Land Use, Housing, Circulation, Conservation, Open Space, Safety, and Noise. Due to the strong interrelationship between the Town's natural open space resources and recreational opportunities, the Open Space and Conservation Elements have been combined into a single element.

Shaping the General Plan

The General Plan is a framework for the entire community, and as such, it was formed with significant input from the public. The General Plan was shaped by community input received from a multifaceted outreach program that included Town events, public workshops, topic-specific workshops, an online forum, survey, study sessions with the Planning Commission and Town Council, and detailed discussions of goals and policies with an appointed General Plan Advisory Committee.

Town residents participate in a public workshop.

Public Outreach

The Town prepared a public outreach plan to connect with the community at events and locations where the largest number of people could be reached. Initial outreach events included interactive booths exploring land use and related topics at the summer music festival and 20th anniversary celebration. As the General Plan process continued, a series of public workshops were conducted to focus discussions on specific areas or topics. Three workshops looked at the areas that are planned to accommodate the largest concentration of the Town's future growth. Meetings were held for the properties in the east end, mid-town, and west side planning areas to gain additional input.

Maps were used to stimulate discussion about future growth areas in Town.

A statistically significant telephone survey was conducted covering a variety of local issues related to the Town's General Plan. A total of 305 Town residents participated in a 25-minute survey. Registered voters were selected to ensure that participants were local residents. Topics related to circulation, economic development, and the preservation of natural resources and open space were ranked the highest by respondents.

In addition to the outreach efforts described above, the Town Council established a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) to assist staff and consultants in the preparation of the new plan. The Town's appointed ad hoc committee consisted of 13 members and met five times during the course of the General Plan update. The GPAC members reviewed each of the General Plan Elements and provided feedback to staff and the General Plan consultants prior to Planning Commission and Town Council's consideration of the consolidated document. Members of the committee also served as liaisons to the community regarding the General Plan effort

1.4 Reading the General Plan

As the blueprint providing the foundation for the future physical development of the Town, government officials, residents, property owners, and business owners alike should familiarize themselves with this document. Guided by the Town's vision and values, each element contains at least one goal, several related policies, and implementation actions to achieve the identified goal. Additional discussion related to the implementation of the General Plan can be found in Section 1.6.

Goals are statements of desired future conditions, regarding a particular topic in the community, toward which effort and use of resources are or will be directed.

Policies are statements that guide decision making and specify an intended level of Town commitment on a subject.

Implementation Actions are provided in a separate, supplemental document. The Town will use implementation actions and strategies as a check list of action items and next steps for Town staff and local decision makers to carry out the goals and policies in the general plan. Implementation actions each have a target timeframe for completion; some are near term (1 to 3 years) and others may have target completion dates that are farther out (5 to 10 years).

The example below illustrates the relationship between a goal, policy, and implementation action:

GOAL:

A comprehensive multi-use, quality system of parks and recreational areas that support a broad range of activities, as well as cultural, and passive open space opportunities for current and future residents.

Policy:

Plan, develop, and maintain quality and adequate outdoor recreational and open space areas that utilize and enhance the unique aspects of the desert environment and provide amenities that are responsive to the needs of residents and visitors.

Implementation Action:

Review the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and establish a list of priorities, action items, and target completion dates to implement the highest priority items identified in the plan.

In addition to goals and policies, the General Plan provides technical information, tables, and figures to support the requirements and recommendations made in the document. Technical information includes quantitative data about the Town's demography, housing, economy, etc.

1.5 General Plan Consistency

Consistency is a key legal requirement of the state's general plan law. First and foremost, a general plan must be internally consistent. Additionally, the Town's related planning tools are required to be consistent with the provisions of the General Plan; these include the Zoning Code, Subdivision Ordinance, and Specific Plans. Furthermore, development proposals must also demonstrate General Plan consistency for project approval.

Internal Consistency

All elements of the General Plan must be internally consistent. The goals, policies, text, maps, tables, etc., of each element cannot conflict within that element or with those of another. Internal consistency has five factors:

- All elements of the General Plan have equal legal status. No element legally takes priority over another.
- All elements must be consistent with one another.
- Each element's data, goals, policies, and implementation actions must be consistent with one another.
- All goals, policies, and implementation actions identified for a Special Policy Area must be consistent with the overall General Plan.

- Text and diagrams within the General Plan must be consistent. Information provided in a table or chart cannot contradict written information.

Consistency with Other City Documents

The implementation tools of the General Plan, such as the Town's Zoning Code, Subdivision Ordinance, and Specific Plans, must be consistent with the General Plan. Likewise, each of these tools must be consistent with one another. In the event that an inconsistency is found, the applicable document must be updated in a reasonable amount of time to maintain consistency with the General Plan.

Consistency with Development Proposals

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): State legislation that defines state environmental goals and the responsibilities of local governments to assist in achieving those goals and sets forth the requirements for the environmental analysis of proposed public and private projects, including the preparation and/or review of environmental impact reports or issuance of exemptions and negative declarations.

Development proposals must be analyzed and tested for consistency with the goals and policies of the General Plan and applicable implementation actions. Proposals to amend a Specific Plan, the Development Code, or the General Plan text or maps also require findings regarding consistency with the General Plan. Inconsistency of a project with the General Plan requires a finding of overriding consideration. This test of General Plan compliance is also a required criteria for determining significant impacts under the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act.

1.6 Implementation

Program EIR: A program EIR covers big projects or a series of actions that work as one big project because they are related geographically, logically, by statute, or by similar impacts, Future actions may or may not require additional environmental review.

California Government Code Section 65103(c) requires that local jurisdictions implement the General Plan once it has been adopted. The Yucca Valley General Plan relies on implementation actions as well as the related mitigation measures and programs in the General Plan Program EIR, that serve as implementation strategies. The Town Development Code also plays a critical role in implementing the goals and policies of the plan. Specific Plans and Special Policy Areas provide detailed programs for particular portions of the General Plan area.

The Yucca Valley General Plan is intended to be the Town's overarching planning document. Frequent changes to the document are strongly discouraged, and proposed changes should be limited to those that are essential to implement the Town's Vision or to reflect a change in the Town's approach to an issue. The implementation actions are intended to be a much more dynamic tool, used by Town planning staff to monitor the outcomes of the plan and to execute the necessary next steps to implement the General Plan. As a result, the Implementation Actions are prepared and reviewed by Town Council in conjunction with the General Plan, but are not adopted into the text of the General Plan document.

Although the implementation actions document should be maintained throughout the year, review of the actions should be in

the annual progress report, as required by Government Code Section 65700. The General Plan implementation actions should also be consulted in conjunction with the Town Council's annual priority-setting efforts and development of the Town's Capital Improvement Program.

Implementation through the Development Code

Zoning Ordinance

The Development Code, which includes the Zoning Ordinance, is the primary tool for implementing the General Plan. The Zoning Ordinance regulates land use through zoning district;, development standards; and permitted, conditional, and other uses. The code describes the distribution and intensity of land uses in more detailed categories that align with the land use designations in the General Plan.

The regulations of the Development Code establish minimum standards for each of the zoning districts consistent with the General Plan. Permitting processes in the Development Code, such as Conditional Use Permits, Variances, Specific Plans, and other land use permitting, also implement the General Plan. The implementation of the General Plan is further regulated by Government Code Sections 65800.

Subdivision Ordinance

Like zoning, subdivision regulation is another mechanism used to implement the General Plan. Subdivisions are regulated by the Town's Development Code and supplement the Subdivision Map Act (Government Code Sections 66410 et seq.). This act leaves the standards for regulating the design and improvement of subdivision to local government. The broadest authority for regulating subdivision lies in Government Code sections 66473.5, 66474, 66474.60, and 66474.61, requiring findings that, among other things, the subdivision is consistent with the Town's General Plan and any applicable Specific Plan.

Development Agreements

Development agreements are a contract between a town, city, or county and a developer. The agreement may specify conditions, terms, restrictions, and regulations pertaining to any aspect of a proposed development project. Development agreements are regulated by the Town's Development Code.

Development agreements are a useful tool for meeting the goals and policies of the General Plan while reducing some of the development risk. In accordance with Government Code Section 65866, the Town, unless otherwise provided by the development agreement, is not prohibited from applying new rules, regulations, and policies to the property. Nor is the Town prevented from denying or conditionally approving any subsequent development project application on the basis of existing or new rules, regulations, or policies.

1.7 Amending the General Plan

The Town's Development Code regulates General Plan Amendments. This General Plan projects conditions and needs into the future as a basis for determining long-term objectives and policies and shorter-term decision making, budgeting, and prioritization of implementation actions. New information will become available and the needs of the community could change. To adapt, the General Plan can be amended up to four times per calendar year in accordance with state law and the Town's Development Code.

Occasions may arise that require the Town to have greater flexibility in amending the General Plan. California Government Code exempts the following from the General Plan amendment schedule limitations:

- Amendments to optional elements
- Amendments requested and necessary for affordable housing (Section 65358(c))
- Any amendment necessary to comply with a court decision in a case involving the legal adequacy of the general plan (Section 65358(d)(1))
- Amendments to bring a general plan into compliance with an airport land use plan (Section 65302.3)
- Changes to the Implementation Actions (separate document)

1.8 Annual Review

As a general law town, Yucca Valley must comply with the state's general law, unlike charter cities, which have authority over their own municipal affairs. This means that the Town is required to prepare a general plan annual progress report. California Government Code requires that the planning agency "render an annual report to the legislative body (Town Council) on the status of the Plan and the progress in its implementation" (Section 65400(b)). The annual report should also be submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the Department of Housing and Community Development (Sections 65584 and 65583(c)). State law further requires that the Housing Element be revised at least once every eight years.

GOAL I1

Informed decision making for the Town's future growth guided by the General Plan and related documents.

Policies

Policy I 1-1 Maintain the General Plan as a relevant, "living document" that provides a framework for informed decision making for the Town.

Policy I 1-2 Participate in all relevant local and regional planning efforts.

Policy I 1-3 Establish regular lines of communication with local, regional, state, and federal agencies whose planning programs may affect the Town.