

Chapter

1

INTRODUCTION

This page was intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

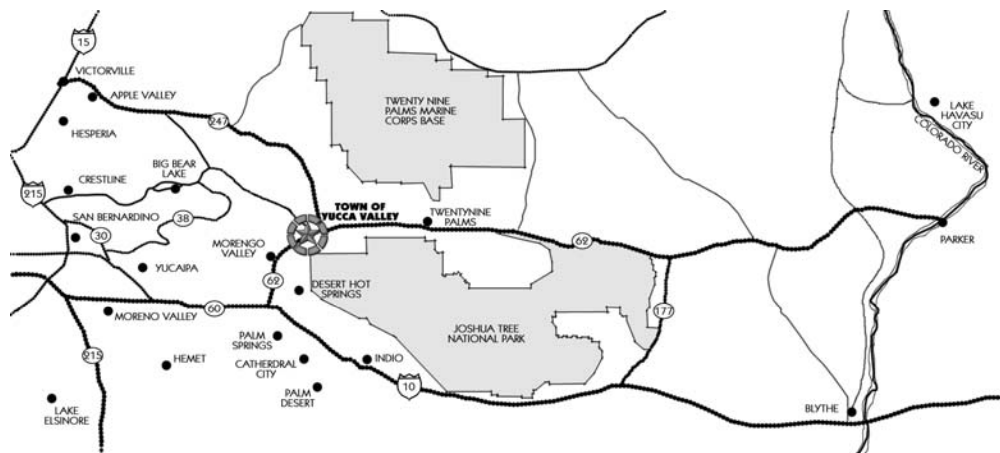
Town. As defined by the American Heritage dictionary, a town is "... larger than a village, but smaller than a city." Indeed, Yucca Valley is a town with a rich past and an even more promising future. According to one long-tenured Yucca Valley resident:

"I live in Yucca Valley for the clean air and to see the stars. I live here because it is a great place to raise children. Yucca Valley is big enough to have modern amenities, but small enough to feel like a small town. It is a community with a rural atmosphere, distinct seasons (unlike the lower desert communities), and a sense of pride that is expressed through a number of annual festivals, such as Grubstakes Days."

The Town of Yucca Valley is a desirable place to live, work, shop, learn, and play. The above message by a resident is an implicit part of the Town's purpose for initiating this Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan. Recognizing that growth and change will occur in the community, the Town and the Yucca Valley community have prepared this Specific Plan for Old Town Yucca Valley. This plan will lead and manage the way in which Old Town's built environment eagerly seizes the opportunities of the future, yet pays respect to its community history and values.

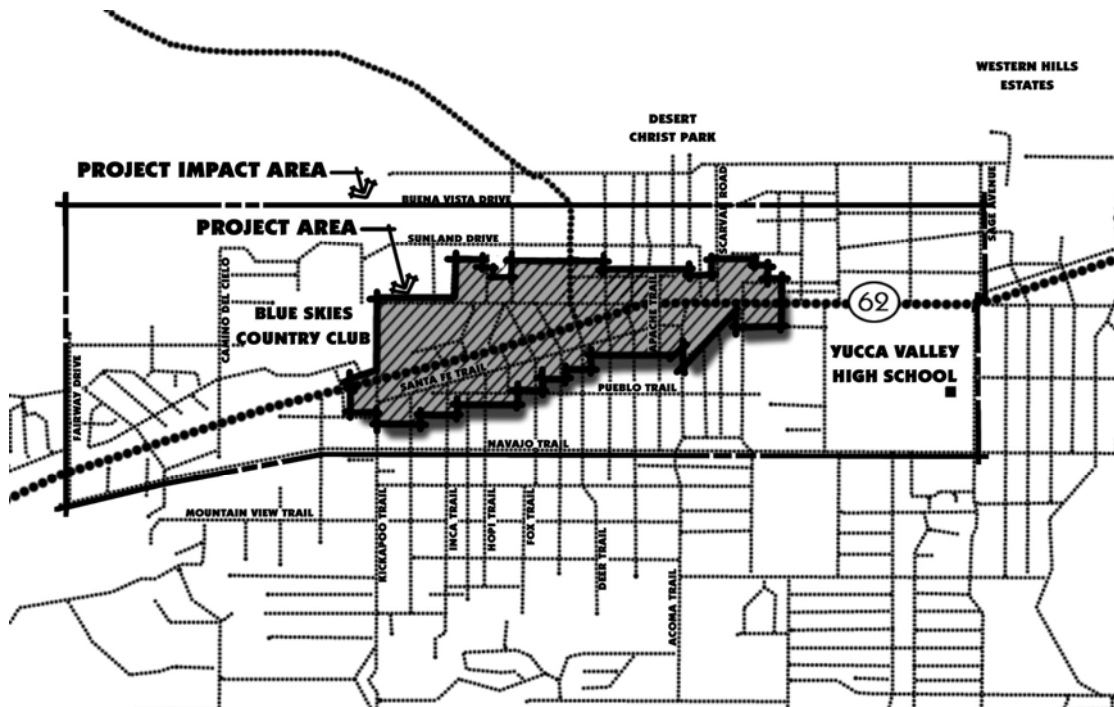
1.1.1 Location and Setting

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan is located near the western end of Yucca Valley along State Route 62 (SR-62).



Introduction

Old Town Yucca Valley is the original commercial core of the Town of Yucca Valley. The Specific Plan project area includes approximately 250 acres along SR-62 between Church Street on the east and Kickapoo Trail on the west, and between Yucca Trail on the north and just beyond Santa Fe Trail on the south. Today, the major junction in the core of Old Town Yucca Valley is the intersection of Pioneertown Road and the existing alignment of SR-62.



1.1.2 Purpose and Intent

The Town of Yucca Valley has identified the need to improve the economic vitality and livability of the Old Town area by establishing comprehensive strategy to attract and expand economic activity and commerce. The purpose of the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan is to identify key opportunities to enhance the Town’s overall economic base and the historic Old Town area.

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan serves as a planning and regulatory link between the Town of Yucca Valley General Plan and individual, project-level development within the project area. The Specific Plan provides area-specific land use regulations and development guidelines. Upon adoption by the Town, the Specific Plan provides the legal development requirements for the project area.

The Specific Plan provides a comprehensive set of plans, guidelines, and regulatory standards in addition to administrative and implementation provisions within the land use districts, and applies to residential, commercial, office, mixed-use, and light industrial uses.

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan has been developed to provide as much flexibility as allowed by State law. The vision of this Specific Plan is intended to be implemented over a 20-year period and, therefore, may be amended over time to reflect the Town’s evolving vision for the area.

This Specific Plan contains flexible concepts, development standards, and design guidelines for the Old Town area that are intended to implement the goals, objectives, and polices of the Town’s General Plan. In developing the Old Town Yucca Specific Plan, the land use plan has been created to achieve the following goals:

- ❖ Implement the General Plan polices by presenting more detailed direction for the Old Town area to improve its overall walkability, traffic circulation, and economic viability.
- ❖ Provide a diversity of housing opportunities that responds to a variety of local needs, incomes, densities, and promote a vibrant Old Town area.
- ❖ Establish high-quality architectural design, in both scale and character, to address the future growth of the area.
- ❖ Develop safe motor vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation systems, emphasizing the pedestrian experience along the “Main Street” within the Old Town area and mitigating potential future impacts at SR-62 intersections.
- ❖ Carry forward the Vision Plan, guiding principles, and community input and consensus generated during the community outreach program, through more detailed plans, guidelines, and regulations.

Introduction

1.1.3 Historical Perspective

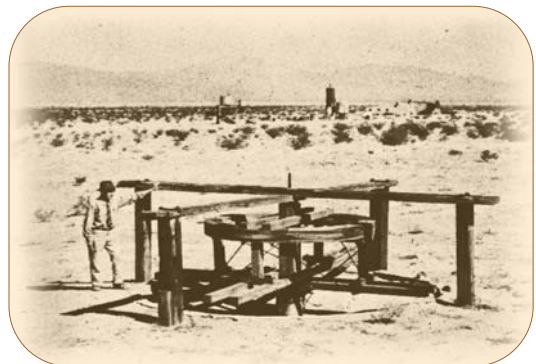
Yucca Valley is part of the Mojave Desert in what is known as the Morongo Basin. The high-desert community is at an elevation of 3,279 feet, 30 miles northwest of Palm Springs, and runs for seven miles along the SR-62 highway north of Joshua Tree to Pipes Canyon and toward other destinations, including the Colorado River. Yucca Valley is noted for its wide-open spaces, healthy lifestyles, equestrian enthusiasts, and clear skies on 320 nights every year, making it a perfect window for celestial observation.

Yucca Valley's low Sonoran Desert exhibits climates ranging from 49 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and supports a variety of fauna and flora. The weather includes both dry, howling winds that sweep sand and carve rock, and summer thunderstorms that flood the lowlands relocating sand and rock from higher elevations. Yucca Valley and its surroundings support hummingbirds, scrub jays, desert threshers, roadrunners, desert tortoises, rosy boas, green Mojave rattlesnakes, lizards, mountain sheep, bears, mountain lions, coyotes, and rabbits. Plants like the creosote bush adapted to Yucca Valley's environment over thousands of years, as have the dusty green yucca, saguaro, salt bush, sage, Joshua, and Palo Verde trees with their wispy green foliage.

Natural resources extend well beyond the native fauna and flora to the people who have made Yucca Valley and the Morongo Basin home. From the Native Americans, who migrated from north and south, to miners and prospectors, who traveled from the eastern United States and other countries seeking a better life and wealth, to ranchers, who drove cattle through the Pioneer Pass until after World War II, and shepherders passing through on the way to grazing land. They make up the fabric woven of strength and determination, from diverse backgrounds and interests, who succeeded through hard work, resilience, resourcefulness, and the entrepreneurial spirit.



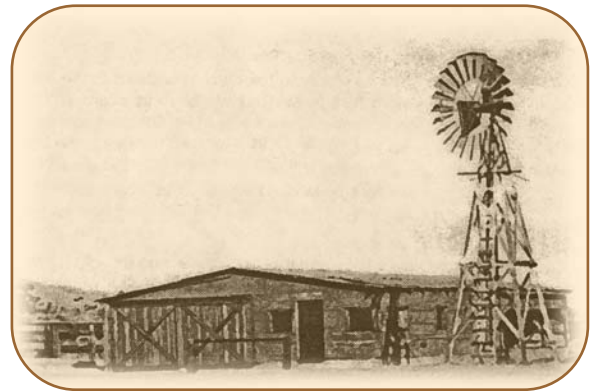
Example of Stamp Mill at Desert Queen Mine in Joshua Tree National Monument
Source: *Yucca Valley Reflections of the Past*



Old Dale Mine
Source: *Yucca Valley Reflections of the Past*

A rediscovery of mineral wealth, known to Native Americans decades before, occurred in the 1860s. After gold was found in Holcomb Valley and near Big Bear, a succession of events brought prospectors and miners, cattle ranchers, and then homesteaders to Yucca Valley. The most successful mines near Yucca Valley were the Onyx, Pipes Canyon, and Rose mines in Pioneer Pass. The Rose Mine, named for its pink and lavender quartz, began operating in the 1880s and was one of the most productive gold mines in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Stamp mills opened in the 1870's and crude housing was built with limited imported timber. In the 1890s, two mining districts (29 Palms District and Monte Negra District) were formed between 29 Palms to Eagle Mountain. Many miners came and went from the 1870s through the 1930s. The high costs associated with transporting water and exporting ore led to the closing of some of the mines surrounding Yucca Valley. Evidence of mining activities faded as the abandoned mine shafts were backfilled. Makeshift cabins with newsprint wallpaper were leveled and Pioneer Pass became a major arterial road to Big Bear.



Warren Well
Source: Morongo Basin Historical Society
(website: www.mbhs.net)

Water has always been as a premium commodity in the dry desert environment. From 1873 to 1881, for instance, cattle ranching had been restricted to the Morongo Valley, where grass and water were accessible and cattle grazed from Whitewater to Big Bear. Around 1880, a teamster named Mark "Chuck" Warren leased government land to raise cattle near Yucca Valley and dug a 160-foot water well. He began selling water, creating the opportunity for other ranchers to move into the area. Over the years, the Warren Well became a gathering place for ranchers during cattle drives and eventually for settlers who staked homesteads between 1910 and the 1930s. Water wells continued to be used until the Yucca Valley Village Company, Ltd. was formed. In 1962, the Hi-Desert Water District was formed and now services the Town of Yucca Valley.



First Yucca Valley Village County
Water District Well
Source: *History of the Morongo Basin*

During its early existence, the San Gorgonio Pass was considered the gateway of the trade route from the Colorado Desert to San Jacinto. Over the centuries, many Indian tribes, Spaniards, fur trappers, and adventurers used the pass. It later served as a stagecoach and rest stop. Supplies were transported from Banning Pass to the Yucca Valley before businesses were established to provide the services

Introduction

needed for the expanding population. Before motor vehicles were available, deliveries came by stagecoach and 8-horse supply wagons, taking two to three days.

Today the major junction in the core of Old Town is the intersection of Pioneertown Road and 29 Palms, which connects Yucca Valley to the historic western movie set in Pioneer Town and continues on SR- 247 toward other high-desert communities, the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base, and mountain towns like Big Bear Lake.

The pioneering spirit lingered well into the 20th century. The growth of private enterprise was slow, but sure. In 1923, Lone Star Ranch began to sell gasoline to the public. The first schoolhouse was built in 1927 (possibly in 29 Palms). Ervine Market came into existence in 1936. The Post Office was opened by Hilda Hardesty inside a dry goods store. Yucca Valley Trailer Park opened in 1939.

In 1947, California Water and Telephone Company came to the Morongo Valley, and kerosene continued to be used as fuel for lighting and heat until electricity arrived with Cal Electric in 1948. The first electric utility office opened in Yucca Valley in 1964, when Southern California Edison bought Cal Electric. The first streetlights were installed by Yucca Valley Lighting District in 1959. During the 1970s and 1980s, a housing boom brought rapid population growth.

In November 1991, the Town of Yucca Valley was incorporated. Over the past decade and continuing today, the Town has experienced significant growth and development.

Out of rich historical events sprang a town characterized by mining, ranching, and pioneering influences. As time passed, additional influences came from the proximity of SR-62 and neighboring communities that attracted tourists seeking the sun, natural splendor, remnants of the western movie era, and celestial encounters. Today, as Yucca Valley grows, its leaders and citizens understand the benefits of maintaining the historical character of Old Town while stimulating economic development. In response, the Town of Yucca Valley has facilitated the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan.



Old Town Core Intersection

1.2 The Planning Process

The planning process for the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan included a series of public workshops and meetings to provide opportunities for input by Town residents, business and property owners, developers, and other interested parties. The various workshops and meetings assisted in the development of the overall vision for the Old Town and policy framework for the Specific Plan. The overall visioning exercise provided community consensus and focus to the Old Town Specific Plan area. The planning process for the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan comprised three distinct phases.

1.2.1 Phase I: Information Gathering

Phase I introduced the Urban Design Studio (UDS) team to Old Town Yucca Valley and SR-62. This phase entailed tours with Town staff members, a review of existing documents and information; background and data research; site reconnaissance and visual observations; and a market feasibility analysis. Initial coordination with Caltrans District 8 and other agencies was also completed during this phase.

1.2.2 Phase II: Concepts and Strategies

In Phase II, alternative concepts and strategies were developed. This phase consisted of the creation of an initial strategy contributed to by the community, UDS Team, Town staff, Caltrans, and other stakeholders through hands-on meetings. A four-day community workshop was held in June of 2004 to interview the local stakeholders, tour Old Town with residents and business and property owners, and a hands-on design workshop for interested participants. This workshop and subsequent charrette led to the creation of the initial visions, concepts, frameworks, plans, and strategies for Old Town and SR-62. This initial vision was presented to community stakeholders, including the Old Town merchants and property owners, for feedback to shape the draft Specific Plan.

As part of Phase II, meetings with Caltrans District 8 were held to consider the possibility of rerouting the SR-62 highway around the Town and creating opportunities for a more vibrant, walkable Old Town. At the time of preparation of this document, Caltrans District 8 had prepared, and recommended approval, of a Project Initiation Proposal that identifies a total of four SR-62 realignment alternatives. Through discussions with Caltrans, City staff, and stakeholders, a preferred Alternative D was identified. The recommended SR-62 Realignment Alternative D would realign SR-62 from Kickapoo Trail north, transitioning to Yucca Trail in the vicinity of Apache Trail. As part of the Realignment Alternative D, SR-62 and Yucca Trail to the north would become a six-lane divided highway, with a single lane connecting to the existing alignment of SR-62 through Old Town (Main Street – Old SR-62). The single-lane roadway would transition to a two-lane divided industrial roadway allowing Old Town Yucca Valley “Main Street” to become more pedestrian-oriented. The SR-62 Realignment concept plans provided by Caltrans District 8 are

purely conceptual, and are utilized only for visioning purposes. The final design and ultimate right-of-way of an SR-62 realignment will be determined at a later date.

1.2.3 Phase III: Preparation of Specific Plan

Phase III comprised drafting and completing the Specific Plan, during which meetings and public hearings with Caltrans and the Town were held to review and discuss progress on the Specific Plan and SR-62 realignment alternatives. The vision poster was introduced to the community as a visual illustration of the community's hopes and expectations for Old Town.

1.3 Community Outreach

The Vision and Specific Plan are based on a comprehensive community involvement process that included the following events:

- ◆ February 19, 2004 – Town Council initiates process
- ◆ March 30, 2004 – Kickoff meeting with Town staff, Caltrans, and other partners
- ◆ June 2-11, 2004 – Community Immersion Program:
 - Community Workshop 1: Understanding Old Town and SR 62
 - Community Leaders Kickoff Breakfast
 - One-on-One Interviews
 - Storefront Drop-In Interviews
 - Pancake Breakfast & Old Town Walk
 - Old Town Yucca Valley Issues, Ideas, Values, and Visions Workshop
 - Old Town Hands-On Design Workshop and Presentations
 - Off-Site Design Studio
 - Town Staff Meeting
 - Community Leaders Reception
 - Meeting with Old Town Merchants and Property Owners
 - Caltrans Workshop
 - Community Open House
 - SR-62 Mobile Design Workshop
- ◆ July and August, 2004 – Meetings with Caltrans and Town
- ◆ September 2, 2004 – Planning Commission and Town Council Workshop to:
 - Update Town Council and Planning Commission on Old Town Specific Plan and SR-62 Streetscape Master Plan
 - Review and Discuss Old Town SR-62 Alternatives
 - Review and Discuss General Plan “Highway Roadway” Cross-Section
 - Receive Town Council and Planning Commission Input and Guidance
- ◆ November 18, 2004 – Planning Commission and Town Council Workshop, including:
 - Planning Process Update: Where We Are
 - General Plan Amendment “Highway Roadway” Cross-Section
 - Old Town SR-62 Alternative
 - Overview of Old Town Market Feasibility Study, General Economic Benefits of Addressing SR-62, and Possible Funding
 - Partnerships & Where We Go from Here
- ◆ December 10, 2004 – Meeting with Caltrans at Town to introduce partnership
- ◆ January 24, 2005 – Meeting with Caltrans at Town to review project

- ◆ March 24, 2005 – Project Initiation Proposal prepared by Caltrans
- ◆ May 19, 2005 – Project Initiation Proposal approved by Caltrans
- ◆ May 25 and 26, 2005 – Confirm New Directions: Old Town Yucca Valley
- ◆ September 18, 2007 – Joint Workshop with Traffic Commission, Planning Commission, and Town Council
- ◆ September 18, 2008 – Planning Commission Hearing
- ◆ November 27, 2007 – Community Meeting to review Public Review Draft Specific Plan
- ◆ November 8 and December 13, 2007 – Town Council Hearings

1.4 Vision Plan

“Imagine . . .

Imagine . . . Old Town Yucca Valley as a vibrant destination in the Morongo Basin where history, environment, art and culture, education, shopping, living, and working coincide amidst a very walkable downtown.

Imagine . . . Old Town Yucca Valley as a renewed setting with its own “Main Street,” mix of housing, diversity of shopping and working environments, and inviting public spaces.

Imagine . . . Old Town Yucca Valley as a district that is highlighted with eclectic architecture, an abundance of indigenous landscaping, comfortable pedestrian areas, and public art.

Imagine . . . Old Town Yucca Valley as a gathering place for respite and discovery by community members and visitors alike.

Imagine . . .”

This vision was derived through an intensive public involvement process consisting of ten days of workshops with Town staff, the community, and Caltrans District 8. The accumulated recommendations, ideas, and efforts of all who attended the immersion week were then synthesized into four alternative concept plans for the Specific Plan area, ultimately refining those alternatives to the proposed Vision Plan (Exhibit 1-1). The following summary of the Vision Plan highlights the improvements needed to implement this vision to create a vibrant Old Town Yucca Valley “Main Street” environment.

The Vision Plan draws inspiration from Old Town’s storefront character reminiscent of past development and incorporates common local features of the desert environment. To implement the vision, unique land use districts were developed to separate and distinguish the historic Old Town from other developments outside of the core area (“Main Street”). The character of the Old Town core is planned to be more urban in the density of the buildings. Streetscape and landscaping elements are arranged, while current development patterns in outlying area are less dense and suburban in character. To also identify the Old Town Districts, gateway signage directs tourists into Old Town, while directional signs guide visitors throughout the town. Accompanying the improved signage are enhanced landscape and streetscape features that add to the comfort of both residents and tourists.

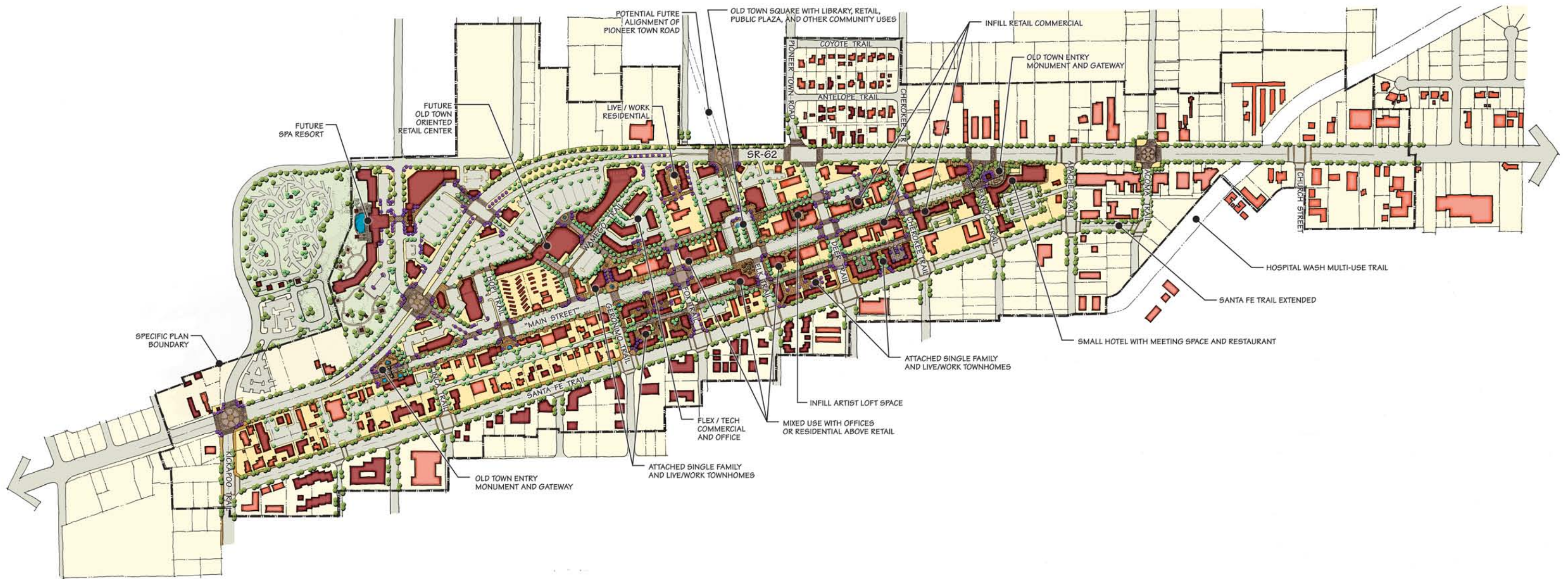
Introduction

The future landscaping utilizes indigenous plants and materials, which are prevalent in the high desert, and the design concepts communicate a more natural appearance and maintain the character of this area. The presence of plants in otherwise barren terrain creates an inviting and shaded place for the residents to rest on benches when pausing between the shops clustered along major streets or when waiting for the public transportation. It is also an enticement to tourists venturing through Town looking for amenities to satisfy their basic needs. The visual character is extended along the corridors of major intersections, including Fox Trail, Pioneertown Road, and Bannock Trail – new hubs in the Old Town district core. Enhanced landscaping along these streets draws attention to and prompts further investigation of restaurants, entertainment, and shopping opportunities at unique stores on the cross streets.

To ensure the continued economic development on both sides of Main Street/SR-62, pedestrian accessibility to both sides of the street must be safe and convenient. Solving the problem of wide street crossings for pedestrians was a serious consideration and has been addressed by creating “bump outs” at intersections, signaling the major intersections, and improving striping at crosswalks. As a result, pedestrian crossing time is shorter and merchants have equal opportunities for increased business. The wide streets accommodate more parking spaces, while curbs and gutters have been introduced to formally designate parking areas.

The streetscape improvements include defining the perimeter of the Old Town district core area as a designated bicycle path that runs along two major streets (Yucca Trail Road and Santa Fe Road) to the north and south of SR-62. The bicycle path improves connectivity, accessibility, and safety for residents traveling to and from the commercial core and public services. The Old Town district core area is graced with a public library, civic center, and natural history museum that share a common open space where community youth can gather. Seasonal programs are scheduled to educate and entertain residents and tourists.

Old Town plays an important role in the overall physical, economic, and social setting of Yucca Valley, and has numerous opportunities for synergy with adjacent and nearby community assets. The Blue Skies Country Club is one such amenity that has untapped potential to be enhanced and to more effectively serve as a source of economic development opportunities within Old Town and adjacent areas. Likewise, the Hi-Desert Water District Property, spanning Pioneertown Road just north of Old Town, has a range of envisioned opportunities that could benefit from and contribute to Old town’s vitality. These two amenities are among others within the context of Old Town that could be harnessed to uplift vitality, reinforce identity, and honor heritage to the benefit of the Yucca Valley community.



This page intentionally blank.

1.5 Organization of the Specific Plan

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan was derived out of an intensive planning process consisting of numerous workshops over 16 months. The Specific Plan creates five new planning districts, includes design guidelines, and presents streetscape concepts to foster a mixed-use environment that is pedestrian friendly and has been developed in a manner largely consistent with traditional small-town downtown core.

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan is organized into six chapters as follows:

- ◆ Chapter 1: Introduction to the Old Town Specific Plan – This chapter presents the purpose and intent, a historical context, planning process, summary of the Specific Plan, Specific Plan authority and requirements, statement of CEQA compliance, and other pertinent information.
- ◆ Chapter 2: Existing Conditions - This chapter discusses the existing on and off-site land uses and infrastructure present at the time of preparation of this Specific Plan.
- ◆ Chapter 3: Development Plan for Old Town – This chapter describes the land use concept, urban design, wayfinding signage, public space and streetscape plan, circulation and public parking concept, and infrastructure plan.
- ◆ Chapter 4: Development Regulations for Old Town – This chapter defines land use districts, the permitted land uses, site development standards, parking requirements, sign regulations (as appropriate beyond existing Town standards), landscaping requirements, and development incentives for Old Town.
- ◆ Chapter 5: Design Guidelines – This chapter serves as a toolkit of suggestions and ideas that illustrate Old Town design concepts through text, graphics, and photographs for a variety of land uses, building types, edge conditions, signage types, landscaping, and site planning.
- ◆ Chapter 6: Administration and Implementation – This chapter specifies the procedures for amending, administering, and enforcing the Specific Plan, development review procedures, mitigation monitoring, public improvement costs (to an order of magnitude), and financing mechanisms.
- ◆ Appendices – This chapter provides background material related to the Specific Plan update process, including a list of contacts and persons consulted, a glossary of Specific Plan terminology, General Plan consistency discussion, and related relevant support information.

1.6 Specific Plan Authority and Scope

1.6.1 Authority

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan is established through the authority granted to the Town of Yucca Valley by California Government Code, Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8, Sections 65450 through 65457 (Specific Plans).

The Specific Plan is regulatory in nature, and serves as the zoning law for the properties within the boundaries of the Specific Plan. Development plans, site plans, and tentative tract and parcel maps must be consistent with the Specific Plan and General Plan. The scope of the subjects covered in the Specific Plan is the same as that of the General Plan to the extent that the subject under consideration involves the Old Town Yucca Valley portion of the City. As expressed in California law, Specific Plans may be adopted either by ordinance or by resolution. This allows jurisdictions to choose whether their specific plans will be policy driven (adopted by resolution) or regulatory in nature (adopted by ordinance).

1.6.2 Relationship to the General Plan

The current Town of Yucca Valley General Plan was last updated in 1995. The Specific Plan reflects current land use buildout and other development policies, as described within the General Plan, while also addressing the realignment of SR-62 and providing opportunities for a vibrant Old Town mixed-use district through increasing density and intensifying uses. The General Plan Amendment accompanying the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan amends the land uses, intensities, and circulation within the project area.

1.6.3 Relationship to the Zoning Ordinance

The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan provides customized, detailed standards and guidelines for future development within the project area. Unless otherwise stated, the Specific Plan development procedures, regulations, and standards shall supersede the relevant provisions of the Town's Zoning Ordinance as they currently exist, or as are subsequently amended in the future. Any development regulation not directly addressed in this Specific Plan shall be subject to the City's adopted zoning regulations in place at the time of the individual request.

Early in the design process, it was determined that the existing Zoning Ordinance had not anticipated the development density and intensity necessary to create a vibrant mixed-use environment within the Old Town district. As a result, new guidelines, standards, and regulations are necessary to implement the Community Vision Plan.

Successive approvals such as, tentative tract maps, parcel maps and other development approvals must be consistent with both the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan and the Town of Yucca Valley Zoning Ordinance.

1.6.4 Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Concurrent with the preparation of the Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan document, the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 [PRC] [18] et seq.); California CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, [CCR] Title 14, §15000 et seq.), and the rules, regulations, and procedures for implementation of CEQA; as adopted by the Town. The principal CEQA Guidelines sections governing content of this document are §§15120 through 15132 (Content of an EIR), §15168 (Program EIR), and §15161 (Project EIR).

In accordance with §15121 of CEQA as noted above, the primary purpose of the Program EIR is to provide decision-makers and the public with specific information regarding the environmental effects associated with the Project; identify ways to minimize the significant effects; and describe and analyze reasonable alternatives to the Project. Mitigation measures will be provided that may be adopted as Conditions of Approval to reduce the significance of impacts resulting from the Project. The Program EIR will analyze the environmental effects of the Project to the degree of specificity appropriate to the current proposed actions, as required by §15146 of the CEQA Guidelines. This Program EIR will discuss both the direct and indirect impacts of the Project, as well as the cumulative impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. CEQA requires the preparation of an objective, full-disclosure document to inform agency decision-makers and the general public of the direct and indirect environmental effects of the proposed action; provide mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate significant adverse effects; and to identify and evaluate reasonable alternatives to the proposed Project.

This Program EIR will also serve as the basis for future tiered environmental analyses for projects resulting from implementation of The Old Town Yucca Valley Specific Plan. The future analyses will be developed as more project-specific information is defined and more detailed architectural and engineering plans are prepared. Subsequent activities in the Project must be examined in light of the Program EIR to determine whether additional environmental documents must be prepared.

This page intentionally blank