

16. Land Use and Planning

16.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This section analyzes a project's potential impacts on land use and planning by evaluating whether the project would physically divide an *established community* and/or whether the project would conflict with any land use plans, policies or regulations adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating environmental impacts. When the analysis of such potential conflict is directly related to other environmental topics, (e.g., biological resources, greenhouse gas emissions, aesthetics), such analysis will be addressed in the applicable section(s) of the Initial Study.

An *established community* can often be identified by its unique *community character*. Elements of *community character* may include such factors as its built environment, natural features, architectural form and style, existing uses (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional), and density and intensity of development. Central to the concept of *community character* are the characteristics of a location that make it readily recognizable as being unique and different from its surroundings and that provides a feeling of belonging to, or being identified with, that particular place.

16.1.1 Established Communities and Land Use Boundaries

To assist in determining whether an *established community* will be potentially divided, it is important to describe the different types of *established communities* in unincorporated Ventura County.

Some *established communities* are within an *Existing Community Designated Area* in the Ventura County General Plan, which may include urban residential, commercial, or industrial enclaves outside of cities or other unincorporated urban centers. In addition, there are nine distinct unincorporated communities that are within an *Area Plan*. These areas also typically include residential and commercial/industrial land uses and have unique Area Plan land use designations. *Area Plans* are discussed in detail in Section 3.5 and shown on Figure 3-12 through Figure 3-24 of the Ventura County General Plan Background Report. Not all Existing Community Designated Areas are subject to an Area Plan. Boundaries of the *Existing Community Designated Areas* and the nine *Area Plans* are found in the Land Use and Community Character Element of the General Plan.

The nine *Area Plans* are:

- Coastal
- El Rio/Del Norte (includes Nyeland Acres)
- North Ventura Avenue
- Oak Park
- Ojai Valley
- Piru
- Saticoy
- Thousand Oaks
- Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley

Although areas within an *Existing Community Designated Area* and/or within an *Area Plan* boundary may include the most easily identifiable *established communities* within Ventura County, they do not constitute all of the areas that may qualify as distinct *established communities*. Indeed, much of Ventura County consists of rural, agricultural or open space areas with lower density development

(areas with a “Rural,” “Agricultural,” or “Open Space” land use designation). Some of these areas could also be described as an *established community* within other planning boundaries as described in General Plan Policy LU-1.2(b) (e.g., the Oxnard Plain, and Santa Monica Mountains).

Understanding the geographic boundaries of *established communities* is important in the context of determining whether a project might physically divide a community. Similarly, understanding the *community character* of an *established community* is also important in making such a determination.

Community character can be established by such physical features as its built environment, natural features, architectural form and style, existing uses (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional), and density and intensity of development.

16.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The determination of significance shall be made on a case-by-case basis and evaluated using the following thresholds of significance as specified below.

LAN-1 A project may have a significant impact if it would a) conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or development standard adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect, such as the Ventura County General Plan, the applicable *Area Plan*, and applicable zoning ordinance, and b) result in a significant adverse environmental effect due to that conflict.

LAN-2 A project may have a significant impact if it would introduce physical development that would physically divide an *established community* or is substantially incompatible with existing land uses, architectural form or style, site design/layout, or density/intensity within the *established community* in which the project is located.

16.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

Guidance on addressing the questions from the Initial Study Checklist is provided below. In order to determine whether project impacts exceed or meet the criteria of the thresholds of significance in Section 16.2, the level of impact shall be evaluated based on the appropriate assessment methodologies as outlined below.

(a) *Would the project a) conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or development standard adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect, such as the Ventura County General Plan, the applicable Area Plan, and applicable zoning ordinance, and b) result in a significant adverse environmental effect due to that conflict?*

This section is intended for discussions of impacts related to land use. Several goals, policies, and development standards in the applicable land use plan or ordinance may be directly related to other environmental topics as discussed in other sections of the Initial Study (e.g., biological resources, greenhouse gas emissions, aesthetics, etc.). As such, discussions of conflicts with such goals and policies may be discussed in the applicable section of the Initial Study.

To determine whether a proposed project would be consistent with applicable land use plans, policies, and development standards, the *Lead Agency* shall determine if the proposed use, structures, and improvements are consistent with:

- Land use designation(s) shown on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and/or *Area Plan* Land Use Diagram(s).
- Development standards found in the Coastal Zoning Ordinance or Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance.
- All goals and policies found in the General Plan, Local Coastal Program, and/or applicable *Area Plan*.

When making a consistency determination, the *Lead Agency* shall complete a comparison table that includes, but is not limited to, the following: citation for applicable policy document and section, the policy text as adopted, and a consistency analysis for each policy listed. See Table 16-1 below for an example of a policy consistency analysis table.

Table 16-1. Policy Consistency Analysis Template

Document Name / Section	Policy Text	Consistency Analysis
General Plan / Area Plan Section #	Policy #: “policy text”	The proposed project is/is not consistent with this policy requirement and therefore does not/ does result in significant impacts because...

(b) Would the project introduce physical development that would physically divide an established community or is substantially incompatible with existing land uses, architectural form or style, site design/layout, or density/intensity within the established community in which the project is located?

Established communities for the purpose of this analysis includes those areas described in Section 16.1 above and include lands within the boundaries of an *Existing Community Designated Area*, an *Area Plan*, areas within other planning boundaries as described in General Plan Policy LU-1.2(b), or other unincorporated communities outside of these boundaries.

The *Lead Agency* shall evaluate the project for any proposed development and other physical changes that would have the potential to divide an *established community*. Such development or physical changes may include, but are not limited to, infrastructure (e.g., roadways, utilities) or other incompatible land uses (e.g., airports) that would be developed within an *established community*, or that would change the boundary of the *Existing Community Designated Area*, *Area Plan*, or areas within other planning boundaries as described in General Plan Policy LU-1.2(b) in a manner that is inconsistent with the Guidelines for Orderly Development. For example, potential impacts may arise from constructing a new or expanded heavily travelled roadway through an *established community*, or from a project that introduces significant differences in the physical scale of development, differences in noise levels or hours of operation from existing *adjacent* uses.

The degree to which a particular project’s existing land uses, architectural form or style, site design/layout, or density/intensity is compatible with the character of an *established community* shall be based on *substantial evidence* that is included as part of the public record for the project. *Substantial evidence* may be acquired through a site visit to ascertain the defining existing land uses,

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architectural form or style, site design/layout, or density/intensity within the *established community* where the project is located. Photo documentation should be included as part of the public record for the project.

The *Lead Agency* shall also consult the Official Zoning Data (viewable through *County View* and the *Resource Management Agency Geographic Information System Viewer*) and General Plan/Area Plan Land Use Diagrams to:

- Determine land use designation and zone classification for the project and the surrounding area; and
- Determine the goals, policies, or development standards relating to land use and *community character* in the General Plan, applicable *Area Plan*, and applicable zoning ordinance that apply to the project.

In certain situations (e.g., projects located within communities with distinct architectural form/styles or within the Scenic Resource Protection (SRP) Overlay Zone), the *Lead Agency* may need to request visual simulations from the project applicant in order to evaluate the degree to which the project is compatible with the surrounding *community character*.

Finally, the *Lead Agency* shall obtain a list of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects that are located within the same *established community* as the project in order to assess the project's contribution to cumulative impacts on land use and *community character*.

Determinations as to the significance of the project's impact on land use and *community character* should be made in consultation with the Planning Division of the Resource Management Agency.

16.4 RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Source	Managing Agency/Organization	Online Access
Resources		
Ventura County CEQA Implementation Manual	Ventura County Resource Management Agency (RMA) Planning Division	PDF Website
Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, Introduction	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF Website
Ventura County Initial Study Checklist Template	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF Website
References		
Ventura County Area Plans	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	Website
Ventura County General Plan	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	Website
Ventura County General Plan Background Report, Chapter 3	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF Website
Ventura County Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF Website
Ventura County Coastal Zoning Ordinance	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF Website