



PLANNING COMMISSION

Agenda Item No.: H.2

Date: January 26, 2010

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Division

SUBJECT: General Plan Conformance Findings [pursuant to Government Code Section 65402(c) and California Public Resources Code Section 21151.2] for the Escondido Union High School District to construct a new high school (Citracado High School).

CITY FILE NO: ADM 10-0001

BACKGROUND:

This report provides information for the Planning Commission's consideration of the Escondido Union School District (EUHSD) proposal to develop a new, specialized, small high school on an approximately 34.2-acre district-owned property off Citracado Parkway and West Valley Parkway. In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21151.2, and California Government Code Section 65402, a local agency shall not acquire or dispose of real property, and no public building or structure shall be constructed or authorized until the location, purpose and extent of the acquisition, disposition or purpose and extent of such purpose has been reviewed by the affected planning agency as to conformance with the adopted General Plan. The City has up to 40 days to report to the District regarding conformance of the proposed project with the General Plan and whether the site is suitable for a public school facility. If the City were not to recommend approval of the proposed location, purpose or extent of the project, the recommendation could be overruled by the Escondido Union School District Board. Escondido Union School District staff shared with the City Council in the past the difficulty of finding school sites that fully conform to all suitability criteria. Therefore, it is possible that a site may be deemed as the most suitable even though issues exist with one or more aspects of the siting criteria.

The report contains a conceptual site plan for the proposed high school, which the General Plan analysis is based on. The relevant Public Resources and Government Code Sections do not specify in detail the scope of the Commission's review and recommendations. However, this report focuses specifically on the appropriateness of the proposed land use at the subject site given the General Plan land use classifications in the area, and make general recommendations regarding project characteristics as they relate to General Plan conformity. Staff has identified issues regarding the conceptual plans, which have been communicated to the District as part of the District's preliminary environmental review (Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report). The Planning Commission is not required to review the proposal in the same level of detail as a typical development permit (i.e., Conditional Use Permit), and the Escondido Union School District will provide additional opportunities to comment on more specific plans as they are developed and also as part of the environmental review for the proposed school design.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Commission find that acquiring and locating a public high school on the subject parcels is in substantial conformance with the City's General Plan and the subject property is an appropriate site for a new school based on the analysis contained in this report.

LOCATION:

The subject property generally is located along Citracado Parkway, between Scenic Trails Way and Greenwood Place, addressed as 2050 Del Dios Highway (APNs 235-180-39 and 235-180-41).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The project involves the proposed construction of a new career/technology high school to serve 500 to 800 students in grades 9 through 12. The District indicated the focus of the new school is to relieve overcrowding and improve specialized career educational opportunities. As a career technology school the number and variety of programs offered (e.g., athletics and music) would be limited and reduced from that of a traditional comprehensive type high school. The curriculum is intended to integrate core academics with technical and occupational knowledge in the fields of biotechnology and medical sciences to provide a pathway to postsecondary education and careers.

The new high school would include the construction of three buildings, totaling approximately 138,265 SF of interior space. The buildings generally would be two stories (or two-story in height) and would house classrooms, a media center, a performing arts theater, a gymnasium, a food service facility, administrative space and offices, and other ancillary features common to modern schools. Other campus features would include a central courtyard, an outdoor amphitheater, parking areas, and a multipurpose playfield. Although sports to be offered at the school have not been defined, the District indicated the school would not participate in football. The school is anticipated to begin operation in August of 2013.

More than 8,500 students currently attend classes at EUHSD campuses. Another 10,000 individuals are enrolled throughout the year in adult education classes and Regional Occupational Programs (ROP). The District supports three comprehensive high schools (Escondido, Orange Glen, and San Pasqual) in addition to Valley (Continuation) and Adult Education.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS:

The irregularly shaped 34.2-acre site is vacant with no existing land uses. The project site is located within a semi-rural/estate and suburban type neighborhood, and is predominantly surrounded by single-family residences. Several non-residential type uses also are located throughout the neighborhood, including the Palomar/Pomerado Convalescent Facility and three small religious facilities. The site previously was developed with a single-family residence and various accessory structures generally located within the central area of the property. All of the structures have been removed over the years. Scattered debris and other miscellaneous items are present on the site. The property consists of rolling topography with steep slopes towards the northern and northwestern portions of the site. A northerly trending drainage swale is located along the eastern area of the site. Elevations range from approximately 670 feet towards the northwestern section of the property to approximately 790 feet towards the top of the ridge near the southern boundary. Several large granite rock outcroppings are present throughout the site. An asphalt driveway provides vehicle access from West Valley Parkway. Access also is provided from Citracado Parkway towards the southeastern corner of the site. Public access to the site is restricted by chain-link fencing and gates. A dirt pathway provides on site access to most areas of the property. The majority of the site contains disturbed vegetation as a result of previous agricultural operations and other development on the site. However, portions of the site contain native vegetation, including coastal sage scrub habitat. A eucalyptus grove occupies the northern and northeastern portions of the site.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: The District, as the lead agency in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to assess potential adverse environmental impacts that may result from the proposed project, including impacts related to traffic, grading, noise, biology, drainage, water quality, and hazardous materials. The City of Escondido would be a "Responsible Agency" and thus, will review the project and the Environmental Impact Report, and take any discretionary or

administrative actions that might be required. The District distributed a Notice of Preparation for the EIR last year and the City responded with a list of comments to be addressed in the EIR.

The Planning Commission's determination of consistency of the current proposal with the local land use regulations is not intended to render a decision on the project, but instead to provide "investigation and recommendation" to the School District in compliance with state codes. Thus, this current action by the Planning Commission is exempt from CEQA under Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) – General Rule (where it can be seen with certainty that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment).

GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE ANALYSIS:

The City's General Plan Quality of Life Standard No. 2: *Schools* (page I-15) indicates the community shall have sufficient classroom space to meet state-mandated space requirements and teacher/student ratios with student attendance calculated on prescribed state and/or local school board standards. Implementation of this standard shall be the responsibility of the school districts, and other appropriate agencies. The Community Facilities and Services Element of the General Plan also contain several policies regarding schools (Page III-31-32) that are designed to enhance communication between the City and the school districts. A review of the General Plan school policies contains several policies regarding the development of high schools. However, these policies merely are recommendations to the school district, and the ultimate decision regarding suitability of the project site is based on the State Department of Education school site selection criteria.

Schools Policy F1.4(f): Future high schools should be located on relatively level terrain and avoid hazards. Access should be provided directly onto a Collector street as well as directly or indirectly to a secondary road. Sites should not be limited to residential areas and may be acceptable in commercial areas, depending on access, noise, safety and other considerations.

Topography-Grading - The subject site consists of rolling topography with slopes greater than 15%, and is subject to the City's Hillside Conservation and Viewshed Protection policies. Due to the varying topography found on the site and the need for large, relatively flat areas for the school and associated athletic fields, parking lots and internal roadways, a considerable amount of grading is anticipated in order for the project to be implemented. This would not be consistent with the General Plan recommendation that the project site should be located on relatively level terrain.

A series of alternative sites previously has been studied by the District over the past several years in order to locate an appropriate site for a new high school. All of the studied sites were discounted due to various constraints or public concerns. Due to the topographical conditions of this area of the city, there is a limited availability of large vacant sites on relatively flat areas that could otherwise accommodate a high school. Based on the previous investigations conducted by the school district, the Citracado site was selected as the most suitable for development of a new school. In order to conform to the General Plan, staff would recommend the District site specific buildings, roads and other improvements to minimize the affects of grading and protect significant landform features; and provide appropriate landscaping and buffer areas/setbacks to offset the visual impacts of grading in conformance with the City's Grading Policies and Design Guidelines. Based on the preliminary site plan and project description, the project development would disturb approximately 20.5 acres of the 34.2-acre site. The proposed grading design and site plan prepared by the District is designed to avoid and preserve areas of steep topography towards the northern and western portions of the site, and a minimum 50-foot buffer is proposed to be established along the northeast, east and southwestern perimeters of the school property.

Hazards – The project is outside the 100-year flood plain area as identified on current Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM). Therefore, the project site is not subject to potential flooding, landslides or mudflows. The site is not considered to possess a significantly greater seismic risk than that of the surrounding area in general. The project would be required to comply with all applicable Fire, Building, and Health and Safety Codes, which would eliminate any potential risk of upset. There are no high voltage power transmission lines within 400 feet of the project site. There is the possibility of on-site contamination from the previous use of the area as a burn ash waste dump site, which was identified off-site near the northeastern area of the property as part of the development of an adjacent residential development (Escondido Tract 817). Burn ash and burn ash waste-contaminated soil has a potential for causing public health and environmental impacts if appropriate care is not taken to reduce exposure. Therefore, the district should evaluate the site for any potential contamination and mitigate any identified issues in accordance with Local, State and Federal requirements.

Traffic-Circulation – The project site fronts onto two Circulation Element Streets: West Valley Parkway (Major Road, 110' R-O-W); and Citracado Parkway (Major Road, 102' R-O-W). Primary access to the new high school is proposed to be provided from Citracado Parkway, with secondary access to West Valley Parkway. Although primary access would not be provided from a Collector Street, access would be provided from Major Circulation Element Streets, with more capacity than a Collector Street. The intersection of West Valley Parkway/Citracado Parkway is signalized, and curb, gutter and sidewalk is provided along both sides of Citracado Parkway and Valley Parkway. Citracado Parkway across the project frontage will need to be improved to its ultimate width. Valley Parkway contains Class II bike lanes along both side of the street, which would provide bicycle access to the site. Citracado Parkway also is identified to contain Class II bike lanes, but striping and signing has not been installed in the area of the proposed new school. Staff recommends the project incorporate appropriate design features and improvements to ensure safe and functional circulation and access for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles.

Land Use - The proposed acquisition would not conflict with the established Estate 1 (E1) General Plan land-use designation for the subject site. The Estate 1 designation and underlying RE-40 zoning designation permits primary and secondary education facilities. The district's three larger comprehensive high schools (Escondido, Orange Glen, and San Pasqual) all maintain an underlying single-family residential land-use designation and are located within or adjacent to residential zones and uses.

Schools Policy F1.5: *Land for new high school shall be 50 acres.*

This policy was enacted in 1990, prior to the advent of charter schools and generally refers to the space requirement for a traditional high school. The proposed smaller specialized high school envisioned by the District would be much smaller than a traditional high school resulting in the need for less land area. This is similar to the Escondido Charter High School on East Valley Parkway. The District has indicated the proposed 34.2-acre project site is more than adequate to accommodate the proposed specialized high school. As part of the current City's General Plan update, the City is evaluating the modification and/or elimination of the minimum parcel size requirements due to the development of alternative school designs and District needs.

Schools Policy F1.6: *The school districts and the City shall give priority to school sites that have the potential for acquisition and for joint development for schools and parks.*

Schools Policy F1.9: *The concept of joint park-school sites shall be strongly encouraged by the City of Escondido, including the provision of open space/trail linkages between school-park sites and residential neighborhoods as a means to implement joint use of playground equipment and ballfields.*

The project site is not identified as a park site or open space area on the City's adopted Master Plan for Parks, Trails and Open Space. Information provided by the School District indicates that community use of the school's playfield is proposed to be allowed in accordance with the Civic Center Act (Education Code Sections 38130-38139) and District Policy. After hours use of the gymnasium and theater by the public also could be permitted with District approval. However, there are no joint-use agreements planned for the project.

Since the adoption of the Parks and Trails Master Plan, the City has been seeking land on the western side of the City for the establishment of a neighborhood park. A community center site also has been sought to provide the City's second community center, as called for in the General Plan. A future Neighborhood Park (ranging from approximately 3 – 5 acres) is identified on the Master Plan of Parks (Avenida Del Diablo) on a city-owned parcel located approximately 0.85 miles west of the proposed school site on the northwestern side of the intersection of Citracado Parkway and Avenida Del Diablo. The City Council also approved a Master Plan for the development of a new neighborhood park and community center on a 3.2-acre city-owned property located approximately 1,300 feet northeast of the high school site on the southwestern corner of Del Dios and 11th Avenue.

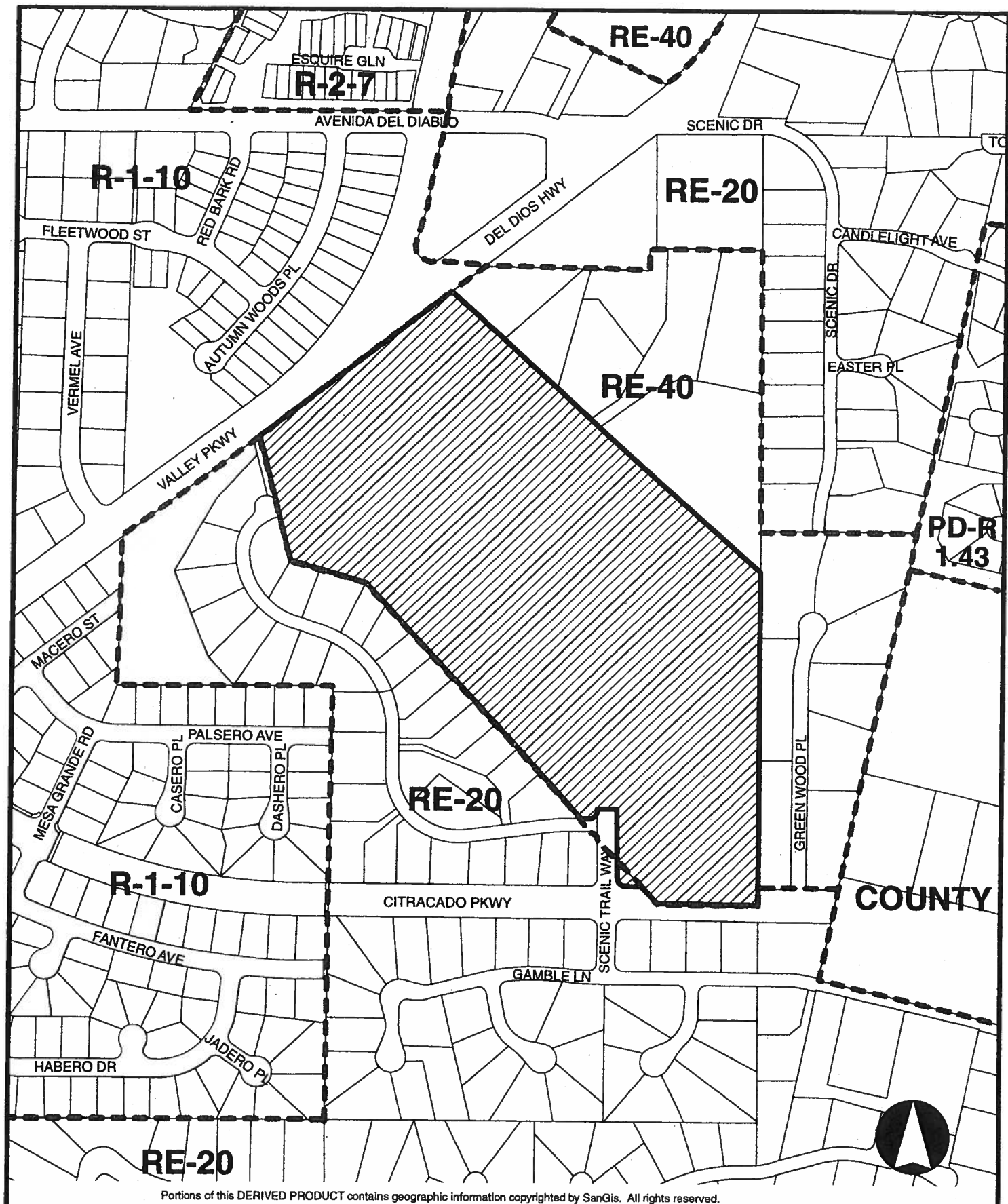
SUMMARY:

Staff feels the siting of the proposed school site generally would be in compliance with the Community Services and Facilities Element and the Land Use Element of the General Plan (with issues identified); and therefore recommends the Planning Commission determine that acquisition and development of the site is in substantial conformance with the General Plan in accordance with Section 65402 of the Government Code and Section 21151.2 of the Public Resource Code, finding that:

1. The proposed project site is in substantial conformance with the City's adopted General Plan with respect to its location, purpose and extent. Specifically, the project would provide for increased school capacity and community-serving facilities in Escondido's neighborhoods; and
2. The site is suitable for a public school use based on the information provided in and attached to this report, which does not include environmental review documents prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act; and
3. The School District should incorporate the general design concepts outlined in the City's adopted General Plan, as discussed within this report, including siting and design features to minimize the effects of grading and to protect significant landform features; provide appropriate landscaping and setbacks to buffer the site and activities from adjacent uses; and incorporate appropriate design features and improvements to ensure safe and functional circulation and access for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles; and
4. The School District should evaluate the site for any potential contamination and mitigate any identified issues in accordance with Local, State and Federal requirements.

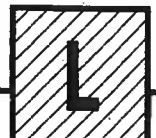
Respectfully submitted,

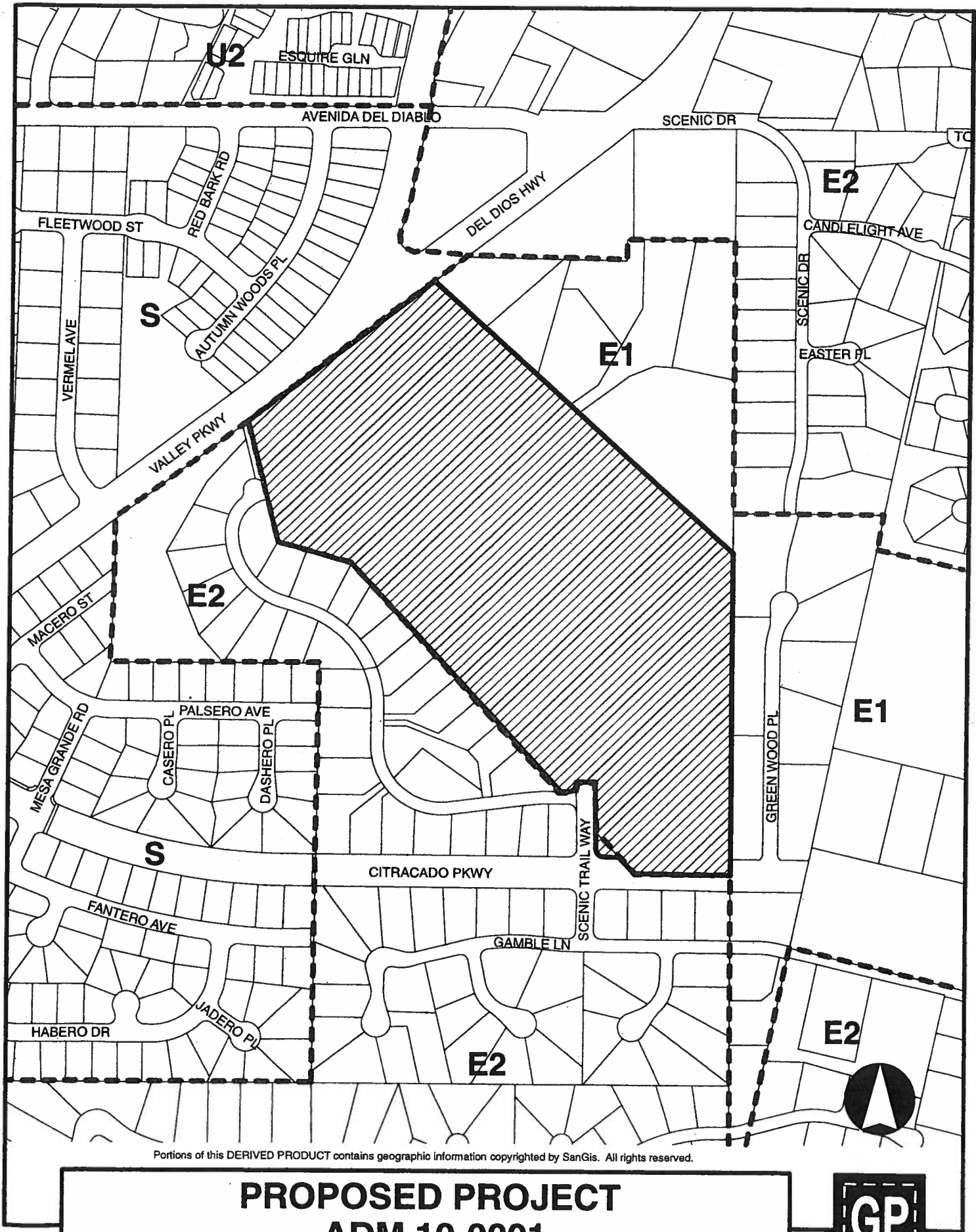

Jay Paul
Associate Planner



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PROPOSED PROJECT
ADM 10-0001



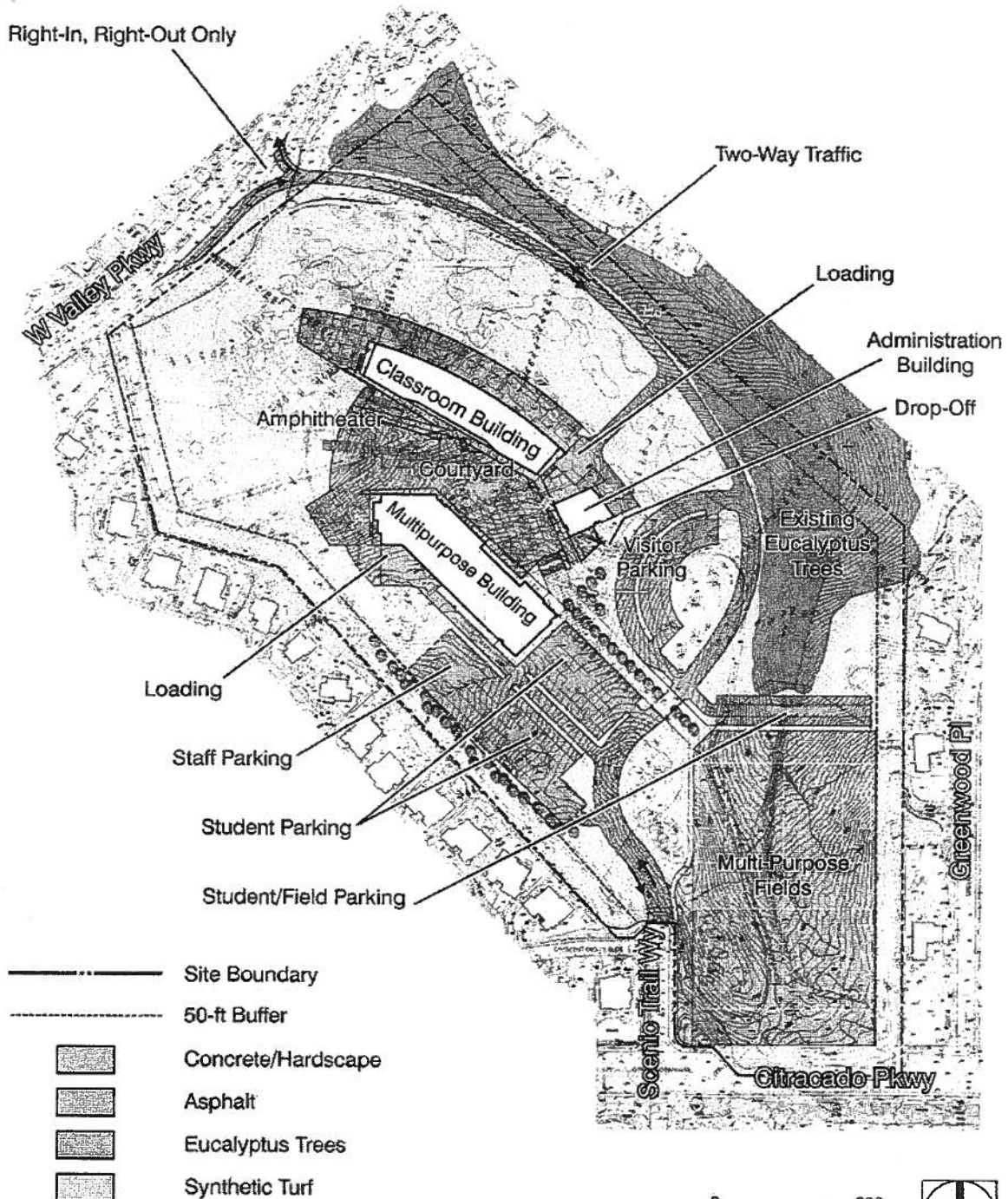


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PROPOSED PROJECT
ADM 10-0001



Conceptual Site Plan

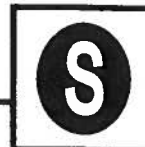


Source: NTD Architecture 2009

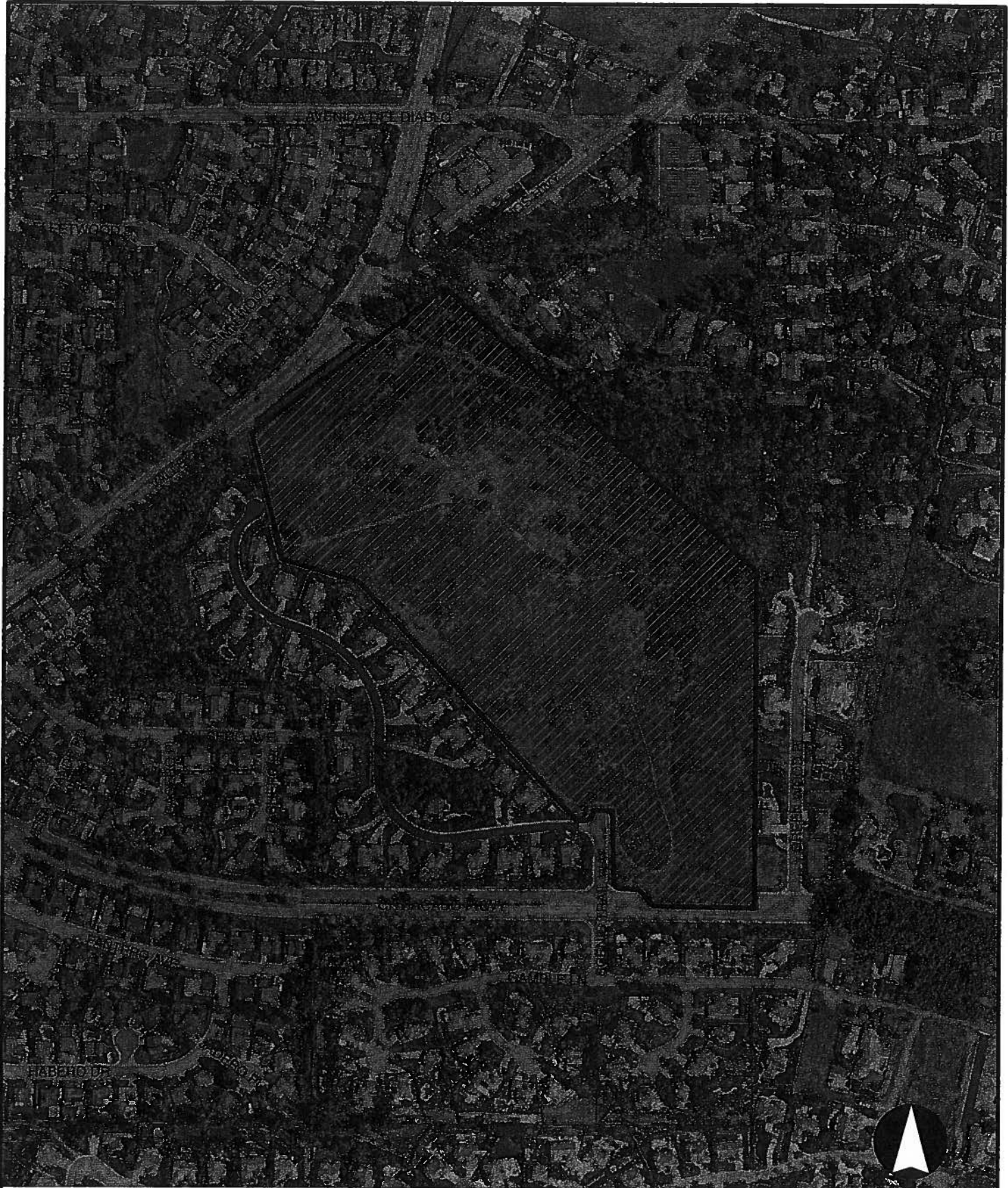
Citracado High School Initial Study

The Planning Center • Figure 5

**PROPOSED PROJECT
ADM 10-0001**

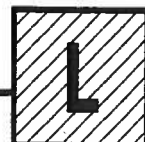


SITE PLAN



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**PROPOSED PROJECT
ADM 10-0001**



LOCATION/ZONING



Escondido Union High School District

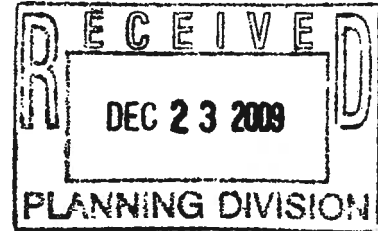
District Service Center

302 North Midway Drive • Escondido, CA 92027-2741
Telephone (760) 291-3200 • FAX (760) 480-3163
Edward J. Nelson, Superintendent

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Randy Garcia
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George McClure
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Tina Pope

December 22, 2009



Barbara Redlitz, AICP, Assistant Planning Director
City Hall, First Floor
201 North Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

**RE: ESCONDIDO UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
Review of CITRACADO HIGH SCHOOL**

Dear Ms. Redlitz:

In compliance with Section 21151.2 of the California Public Resources Code, please provide the District with a letter addressing the consistency with the General Plan for the above referenced school site. Specifically, this school is located along Citracado Parkway between the streets, Scenic Trails Way and Greenwood Place; APN-235-180-39-00 and 235-180-41-00. We are submitting this project to the California Department of Education for review and approval of the school site.

If you have any questions, or need further information, please call me at 760.291.3219.

Sincerely,

Thomas W. Clark
Coordinator of Facilities

C: Barry Dragon, EUHSD

TCLARK@EUHSD.K12.CA.US

**Public Resources Code
Section 21151.2**

California Public Resources Code Section 21151.2

To promote the safety of pupils and comprehensive community planning the governing board of each school district before acquiring title to property for a new school site or for an addition to a present school site, shall give the planning commission having jurisdiction notice in writing of the proposed acquisition. The planning commission shall investigate the proposed site and within 30 days after receipt of the notice shall submit to the governing board a written report of the investigation and its recommendations concerning acquisition of the site. The governing board shall not acquire title to the property until the report of the planning commission has been received. If the report does not favor the acquisition of the property for a school site, or for an addition to a present school site, the governing board of the school district shall not acquire title to the property until 30 days after the commission's report is received.

Government Code Section 65402

65402. (a) If a general plan or part thereof has been adopted, no real property shall be acquired by dedication or otherwise for street, square, park or other public purposes, and no real property shall be disposed of, no street shall be vacated or abandoned, and no public building or structure shall be constructed or authorized, if the adopted general plan or part thereof applies thereto, until the location, purpose and extent of such acquisition or disposition, such street vacation or abandonment, or such public building or structure have been submitted to and reported upon by the planning agency as to conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof. The planning agency shall render its report as to conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof within forty (40) days after the matter was submitted to it, or such longer period of time as may be designated by the legislative body.

If the legislative body so provides, by ordinance or resolution, the provisions of this subdivision shall not apply to: (1) the disposition of the remainder of a larger parcel which was acquired and used in part for street purposes; (2) acquisitions, dispositions, or abandonments for street widening; or (3) alignment projects, provided such dispositions for street purposes, acquisitions, dispositions, or abandonments for street widening, or alignment projects are of a minor nature.

(b) A county shall not acquire real property for any of the purposes specified in paragraph (a), nor dispose of any real property, nor construct or authorize a public building or structure, in another county or within the corporate limits of a city, if such city or other county has adopted a general plan or part thereof and such general plan or part thereof is applicable thereto, and a city shall not acquire real property for any of the purposes specified in paragraph (a), nor dispose of any real property, nor construct or

authorize a public building or structure, in another city or in unincorporated territory, if such other city or the county in which such unincorporated territory is situated has adopted a general plan or part thereof and such general plan or part thereof is applicable thereto, until the location, purpose and extent of such acquisition, disposition, or such public building or structure have been submitted to and reported upon by the planning agency having jurisdiction, as to conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof. Failure of the planning agency to report within forty (40) days after the matter has been submitted to it shall be conclusively deemed a finding that the proposed acquisition, disposition, or public building or structure is in conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof. The provisions of this paragraph (b) shall not apply to acquisition or abandonment for street widening or alignment projects of a minor nature if the legislative body having the real property within its boundaries so provides by ordinance or resolution.

(c) A local agency shall not acquire real property for any of the purposes specified in paragraph (a) nor dispose of any real property, nor construct or authorize a public building or structure, in any county or city, if such county or city has adopted a general plan or part thereof and such general plan or part thereof is applicable thereto, until the location, purpose and extent of such acquisition, disposition, or such public building or structure have been submitted

Government Code Section 65402

to and reported upon by the planning agency having jurisdiction, as to conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof. Failure of the planning agency to report within forty (40) days after the matter has been submitted to it shall be conclusively deemed a finding that the proposed acquisition, disposition, or public building or structure is in conformity with said adopted general plan or part thereof. If the planning agency disapproves the location, purpose or extent of such acquisition, disposition, or the public building or structure, the disapproval may be overruled by the local agency.

Local agency as used in this paragraph (c) means an agency of the state for the local performance of governmental or proprietary functions within limited boundaries. Local agency does not include the state, or county, or a city.

