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Dispersed Hillside Clustering

Valley Vineyards, TTM 066952

Ever since Ebenezer Howard introduced his “Garden Cities” one hundred years ago, urban planners have discussed and implemented many versions of clustering.¹ Generally, Howard's idea was to combine the best features of metropolitan life in satellite villages separated from each other and from an urban core by large swaths of open space. More compact examples of clustering are often found in contemporary planned communities and involve concentrating higher densities on a portion of a site while limiting development elsewhere. Clustering homes – whether on the large scale of Howard’s Garden Cities or the more neighborhood scale in today’s planned communities – always involves concentrating smaller lots on part of a property and placing lower densities (or no units at all) elsewhere.

The flexibility of planning sites in this way allows for a certain number of homes to be built while preserving *a portion* of the overall site. If for example one part of a property contained a resource worth preserving, the units could be clustered elsewhere and that one portion preserved as parkland, used for agriculture, or simply maintained for its visual value as open space.

But what if residential uses were allowed, yet there were features worth preserving that were *spread over the entire site*? What if one wanted to mix large lot homesites among natural ridgelines, riparian areas and gentle topography that existed all over the site, without adversely impacting these features? What if it was desired to create large areas throughout the site where agricultural activities could be carried out along with residential uses while at the same time preserving the natural beauty of the site? To do this, a more *dispersed clustering concept* is appropriate. Application of this concept, which we shall call “Dispersed Hillside Clustering,” *results in a number of small clusters of lots in various locations rather than one large cluster in just one part of the site.*

Support for this form of clustering is encouraged by many county regulations.

The Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan encourages clustering as a means for preserving hillsides and promoting superior design.² It is the policy of the county, the plan states, to carefully “integrate physical land use development into the natural environmental setting (e.g., hillside development should respect natural contours, rather

¹ Garden Cities of Tomorrow, by Ebenezer Howard, c1908

² Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan, a component of the Los Angeles County General Plan, Chapter V, #11 (page V-2).

than utilizing [sic] massive grading to reshape the site.)”³

The Open Space Element of the Proposed Preliminary County General Plan contains “Design Guidelines for a Model Project in Hillside Management Areas”⁴ These guidelines include preserving hillsides by clustering buildings and using other innovative site design approaches; using flag lot designs; varying lot sizes; incorporating trails where appropriate; designing circulation routes that incorporate existing contours; undulating road patterns; preserving prominent skyline ridge silhouettes; locating roads and structures below skyline ridges; preserving natural features and topographical forms; preserving natural watercourses and distinctive natural features, and other design methods.

The Zoning Code contains regulations for development in hillside areas that also encourage clustering.⁵ These hillside management regulations are not meant to preclude development. Rather, clustering is encouraged as a way to preserve the natural topography, ecological areas and the resources and amenities of hillside areas, while allowing for controlled development therein.⁶

The base zoning for the Valley Vineyards site, A-2-2, is an agricultural zone that also permits low-density single-family residential development. The Zoning Code also contains supplemental zoning regulations for Leona Valley – the Leona Valley Community Standards District.⁷ The Leona Valley Community Standards District regulations also encourage both agriculture and low density residential development.⁸ These regulations provide for a minimum lot size of two and one half acres for most of the undeveloped flat areas of Leona Valley. On hillsides however, the Leona Valley Community Standards District allows these lots to be “clustered” and reduced to one and one half acres so long as the hillside management regulations are respected.⁹

The Valley Vineyards property is a perfect location to apply Dispersed Hillside Clustering because the entire site, while zoned residential, has attributes worth protecting. Rather than a single large cluster of lots, smaller clusters are dispersed throughout the site, with the result being that the entire site has preserved natural areas. The Valley Vineyards plan utilizes varying lots sizes, flag lots and undulating roads that mimic the natural topography. The plan places pads well below the preserved ridgeline, utilizes contour grading throughout the site and provides for agricultural uses to be intermixed with residential uses. Riparian areas are preserved and a publicly accessible multi-use

³ Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan, a component of the Los Angeles County General Plan, Chapter V, #63 (page V-9).

⁴ Proposed Preliminary County General Plan, Conservation & Open Space Element, Figure 5.6, pg 136

⁵ Los Angeles County Zoning Code, Title 22 Chapter 22.56.215 “Hillside management and significant ecological areas – Additional regulations.”

⁶ Los Angeles County Zoning Code, Title 22 Chapter 22.56.215.B “Intent and Purpose of Regulations.”

⁷ Los Angeles County Zoning Code, Title 22, Chapter 22.44.122

⁸ Los Angeles County Zoning Code, Title 22, Chapter 22.44.122, Section A.

⁹ Los Angeles County Zoning Code, Title 22, Chapter 22.44.122, Section C.7.

trail is being constructed. Dispersed Hillside Clustering, as it has been applied to this property, should serve as a model for implementation of clustering and the county's hillside management regulations.

The planners for the Valley Vineyards community are proud of this concept and are confident its application to this property will be of benefit to its future residents and to the entire community of Leona Valley.

See the attached exhibit for a generalized depiction of the following cluster areas.

Please contact me with any questions.

 10-01-07

Richard E. Doss, AICP

Pacific Coast Civil, Inc.

BOUQUET CANYON ROAD CLUSTER: Clustering lots in this area facilitates preservation of the riparian area paralleling Bouquet Canyon. Also, the slope adjacent to Bouquet Canyon Road will not be graded and will be planted with grapevines, creating a beautiful entry statement for all of Leona Valley.

LOST VALLEY CREEK CLUSTER (north side and south side): Clustering lots away from this watercourse allows for the creek to be untouched by development. The slopes between the street (the extension of 87th Street West) and the homes will be planted with grapevines.

TRAIL CLUSTER: Clustering lots along both sides of the trail – but set back from it – allows for the public equestrian and hiking trail to be constructed a distance from the homes. The open space area along both sides of the trail will be planted in grapevines, thus making this segment of the county's trail system particularly beautiful.

NORTH SLOPE CLUSTER and SOUTH SLOPE CLUSTER: Dispersed Hillside Clustering will preserve the major east-west ridgeline across the center of the site. Not only will the ridge itself not be graded, but also the residential pads below the ridge have been clustered so that houses will not intrude into the ridgeline. Pads in the North Slope Cluster are lower than the ridgeline by 66', 113', 99', 67', 184', 182', 158' and 105'. Pads in the South Slope Cluster are lower than the ridgeline by 38', 58', 72', 77', 74', 79', 53' and 54'. Also many of the slopes between the pads and ridgeline will be planted in grapevines.

NORTH LOOP ROAD CLUSTER: Clustering lots along this road allows the road to gently rise and fall with the existing contours, thus helping to preserve the existing hillside topography.

SOUTHWEST PEAK CLUSTER and NORTHWEST PEAK CLUSTER: Clustering lots in these areas facilitated preservation of the topographical features in this part of the site. Grapevines will be planted in the open slope areas.