TABLE OF CONTENTS

Figures

Tables

3.0
Environmental Setting

3.1 Project Site and Vicinity Setting

Project Location

The project site is located along River Road between the cities of Monterey and Salinas, within the unincorporated area of Monterey County. The location of the project site is illustrated in Figure 3-1, Project Location. Surrounding land uses include row crop production to the north across River Road, areas of the Ferrini Ranch development that will be maintained in open space, limited residential uses, and a future winery to the south and west, and areas of the Las Palmas Ranch #1 subdivision of single family dwellings to the east.

Project Site Setting

The project site is a 15.64-acre lot created as part of the Las Palmas Subdivision #1. The site is located within the boundary of the Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan. The Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan designated the property Medium Density Residential in 1983. That designation continues through the Monterey County 2010 General Plan and 2010 Toro Area Plan. The property is currently zoned "MDR/2.61-D" (Medium Density Residential, 2.61 units per acre; Design Control).

The project site is a knoll rising above River Road and the existing Las Palmas Subdivision #1 neighborhood to a largely flat plateau that would be the primary development area. Existing site improvements consist of an existing graded dirt driveway off of Woodridge Court at the southeasterly corner of the site, storm drain inlet pipe and electrical vaults at the southeasterly property corner, two cribwall-type retaining walls near the westerly end of the access drive, and a reclaimed water irrigation distribution system. The site is characterized by non-native grasses and numerous mature non-native eucalyptus trees. There is no current active use of the project site, although a small portion of the southwest corner is occasionally grazed. Site elevations range from approximately 70 feet above sea level in the northeastern area of the project site to 210 feet above sea level in the southwestern area of the project site. Slopes on the project site are 0-30% and 30-50% slope. Figure 3-2, Aerial Photograph, presents the project site characteristics. Figure 3-3, Surrounding Uses, presents the project site's surrounding uses. Figure 3-4, Project Site Photos, presents photographs of the existing setting at the project site.

3.2 BASELINE CONDITIONS

The project site is undeveloped and there is no current use of the site aside from a portion used for occasional grazing. This is the baseline condition of the project site as considered by this EIR. However, the Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan designated the property for medium density residential. That designation continues through the Monterey County 2010 General Plan and 2010 Toro Area Plan. The Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan EIR previously evaluated potential impacts of development of the Specific Plan area, including the project site. While not the CEQA baseline to determine the potential environmental impacts of this project, individual and cumulative impacts should also be viewed in the context of the level of development and associated impacts of the specific plan.

3.3 REGIONAL SETTING

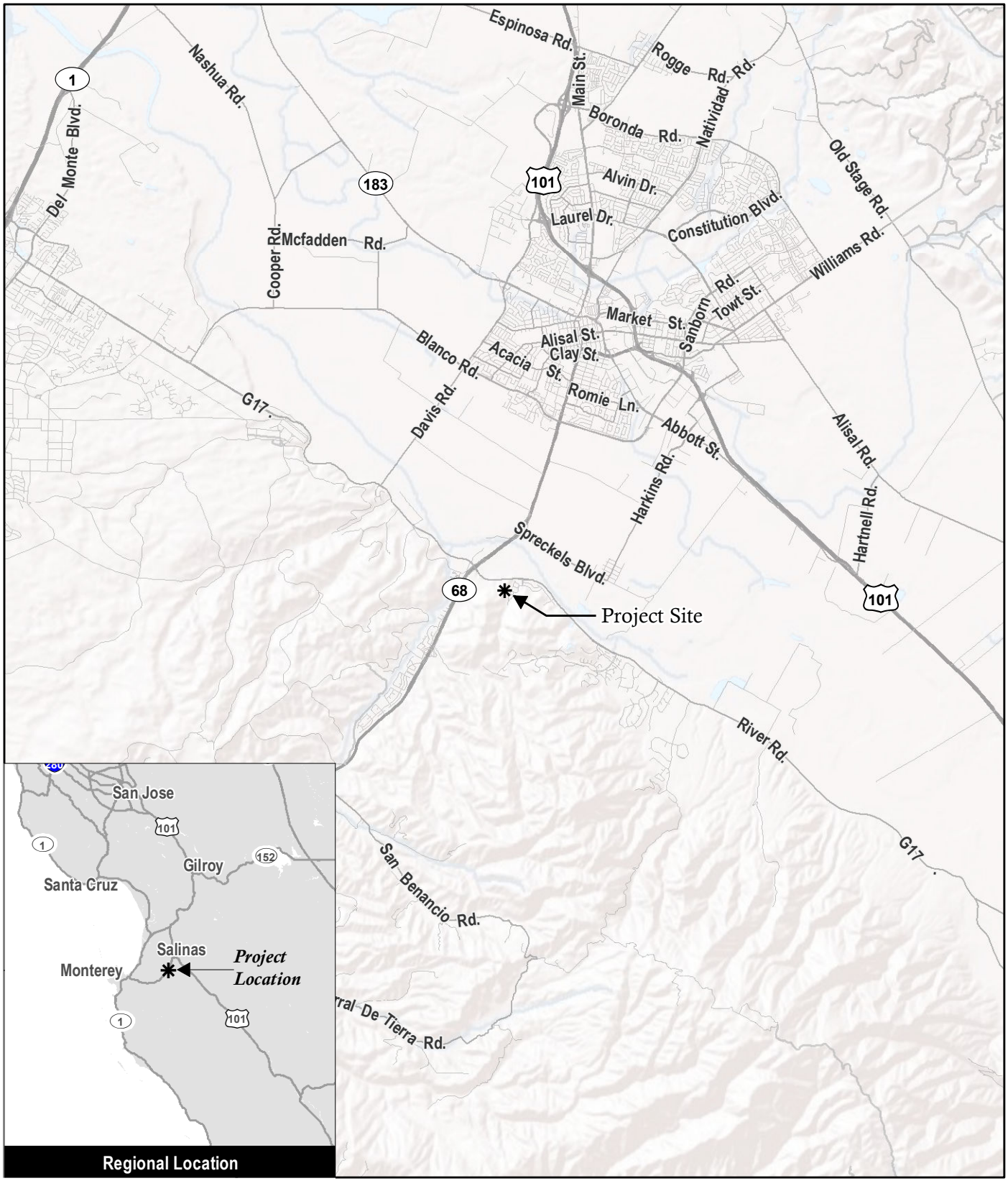
The regional setting discussion is taken from the Monterey County 2010 General Plan and 2010 Toro Area Plan.

Geography

The project site is located in the Toro Planning Area in the north central area of unincorporated Monterey County, south of the city of Salinas and east of the Monterey Peninsula. The planning area is comprised of approximately 74 square miles and is dominated by the mountains and rolling hills of the Sierra de Salinas Range. Mount Toro, with an elevation of 3,560 feet, is the highest peak in the range and is located on the southern boundary of the planning area. The terrain of the planning area varies greatly and is composed primarily of rolling hills and valleys. Elevations within the planning area range from approximately 40 feet above sea level to 3,560 feet above sea level. Topography in the planning area includes steep ravines with slopes exceeding 75 percent, a large amount of hillsides with slopes exceeding 30 percent, canyon floor and ridgelines with moderate slopes, and the flat floodplains along the Salinas River.

Soils and Slope

A wide variety of soils are present in the planning area. The characteristics of the soils and the slope of the land are significant determinants of the appropriate land uses for a specific area. Some of the soils, due to their composition, drainage, and gentle slope, are suitable for either agricultural use or urban use. Such soils are found along River Road, State Route 68, and in some of the Corral de Tierra/San Benancio area. Other soils pose severe limitations to the agricultural or urban use of the land. Rugged areas along Laureles Grade Road, in the south and central portions of the planning area, and on the east slopes of the Sierras de Salinas have soils that limit the development and use of the properties .



Source: Esri 2017

Figure 3-1

Project Location

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

This side intentionally left blank.

0 300 feet

Project Site

Source: Monterey County GIS 2016, Google Earth 2017

Figure 3-2

Aerial Photograph

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

This side intentionally left blank.

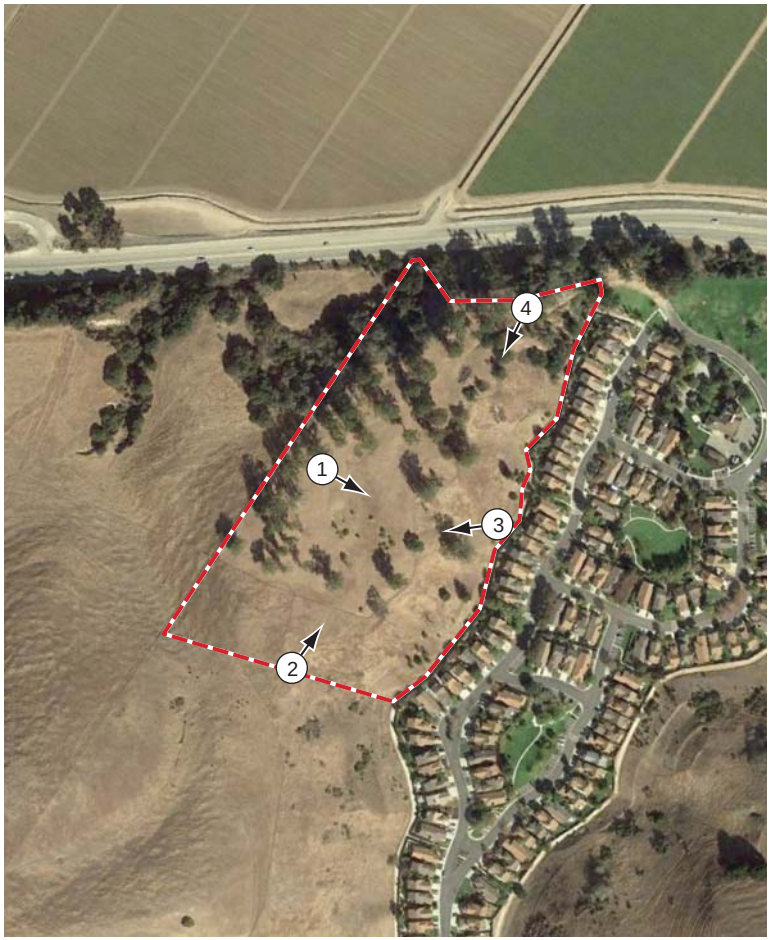
Source: Monterey County GIS 2016, Google Earth 2017

Figure 3-3

Surrounding Uses

This side intentionally left blank.

1 Southern view from the north area of the project site



3 Western view from the east area of the project site

2 Eastern view from the west area of the project site

Project Site

Source: Google Earth 2017
Photographs: EMC Planning Group 2016

4 Northern view from the south area of the project site

Figure 3-4
Site Photos

This side intentionally left blank.

Farmlands

The USDA Soil Conservation Service has developed and adopted a system for categorizing important farmlands for California and the rest of the nation. The system distinguishes four categories of farmlands, each with specific criteria. The categories are "prime farmlands," "farmlands of statewide importance," "unique farmlands," and "farmlands of local importance." All farmlands in the Toro planning area qualifying as prime farmlands and farmlands of statewide importance are located along River Road and the Salinas River. These lands are among Monterey County's most productive. The planning area also contains farmlands of local importance. The project site is designated “grazing land” by the Soil Conservation Service and, therefore, is not considered important farmland.

Water Resources

Water resources of the planning area are divided between two watersheds. One is within the El Toro Basin and encompasses 32 square miles of the 74 square miles of the planning area. The other is within a portion of the large Salinas River Basin. Surface water is a very limited resource in the planning area. The Salinas River is the only river or stream in the planning area that flows year-round. El Toro Creek flows only seasonally. There are no sizable reservoirs in the planning area. The flow of the Salinas River is controlled by the monitored release of water from the San Antonio and Nacimiento reservoirs, located over 70 miles to the south.

Groundwater resources within the planning area vary greatly from one area to another. There are differences in water quality, storage capacity of the aquifers, and hydraulic properties. These differences arise primarily from the variations in underlying geologic formations.

Vegetation and Wildlife

There are four general vegetation communities present in in the Toro planning area: grasslands, chaparral, woodlands, and riparian. Of the four communities, grasslands and woodlands predominate. Dry soils such as those on steep or south-facing slopes, on ridgetops, or in dry hot valleys support grassland vegetation, as do soils in areas which have been heavily grazed.

Scattered among the slopes of the planning area are chaparral plant communities of hard woody evergreen shrubs. The grasslands and chaparral both present a high fire risk, particularly on the steeper slopes and during the dry season. The woodlands of the planning area are dominated by evergreen oak communities, and are generally found on the north and east facing slopes, and in the valleys. Riparian vegetation is limited in the planning area and is found adjacent to the Salinas River and El Toro Creek.

The vegetation in the planning area is highly valued for its scenic qualities, recreational opportunities, and its role in watershed and soil management. Just as important, however, is its role of providing habitat for wildlife. A diversity of birds and animals find food, shelter, and cover in the planning area's various vegetation communities.

Vegetation on the project site consists of non-native grasslands, non-native Eucalyptus trees, non-native Monterey cypresses, and native coast live oak trees. Most of the site supports non-native grassland with various shrubs also present.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas – Toro Planning Area

The following plant species have been identified as environmentally sensitive habitats within the Toro Planning Area. The rare and endangered Hutchinson's delphinium (*Delphinium hutchinsonae*), Carmel Valley bush-mallow (*Malacothamnus palmeri, involucratus*) and Monterey manzanita (*Arctostaphylos montereyensis*) have been identified in the planning area. The rare but not endangered plant, the Monterey Ceanothus (*Ceanothus rigidus*), is also located in the planning area. The California Natural Areas Coordinating Council has designated Toro Regional Park as an area of unique research, education, and recreation value because of its oak woodlands, chaparral communities, and relatively undisturbed site.

Archaeological resources are also sensitive to man's activities but information is scarce regarding where these resources are located. Using the information available and applying the various topographic characteristics most often associated with such sites, Monterey County has delineated three archaeological sensitivity zones: low, moderate, and high, which indicate the relative probability of an archaeologically sensitive site being present. Within the planning area, there is one section of high archaeological sensitivity located southeast of State Route 68 in the Corral de Tierra area. The area located north of River Road is in the low sensitivity zone and the remainder of planning area has been designated as having a moderate chance of containing areas of archaeological importance.

3.4 Consistency with Applicable Plans

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15125(d), this section identifies and discusses inconsistencies between the proposed project and applicable general plans, specific plans, and regional plans.

The proposed project was evaluated for consistency with the Monterey County General Plan, Toro Area Plan, and Las Palmas Specific Plan in the relevant sections of this draft EIR.

Table 3-1 Policy Consistency Review (Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan, Monterey County 2010 General Plan, Toro Area Plan)