

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIFIC PLAN

The Valiano Specific Plan provides the County of San Diego with a comprehensive planning document to direct the orderly development of approximately 238 acres in Northern San Diego County (**Figures 1-1 and 1-2**). The Valiano Specific Plan establishes a framework for development of the area including:

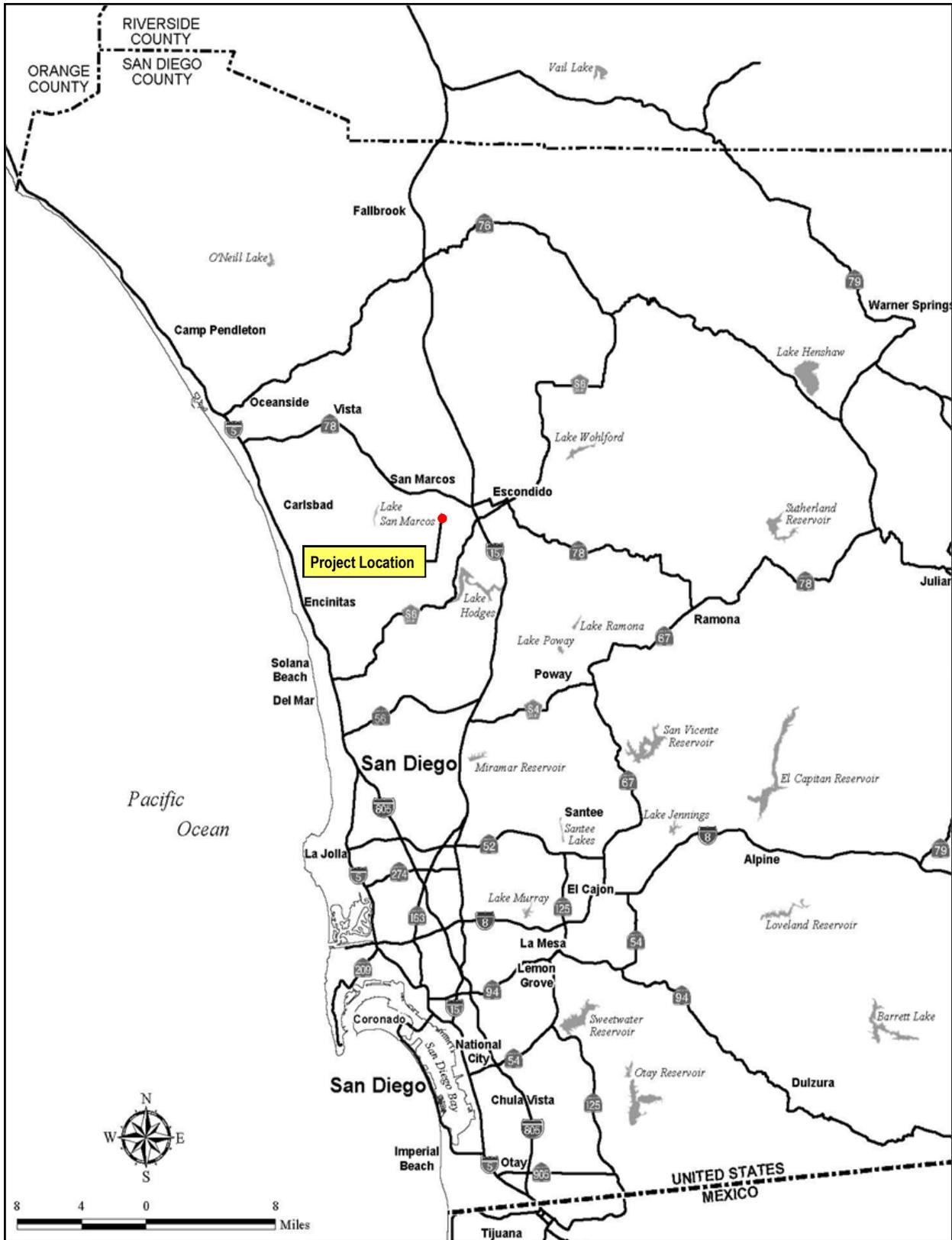
- Proposed land uses, development regulations and design standards (Chapter 2);
- A vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian circulation plan (Chapter 3);
- A plan for protecting and managing natural resources (Chapter 4);
- Infrastructure facilities required, including financing and phasing, to support Plan development (Chapters 5, 6 and 7); and
- Implementation and administrative processes needed to approve specific development project in the Plan Area (Chapter 8).

The Valiano Specific Plan is designed as a semi-rural residential community with associated park and recreation amenities. The Plan includes five single-family residential neighborhoods with varying densities, lot sizes and home styles. A multi-use and pedestrian trail network passes through the heart of the community to allow for additional recreational opportunities for a variety of users including equestrian. In addition to the proposed residential development, approximately 29 percent of the project site will be conserved in open space. This includes 28.2 acres of biological open space and 36.5 acres of agricultural open space.

Given the projected phased buildout of the Plan area and the potential changes in market conditions over time, the Valiano Specific Plan assumes that certain minor variations in the Land Use Plan could occur. However, the Specific Plan establishes a total maximum allowable number of 326 single family housing units in the Plan area.

## 1.2 PLANNING OBJECTIVES

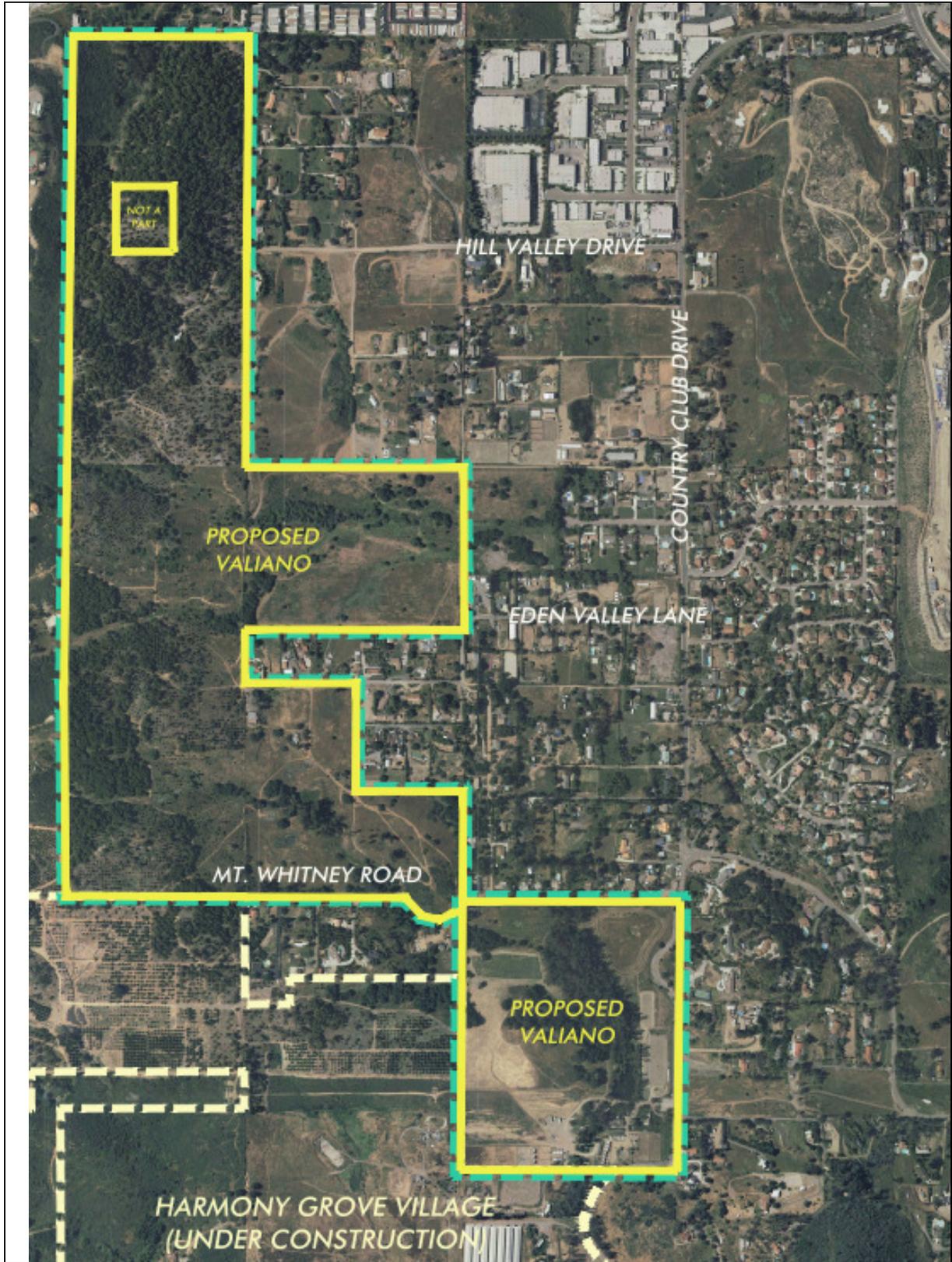
A Specific Plan allows a developer to comprehensively plan the land uses and public facilities of a large contiguous land area while maintaining a degree of design flexibility to respond to future conditions.



Source: Helix Environmental Planning

**Valiano Specific Plan  
County of San Diego**

**Figure 1-1  
Regional Location**



The following planning objectives have been established to guide the development of the Valiano Specific Plan Area:

- Develop a community which complements and responds to the unique topography and character of the Plan area and surrounding area;
- Utilizing Smart Growth concepts, provide a variety of housing opportunities, ranging in size and affordability, to meet the growing housing needs of the region;
- Provide a range of lot sizes to accommodate a full spectrum of housing sizes to meet the varied family make up;
- Provide for a range of for sale market rate, and detached housing types to accommodate broad market needs from singles to large families and across age groups;
- Provide recreation areas to serve the recreation needs of the future Plan area residents;
- Design a community that embraces and preserves the equestrian activities and the equestrian nature of the surrounding areas and provides amenities for the community area;
- Provide a healthy living component including multi-use trail network that connects to other trails adjacent to the Plan area to encourage pedestrian and equestrian mobility and outdoor connectivity;
- Provide increased residential density close to the shopping, employment, and transportation centers of Escondido and San Marcos;
- Set aside on-site biological and agricultural resources within open space areas;
- Design a safe and efficient circulation system that adequately supports the anticipated level of traffic in and around the Plan area that is pedestrian safe;
- Provide for adequate Public Services and facilities to accommodate the proposed residential uses;
- Develop a financing and phasing plan that provides for the efficient and timely provision of infrastructure and public services as development occurs; and
- Provide for the significant preservation of resources and preservation of community character through implementation of the Valiano Specific Plan.

### **1.3 SPECIFIC PLAN PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The Valiano Specific Plan serves as the primary land use, policy and regulatory document for the Plan area by providing for an efficient development planning and review process. The planning and review

process emphasizes the direct and comprehensive correlation between land use, public services and infrastructure necessary to support those land uses. When implemented together, the elements of the Valiano Specific Plan support the logical development of the Plan area by establishing a comprehensive planning program that is responsive the opportunities and constraints of the area.

The Valiano Specific Plan is both a policy and a regulatory document. As policy document, the Plan applies the broader goals and policies of the County of San Diego General Plan (General Plan) by establishing specific objectives for the Plan area. As a regulatory document, the Plan specifies the land uses and associated development, as well as design and infrastructure standards that must be met to successfully implement the Plan. Through inclusion of development, design and infrastructure standards, this Plan creates standards specifically applicable to the Plan area. As a regulatory document, all subsequent design documents and development activities in the Valiano Specific Plan area are required to be consistent with this Plan.

## **1.4 SPECIFIC PLAN AUTHORITY**

California Government Code Section 65450 gives a legislative body the authority to prepare a Specific Plan for the systematic implementation of a General Plan for all or part of the area covered by a General Plan. Per Sections 65451 and 65452, a specific plan shall contain the following information:

- A statement of the relationship of the Specific Plan to the General Plan;
- The distribution, location and extent of land uses;
- The distribution, location and extent of major infrastructure needed to support the land uses described in the plan;
- Development standards and criteria; and
- A program of phasing and implementation measures.

## **1.5 CONTENTS OF THE SPECIFIC PLAN**

To meet the requirements described above, the Valiano Specific Plan includes the following components and features:

- Planning objectives that expand upon the General Plan regarding land use, circulation, resource management as well as public services and utilities (Chapter 1);
- Written and graphic descriptions of proposed land uses within the Planning area, including clearly identified specific development patterns and design standards (Chapter 2);

- Written and graphic descriptions of proposed vehicular, pedestrian and equestrian circulation systems for the Plan area and how these networks will tie into adjacent properties (Chapter 3);
- Textual descriptions and graphic illustrations of significant natural resources in the Plan area and a plan for the protection of important resources (Chapter 4);
- A public service and utility plan that includes the location and extent of public services and utilities necessary to serve the Plan area (Chapters 5 and 6);
- A public facility financing and phasing plan that provides the general framework for the financing and phasing of public improvements in the Plan area (Chapter 7); and
- An implementation program that describes the project review procedures and regulations for specific development projects within the Plan area and any future Plan amendments (Chapter 8).

## **1.6 PLAN AREA SETTING**

### **1.6.1 Regional and Local Setting**

The 238-acre Valiano Specific Plan area is located in an unincorporated area of San Diego County, between the cities of San Marcos and Escondido on the eastern toe of the Merriam Mountains. The Plan area is generally divided into two areas, a larger northwestern portion of 190 acres and a smaller southeastern portion of approximately 48 acres. The two areas connect corner to corner. The northern area is generally bounded by the City of San Marcos on the north and west, Mt. Whitney Road on the south, and the Eden Valley area on the east. The southern portion of the Plan area is bound by Mt. Whitney Road on the north and Country Club Drive on the east.

The Plan area is in close proximity to major transportation, employment, health, education, recreation, and retail service centers. Transportation in the surrounding area consists of two major highways (State Route 78 and Interstate 15), a SPRINTER station, and BREEZE bus service. Employment centers include industrial and business parks located in San Marcos and Escondido, and further south on Interstate 15 is Rancho Bernardo's employment center. Along with elementary, middle and high schools, there are two higher education institutions, California State University San Marcos and Palomar College, located within a few miles of the Plan area. A new regional hospital recently opened within a mile of the project and regional and neighborhood shopping opportunities are available in the adjacent Escondido and San Marcos communities. The Plan area's location near these transportation and service resources make it an ideal location for an infill Smart Growth project. A discussion of all factors that shaped the Plan is presented in Section 1.6.3, below.

Land use adjacent to the Plan area is residential in nature and incorporates some equestrian uses. The Harmony Grove Village Specific Plan (HGVSP) abuts the southern portion of the Valiano Specific Plan, whereas the HGVSP is further from infrastructure as described above compared to Valiano Specific Plan.

Several easements surround and traverse the Plan area. These easements are primarily for utility providers, such as San Diego Gas & Electric and Rincon del Diablo Municipal Water District. The easements and their associated facilities will be retained, vacated or realigned as appropriate.

### **1.6.2 Plan Area Physical Characteristics**

The Valiano Specific Plan covers 13 parcels totaling approximately 238.8 acres, including the following APNs: 228-313-13, 232-013-01, 232-013-02, 232-013-03, 232-020-55, 232-492-01, and 232-500-18 thru 24.

The Valiano Specific Plan area has varying topography with the highest point located near the northwestern corner the Plan area. Elevations range from 632 feet above mean sea level (amsl) in the southeastern portion of the site to 1,012 feet amsl in the northwestern corner of the site.

Agricultural uses cover approximately 57 percent of the Plan area, primarily on the sloped western portion of the site. Non-native grassland is also present, primarily in the south and south central portion of the Plan area. Other vegetation within the Plan area is a mix of native and non-native habitats. Jurisdictional wetlands and waters also occur within the Plan area.

The Plan area is primarily undeveloped and existing development on the site is limited. The agricultural uses and associated farm roads are the dominant features within the Plan area. There are two farm/ranch complexes located within the Plan area and the Harmony Grove Equestrian Center is located within the southeast corner of the southern portion of the Plan area.

### **1.6.3 Factors that Influence the Specific Plan**

The opportunities and constraints described below are the key factors influencing the design of the Valiano Specific Plan. In addition to these factors, the Specific Plan incorporate input from County of San Diego staff and neighbors to the Plan area.

#### **General Location**

The Plan's location is in an area that is already developed with residential uses varying from high density mobile home parks to one to four acre parcels. Additionally, it is near regional transportation, employment, services and shopping. Proposing infill Smart Growth residential uses would be

consistent with the existing adjacent uses and provide additional homes near already established infrastructure, services and employment centers. Proposing residential uses near regional transportation, employment, services and shopping promotes the interregional relationship between housing and employment. Additionally, placing infill Smart Growth residential uses near employment and services helps minimize vehicles miles traveled and reduce greenhouse gases, which is consistent with the goals of Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) (Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008). Thus, the Valiano Specific Plan maximizes the project's location to established infrastructure, employment opportunities and services.

### **Topography**

The Plan area has varying topography from flat to rolling hills, and steeper slopes with the highest point located near the northwestern corner the Plan area. The primary slopes on the project site support agriculture while the flat and rolling hills could support development. Topography is an important element from a grading and drainage design perspective. Thus, the design of the Specific Plan considered topography as a factor. The resulting Valiano Specific Plan responds sensitively to the steep slopes by clustering development to minimize the amount of grading and disturbance and maintain many of the natural land formations.

### **Agricultural Operations**

Existing agricultural activity occurs on more than 57 percent of the site with varying quality from poor (non-producing) to good. Understanding the importance of agriculture operations from both an economic perspective as well as a visual amenity towards preserving semi-rural character, the Plan was designed to retain and integrate higher quality agricultural uses into the overall Plan concept. Under the Plan, 36.5 acres will be preserved within an agricultural open space easement. This will allow for ongoing agricultural activity and also contribute to the retention of some of the Plan area's visual character.

### **Biological Resources**

In addition to the agricultural operations, the Plan area contains some sensitive habitats, including upland habitats and wetland/water areas. A pond feature exists in the southeastern portion of the site. Preservation of important biological resources was considered in the design of the Plan. Under the Plan 28.2 acres will be preserved in a Biological Open Space Easement.

### **Adjacency to Harmony Grove Village Specific Plan**

The southern portion of the Valiano Specific Plan area is adjacent to the Harmony Grove Village Specific Plan. The Valiano Specific Plan considered the density of future development within the Harmony Grove Specific Plan as well as its proposed infrastructure and circulation network. The Valiano Specific Plan has been designed to complement the Harmony Grove Village Specific Plan by providing additional mid-sized lots, since many of the HGVSP lots are small lot configurations.

### **Equestrian Character of Surrounding Community**

The Plan area vicinity supports equestrian uses and the Valiano Specific Plan was designed to respond to those uses. Specifically, the Plan incorporates a multi-use trail, and trail head area as an integral part of the Plan. These amenities would benefit the surrounding residents who ride horses. The project would also increase the customer base for nearby equestrian facilities.

## **1.7 RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS AND REGULATIONS**

The Valiano Specific Plan is closely related to several documents that will also have a bearing on development within the Plan area. This section describes the relationship between this Plan and other applicable regulatory documents.

The Plan area is within the jurisdiction of unincorporated San Diego County. The General Plan serves as the blueprint for future growth and development and establishes policies for lands located within the unincorporated areas of San Diego County.

### **1.7.1 County of San Diego General Plan**

The County of San Diego is the lead agency maintaining the General Plan and Community Plan policies. As noted below the Valiano Specific Plan is consistent with the overarching goals and intent of the General Plan.

**Specific Plans** - The Land Use Element of the General Plan describes Specific Plans as a planning tools allowed for by State law that may be developed for areas of the County to provide more precise guidance for land development, infrastructure, amenities and resource conservation consistent with the use types and densities specified by the Land Use Designations and the goals and policies of the General Plan. The General Plan notes that the intention is to retain the underlying densities on the General Plan Land Use Plan to clearly show the area's relationship within the context of where it is located.

The Valiano Specific Plan implements the goals and policies of the General Plan by providing development guidelines that reflect the unique opportunities and constraints of the Plan Area.

According to Government Code Section 65454, a Specific Plan must be consistent with the adopted General Plan. The Specific Plan's consistency with the General Plan and the proposed General Plan Amendments are described in general, below, in relation to each individual General Plan Element.

**Land Use Element - Regional Category** - The Valiano Specific Plan area is identified as having a Semi-Rural regional category in the General Plan. "The Semi-Rural category identifies areas of the County that are appropriate for lower-density residential neighborhoods, recreation areas, agricultural operations, and related commercial uses that support rural communities. Semi-Rural areas often function as a transition between the Village and Rural Lands categories, providing opportunities for development, but without the intensity and level of public services expected in Villages and with design approaches that blend the development with the natural landscape. Semi-Rural residential densities are derived in consideration of the physical conditions, community character, and availability of public services, roads, and other infrastructure. Higher densities within the allowable range should be located near Village areas and surrounding urban areas such as San Marcos and Escondido, while lower densities should be located near Rural Land areas. Site design methods that reduce on-site infrastructure costs and preserve contiguous open space or agricultural operations are encouraged." (San Diego County General Plan, page 3-8.)

**Land Use Element - Designations** - The parcels that make up the Valiano Specific Plan area are currently designated as a mix of Semi-Rural 1 (SR-1) and Semi-Rural 2 (SR-2). Depending on the slope on an individual parcel, SR-1 densities can range from 1 du/gross acre to 1 du/4 gross acre. Similarly, depending on the slope on the individual parcels, SR-2 densities can range from 1 du/2 gross acres to 1 du/8 gross acres.

With implementation of the Valiano Specific Plan and General Plan Amendment, all portions of the Plan area would change to the Semi-Rural 0.5 (SR-0.5) designation. Densities under the proposed designation range from 2 dus/gross acre to 1 du/2 gross acres, depending on the slope. The densities proposed under the Valiano Specific Plan are consistent with the proposed SR-0.5 designation. SR-0.5 is the highest density in the Semi-Rural category, which is consistent with General Plan direction to locate higher densities near the urban areas of San Marcos and Escondido, as well as the Village area of HGVSP.

**Mobility Element** - The Mobility Element provides a framework for a balanced, multi-modal transportation system for the movements of people and goods within the unincorporated areas of the County of San Diego. The Valiano Specific Plan includes a circulation plan with five street types and an integrated multi-use trail network that will connect to existing and proposed road and trail networks. Additionally, the Plan area is located near transportation infrastructure, including SR-78 and the Nordahl SPRINTER station. Placing infill Smart Growth residential uses near public transit provides

multiple mobility options for future Plan area residents. It also fulfills the General Plan goals and is consistent with SB 375. This Specific Plan is consistent with the seven goals of the County's Mobility Element.

***Conservation and Open Space Element*** - The Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan provides direction to future growth and development in the County of San Diego with respect to natural resources, cultural resources, protection of open space and the provision of park and recreation resources. Key resources within the Plan area include biological resources and agricultural resources. Future residential development within the plan area is clustered to minimize the amount of disturbance and to make more areas available as open space. The Valiano Specific Plan preserves both biological and agricultural open space areas. Specifically, the Plan preserves 28.2 acres preserved in a biological open space easement and 36.5 acres preserved in an agricultural open space easement. This Specific Plan is consistent with the 24 goals of the County's Conservation and Open Space Element.

***Housing Element*** - The Housing Element of the General Plan seeks to balance housing requirements with infrastructure deficiencies, safety issues, and the rural and semi-rural character of many of the County's unincorporated communities. It also seeks to reconcile housing needs with competing land use interests. Residential development in the Valiano Specific Plan area will provide up to 326 additional single-family homes in the region. Proposed residences will vary in size and appeal to a variety of economic groups. Development under the Plan will assist the County in fulfilling its affordable housing requirements by providing three distinct housing opportunities within the Plan area: single-family homes on their own lots, detached condo lots with four or five homes surrounding a central courtyard, and a maximum of 54 Second Dwelling Units that could be used for rental or multi-generational family members. Second Dwelling Units would be restricted to 640 square feet or less. The home types are specifically designed and targeted to meet affordable need by offering both detached and attached or secondary units. The total number of affordable homes will exceed the minimum state required ten percent of the overall homes onsite.

The Plan area is located near regional transportation, employment, services, and shopping. Proposing infill residential uses would be consistent with the existing adjacent uses and provide additional homes near already established infrastructure, services and employment centers. This Specific Plan is consistent with the six goals of the County's Housing Element.

***Safety Element*** - The Safety Element of the General Plan addresses the natural hazards and human activity that may pose a threat to public safety in the areas of wildfires, geologic and seismic hazards, flooding, hazardous materials, law enforcement and airport hazards. The Plan has been reviewed for

safety in all of these areas. This Specific Plan is consistent with the 15 goals of the County's Safety Element.

**Noise Element** - The Noise Element of the General Plan provides for control and abatement of environmental noise to protect citizens from excessive exposure. A noise study was prepared for the Plan. This Specific Plan is consistent with the six goals of the County's Noise Element.

## **1.7.2 Subregional and Community Plans**

While the Land Use Element inclusive of Land Use Maps and Goals and Policies applies to all lands throughout the unincorporated County, there are special land use issues and objectives that uniquely pertain to each of its diverse communities. These are addressed by Community Plans in which goals and policies are defined to provide more precise guidance regarding the character, land uses, and densities within each community planning area. The Valiano Specific Plan area is located within the San Dieguito Community Plan area.

### **San Dieguito Community Plan**

The Plan area is within the northern portion of the San Dieguito Community Plan area, which is characterized as a low-density estate residential area bordered in close proximity to rapidly urbanizing areas in the North San Diego County. The San Dieguito Community Plan identifies goals related to community character, land use, circulation, public safety/services/facilities, conservation, recreation, scenic highways, open space, noise, and energy. The County of San Diego is the lead agency maintaining the goals of the San Dieguito Community Plan and the Valiano Specific Plan's consistency with those goals. The Valiano Specific Plan is consistent with the goals of the San Dieguito Community Plan.

### **Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove Community Plan**

The southeastern portion of the project site (future Neighborhood 5) is within the Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove Community Plan (EFHGCP) area, which is characterized as an area of primarily single-family rural residential communities on estate lots sprawling over hillsides, along with agricultural uses and residential livestock keeping. The EFHGCP identifies goals related to community character, land use, circulation/mobility, conservation/open space, safety and noise. The County of San Diego is the lead agency maintaining the goals of the Harmony Grove portion of the EFHGCP and the Valiano Specific Plan's consistency with those goals. The Valiano Specific Plan is consistent with the goals of the Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove Community Plan.

### **1.7.3 County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance**

The San Diego County Zoning Ordinance serves as the implementation tool for the Land Use Element of the General Plan. The Zoning Ordinance identifies specific types of land use, intensity of land use and development performance standards applicable to each parcel of land under the County's jurisdiction. The land use types, use regulations, and development design standards within this Plan supersede the standards contained with the Zoning Ordinance. However, the Zoning Ordinance continues to apply to all other topics not specifically discussed in the Plan.

## **1.8 COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA**

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Valiano Specific Plan accompanies this Plan. The EIR, prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) examines the potential environmental impacts of the implementation of the Specific Plan and identifies mitigation to reduce impacts to below a level of significance. It serves as the base environmental document for the purpose of evaluating subsequent entitlements associated with the Plan. The EIR is to be certified concurrently with the adoption of the Specific Plan.

A mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP) is adopted in accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21081.6 to ensure implementation of the EIR mitigation measures. As applicable, future development within the Plan area is required to implement the mitigation measures specified in the MMRP.

In accordance with California Government Code Section 65457, subsequent development proposals within the Plan area, if found by the County to be consistent with this Plan and the impact analysis and mitigation measures in the certified EIR, may be approved and implemented in accordance with and based upon the certified EIR without further environmental review. County of San Diego staff will determine if further environmental analysis is required for any proposed Amendment to the Specific Plan.