CHAPTER 3.0
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1 Project Location

Regional Location

The City of Dana Point is located in the southern portion of Orange County, approximately midway between San Diego to the south and Los Angeles to the north (refer to Exhibit 3-1). The community encompasses coastal bluffs and rolling hills located along seven miles of the Pacific Ocean. The Cities of Laguna Niguel and Laguna Beach are located north of Dana Point; San Juan Capistrano is east of the City and San Clemente is located to the south.

Project Vicinity

The project area encompasses Pacific Coast Highway and Del Prado Avenue in the City of Dana Point, extending from Copper Lantern on the east to Blue Lantern on the west, within the Dana Point Town Center as illustrated in Exhibit 3-2.

3.2 Environmental Setting

3.2.1 Existing Land Use

Project Site

At the present time, Pacific Coast Highway and Del Prado Avenue between Copper Lantern and Blue Lantern are improved with three thru lanes, generally within an 80-foot right-of-way. Land uses along Pacific Coast Highway and Del Prado between Copper Lantern and Blue Lantern include tourist-related retail, commercial uses, and residential. The roadway segments that are the subject of this analysis are currently characterized by moderate traffic volumes with little congestion.

Surrounding Land Uses

Land uses outside the mixed-use town center north and south of the project are zoned for single-family and multiple-family residential as well as mixed-use commercial/residential. Land uses east and west of the project are zoned commercial/retail.

3.2.2 Existing General Plan

The Circulation Element of the Dana Point General Plan designates PCH as a Primary Arterial in this segment. Primary Arterials are four-lane, divided roadways, with a typical right-of-way width of 100 feet and curb-to-curb pavement width of 84 feet. At the present time, PCH and Del Prado Avenue operate as a one-way couplet, moving traffic through the Dana Point Town Center area.
3.2.3 Physical Environment

Climate and Air Quality

The project site is located within the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB), a 6,600 square mile area encompassing all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. A persistent high-pressure area that commonly resides over the eastern Pacific Ocean largely dominates regional meteorology. The distinctive climate of this area is determined primarily by its terrain and geographic location. Local climate is characterized by warm summers, mild winters, infrequent rainfall, moderate daytime onshore breezes, and moderate humidity. Ozone and pollutant concentrations tend to be lower along the coast, where the constant onshore breeze disperses pollutants toward the inland valley of the SCAB and adjacent deserts. However, as a whole, the SCAB fails to meet national standards for several criteria pollutants, including ozone, carbon monoxide and PM_{10}, and is classified as a "non-attainment" area for those pollutants.

Geology and Seismicity

The proposed project area consists of surficial Tertiary marine terrace deposits and Capistrano and San Onofre Formation geologic bedrock. The PCH and Del Prado rights-of-way and adjacent areas are characterized by gentle topography. No landslides have been mapped within the immediate area. In addition, the site is not located within an area of potential landsliding due to seismic shaking. Dana Point, like the rest of Orange County and southern California, is located in a seismically active area. No known active faults extend through the City; however, the Newport Inglewood Fault Zone is located approximately four miles to the southwest. Major active faults that could affect the City include the Whittier-Elsinore Fault, the San Andreas Fault, the Palos Verdes Fault, the San Clement Fault, and the Rose Canyon Fault. The project area and region are subject to seismic activity, including moderate to heavy groundshaking. The probability of occurrence of ground failure associated with severe ground shaking (e.g., ground subsidence, ground lurching, shallow ground rupture, liquefaction, and soil strength loss) depends on the severity of the earthquake, distance from the causative fault, topography, subsoils and groundwater conditions, and other related factors.

Drainage and Hydrology

The Dana Point Town Center Area, including the project environs, is located within the San Juan Creek Watershed. The project area is generally built out and is covered with impervious surfaces. Surface flows within the project area are directed to a variety of drainage facilities within the project area, including catch basins and storm drains that direct the flows to the major flood control facilities prior to discharging the runoff into the Pacific Ocean. San Juan Creek is the watercourse that poses the greatest flood hazard within the City. The flood plain of this river varies in width from 700 feet to 1,200 feet. Other watercourses in the City include Salt Creek, a narrow watercourse that extends through the Links at Monarch Beach golf course. The Salt Creek flood plain is approximately 100 feet wide. Prima Deshecha Canada runs through the City for approximately 200 feet, forming the City’s southernmost border adjacent to Camino Capistrano. No portion of the project area is located within the 100-year flood plains of any of the watercourses that extend through the City of Dana Point.

Transportation and Circulation

The City and project area are served by several arterial streets, including Pacific Coast Highway (PCH), Del Prado Avenue, and the Street of the Golden Lantern. PCH is a two-way, four-lane roadway west/north of the Street of the Blue Lantern and east/south of the Street of the Copper Lantern. Within the Dana Point Town Center area, PCH and Del Prado Avenue form a couplet with three lanes of traffic.
flowing westbound on PCH and three lanes flowing eastbound on Del Prado Avenue (PCH Eastbound). The couplet diverges at Street of the Blue Lantern and converges at Street of the Copper Lantern. Other arterial streets serving the area include Street of the Golden Lantern, a four-lane divided arterial extending in a north-south direction. The Orange County Transit Authority (OCTA) operates several bus lines within the vicinity of the Dana Point Town Center along PCH, Golden Lantern, and Del Prado Avenue.

Public Services and Utilities

Fire protection facilities and service in Dana Point are provided by the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) under contract to the City of Dana Point. Four fire stations respond to emergency calls within the City. The OCFA operates and maintains two of those fire stations within the City boundary. The Orange County Sheriff’s Department (OCSD) provides law enforcement services, under contract, for the entire City of Dana Point. The Dana Point Police Services Department of the OCSD currently provides all law enforcement services to the project site and adjacent areas, handling all calls for service, investigating criminal matters, apprehending criminal offenders, handling non-criminal matters, enforcing traffic and parking regulations, and investigating traffic accidents. The provision of educational services in the City of Dana Point is the responsibility of the Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD). The South Coast Water District (SCWD) is responsible for providing sewer and water facilities and service throughout most of the City of Dana Point, including the project area. Facilities are located in both PCH and Del Prado Avenue as well as several alleys, private parcels with easements and adjoining north-south running streets. SCWD recently approved a project to upgrade existing sewer and water facilities in the Dana Point Town Center area. Storm drain facilities also exist throughout the City and project area, which are maintained by the City of Dana Point. SoCal Gas provides natural gas service in the project area and SDG&E is the electrical service provider.

3.2.4 Social Environment

In 2009, the City of Dana Point had an estimated population of 37,082 (36,840 households), compared to its 2008 population of 36,825 (i.e., 0.7 percent increase). A total of 15,955 housing units existed in Dana Point in 2009, including 10,214 single-family detached and attached dwelling units, 5,447 multiple-family residential dwelling units, and 294 mobile homes. Of the total dwelling units in the City, 14,710 were occupied, with a vacancy rate of 7.8 percent. Based on the occupied dwelling units, the City has a population per household (pph) of 2.504 persons.1

3.3 History and Evolution of the Existing Plans

The Dana Point Town Center Plan was adopted by the City in 2006 to encourage the revitalization of the Dana Point Town Center, which extends over approximately a one-mile area along Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) and Del Prado. Between these two streets, PCH and Del Prado currently form a one-way “couplet” to accommodate east-west vehicular travel through the urban core of the City. This project provides the public right-of-way improvements, consistent with the Town Center Plan approved by the City and the California Coastal Commission.

In order to help ensure that this project is constructed in the most business/property owner friendly manner possible, the City worked with a representative cross-section of the Town Center Community to develop project implementation guidelines. This Town Center Construction Implementation Advisory Group helped the City staff develop a plan that is sensitive to continuous business operation and function during construction. As a result, the Project will assure that physical access is maintained to Town Center

1 California Department of Finance; Table 2: E-5 City/County Population and Housing Estimates, 1/1/2009.
properties. PCH will be constructed first and two-way operations established. Del Prado will remain open during construction albeit a single eastbound lane. Del Prado street curb relocation work will be undertaken in four increments, a quarter section at a time. “Business Open” and parking signage will be used as well as event publication to encourage customers to use businesses during the construction period.

3.4 Description of the Proposed Project

The City of Dana Point is proposing the Pacific Coast Highway/Del Prado Avenue Phase I Streetscape Improvements for the Dana Point Town Center. The PCH/Del Prado Phase I Streetscape Improvement project (“Project”) is the initial project for ultimate street improvements identified in the approved Town Center Plan for these Circulation Element roadways. Implementation of the proposed project will re-establish two-way circulation for both PCH and Del Prado. Exhibit 3-3A through Exhibit 3-3K illustrate the Project Improvements proposed by the City.

In addition to the return to two-way operations, the proposed improvements along PCH include traffic signal improvements/modifications, striping, and signing modifications, improved transit stops, and initial traffic and beautification related modifications to the “gateways” at Blue Lantern and Copper Lantern. The traffic signal improvements/modifications include new signals at Ruby Lantern and a new intersection between Blue Lantern and Ruby Lantern. In addition, modifications are also proposed at other traffic signals within the project area to accommodate the two-way travel proposed for the two arterials. Other improvements include the incorporation of landscaped medians, street improvements as needed to accommodate bus turnouts and u-turns at designated locations, the modification of certain vehicular access points and the relocation of some on-street parking. Some of these improvements will require acquisition of rights of way for sidewalk easements and parking, to accommodate the refined project design.

The curb and gutter of PCH will generally remain in the existing location. A two-lane left-turn pocket will be included on southbound Golden Lantern at Pacific Coast Highway, along with other key signing and striping adjustments to accommodate the change to two-way traffic and the associated traffic volumes.

The improvements proposed for Del Prado also include the return of two-way operations, along with, additional on-street parking, streetscape beautification, and “gateway” improvements and attendant right-of-way acquisition where needed. Other general improvements include the incorporation of water quality and air quality enhancements with significant additional landscaped pervious areas, reduced lighting energy consumption, reduced long-term noise levels with reduced traffic speeds, landscaped medians, parkway landscaping, installation of new trees, protection of existing trees where possible, street light improvements, signage and banner poles, drainage and water quality enhancements, sidewalk enhancements, wall and retaining wall construction, pavement resurfacing, new curb and gutter, the modification of certain vehicular access points including relocation or closure of certain drive entries, and other miscellaneous improvements. Three existing traffic signals will be replaced with 4-way stop signs. The design is intended to enhance the pedestrian experience by widening sidewalks while improving on-street parking between Blue Lantern and Golden Lantern.
The design concepts of the Town Center Plan call for rebalancing through-movement with public access, “calming” traffic, enhancing the pedestrian environment, and making the Town Center more readily accessible and navigable to residents and visitors to the area. Beyond the circulation and streetscape concept proposed by the City, the plan also includes improvements that are intended to enhance the use of existing businesses, strengthen the economic viability of the Town Center, and identify the Town Center as the hub of the community, consistent with the recommendations previously approved in the Town Center Plan. This will create a more vital and vibrant atmosphere in the Town Center.

3.5 Project Phasing

Implementation of the proposed improvements is anticipated to begin as early as 2012 and extend through 2013; however, implementation is dependent on several factors, including the availability of funding and prevailing economic conditions, which could delay work for two or three more years. However, once funding is secured by the City of Dana Point, the proposed improvements will move ahead expeditiously in order to secure the significant benefits that flow from the project. Once funding is secured, construction activity is estimated to last 12 months.

3.6 Project Objectives

Implementation of the proposed project will achieve the following intended specific objectives, which have been identified by the City of Dana Point that are intended to achieve the goals and objectives of the Dana Point Town Center Specific Plan.

- Improved overall traffic circulation and safety
- Street beautification
- Pedestrian enhancements to support mixed-use development
- Improved lighting and use of reduced energy LED lighting
- Improved drainage facilities
- Increased parking overall
- Improved ocean water quality
- Reduced long-term noise levels
- Improved access to bus and bicycle public transit
- Improved long-term air quality
- Improved accessibility

3.7 Project Processing Requirements and Requested Entitlements

Project implementation will necessitate the approval of the following legislative and discretionary actions by the City’s Planning Commission and City Council:

- Acquisition of rights-of-way
- Preparation of project construction drawings and approval of contracts for same
- Bidding and awarding of project construction contract
- Coastal Development Permit