



# PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2004

VIII.1(b)  
ITEM NUMBER:

SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT GP-02-06/REZONE R-02-03  
1626/1640 NEWPORT BOULEVARD

DATE: AUGUST 30, 2004

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: KIMBERLY BRANDT, SENIOR PLANNER  
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## DESCRIPTION

A General Plan amendment to include a site-specific floor area ratio of 0.40 for medical office use in the General Commercial land use designation and a rezone from C2 (General Business District) to PDC (Planned Development Commercial).

## APPLICANT

Ms. Cora Newman, Government Solutions, is the authorized agent for Joseph Brown, property owner.

## RECOMMENDATION

Recommend to City Council denial of the requested general plan amendment and rezone by adoption of the attached resolution.

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KIMBERLY BRANDT  
Senior Planner

Handwritten signature of Michael Robinson in black ink.

MICHAEL ROBINSON  
Planning & Redevelopment Mgr.

Handwritten signature of Perry L. Valentine in black ink.

PERRY L. VALANTINE  
Asst. Development Services Director

## **BACKGROUND**

In May 2002, City Council approved a General Plan amendment (GPA) screening request for the two properties containing the Snug Harbor Village and El Nido Trailer Parks located at 1626/1640 Newport Boulevard. Council directed staff to evaluate a 4-story medical office building with a site-specific floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.40. The applicant originally proposed a 5-story building for the site. However, Council declined to amend the General Plan to accommodate the 5-story height.

As shown in Figure 1A, the property is currently shown as General Commercial on the 2000 General Plan Land Use Map; therefore, the mobilehome parks are legal nonconforming land uses. Both parks closed in June 2004.

In July 2002, the property owner submitted several requests to the City including a general plan amendment, rezone, mobilehome park conversion, and final master plan to allow the construction of a 76,500 square-foot, 4-story medical office building. Staff determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was required for all these requests and then proceeded with contracting with an environmental consulting firm for preparation of the necessary environmental documentation. This report addresses the general plan amendment and rezone requests; the remaining requests are addressed in separate staff reports.

## **ANALYSIS**

The General Plan designates the 4.4-acre site as General Commercial. This designation allows for the development of a wide variety of commercial uses and includes a "stepped" range of maximum allowable floor area ratios (FARs) that range from 0.20 to 0.75 (see following table). The FAR establishes how much building area can be developed on any particular nonresidential property. As shown in Table 1, the City has further defined the maximum allowable FAR based on the traffic-generating characteristics of a proposed use. Simply stated, a use that generates a high amount of traffic (such as a gas station or a fast-food restaurant) is allowed a smaller building when compared to a land use that generates fewer vehicle trips (such as a general office building or furniture store). These FAR standards are the basis for correlating the General Plan's Land Use Element to the City's Master Plan of Highways and maintaining internal consistency within the General Plan as required by State Planning and Zoning Law.

<b>Table 1</b>				
<b>GENERAL COMMERCIAL LAND USE DESIGNATION</b>				
<b>FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR) RANGE</b>				
	<b>HIGH TRAFFIC FAR</b>	<b>MODERATE TRAFFIC FAR</b>	<b>LOW TRAFFIC FAR</b>	<b>VERY-LOW TRAFFIC FAR</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Generates more than 75 ADT* per 1,000 square feet of building area.  Examples are gas stations and fast food restaurants.	Generates between 20 and 75 ADT* per 1,000 square feet of building area.  Examples are medical offices, governmental offices, and general retail.	Generates between 3 and 19 ADT* per 1,000 square feet of building area.  Examples are general offices, corporate offices, furniture stores, and motels and hotels.	Generates less than 3 ADT* per 1,000 square feet of building area.  Examples are mini-warehouse/storage.
<b>Maximum FAR</b>	0.20	0.30	0.40	0.75
<b>Maximum Building Sq. Ft. for Project Site</b>	38,333 maximum allowable sq. ft.	57,500 maximum allowable sq. ft.	76,666 maximum allowable sq. ft.	143,748 maximum allowable sq. ft.
* ADT means average daily trips.				

The applicant is proposing to construct a medical office building that has a trip generation rate that qualifies as a Moderate Traffic FAR (0.30 FAR). However, the applicant would like to construct a larger building (76,500 sq. ft.) than what is allowed by the General Plan (57,500 sq. ft.). Therefore, the applicant is requesting that a site-specific FAR of 0.40 be established for the project site. This request is a 33% increase in building square footage over the General Plan allowance for a moderate-traffic generating land use.

The applicant's project objectives are as follows:

- To provide medical offices that will be locally accessible and will serve neighborhoods in the surrounding communities;
- To promote the development of health care related facilities in proximity to Hoag Memorial Hospital, a major regional hospital under expansion; and

- To provide a commercial use that will ensure the long-term productivity and viability of the community's economic base consistent with the General Plan Land Use Objective LU-1B.

### ***Staff's Concerns***

**General Plan Chronology:** In 1970, the City adopted its first General Plan and designated the project site as Commercial Center, which at that time did not include any FARs. Then in 1985/1986, the City adopted Specific Plan SP-85-01/SP-8501A, which established unique development standards for the entire 1600 block of Newport Boulevard, including FARs. Potential FARs for C1-zoned property ranged from 0.50 to 1.0 FAR. The size of the property determined the maximum allowable FAR, with the larger parcels given a larger FAR. This specific plan was approved at a time when the City still assumed the completion of the Costa Mesa Freeway, construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> Street bridge, and the widening of East 17<sup>th</sup> Street.

Subsequently in 1992, the City adopted the 1990 General Plan and changed the land use designation in this block from Commercial Center to the less intense General Commercial land use designation. The City also repealed SP-85-01A/SP-85-01, which become inconsistent with the lower FAR standards of the new 1990 General Plan. The change in land use designation for this block along with other similar density reductions throughout the community allowed the City to include a policy in the 1990 General Plan that supports the removal of the 19<sup>th</sup> Street bridge from the County's and City's master plans of highways. Since then, the City has initiated efforts to work with Caltrans to remove the SR-55 extension from the State's freeway master plan and with the Orange County Transportation Authority to downgrade East 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Therefore, any GPA that results in increased traffic in this overall area is a significant policy issue.

**Traffic/Circulation:** Final EIR No. 1051 determined that all the anticipated impacts of the proposed project could be mitigated to a level of insignificance. However, the EIR includes the widening of Newport Boulevard between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets to mitigate the project's anticipated traffic impacts at the Newport Blvd./17<sup>th</sup> Street and Newport Blvd./19<sup>th</sup> Street intersections. As discussed further in the Final EIR staff report, this improvement is currently being pursued by the City of Costa Mesa in conjunction with Caltrans, as this section of Newport Boulevard is controlled by Caltrans. Since the City cannot cause the improvement to occur because it is within Caltrans' jurisdiction, the implementation of this mitigation measure cannot be ensured. Therefore, the Final EIR concludes that project implementation may result in unavoidable impacts in respect to traffic/circulation. It should be noted these unavoidable impacts are also associated with the development of the project site with uses that are consistent with the General Plan. This is due to the "constrained" circulation system assumption for the Year 2020, which includes none of the following improvements: extension of the Costa Mesa Freeway, widening of East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, and the construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> Street bridge. However, development proposed under the requested GPA/rezone results in total

average daily trips that are 20% to 33% greater than that associated with the General Plan alternatives analyzed in the Final EIR No. 1051, resulting in larger impacts at the Newport Boulevard intersections under these constrained conditions.

As shown on Figure 1B, current site access is via the Newport Boulevard frontage road. Orange Avenue is to the rear of the property, with existing residential land uses across Orange Avenue. Neither of the closed trailer parks had vehicle access to Orange Avenue, nor has it been staff's position to allow Orange Avenue access on recent project approvals (i.e., Shurgard storage facility). However, given the anticipated number of vehicle trips associated with the proposed medical office project as well as the General Plan development alternatives, the traffic analysis indicated that restricted access to Orange Avenue provides a better circulation pattern for the site. Otherwise, all site access is limited to the 16th Street/Newport Boulevard intersection, which has an atypical design because of the frontage road. The Final EIR has included measures to mitigate impacts, to a level of insignificance, to the residential land uses across Orange Avenue. But retention of the existing General Plan floor area ratio standards will result in 20% to 33% fewer average daily trips on Orange Avenue even if access to Orange Avenue is allowed (Proposed Project: 1,385 ADT versus Existing General Plan: 1,039 – 1,168 ADT).

Building Height: The proposed 4-story building complies with General Plan Policy LU-1C.2, which limits building heights south of the I-405 freeway to four stories. It should be noted the policy does not specify a corresponding building height to the 4-story limit. Generally, a "story" is considered to be 15 feet in height. The C2 zoning district defines maximum building height as 2 stories/30 feet. Based on these guidelines, it can be presumed that a 4-story building would be about 60 feet high. This overall height includes any roof parapet and/or rooftop mechanical screening. The applicant is requesting a rezone from C2 to PDC primarily because the PDC zone does not have a maximum building height restriction. Thus with a rezone, the 4-story building height would not require a variance. Also, the required landscaped setback on Orange Avenue increases from 15-feet deep to 20-feet deep with the proposed rezone to PDC.

As noted above, the General Plan does allow a maximum height of 4 stories south of I-405. However, the nodes of mid-rise development that exist south of the I-405 are located in the Bristol Street area, north of Pularino Avenue; the Civic Center/Vanguard University area; and the City's Downtown Redevelopment Project Area. The General Plan designates East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and the Newport Boulevard corridor, south of 17<sup>th</sup> Street, as General Commercial, which are typically developed with one- to two-story commercial buildings.

The proposed 4-story, 76,500 square-foot building is 71 feet 10 inches above grade at its highest point. It is nearly 12 feet taller than what a 4-story building may be expected to be, and that is due to the 11 foot 10 inch high roof-top mechanical screen and the 13.5-foot floor-to-ceiling heights for the second, third, and fourth

floors. All of the immediately surrounding commercial properties are well within the C2 zone 30-foot height limit, and the introduction of a building that is more than twice the height of any other structure will dominate surrounding development (both commercial and residential). See Figures 2 and 3.

There are examples in the City where one mid- or high-rise building exists in an area of one- to two-story development. The first example, although extreme, is Bethel Tower located at 666 W. 19th Street, which is 18 stories high. A more comparable building is 485 E. 17th Street, which is 6 stories/92 feet high. Staff believes these tall buildings do not complement the surrounding development patterns, and that the construction of a single, 72-foot high office building in the 1600 block of Newport Boulevard will result in a similar out-of-scale appearance.

The Final EIR includes a 3-story design alternative for which the overall building height is reduced to 58 feet 4 inches (this is accomplished by removing one 13.5 foot-high story). A more typical 3-story building height is 45 feet. As shown in Figure 4, this building is still twice the height of the surrounding development. As with the proposed project, staff believes that this building would result in an out-of-scale appearance when viewed in context with the neighborhood.

The Final EIR does not identify any potential environmental impacts associated with either the 4-story or 3-story building height that cannot be mitigated to a level of insignificance. Therefore, approval of the proposed building height is a policy decision.

### ***Environmental vs. Policy Issues***

As noted above, the proposed GPA and rezone requests involve both environmental and policy issues. Both are important and must be carefully considered and weighed.

Final EIR No. 1051 adequately addresses the project's environmental issues. With the exception of traffic impacts at the Newport Boulevard/17th Street and Newport/19th Street intersections, the EIR indicates the project, with mitigation, will not result in any significant adverse environmental impacts. However, it is staff's opinion that these facts alone do not mean it is a good project for the area or the community.

The three most significant policy issues related to the GPA and rezone are the proposed land use intensity, its resulting traffic impacts, and 4-story building height. As noted in the previous discussions, staff believes that approval of the requested land use intensity would be inconsistent with previous land use intensity and circulation system policy decisions for the area, and that the proposed building height would be inconsistent with existing and planned development pattern in the immediate vicinity. Staff suggests that these policy issues outweigh the project

benefits, regardless of its limited and incremental increase in environmental impacts.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Planning Commission may choose to recommend approval of the e general plan amendment request and rezone. Staff has prepared a resolution supporting approval (Attachment 3). The Final EIR includes a mitigation measure for the adoption of a trip budget for this site in conjunction with the general plan amendment. This will ensure that future land uses in this medical office building do not generate any additional trips beyond what were assumed in the traffic analysis. The trip budget is included in the attached resolution.

It would also be necessary for a statement of facts and findings and a statement of overriding considerations to accompany Planning Commission's recommendation of approval. These statements are attached to the resolution contained in Attachment 3.

Should the Planning Commission choose to recommend approval of the 3-story design alternative contained in Final EIR No. 1051, the motion should also include direction to staff to make any necessary modifications to the Statement of Facts and Findings prior to City Council consideration.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION**

Final EIR No. 1051 has been prepared for this project, and it has considered all the environmental effects of the proposed project and a reasonable range of alternatives. City Council certification of the Final EIR is required prior to Council's final action on this request.

### **CONCLUSION**

As shown in Table 1, the existing General Plan FAR standards allow a reasonable range of development opportunities for this property. The General Plan already allows the requested site-specific 0.40 FAR provided that use is limited to a "low-traffic" generator. Examples of "low-traffic" uses include general offices, corporate offices, furniture stores, and motels, hotels, and SROs. Any incremental increase in traffic above current General Plan levels will further exacerbate the "constrained" circulation system that surrounds the project site. The retention of the C2 zoning district will ensure a development that is in scale in terms of height with the surrounding commercial and residential neighborhoods. Staff believes that the site can be successfully developed with uses that comply with the existing General Plan FAR standards and C2 zoning regulations, and, therefore, staff is recommending denial of the proposed requests.

- Attachments:**
1. Figures 1A, 1B, 2, 3, and 4
  2. Draft Resolution for Denial
  3. Draft Resolution for Approval

**Distribution:**

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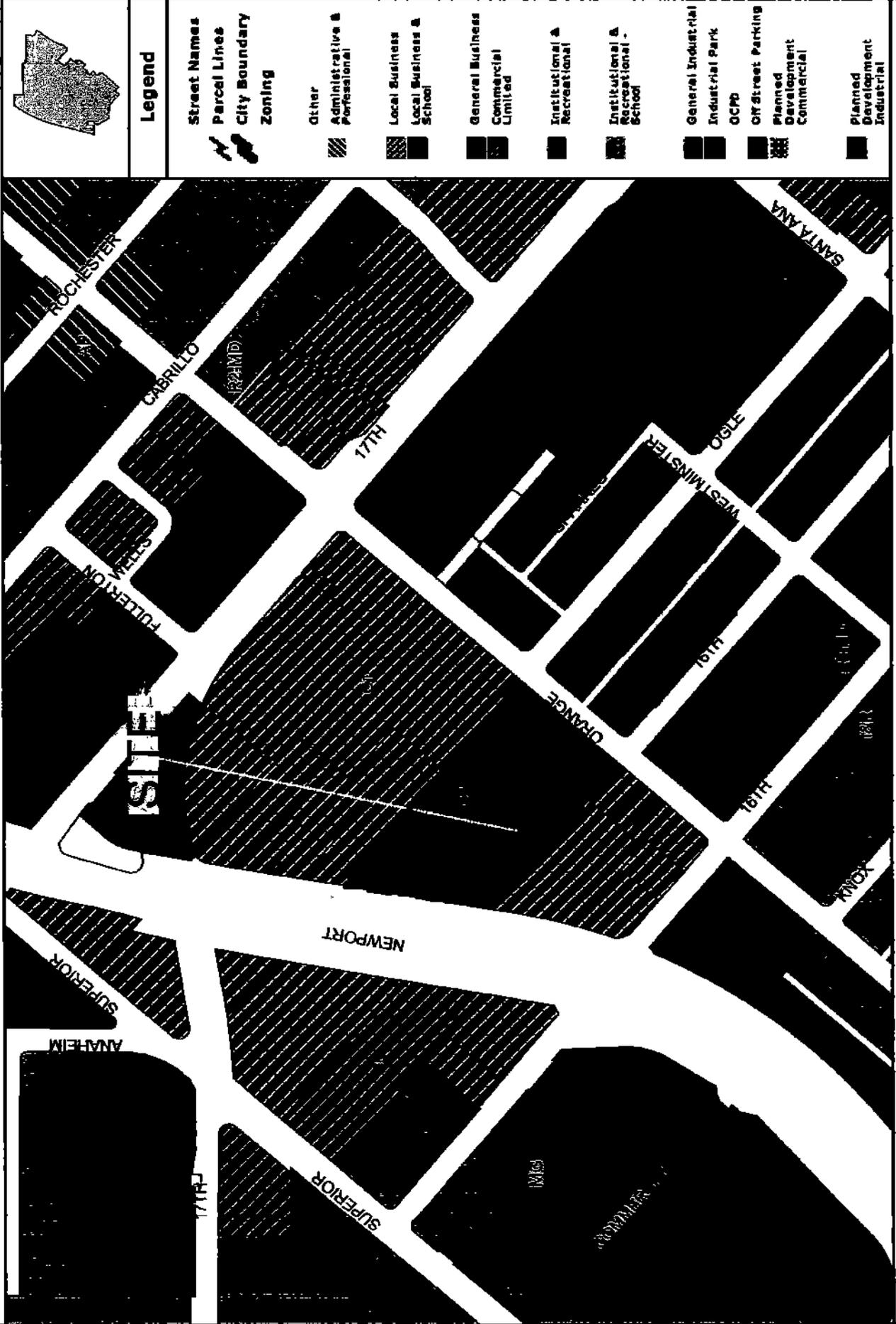
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# **ATTACHMENT 1**

## **FIGURES**

# General Plan and Zoning Information

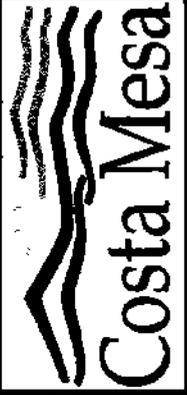
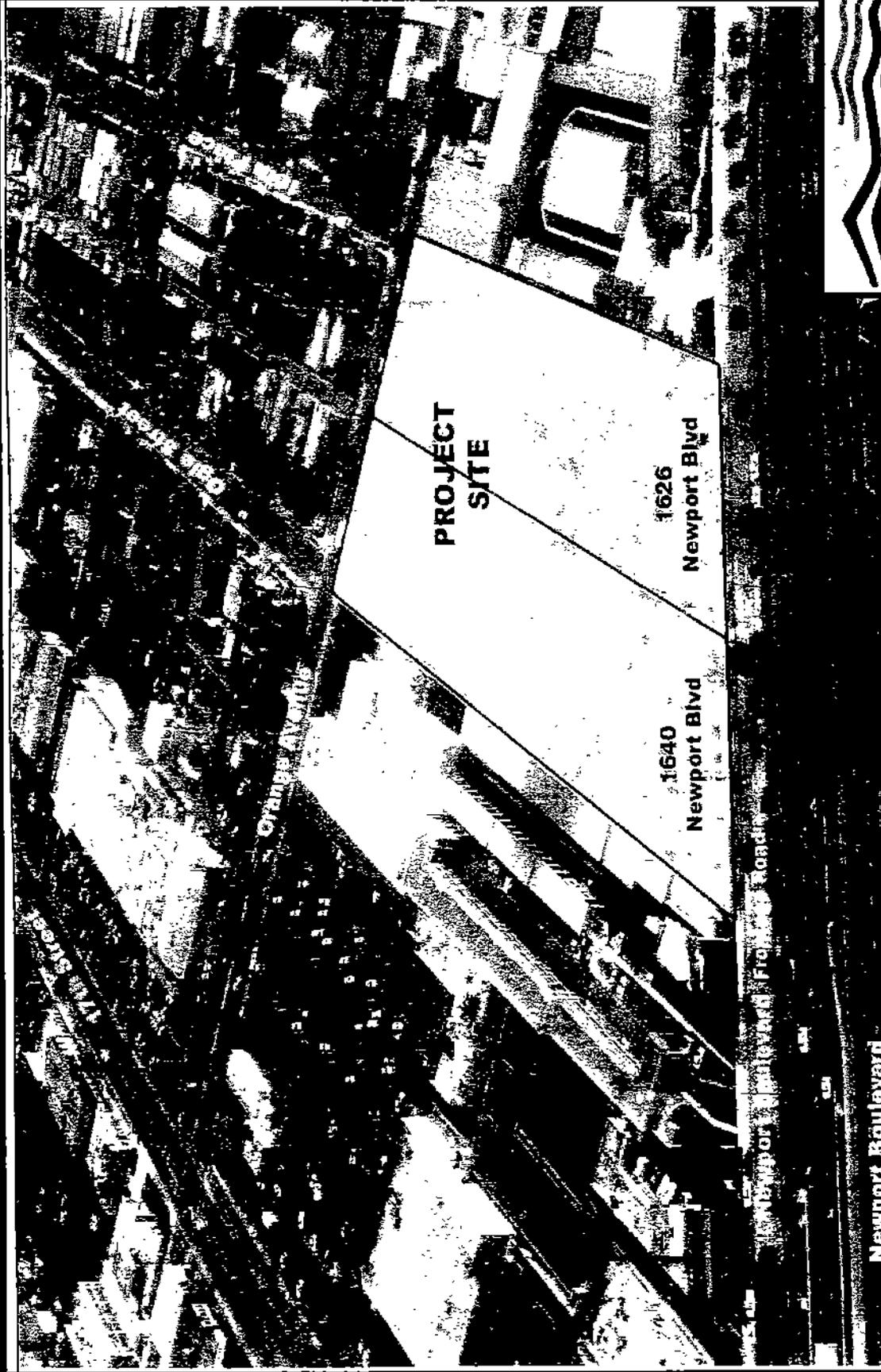
GP-02-06/R-02-03



## Legend

- Street Names
- Parcel Lines
- City Boundary
- Zoning
- Other
- Administrative & Professional
- Local Business & School
- General Business
- Commercial Limited
- Institutional & Recreational
- Institutional & Recreational - School
- General Industrial
- Industrial Park
- OCPD
- Off Street Parking
- Planned Development Commercial
- Planned Development Industrial

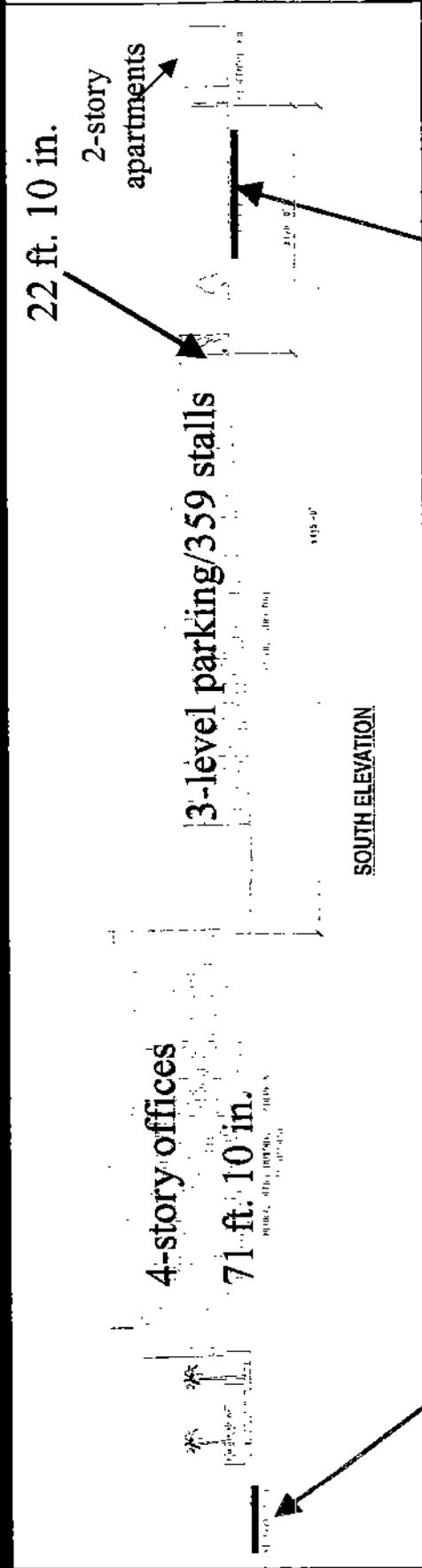
# FIGURE 1A



*Pacific Medical Plaza*

Newport Boulevard

FIGURE 1B



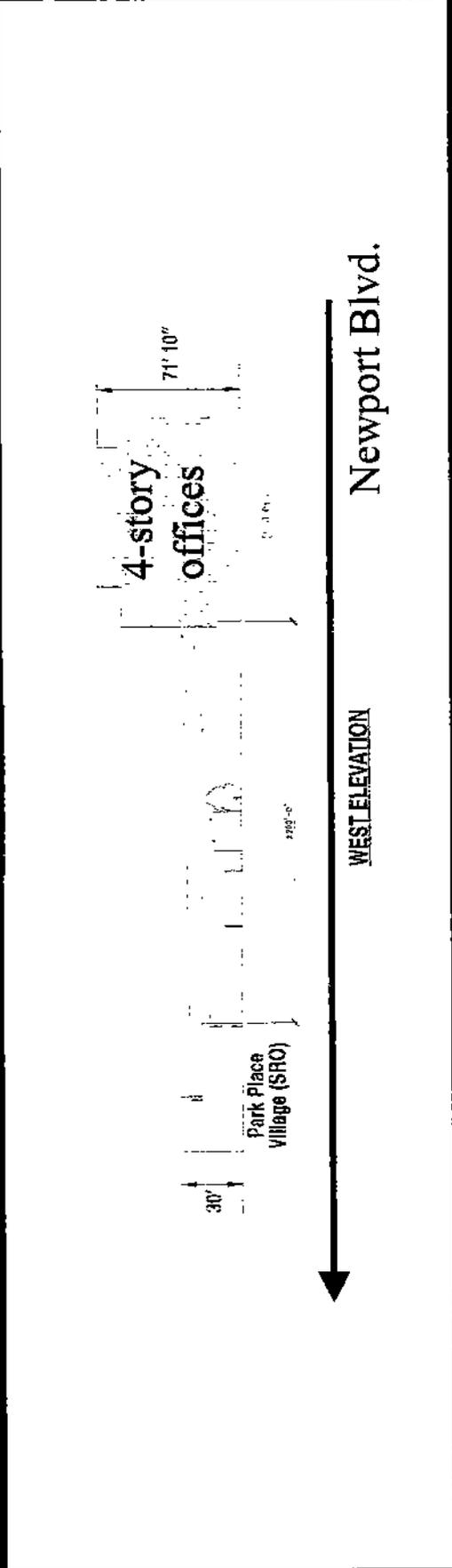
**Newport Boulevard**

**Orange Ave**

*Pacific Medical Plaza*

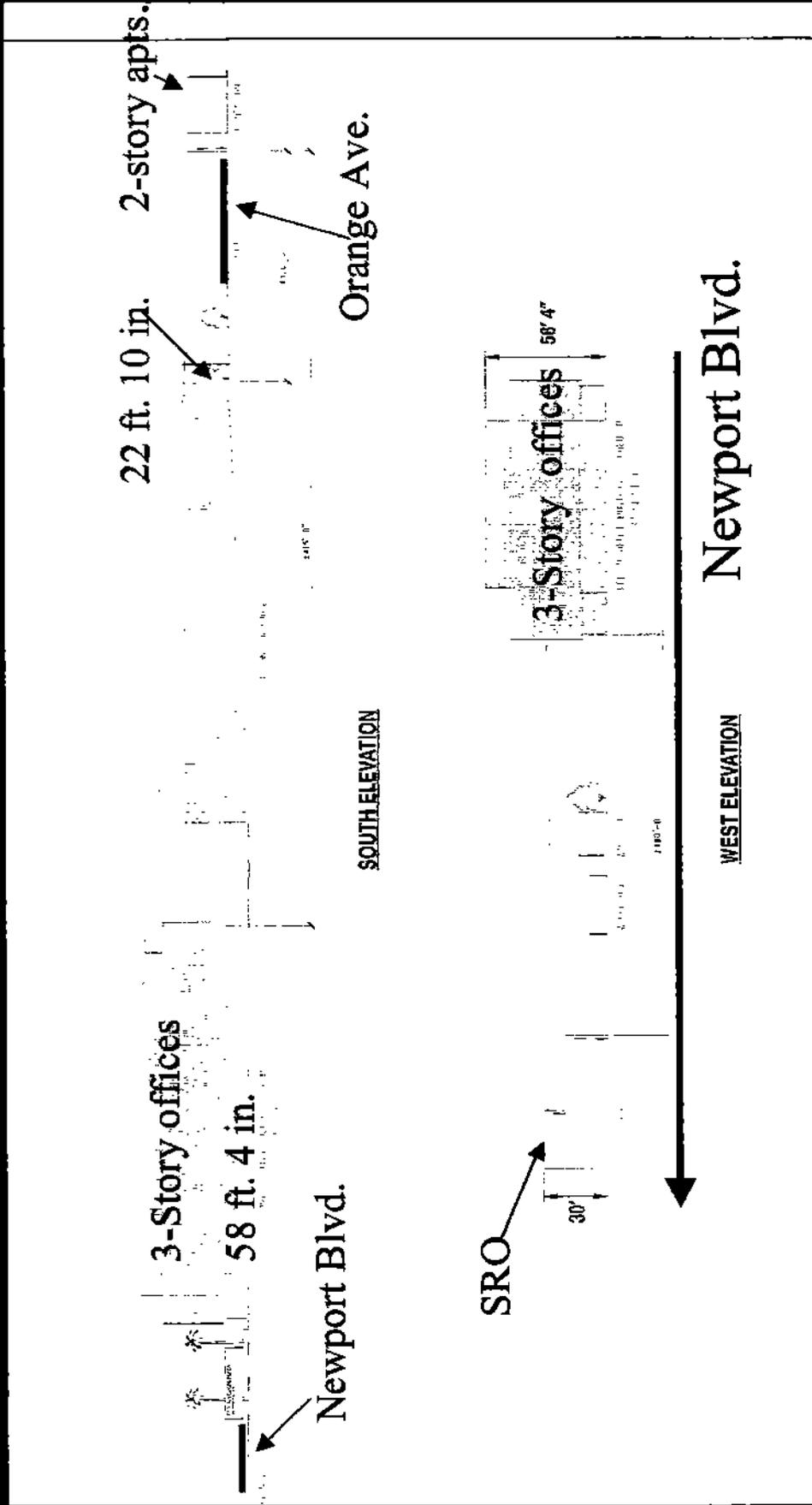


Figure 2



*Pacific Medical Plaza*

Figure 3



**3-STORY DESIGN ALTERNATIVE**

*Pacific Medical Plaza*



Figure 4



# **CITY OF COSTA MESA**

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DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**FOR ATTACHMENTS NOT INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT  
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