

CHAPTER 2

Project Description

2.1 Project Background

This EIR has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of CEQA with respect to the proposed New Leaf project (“the proposed project”). In 1970, CEQA was enacted to provide decision-makers and the public with information regarding environmental effects of proposed projects. In accordance with *CEQA Guidelines*, this EIR provides an overview of the environmental review process, analyzes potential environmental impacts, proposes mitigation measures where applicable, and provides alternatives to the proposed project.

In compliance with CEQA, the City provided public notice to determine the appropriate scope of issues to be examined in the Draft EIR. A NOP was circulated to responsible agencies and interested parties, including the State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2007071145), describing the proposed project and requesting comments, between July 27, 2007 and September 28, 2007 (see Appendix A). In accordance with CEQA guidelines, a public scoping meeting was held on September 10, 2007. Public and agency comments are also included in Appendix A.

At the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this project was sent out the project included the construction of 11 new homes (compared to the one new home now proposed) and remodeling of the five existing unfinished homes (now the applicant proposes to complete these five homes rather than substantially remodel and complete them). Since publication of the NOP the project applicant has held extensive discussions with surrounding property owners and has agreed to reduce the project to the currently proposed plan.

The City of Los Angeles is the Lead Agency for the proposed project. The applicant, Alan Kapilow, now proposes to construct one new home and complete 5 partially constructed homes on a 3.37 acre site. About 0.40 acres of unimproved street would remain on the site (Leicester Drive). The full improvement of about 0.39 acres of public streets (Woodstock Road) is proposed; Woodstock Road through the site is currently graded but not paved. Woodstock Road and Leicester Drive pass through the site and terminate just southwest of the site. A large area of the site (13 lots) would be maintained as an open space easement through donation to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other means.

The project site is partially developed. Five homes were constructed, by a previous owner, Arviv Enterprises, but never completed. The previous owner received first permits to build three homes on Woodstock Road and shortly after received a second permit to build two additional homes on Woodstock Road. These homes were not subject to environmental review at the time, due to the small scope of the individual projects. Shortly thereafter, Arviv submitted an application to build 14 homes.

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared for the 14 home project. However, it was determined by the City and confirmed through litigation (see Appendix B), that an EIR should be prepared so that the entire project could be viewed together. The court determined there was substantial evidence to support a fair argument the overall project may have substantial environmental effects. In particular, residents had described concerns over mudslides, soil erosion, slope failure, dust, construction traffic, emergency access and aesthetics.

2.2 Project Objectives

The objectives of the New Leaf development are as follows:

- Develop a residential project consistent with zoning and compatible with development in the area;
- Dedicate a portion of the site for open space in order to preserve a portion of the hillside; and
- To realize a return on investment in the site.

The project applicant intends to complete the five homes that have been constructed on the site (in 2002) and are currently deteriorating and presenting an aesthetically unattractive view as well as fire hazard (as there is no water service to the homes or site). The applicant also proposes to complete one additional home on Thames Street in an unobtrusive (not visible from Mulholland Drive) location already served by an improved street (Thames Street) and utilities. In addition the applicant proposes to maintain 13 lots as an open space easement through donation to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other means.

2.3 Project Location

The approximately 4-acre (including streets), 22-lot, project site is located in a very low-density residential area of the City of Los Angeles (see **Figure 2-1**), generally known as the Hollywood Hills.

Two unimproved streets (Leicester Drive and N. Woodstock Road) pass through the site and terminate on the western side of the site.

Laurel Canyon Boulevard provides north-south access from Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley and is located approximately one-quarter mile to the west of the site. Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Willow Glen Road provide primary access to the site. The site can also be

accessed from Woodrow Wilson off Mulholland, also via Apollo off Nichols Canyon from Hollywood Boulevard.

Table 2-1 shows project lots, addresses and sizes.

TABLE 2-1 PROJECT LOTS			
No.	Address	Area (sf)	Lot
1	2500 Woodstock	7,311	27
2* A	2505 Woodstock	5,581	25
3* B	2509 Woodstock	5,177	24
4* C	2513 Woodstock	5,442	23
5 D	2516 Woodstock	5,320	POR 22
6 E	2520 Woodstock	8,428	POR 21
7* D	2521 Woodstock/2540 Leicester	10,152	POR 22
8* E	2529 Woodstock/2550 Leicester	8,419	POR 21
9	2500 Leicester	6,257	18
10	2501 Leicester/2500 Thames	6,293	9
11	2506 Leicester	9,352	19
12	2509 Leicester/2506 Thames	5,768	10
13	2513 Leicester	5,599	17
14 A	2518 Leicester	6,309	20
15	2519 Leicester	6,636	16
16 B	2524 Leicester	5,024	21
17	2525 Leicester	6,165	15
18C	2530 Leicester	5,261	22
19	2537 Leicester	6,875	14
20	2543 Leicester	5,625	POR 22
21	2551 Leicester/2548 Thames	9,982	POR 21
22 *	2534 Thames	5,703	13

Some lots have two addresses since they front on two streets. Letter designations indicate lots to be tied, conservation easements would be attached to these lots; Leicester Drive addresses would not be applicable as Leicester Drive would remain unimproved. * Indicates the lots where existing homes are constructed. ** Lot where one new home is proposed to be constructed.

2.4 Physical Environmental Setting

Existing Land Uses

The land uses at the project site includes five partially completed homes located in the southern third of the site along Woodstock Road (2529, 2521, 2513, 2509 and 2505 Woodstock); the remainder of the site is vacant and largely unimproved. Although these homes were constructed, they are not completed and are uninhabitable. One building has a stucco exterior, none have sewer or water hookups nor is there sufficient access, since Woodstock is only graded and not improved in front of the homes; they have remained in this partially completed state since their

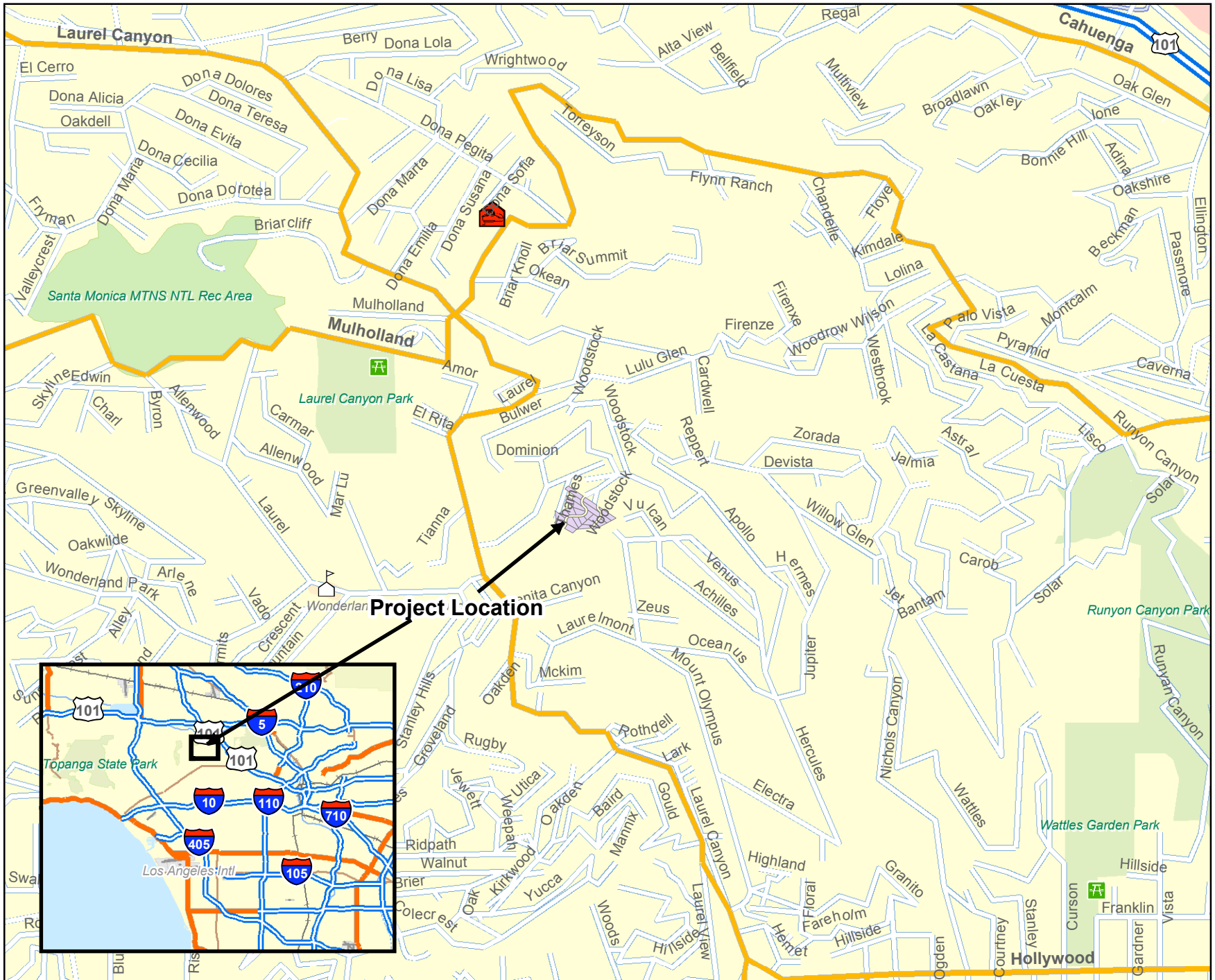
construction in 2002. These homes were built in excess of the permitted height; they vary between 46 feet to about 59 feet in height. The sizes of the existing homes are as follows:

2505 Woodstock 3,634 sf
2509 Woodstock 3,810 sf
2513 Woodstock 4,925 sf
2521 Woodstock 3,853 sf
2529 Woodstock 4,594 sf

Portions of the site were graded during the construction of the five existing homes. As a result, large chunks of the hillsides and vegetation are missing from adjacent to the homes. The remainder of the site is open space; it supports limited plant and some animal species (see Section 3C for a description of biological resources on the site and in the vicinity). Much of the site is inaccessible due to dense vegetation and steep slopes. There are no other land uses on the site.

Surrounding Land Uses

The project site is surrounded by very low-density single-family hillside development. (See Section 3A for photographs of the site and vicinity). The most-dense development is to the south of the site, in the canyons, however there are homes on most hillsides in the vicinity of the site. Streets in the surrounding area are very narrow and winding. Two streets, Leicester Drive and Woodstock Road, pass through the site and terminate on the southwestern side of the property. Woodstock Road would be improved as it passes through the site as part of the proposed project. Leicester Drive would remain in its unimproved condition; the lots adjacent to Leicester Drive through the site would be maintained as an open space easement either through donation of the lots to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other means. Thus, Leicester Drive through the site would be a part of this open space. On the west, the site is bounded by Thames Street, which may not require any additional improvements. The general topography of the area consists of steep hillsides and canyons.



Source: ESRI StreetMap USA, 2006

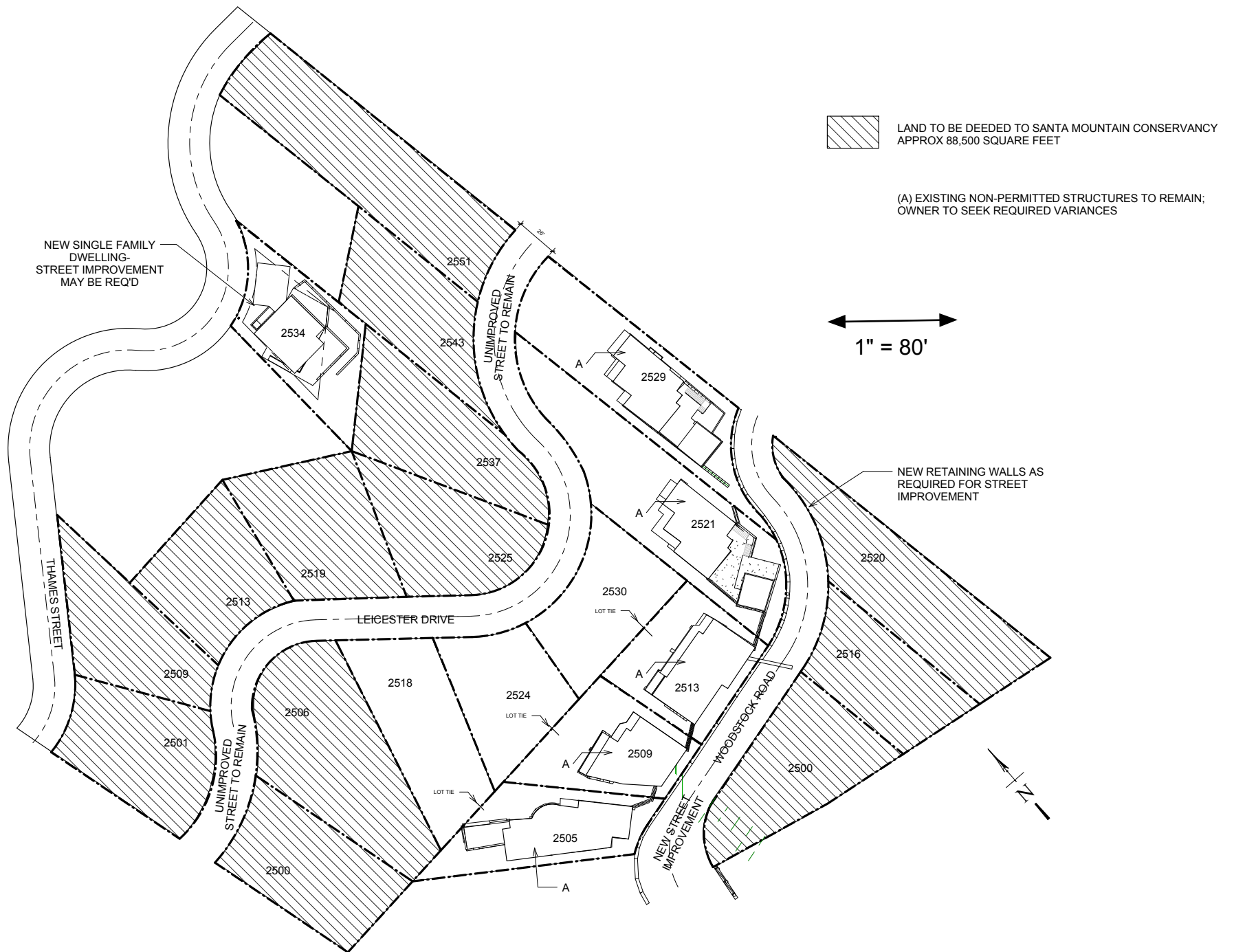
Figure 2-1. Project Location Map

2.5 Project Components

The proposed project includes the construction of one new home and the completion of five existing homes. The project also includes the maintenance of an open space easement of a substantial portion of the site (13 lots) through the donation of these lots to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other similar means. A site plan is provided as **Figure 2-2**. The components of the project include the following:

- Construction of one new home of about 2,400 square feet with a height of 36 to 40 feet.
- The five existing homes and one new home would have primarily wood and stone cladding.
- 13 lots to be maintained as an open space easement through donation to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or other means.
- Completion of five existing homes since these homes do not comply with the Mulholland Specific Plan, variances for height and setback may be needed to complete them.
- Improvement and paving of Woodstock Road (20 feet minimum within a 26 foot right-of-way) to provide access to the five completed homes; Woodstock Road is already graded through the site.
- Leicester Drive would remain unimproved through the site and would become a part of the open space easement since it would abut open space lots.
- The proposed project would require the removal of two existing trees. A tree report prepared for the site determined that no native protected trees, such as oaks and sycamore currently exist on the project site. The project would provide for landscaping, which would include the planting of new trees and shrubs, and streetscape improvements;
- The project would require excavation of up to about 2,000 cubic yards of soil (that would require about 3 weeks to remove from the site).
- Retaining walls would generally be incorporated in to the new homes. New freestanding retaining walls if needed along Woodstock Road or for the one new home would generally be no taller than 12 feet, or if two walls no more than 10 feet tall each. (Existing retaining walls, built prior to the current Retaining Wall Ordinance that are taller than 12 feet will remain, fill will be placed at the base of these walls, but they may still be over 12 feet.) If needed Zoning Administrator approval will be requested for retaining walls over 12 feet (or 10 feet where there are two).
- Fire hydrants (two on Woodstock) and fire truck turnaround on Woodstock.
- Connections to utilities, mostly in Thames Street (which may require that the applicant retain a utility easement through the open space easement).

This document does not address project design in detail because design rarely rises to the level of an impact on the environment (unless buildings were to be covered in reflective glass or metal, or some other material that could impact the environment in some way).



Source: abrahams+oyster architecture, inc

Figure 2-2. Site Plan.

At the northwest corner of the site on Thames Street, is a new house; it is approximately 2,400 square feet and is of a modern design -- boxy with large windows. This home was designed by the same architect as the project; the new home on-site would be of similar size and design. The project would be subject to a rigorous design review process as part of the Mulholland Specific Plan consistency review.

CEQA is concerned with view blockage, especially public views such as in this case the potential for the project to be visible from Mulholland Drive. Project size and massing is especially important in such an analysis. See Chapter 3, Section A for a discussion of potential aesthetic impacts of the project.

2.6 Project Approvals, and Intended Uses of the Draft EIR

The City of Los Angeles is the Lead Agency responsible for the preparation of environmental documentation in compliance with CEQA. The following is a list of actions and approvals that have been or will be required for the project:

- Project Permit Compliance with LAMC 11.57 (c) Mulholland Scenic Parkway Specific Plan
- Design Review pursuant to Section 11, Mulholland Scenic Parkway Specific Plan
- Haul Route Hearing and Approval
- An "A" Permit to improve city streets
- Potential variance setback requirements for existing homes and minor setback variances for new home
- Potential for Zoning Administrator Determination regarding improvement of sub-standard streets and retaining walls in excess of 12 feet (10 feet where there are two walls in tandem).
- For the existing homes to be completed potential variances and/or Specific Plan exceptions for height up to 59 feet where 40 feet (as measured from the parallel slope) to 52 feet (as measured 5 feet out from the lowest point of the building to the highest point of the roof) is permitted.

There are no other approvals required from regional, state, and/or local agencies for development of the proposed project.

2.7 Cumulative Development

Cumulative impacts refer to the combined effect of project impacts with the impacts of other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Both CEQA and the *CEQA Guidelines* require

that cumulative impacts be analyzed in an EIR. As set forth in the *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15130(b), “the discussion of cumulative impacts shall reflect the severity of the impacts, and their likelihood of occurrence, the discussion need not be as detailed as the discussion of environmental impacts attributable to the project alone.”

According to Section 15355 of the *CEQA Guidelines*,

“‘Cumulative impacts’ refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.

- a) The individual effects may be changes resulting from a single project or a number of separate projects.*
- b) The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.”*

Therefore, the cumulative discussion in this EIR focuses on whether the impacts of the proposed project are cumulatively considerable within the context of impacts caused by other past (i.e. approved but not constructed), present, or future projects. Cumulative impact discussions for each issue area are provided in the technical analysis contained within Chapter 3 as appropriate. In the project area most cumulative development consists of replacement and substantial remodeling of single houses (for example there are several homes on Bulwer), in general the City does not keep track of these individual permit applications, thus, the cumulative analysis in this document addresses the general trend in development in the area rather than individual projects. In general the types of impacts associated with redevelopment or development of these small sites are extremely localized to just the immediate vicinity (abutting sites and local roads) of the homes themselves, except as they may generally result in the densification of the area, and the reduction in area available to wildlife.

2.8 Development Processes and Schedule

Construction activities associated with the proposed project would include demolition/remodeling, site clearance/excavation and building construction. Excavation would last about 3 weeks; building construction and finishing would require another 12 months or more. Project construction is anticipated to begin in (2009/2010) and would continue for approximately a year depending on demand for the units.