

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) are informational documents intended to inform stakeholders, decision-makers, responsible agencies, and the general public of the environmental effects of a Proposed Project. The City of El Centro (City) has prepared this EIR to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the construction and development of a commercial retail development called “The Plaza at Imperial Valley” (Proposed Project) on approximately 38 acres. The project proposes: (1) a general plan amendment to change the designated land use from General Industrial/Commercial Overlay to General Commercial and (2) a zone change from ML (Light Manufacturing) to CG (General Commercial). This Draft EIR (DEIR) describes the objectives and components of the Proposed Project and identifies appropriate feasible mitigation measures and alternatives that may be adopted to reduce or eliminate potentially significant environmental impacts.

The City of El Centro Planning Department (Planning Department), in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to all interested parties and potential stakeholders via individual letters and public notice in the Imperial Valley Press. A public scoping meeting was also held to solicit input for the DEIR. All comments received during the 30-day NOP review period and the scoping meeting were considered and, if appropriate, incorporated during the preparation of the DEIR. The NOP and the comments associated with the release of the NOP are included in Appendix L of the DEIR.

The City will act as the lead agency pursuant to Section 15051 of the CEQA Guidelines. This DEIR has been prepared in conformance with the requirements of CEQA (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.), the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR], Section 15000 et seq.), and the rules, regulations and procedures for implementation of CEQA. The DEIR is made available for review by individuals, public, and private agencies for 45 days. Written comments are due to the Planning Department within the 45-day review period. The Planning Department will review and consider all comments on the DEIR prior to the completion of the Final EIR (FEIR). Responses to comments will be prepared and included as a part of the FEIR. The City Council will review and consider the FEIR prior to making a decision to approve, revise, or deny the Proposed Project.

This DEIR is further intended to serve as the primary environmental document for all future entitlements associated with the Proposed Project, including all discretionary approvals requested or required to implement the project. In addition, this DEIR is the primary reference document in the assessment and implementation of mitigation measures and the accompanying Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for the Proposed Project.

1.1 REGULATORY DOCUMENTS

In addition to CEQA guidelines, the regulatory land use plans listed below are referenced in this report and are relevant to the future development of the Proposed Project.

- City of El Centro Zoning Ordinance (1995).
- City of El Centro General Plan with amendments (February 2004).

1.2 REQUESTED ACTIONS

A general plan amendment and zone change are requested for the Proposed Project. This DEIR document provides analysis of the environmental impacts associated with the following actions.

- A change in zoning designation from ML to CG.
- A general plan amendment to change the designated land use from General Industrial/Commercial Overlay to CG.

Some future actions evaluated in this DEIR, may require more detailed project design plans and additional environmental analysis prior to implementation. Any future ministerial or discretionary approvals that are required will be subject to environmental regulations and policies in effect at the time approvals are requested.

1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT ORGANIZATION

The reader is advised that the DEIR is organized into sections as mandated by CEQA. These sections describe the project and setting, provide analysis based on potential issues, and evaluate other issues such as the potential for the project to induce growth or contribute to cumulative impacts. Sections are listed in the table of contents. A partial description of each is provided below.

- Section 2, *Project Description*, contains a description of the Proposed Project, the proposed zone change and the proposed general plan amendment, that would be required prior to approval of the project. The project description includes the project location, objectives, project characteristics, and discretionary actions and required approvals to implement the project.
- Section 3, *Environmental Setting*, describes the Proposed Project's Environmental Setting.
- Section 4, *Environmental Analysis*, addresses in detail each of the issues identified during an environmental scoping process conducted by the Planning Department. Section 4 discusses the existing conditions at the project site as they relate to each issue, and discusses the direct, indirect, short-term, long-term, and unavoidable consequences of the Proposed Project that would occur with development. The issues include potential direct impacts to: agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, hazards and hazardous materials, land use and planning, public services, socio-economic effects and traffic/circulation. Mitigation measures are also identified to reduce or eliminate significant impacts where feasible.
- Section 5, *Alternatives to the Proposed Project*, describes the three alternatives to the Proposed Project considered, including the (1) Reduced Project Alternative (2) Light Manufacturing Alternative and (3) No Build Alternative. Additionally, the Environmentally Superior Alternative is identified in this section.
- Section 6, *Growth Inducement*, addresses the potential for the Proposed Project to spur additional growth as a result of development.
- Section 7, *Cumulative Impacts*, provides an overview of other development projects in the vicinity of the Proposed Project. The purpose of this discussion is to provide an overview of environmental impacts that might occur if this project is added to all of the projects that are proposed, planned, under development, or completed.

- Section 8, *Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes*, addresses any significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided, and any irreversible changes to the environment that may result from implementation of the Proposed Project.
- Section 9, *Effects Found Not to Be Significant*, discusses the resource areas with impacts found not to be significant after either the Initial Study or the EIR analyses. These resource areas include aesthetics, agriculture, geology and soils, hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, and recreation.
- Section 10, *References, Persons and Agencies Consulted*, contains the sources and references used in preparation of this document.
- Section 11, *Certification*, provides the disclosure of the independent analysis and a list of the contributing preparers.

A list of acronyms is provided immediately following the list of tables in the *Table of Contents* for the reader's reference. The preceding *Summary* section is a requirement of the State Guidelines to provide a synopsis of the information and conclusions presented in this document.

This document conforms to the requirements of CEQA (Public Resources Code § 21000 *et seq.*) and the CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 § 15000 *et seq.*).

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