

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed Alvarado Specific Plan (Specific Plan) and associated discretionary actions (collectively referred to throughout this PEIR as the “project”) has been prepared on behalf of the City of La Mesa (City) in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Statute and Guidelines (Public Resources Code [PRC], Section 21000 et seq. and California Code of Regulations [CCR], Title 14, Section 15000, et seq.).

This section provides a brief description of the project scope; the purpose, type, and intended uses of the PEIR; the Lead, Responsible, and Trustee Agencies; the scope and content of the PEIR; an explanation of how the PEIR is organized; and an overview of the PEIR process. This PEIR contains an analysis of the project described in detail in Chapter 3.0, *Project Description*.

1.1 PROJECT SCOPE

The project analyzed in this PEIR is a master development plan for a phased transit-oriented development (TOD) and associated public improvements as outlined in the Specific Plan. The proposed Alvarado Specific Plan is a comprehensive planning document (i.e., specific plan) that provides the framework to guide project development within the Specific Plan area and contains site-specific development regulations that further implement the City’s General Plan. A *specific plan* is a land use planning and regulatory tool authorized by the State to local governments as a means to implement the broad goals and policies of the local General Plan. A specific plan provides the link between the implementing policies of a General Plan and the more precise development plans for a defined area. A specific plan may cover a general set of objectives and broad policy issues within a community or subarea, or it can be tailored to a development plan for a defined neighborhood or site. The proposed Specific Plan covers the latter, in that it addresses a phased development plan on a specific property.

The Specific Plan area (project site) encompasses an approximately 12-acre site along the south side of Alvarado Road generally between 70th Street on the west and Guava Avenue on the east in the western portion of the City. The project site is bound by the 70th Street Trolley Station to the west, the Green Line trolley corridor to the south, a car dealership to the east, and Alvarado Road and Interstate 8 (I-8) to the north. The site is developed and currently contains a recreational vehicle (RV) resort facility with paved access roadways, RV spaces, a clubhouse, a swimming pool, other ancillary buildings, and three billboards. Alvarado Creek traverses the property as it flows under Alvarado Road in the eastern portion of the site and continues southwesterly and westerly along the southern boundary of the western portion of the site. Figure 1-1, *Regional Location*, depicts the general location of the project site within the region, and Figure 1-2, *Project Location*, shows the boundary of the project site and vicinity.

In addition to adoption of the Specific Plan, the project also includes a rezone to establish an Alvarado Specific Plan Overlay Zone and a Development Agreement to memorialize the project entitlements and the provisions for construction of proposed public improvements.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM EIR

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15121, the purpose of this PEIR is to provide public agency decision-makers and members of the public with detailed information about the potential significant environmental effects of the project, possible ways to minimize its significant effects, and reasonable

alternatives that would reduce or avoid any identified significant effects. This PEIR is informational in nature and is intended for use by decision-makers, Responsible or Trustee Agencies as defined under CEQA, other interested agencies or jurisdictions, and the general public. The PEIR includes mitigation measures which, when implemented, would lessen project impacts and provide the City, the Lead Agency as defined in Article 4 of the CEQA Guidelines (Sections 15050 through 15051), with ways to substantially lessen or avoid significant effects of the project on the environment, whenever feasible.

1.3 TYPE OF EIR

This document is a PEIR, as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. A PEIR is prepared for a series of actions that are characterized as one large project and are related either:

1. Geographically;
2. Logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions;
3. In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or
4. As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.

Because the proposed project is comprised of a series of planned actions within the same project site and under the same regulatory process with similar environmental effects and mitigation strategies, a PEIR is appropriate.

1.4 INTENDED USES OF THE PEIR

As the proposed project entails a phased master development plan, full project implementation would require subsequent approval of development proposals for each parcel within the Specific Plan area (referred to as “later activity” in this PEIR) to carry out the land use plan and demonstrate compliance with policies presented in the Specific Plan. That is, development on each of the four parcels within the Specific Plan area and related site improvements would require review and approval of a Site Development Plan to implement the Specific Plan. Later activities within the Specific Plan area would be evaluated for compliance with Specific Plan regulations and guidelines.

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15168, a PEIR may serve as the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for later activities or implementing actions associated with the project to the extent it contemplates and adequately analyzes the potential environmental impacts of those later activities. If, in examining later actions for development within the Specific Plan area, the City finds no new effects could occur or no new mitigation measures would be required other than those identified and/or required in this PEIR, the City can approve the activity as being within the scope covered by this PEIR and no new environmental documentation would be required.

Furthermore, this PEIR is also specifically intended to implement the intent of CEQA Guidelines Section 15182, which provides a CEQA exemption for certain residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects that are consistent with a specific plan for which an EIR has been prepared. Later activities or

implementation actions may be able to rely on this exemption if it meets the following criteria pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15182(b) and (c):

- The later activity is a residential or mixed-use project, or has a floor area ratio of at least 0.75 on commercially zoned property;
- The later activity is located within a Transit Priority Area (TPA);
- The later activity is consistent with a specific plan for which an EIR was certified; and
- The later activity is consistent with the general use designation, density, building intensity, and applicable policies specified for the project area in either a sustainable communities strategy or an alternative planning strategy for which the State Air Resources Board has accepted the determination that the sustainable communities strategy or an alternative planning strategy would achieve the applicable greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

The City will conduct a consistency review or other equivalent analysis for each later activity to determine if that later activity would meet the criteria for this CEQA exemption. If the analysis finds that the later activity meets these criteria, the City must further determine if any of the events specified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 would occur with respect to that later activity, including:

- Substantial changes are proposed in the project which will require major revisions of the EIR due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects;
- Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is being undertaken which will require major revisions of the EIR due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects; or
- New information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of reasonable diligence at the time the EIR was certified as complete shows any of the following:
 - The project will have one or more significant effects not discussed in the EIR;
 - Significant effects previously examined will be substantially more severe than shown in the EIR;
 - Mitigation measures or alternatives previously found to not be feasible would be feasible and would substantially reduce one or more significant effects of the project, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measures or alternative; or
 - Mitigation measures or alternatives which are considerably different from those analyzed in the EIR would substantially reduce one or more significant effects on the environment, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measure or alternative.

Further environmental review would be conducted only if any of these conditions would occur as a result of the implementation of the later activity associated with the proposed project. If additional environmental analysis is required, it can be streamlined by tiering from this PEIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15152, 15153, 15162, 15163, 15164, and 15168 (e.g., through preparation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration, Addendum, or Supplemental or Subsequent EIR).

1.5 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE, AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

1.5.1 Lead Agency

The City is the Lead Agency for the project pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15050 and 15051. The Lead Agency, as defined by CEQA Guidelines Section 15367, is the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project. The City conducted a preliminary review of the project and determined that a PEIR was required. The analysis and findings in this document reflect the independent, impartial conclusions of the City.

1.5.2 Responsible and Trustee Agencies

State law requires that EIRs be reviewed by Responsible and Trustee Agencies. Responsible Agencies, as defined by CEQA Guidelines Section 15381, are public agencies that may have discretionary approval authority for a project. Trustee Agencies are defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15386 as state agencies that have jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project that are held in trust for the people of the State of California. Implementation of the proposed project may require subsequent actions and/or consultation from Responsible or Trustee Agencies. A brief description of some of the primary Responsible or Trustee Agencies that may have an interest in the project is provided below.

1.5.2.1 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has jurisdiction over development in or affecting the navigable waters of the United States, pursuant to two federal laws: the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1889 and the Clean Water Act (CWA), as amended. A “navigable water” is generally defined by a blue line as plotted on a United States Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangle map. Projects that include potential dredge or fill impacts to waters of the United States are subject to Section 404 of the CWA. Impacts to waters of the United States (defined as direct fill or indirect effects of fill) greater than one-half acre require an individual permit. All permits issued by the USACE are subject to consultation and/or review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA).

1.5.2.2 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Acting under the federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), the USFWS is responsible for ensuring that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by a federal agency (such as the USACE) is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or modify their critical habitat. Accordingly, the USFWS will provide input to the USACE as part of the CWA Section 404 process.

1.5.2.3 California Department of Fish and Wildlife

The California Department of Fish Wildlife (CDFW) has the authority to reach an agreement with an agency or private party proposing to alter the bed, banks, or floor of any watercourse/stream, pursuant

to Section 1600 et seq. of the California Fish and Game Code. The CDFW generally evaluates information gathered during the preparation of the environmental documentation and attempts to satisfy their permit concerns in these documents. Where state listed threatened or endangered species not covered by the City's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan occur on a project site, the CDFW would be responsible for the issuance of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure the conservation, enhancement, protection, and restoration of state listed threatened or endangered species and their habitats.

1.5.2.4 San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board

The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) regulates water quality through the CWA Section 401 certification process and oversees the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit No. CAS0109266. The RWQCB is responsible for permitting, compliance, and other activities to reduce pollutants in municipal, construction, and industrial storm water runoff, including overseeing the development and implementation of Water Quality Improvement Plans (WQIPs) as required by the Regional Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit for the San Diego region, which includes the City, as well as ensuring that all other MS4 permit requirements are met.

1.5.2.5 San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

The Specific Plan area is adjacent to the Green Line trolley corridor owned by the San Diego Metropolitan System (MTS). The project includes improvements to the Alvarado Creek channel and utilities that would encroach into adjacent property owned by MTS.

1.5.2.6 City of San Diego

A portion of the Alvarado Creek channel to the south of the Specific Plan area is located in the City of San Diego. The project includes improvements to the Alvarado Creek channel and utilities that would extend into the City of San Diego.

1.5.2.7 California Department of Transportation

I-8 is located immediately north of the Specific Plan area. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages and maintains the right-of-way associated with I-8. The project includes improvements to the Alvarado Creek channel and utilities that would extend into the Caltrans right-of-way.

1.6 SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE PEIR

The scope of analysis for this PEIR was determined by the City as a result of initial project review, as well as consideration of comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP) circulated on May 21, 2019, and a scoping meeting held on May 29, 2019 at the La Mesa Police Station located at 8085 University Avenue, La Mesa, California 91942. The PEIR addresses in detail potentially significant environmental impacts associated with the following issue areas:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Noise
- Paleontological Resources
- Public Services and Facilities
- Public Utilities
- Transportation
- Visual Resources

The project would not result in potentially significant impacts with respect to Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Energy, Mineral Resources, Population and Housing, and Wildfire as described in Section 6.1, *Effects Found Not to be Significant*, of this PEIR.

The NOP and scoping meeting notice, scoping meeting sign-in sheet, and comment letters received in response to the NOP are contained in Appendix A of this PEIR. Verbal and written comments received during the scoping process have been taken into consideration during the preparation of this PEIR. An outline of the issues noted during the scoping process is contained in the *Areas of Controversy/Issues to be Resolved* discussion in the Executive Summary section. The environmental conditions evaluated as the baseline in this PEIR are those that existed at the time the NOP was circulated as described in Chapter 2.0, *Environmental Setting*.

The PEIR includes mandatory contents of EIRs as required pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15120 through 15132. A cumulative impacts analysis is presented for each specific environmental issue area in Chapter 5.0, *Cumulative Impacts*. Chapter 6.0, *Other Mandatory Discussion Areas*, discusses potential growth-inducing impacts, effects found not to be significant, and unavoidable significant environmental impacts/significant irreversible environmental changes. Chapter 7.0, *Alternatives*, includes a discussion of alternatives that could avoid or reduce potentially significant environmental effects associated with implementation of the project.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE PEIR

As stated above, the content and format of this PEIR are in accordance with the most recent guidelines and amendments to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines. Technical studies have been summarized within individual environmental issue sections and have been included in the appendices to this PEIR.

This PEIR has been organized in the following manner:

- **Executive Summary** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15123) provides a summary of the PEIR analysis, a brief description of the project, and alternatives that would reduce or avoid significant impacts; and includes a summary table identifying significant impacts, proposed mitigation measures, and the significance of the impact after mitigation. A discussion of areas of controversy known to the City, including those issues identified by other agencies and the public is also provided.
- **Chapter 1.0, Introduction**, provides a brief description of the project and an overview of the purpose and intended uses of the PEIR, as well as its scope, content, and format. It also provides a discussion of the CEQA environmental review process, including public involvement.
- **Chapter 2.0, Environmental Setting** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15125), provides a description of the project's regional and local setting, as well as existing physical characteristics within the

Specific Plan area. The setting discussion also includes background information of the project site and identifies the relevant planning documents and existing land use designations for the Specific Plan area.

- **Chapter 3.0, Project Description** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15124), provides a detailed description of the proposed project, including project objectives, development components, building characteristics, public improvements, landscape plan, and grading and construction phasing for the project. In addition, a discussion of discretionary actions required for project implementation is included in this chapter.
- **Chapter 4.0, Environmental Analysis** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126), constitutes the main body of the PEIR and includes the detailed impact analyses for each environmental issue identified in the NOP as potentially resulting in significant environmental impacts (refer to Section 1.6 above). For each environmental issue, Chapter 4.0 includes a discussion of existing conditions, the regulatory framework, the thresholds identified for the determination of significant impact, and an evaluation of the impacts associated with implementation of the project. Where the impact analysis demonstrates the potential for the project to result in a significant impact on the environment, mitigation measures are provided that would avoid or reduce the significant impact. Where mitigation measures are required, a statement regarding the significance of the impact after mitigation is provided.
- **Chapter 5.0, Cumulative Impacts** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15130), provides a detailed discussion of the proposed project's cumulative impacts. Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15065(a)(3), a project's impacts are "cumulatively considerable" when the incremental effects of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effect of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of other recently approved or pending projects in the area.
- **Chapter 6.0, Other Mandatory Discussion Areas**, includes a discussion of the effects found not to be significant, growth inducement, and unavoidable significant impacts/significant irreversible changes.
 - **Effects Found Not to Be Significant** identifies the issues determined in the initial scoping and environmental review process to be not significant for the project, and briefly summarizes the basis for these determinations. For the proposed project, it was determined that environmental issues associated with agriculture and forestry resources, energy, mineral resources, population and housing, and wildfire would not be significant.
 - **Growth Inducement** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(e)) evaluates the potential influence the project may have on economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing within the Specific Plan area, as well as in the region, either directly or indirectly.
 - **Unavoidable Significant Impacts/Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes** (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15126.2(c) and 15126.2(d)) provides a summary of the significant unavoidable impacts of the proposed project as detailed in Chapter 4.0. This chapter also describes the potentially significant irreversible changes that may be expected and

addresses the use of nonrenewable resources and energy use anticipated during implementation of the proposed project.

- **Chapter 7.0, Alternatives** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6), provides a description and evaluation of alternatives to the proposed project. This section addresses the mandatory “no project” alternative, as well as development alternatives that would potentially reduce or avoid the proposed project’s significant impacts.
- **Chapter 8.0, References Cited**, lists the reference materials cited in the PEIR.
- **Chapter 9.0, Individuals Consulted/List of Preparers** (CEQA Guidelines Section 15129), identifies the individuals contacted during preparation of the PEIR and lists the individuals who contributed to the PEIR.

1.8 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

1.8.1 Draft PEIR

The Draft PEIR and related technical studies are available for review by the public and public agencies for 45 days to provide comments “on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and ways in which the significant effects of the project might be avoided or mitigated” (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15204). The public review period will be from September 9, 2020 to October 26, 2020.

Comments on the Draft PEIR can be mailed to:

Kirt Coury
Project Planner, Community Development Department
City of La Mesa
8130 Allison Avenue
La Mesa, California 91942

Or provided via email to alvaradosp@cityoflamesa.us.

The PEIR and all supporting technical studies and documents are available for review at the City of La Mesa, Community Development Department, 8130 Allison Avenue, La Mesa, 91942, as well as at the La Mesa Branch Library at 8074 Allison Avenue, La Mesa, 91942. An electronic copy of the PEIR and the technical analyses are posted on the City’s website at: <https://www.cityoflamesa.us/1639/Alvarado-Specific-Plan>.

1.8.2 Final PEIR

Following the end of the public review period, the City, as lead agency, will provide written responses to comments received on the Draft PEIR per CEQA Guidelines Section 15088. Comments and responses will be considered in the review of the PEIR. Responses to the comments received during public review, a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), Findings of Fact, and (if required) a Statement of Overriding Considerations for impacts identified in the PEIR as significant and unavoidable will be prepared and compiled as part of the PEIR finalization process. The culmination of this process is a

public hearing where the City Council will determine whether to certify the Final PEIR, which includes the MMRP, Findings of Fact, and Statement of Overriding Considerations (if required), as being complete and in compliance with CEQA. Subsequent to certification of the PEIR, agencies with permitting authority over all or portions of the project may use the PEIR to evaluate environmental effects of the project, as they pertain to the approval or denial of applicable permits.

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