

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Draft Project Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) has been prepared by the City of Simi Valley (City) to assess the environmental consequences of the North Canyon Ranch and Required Island Annexations (proposed project). The City is the lead agency for the proposed project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act¹ (CEQA).

1.1 STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Under CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines,² public agencies are required to evaluate proposed development projects for the anticipated effect on the physical environment and identify any feasible measures that would avoid or lessen significant environmental effects. This is intended to provide disclosure of the environmental consequences of a project to the public and agency decision makers before action is taken to approve project permits.

With exceptions not applicable here, all projects within the State of California are required to undergo environmental review to analyze the environmental impacts associated with implementation of the project in accordance with CEQA. The preparation of an EIR provides information to assist a lead agency in making decisions on the project but does not control the lead agency's exercise of discretion. Specifically, as noted in the State CEQA Guidelines:³

- (a) An EIR is an informational document which will inform public agency decision makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effect of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project. The public agency shall consider the information in the EIR along with other information which may be presented to the agency.
- (b) While the information in the EIR does not control the agency's ultimate discretion on the project, the agency must respond to each significant effect identified in the EIR by making findings under Section 15091 and if necessary by making a statement of overriding considerations under Section 15093.
- (c) The information in an EIR may constitute substantial evidence in the record to support the agency's action on the project if its decision is later challenged in court.

1.2 TYPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

As provided for in CEQA, this EIR is considered a Project EIR prepared pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15161, as it addresses a specific development project with the North Canyon Ranch Project and the proposed specific action (i.e., annexation to the City) of the County Islands, although there is no development or physical changes proposed within the Islands.

1.3 ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

The content of this Draft EIR was determined by CEQA, the State CEQA Guidelines and City policy and procedures, including the CEQA processes of early consultation and public review and comment. The organization of the EIR is as follows:

¹ California Public Resources Code, Division 13, Environmental Quality, Section 21000 et seq., California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

² California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Guidelines for the Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act, Section 15000 et seq., (State CEQA Guidelines).

³ California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15121.

Executive Summary (ES), provides a summary of the existing setting, proposed project, identified significant impacts of the proposed project, and mitigation measures. Alternatives that were considered to avoid significant effects of the project are identified in the ES. In addition, the ES identifies areas of controversy known to the City, including issues raised by agencies and the public. The ES includes a list of the issues to be resolved, including the choice among alternatives and whether or how to mitigate significant effects of the project.

Chapter 1.0, Introduction (this chapter), includes information related to the purpose, scope of the EIR, environmental review process, and the organization and content of the EIR.

Chapter 2.0, Project Description, provides the precise location and boundaries of the proposed project, statement of objectives, a description of the technical, economic, and environmental characteristics of the project, considering the principal engineering proposals and supporting public service facilities. The project description identifies the intended uses of the EIR, including a list of agencies that are expected to use the EIR in their respective decision-making processes, indicating the related discretionary actions (permits and approvals) required to implement the proposed project, and any related environmental review and consultation requirements required by federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or policies.

Chapter 3.0, Cumulative Project, describes the CEQA requirements for cumulative analysis and explains the cumulative assumptions for the EIR, including a list of the past, present and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects in the project vicinity area. Where applicable for individual analysis sections, general plan buildout or a list of related projects may be utilized (State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15130). Each analysis provides a cumulative impact analysis subsection that discusses cumulative assumptions and impacts relevant to the issue area being addressed.

Chapter 4.0, Impact Analysis, includes for each environmental issue area the existing conditions, regulatory setting, significance thresholds, impacts, mitigation measures, residual impacts (i.e., the level of significance after implementation of mitigation measures), and cumulative impact analysis. This portion of the EIR is organized by the applicable environmental topics resulting from the analysis undertaken in the Initial Study and Notice of Preparation (NOP) scoping phase.

Chapter 5.0, Alternatives, describes and evaluates a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project or to the location of the proposed project, including an evaluation of the no project alternative. CEQA requires that the EIR explore potentially feasible alternatives that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the proposed project.

Chapter 6.0, Other CEQA Considerations, addresses several CEQA-required requirements: “Significant Environmental Effects that Cannot be Avoided if the Proposed Project Is Implemented,” which summarizes the significant effects of the proposed project; “Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes,” which evaluates potential uses of nonrenewable resources and potential irreversible changes that may occur during the course of the proposed project; and “Growth-Inducing Impacts,” which evaluates the potential for the proposed project to foster economic growth or population growth, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Chapter 6 also discusses Effects Found Not to be Significant and Mandatory Findings, applicable to the State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G Checklist.

Chapter 7.0, Preparers of the EIR, Organizations and Persons Consulted, and References, provides a list of federal, state, county and local agencies, other governmental agencies and organizations and private individuals consulted during the preparation of this EIR; provides a list of key personnel writing, managing and providing technical analysis, including the private consulting firm preparing this EIR with the City of

Simi Valley; and a list of references that includes sources, communications, and correspondence used in the preparation of this EIR.

Appendices. The Table of Contents lists the appendices and their general subject matter. The appendices contain the Initial Study, Notice of Preparation, Public Comments, the Cumulative Projects report, and other data and reports supporting the EIR analysis. The appendix materials have been attached to, and are incorporated as a part of, this EIR.

1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

An NOP concerning the EIR for the proposed project was circulated for a 30-day State Clearinghouse review period that began on August 12, 2022 and closed on September 12, 2022. An Initial Study was prepared to identify the environmental issues to be analyzed in the EIR. Copies of the NOP and IS were made available during the review period and posted with the California Office of Planning and Research, the state clearinghouse for CEQA.

A public scoping meeting was held, pursuant to state and City requirements as follows:

Date and Time: August 18, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Location: Simi Valley Public Library Community Room
 2969 Tapo Canyon Road
 Simi Valley, CA 93063

The comments submitted in response to the NOP and Initial Study are provided in **Appendix A, Notice of Preparation/Initial Study, NOP Scoping Comments, Cumulative Projects**. The issues raised in these comments are summarized briefly below in **Table 1-1, Comment Matrix – Comments Received in Response to the NOP**, which also indicates where the relevant issues are addressed within the EIR.

Table 1-1
Comment Matrix – Comments Received in Response to the NOP

Commenters	CEQA Issues(s)	Primary EIR Location Where Discussed
State and Local Public Agencies		
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), mixed-use, parking, and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), walkability transit, impacts. – Some of the Annexation parcels are adjacent to Caltrans rights-of-way. – Permits are needed for oversized vehicles traveling on Caltrans roadways. <p>Note: Permits for oversized vehicles are routinely addressed through standard, ministerial, regulatory compliance.</p>	2.0 Project Description 4.14 Transportation 4.12.1 Fire Services 4.16 Wildfire

Commenters	CEQA Issues(s)	Primary EIR Location Where Discussed
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CDFW Role as a Trustee and Responsible Agency for the project. - Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on habitats and open space, including encroachment into sensitive habitats/open space and edge effects, including California Endangered Species Act (California ESA) related impacts. - Recent plant survey with appropriate content specified. - Reasonable range of alternatives, including alternatives that would not result in conversion of sensitive habitats/open space. - Avoidance, translocation, and compensatory mitigation. - If avoidance of impacts is not feasible, provide mitigation measures and provide justification of the effectiveness of those measures. - Discuss impact (critical habitat) the coastal California gnatcatcher (<i>Poliophtila californica californica</i>) and sensitive bird species, reptiles, and streambed alteration. - Landscaping should include no invasive plant material. - Identify if a take permit is needed pursuant to California Endangered Species Act (CESA, or California ESA). - Request that Project Description include purpose and need for the project as well as staging areas and access routes for construction and construction staging. - Report survey data to California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), where applicable. 	2.0 Project Description 4.4 Biological Resources 5.0 Alternatives
California Native American Heritage Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifies the process for Native American tribal consultation under state Assembly Bill (AB) 52 and Senate Bill (SB) 18. Pursuant to AB 52, tribal consultation is required for projects undergoing CEQA preparation of a (Mitigated) Negative Declaration or an EIR. Pursuant to SB 18, General Plan Amendments also trigger tribal consultation. 	4.5 Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources
Ventura County Air Pollution Control District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistency with the Air Quality Management Plan and the thresholds included in the Ventura County Air Quality Assessment Guidelines. 	4.3 Air Quality
Ventura County Fire Protection District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides roadway / access, setback requirements and units served by one access limitations (i.e., 30 multi-family units). - Requests Preliminary Project Fire Protection Plan for the project. 	2.0 Project Description 4.12.1 Fire Services 4.16 Wildfire Note: Plans were revised to accommodate a secondary access

Commenters	CEQA Issues(s)	Primary EIR Location Where Discussed
Ventura County Public Works, Watershed Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage groundwater recharge (clarifies typo in Initial Study). - Requests evaluation of whether Wastewater Treatment Plant Capacity would accommodate the project and treatment of water to avoid increased pollutants (total dissolved solids) in the groundwater. - Imported fill should be screened and assessed prior to placement – References the California Department of Toxic Substance Control's October 2001 Clean Imported Fill Material Information Advisory guidelines. 	4.6 Geology and Soils 4.8 Hydrology and Water Quality 4.15.1 Water Supply 4.16.2 Wastewater Treatment
Ventura County Resource Management Agency, Planning Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cumulative impacts to biological resources, including the coastal California gnatcatcher, Spadefoot Toad (<i>Spea hammondi</i>) and Bell's Sage Sparrow (<i>Artemisiospiza belli</i>). 	4.4 Biological Resources
Individuals or Organizations		
Calvin Schlotzhauer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Valley Fever. - Transportation (congestion). - Water supply and drought. 	4.3 Air Quality 4.14 Transportation 4.15.1 Water Supply
Chris Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address potential impacts to the environment (i.e., wildlife, natural resources), utilities. <p>Note: Non-CEQA issues were also raised (e.g., taxes and regulations regarding the animal keeping, physical changes within the Required Island Annexation areas, why the annexations are required). No physical changes are proposed within the Required Island Annexation Areas. Non-CEQA comments will also be included in the case record and considered in the project approval process.</p>	2.0 Project Description 4.4 Biological Resources 4.15 Utility and Service Systems
David Hardy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water supply and drought. - Water demands of landscaping. - Trees. - Hillside grading. - Odors from the neighboring waste management operation. <p>Note: With regard to existing odors, CEQA impacts are generally concerned with the project's impact on the environment. Existing odor issues are an enforcement issue outside of this EIR.</p>	2.0 Project Description 4.3 Air Quality 4.4 Biological Resources 4.6 Geology and Soils 4.15.1 Water Supply
Emily Walker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objects to the project, including removal of [natural] landscape and wildlife areas for the development of North Canyon Ranch. Project and the Required Island Annexations. - Water availability (water shortage for existing residents). - Other public services and utilities. 	4.4 Biological Resources 4.12 Public Services 4.15 Utility and Service Systems 4.6 Geology and Soils 4.12.1 Fire Services 4.16 Wildfire 4.3 Air Quality

Commenters	CEQA Issues(s)	Primary EIR Location Where Discussed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Earthquake fault (east west) in the vicinity. – Wildfires. – Public Health (Valley Fever). <p>Note: Non-CEQA issues were also raised (e.g., semi-rural quality of life/deterioration, animal keeping, opposition to Required Island Annexations). Non-CEQA comments will also be included in the case record and considered in the project approval process.</p>	
Jan Lew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water availability. – Note: Non-CEQA issues were also raised (i.e., opposition to Required Island Annexations). Non-CEQA comments will also be included in the case record and considered in the project approval process. 	4.15.1 Water Supply
Mary Eral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water availability. – Utilities (electrical grid overloaded). – Note: Non-CEQA issues were also raised (i.e., opposition to annexation of Island #3, Ditch Road, litigation with state of California, physical changes in the Required Island Annexation Areas). No physical changes in the Required Island Annexation Areas are proposed. Non-CEQA comments will also be included in the case record and considered in the project approval process. 	4.15.1 Water Supply 4.15 Utility and Service Systems
Sheila Kuntz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does not want her property annexed. – Rural character and Animal Overlay. 	2.0 Project Description 4.9 Land Use and Planning
Theresa Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Fire Safety Plan needed for the North Canyon Ranch housing development (as was done for the Big Sky Country Club Golf Course in 1997). – Water availability (drought). – Note: Non-CEQA issues were also raised (e.g., opposition to the project, Simi Valley Municipal Code or plan revisions regarding emergency preparedness and fire prevention). Non-CEQA comments will also be included in the case record and considered in the project approval process. 	4.12.1 Fire Services 4.16 Wildfire 4.15.1 Water Supply
Note: The NOP comment letters can be found in Appendix A.		

All NOP commenters will be placed on the list for notification announcing availability of the Draft EIR and list of notification for project hearings.

The Public review period for this Draft EIR will be 45 days. Comments should be sent by 5:00 p.m. on the closing date indicated on the Notice of Completion or Notice of Availability to:

Contact: City of Simi Valley
Environmental Services Department, Planning Division
2929 Tapo Canyon Road
Simi Valley, CA 93063-2199
Attn: Elizabeth Richardson, Senior Planner
Email: ERichardson@simivalley.org

Following receipt of the comments on the Draft EIR, the City will provide responses to all significant CEQA/environmental issues raised in such comments that are relevant to the EIR. The written comments and responses will be incorporated into the Final EIR.