

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15132). The City of Ceres is the lead agency for the environmental review of the Mitchell Ranch Center (project) and has the principal responsibility for approving the project. This Final EIR assesses the expected environmental impacts resulting from approval of the Mitchell Ranch Center and associated impacts from subsequent development of the project, as well as providing a response to comments received on the Draft EIR.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EIR

OVERVIEW OF CEQA REQUIREMENTS FOR PREPARATION OF AN EIR

The City of Ceres (City), serving as the lead agency, has prepared this EIR to provide the public and responsible and trustee agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of the proposed project. As set forth in the provisions of CEQA and implementing regulations, public agencies are charged with the duty to consider the environmental impacts of proposed development and to minimize these impacts where feasible while carrying out an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, including economic, environmental, and social factors.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15121(a) states that an EIR is an informational document for decision-makers and the general public that analyzes the significant environmental effects of a project, identifies possible ways to minimize significant effects, and describes reasonable alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid its adverse environmental impacts. Public agencies with discretionary authority are required to consider the information in the EIR, along with any other relevant information, in making decisions on the project.

CEQA requires the preparation of an environmental impact report prior to approving any project which may have a significant effect on the environment. For the purposes of CEQA, the term "project" refers to the whole of an action that has the potential for resulting in a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378[a]). With respect to the Mitchell Ranch Center project, the City has determined that the proposed development is a project within the definition of CEQA.

BACKGROUND OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS OF THE PROJECT

The following is an overview of the environmental review process for the Mitchell Ranch Center project leading to the preparation of this FEIR:

Initial Study and Notice of Preparation

In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the City of Ceres prepared an Initial Study and Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an EIR that was released for public review on September 5, 2007. The NOP was circulated to local, state, and federal agencies and other interested parties to solicit comments on the proposed scope of the EIR. The NOP is presented in **Appendix 1.0-1** of the Draft EIR. Comments received in response to the NOP were considered during preparation of the Draft EIR. These comments were included in **Appendix 1.0-2** of the Draft EIR.

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Draft EIR

The Draft EIR and appendices, which together consisted of two volumes, were released for public and agency review on May 19, 2010, with an initial review period that ended on July 6, 2010 (45-day review period). The Draft EIR contains a description of the project, description of the environmental setting, identification of project impacts, and mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant, as well as an analysis of project alternatives.

Final EIR

During the public review period, the City received forty-six (46) individual comment letters from agencies, interest groups, and the public regarding the Draft EIR. Eighty-three (83) signed form letters were also received and are included on a CD at the back of the document. This document responds to the written comments received as required by CEQA. This document also contains minor edits to the Draft EIR, which are included in Section 3.0 (Revisions to the Draft EIR) and the final mitigation monitoring and reporting program for the project. This document constitutes the Final EIR.

Certification of the Final EIR/Project Consideration

The City of Ceres will review and consider the Final EIR. If the City finds that the Final EIR is "adequate and complete," the City may certify the Final EIR at a public hearing. The rule of adequacy generally holds that the EIR can be certified if it: (1) shows a good faith effort at full disclosure of environmental information; and (2) provides sufficient analysis to allow decisions to be made regarding the project in contemplation of its environmental consequences.

Upon review and consideration of the Final EIR, the City may take action to approve, revise, or reject the project. A decision to approve the project would be accompanied by written findings in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 and Section 15093. Public Resources Code Section 21081.6 also requires lead agencies to adopt a mitigation monitoring and reporting program to describe measures that have been adopted or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment. The final mitigation monitoring and reporting program for the project is provided in this document as Section 4.0.

1.2 TYPE OF DOCUMENT

The CEQA Guidelines identify several types of EIRs, each applicable to different project circumstances. This Draft EIR has been prepared as a Project EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15161. This type of analysis focuses primarily on the changes in the environment that would occur as a result of project implementation and examines all phases of development of the site (i.e., planning, construction, and operation). The project-level analysis addresses on- and off-site environmental impacts resulting from the construction and operation of site development. Please refer to Section 3.0, Project Description, for a complete description of project characteristics.

1.3 INTENDED USES OF THE EIR

This EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The EIR is intended to evaluate the environmental impacts of the project to the greatest extent possible and to be used to modify, approve, or deny approval of the proposed project based on the analysis in the EIR. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126, this EIR should be used as the primary environmental document to evaluate all subsequent planning and

permitting actions associated with the project. Subsequent actions that may be associated with the project are identified in Section 3.0 (Project Description) of the Draft EIR.

1.4 ORGANIZATION AND SCOPE OF THE FINAL EIR

This document is organized in the following manner:

SECTION 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

Section 1.0 provides an overview of the EIR process to date and what the Final EIR is required to contain.

SECTION 2.0 – COMMENTS AND RESPONSES TO COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT EIR

Section 2.0 provides a list of commenters, copies of written comments (coded for reference) and the responses to those written comments made on the Draft EIR.

SECTION 3.0 – REVISIONS TO THE DRAFT EIR

Section 3.0 consists of the revisions to the Draft EIR that are a result of responses to comments, as well as minor staff edits that do not change the intent or content of the analysis or mitigation measures.

SECTION 4.0 – FINAL MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

Section 4.0 consists of the final mitigation monitoring and reporting program for the project.

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