

III. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Section 15125 of the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines* requires that an environmental impact report (EIR) include a description of the existing environment. This section is intended to give a general overview of the environmental setting for this project. More detailed information on existing conditions is provided under each individual environmental topic studied in **Section IV, Environmental Impact Analysis**. This section also provides an overview of the related projects that are considered as part of the future conditions in evaluating cumulative impacts.

A. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

1. Project Site and Surrounding Area

Location

The Project site is located in the North University Park neighborhood of the City of Los Angeles and is bounded by the Doheny Campus of Mount St. Mary's College to the west, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet convent to the north, Figueroa Street to the east, and St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church (St. Vincent's Church) to the south, and is approximately 0.5 mile north of USC. North University Park encompasses the northern portion of the area known as University Park, which includes USC and Exposition Park, and extends from the Santa Monica Freeway on the north to Exposition Boulevard on the south and from Figueroa Street on the east to Vermont Avenue on the west.

Existing Land Uses

The majority of the Project site is currently a paved, lighted surface parking lot used primarily by parishioners and clergy of the adjacent St. Vincent's Church, with incidental use by employees of Mount St. Mary's College. A small, private gated garden occupies the rear (western) end of the site. Vehicular and pedestrian site access is provided from Figueroa Street and pedestrian walkways link the site to the Church property to the south and Mount St. Mary's college to the west. Existing vegetation on the Project site includes the landscaped Figueroa Street setback, scattered mature trees lining the northern and southern property boundaries, and trees, shrubs and lawn at the west end of the site.

A 28-foot-wide easement on the adjacent Church property extends from the western portion of the Project site to Adams Boulevard. Currently, the area of the easement contains a 10-foot-wide cement driveway from Adams Boulevard that serves the church rectory and provides access to a parking area at the rear of the rectory. The remaining area within the easement contains grass and trees. Please see **Figure II-8, Existing Site Plan**, and **Figure II-1, Proposed Site Plan**, in **Section II, Project Description**.

Existing land uses immediately surrounding the Project site include the following institutional, commercial, and residential uses, as follows:

- North: The Sisters of St. Joseph Convent, which is located within the Stimson House, and the St. Vincent Elementary School to the north of the Convent.
- South: St. Vincent's Church, the church rectory, a utility shed used by the church, and the Miner house.
- East: Two commercial shopping centers and the 110 Freeway
- West: The 20-acre Doheny Campus of Mount St. Mary's College.

The photographs provided in **Figures III-1 through III-4**, show the surrounding land uses, as described above.

Historical Context

The Project site is surrounded by a variety of historic buildings, structures and landscape features, including the St. Vincent Church, the Stimson House, a portion of the early Los Angeles water distribution (*zanja*) system and the Mount St. Mary's College Doheny Campus at Chester Place. Refer to **Figure II-7, Aerial Photograph of Project Site and Vicinity**, for the locations of these historic buildings and structures.

The Project site is considered to be a part of a National Register eligible district known as "Chester Place Historic District." The district represents a grouping of related buildings and sites constructed between 1885 and the 1920s that are associated with the development of an early residential subdivision and the architects who designed houses there. Additionally, the Project site is located adjacent to the University Park Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ). The University Park HPOZ contains a high concentration of designated City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments. Two historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Twentieth Street and Saint James Park, as well as the National Register-eligible Chester Place Historic District, are located within the boundaries of the University Park HPOZ. More information regarding the historical context of the Project site is provided in **Section IV.C, Cultural Resources**.

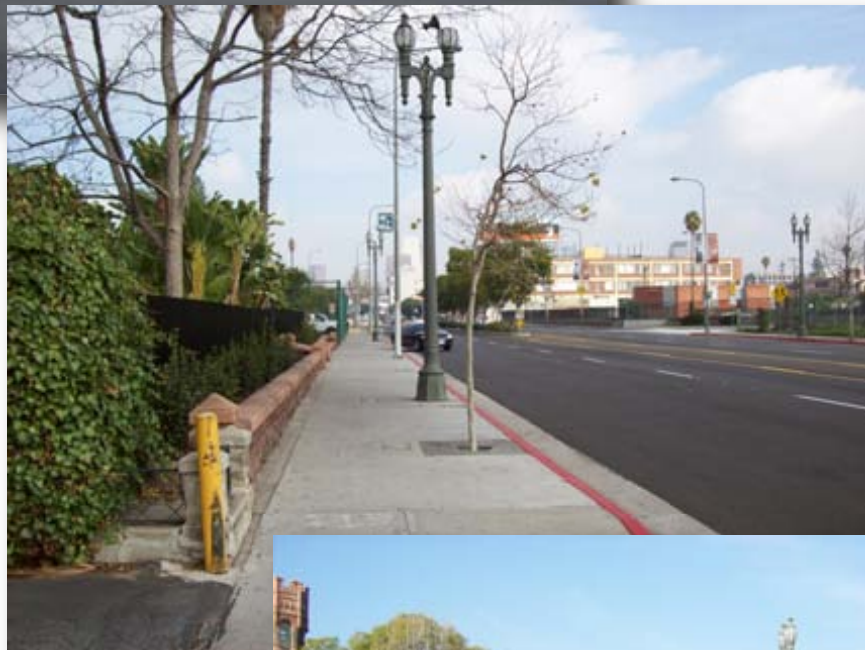
Transportation

Roadway Infrastructure

Regional access is provided to the Project site from the Harbor (I-110) Freeway, one block to the east, and the Santa Monica (I-10) Freeway, 0.6 mile to the north. Local access to the Project site is provided via Adams Boulevard and S. Figueroa Street, both designated Major Highways. Primary access to the Project site is from S. Figueroa Street.



Stimson House



**St. Vincent
Elementary
School**



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - March 2008

FIGURE **III-1**

Surrounding Land Uses North of the Project Site



Commercial Properties along Figueroa Street



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - March 2008

FIGURE **III-2**

Surrounding Land Uses East of the Project Site



St. Vincent de Paul Cathedral and Auto Club of Southern California

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - March 2008

FIGURE **III-3**

Surrounding Land Uses South of the Project Site



Mount St. Mary's College - Doheny Campus



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - March 2008

FIGURE **III-4**

Surrounding Land Uses West of the Project Site

Public Transportation Services

There are two main providers of public transportation near the Project site: the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT). As shown in **Figure III-5, Public Transportation Routes**, Metro, and LADOT operate several bus routes in the vicinity of the Project site. Metro offers lines 81/381, 442, 444, 445, 446/447, and 450X, which provide north-south service with stops either at or near the intersection of Figueroa Street and Adams Boulevard. The LADOT offers the DASH F and King-East, which provide loop service to Downtown Los Angeles and Southeast Los Angeles, respectively, with stops at the intersection of Figueroa Street and Adams Boulevard. Additionally, the Project site is approximately 1.7 miles south of the 7th/Metro Center station, which provides service to the Metro Purple, Blue, and Red lines. The Purple and Red lines provide service from the 7th/Metro Center station to Union Station, thereby linking the Project area to the region's continually expanding rail network.

USC Tram

Tram Route A provides loop service between the University of Southern California campus and the student residential units north of the campus. The stop nearest to the Project site is currently provided at the intersection of Figueroa Street and 27th Street, approximately 0.15 mile south of the Project site. Route A operates from Monday to Friday between 7:30 AM and 11:00 PM, with approximately 30-minute headways.

Public Services and Utility Systems

The Project site is within the City of Los Angeles. As such, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) and Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) provide fire and police protective services, respectively, to the Project site and the surrounding area. Water and electricity are provided by the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). Natural gas service is provided by Southern California Gas Company. Wastewater is conveyed by the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works. The Los Angeles Public Library, the City of Los Angeles Community College District, the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks and the Los Angeles Unified School District also serve the Project vicinity. Surrounding institutions of higher education include the University of Southern California, Mount St. Mary's College – Doheny Campus, and the Los Angeles Trade Technical College.

2. Applicable Plans and Policies

The following presents an overview of the regulatory framework applicable to the Project site. A review of the consistency of the Project with these local and regional plans is included in **Section IV.G, Land Use and Planning**.

Local Plans and Policies

The City of Los Angeles General Plan

California state law (Government Code Section 65300) requires that each City prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan for its future development. Adopted in 1996, the City of Los Angeles General Plan Framework Element presents the City's long-range, comprehensive growth strategy and provides a Citywide context within which local planning can take place. The City of Los Angeles is a large metropolitan area with diverse characteristics. The City's General Plan Land Use Element is made up of 35 community plans that establish land use policy and standards for each of the community planning areas defined in the Land Use Element to respond to the diverse characteristics of these communities.

South Los Angeles Community Plan

The Project site is located at the eastern boundary of the South Los Angeles Community Plan area, which is bounded on the north by the Santa Monica Freeway and on the east by Figueroa Street and Broadway. The Century Freeway and 120th Street form the southern boundary, and the Alameda Corridor forms the western boundary of the Community Plan. Adopted in 2002, the South Los Angeles Community Plan sets forth goals intended to maintain the community's distinctive character by

- preserving and enhancing the positive characteristics of the existing residential neighborhoods while providing a variety of compatible new housing opportunities;
- improving the function, design and economic vitality of the commercial corridors;
- preserving and/or redeveloping the limited industrial areas to accommodate emerging technologies, thus providing an enhanced job base for the Community's population;
- retaining the currently available inventory of historic buildings;
- expanding a public transit system aimed at providing capacity, improved efficiency and new developmental opportunity;
- preserving and enhancing the positive characteristics of existing uses which provide the foundation for community identity, such as scale, height, bulk, setback and appearance; and
- designing a comprehensive set of programs to empower local communities to capitalize on the opportunities available for economic development.



SOURCE: Google Earth - 2007, http://www.metro.net/riding_metro/maps/system_map.pdf

FIGURE III-5

Public Transportation Routes

The Project site is designated as High Medium Multiple Family Residential on the General Plan Land Use Map in the South Los Angeles Community Plan, as shown in Figure 4.5-1, Land Use Designations. Properties immediately north and south of the Project site are also designated High Medium Multiple Family Residential, including St. Vincent's Church, the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent, and the St. Vincent School. The Doheny campus of Mount St. Mary's College to the west is designated as Medium Density Multiple Family Residential. The east side of Figueroa Street is within the Southeast Los Angeles Community Plan area and is designated as Community Commercial in the Project vicinity.

The Community Plan designates Figueroa Street from the Santa Monica Freeway on the north to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the south as a "Major Opportunity Site" with the potential to enhance the surrounding neighborhood. The designation is applied to areas with potential to generate benefits within the surrounding neighborhood.¹ The following characteristics were considered in designating a Major Opportunity Site: community identity or uniqueness of a parcel, unimproved or underdeveloped nature/acreage of the parcel, potential build out created by new development, potential for jobs that new development could bring, adequacy of the existing and proposed infrastructure, and potential benefit to the community. This stretch of Figueroa Street offers opportunity for a variety of community serving uses while already catering to development with a large regional draw.

The City of Los Angeles Municipal Code

The Project site is subject to the provisions of the City of Los Angeles Municipal Code, including the planning and zoning provisions of Volume 1. The Los Angeles Zoning Code is the primary tool for implementing the General Plan Land Use Element. For each defined zone, the Zoning Code identifies permitted uses and applicable development standards for characteristics of development, such as density, height, parking, and landscaping requirements. The site is designated High-Medium Multiple Family. Uses permitted include, among others, apartment houses and other residential uses, churches, schools, childcare facilities, and homeless shelters. The Project site is located within Height District 1. While there is no specified height limit for R4 properties located within Height District 1, the height is nevertheless constrained by the floor-area ratio (FAR) limitation. Height District 1 limits the total FAR to 3:1, where the maximum allowable developed square footage is three times that of the site.² The maximum residential density permitted under this zoning designation is 56 to 109 units per acre and requires a minimum 400-square-foot lot area per dwelling unit.

Figueroa Corridor Partnership Business Improvement District

The Project site is located in the Figueroa Corridor Business Improvement District (BID), a non-profit partnership of businesses, service organizations and stakeholders that provides management and

¹ City of Los Angeles, *South Los Angeles Community Plan*, 2000, III-14.

² LAMC 12.21.1.

promotional services related to safety, maintenance, marketing and economic development in the district. Area property owners assess themselves additional fees to pay for maintenance, security, and marketing services above those provided by the City.³ The BID provides services that link Exposition Park to Downtown Los Angeles and is centered on the Figueroa/Flower/Vermont Corridors. It extends from the Santa Monica Freeway on the north to Exposition Park on the south and from Flower Street on the east to Vermont Avenue on the west.

Regional Plans and Policies

SCAG Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the Southern California region. The Project site is within the six-County jurisdiction of SCAG, which includes portions of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, and Imperial Counties.

To coordinate regional planning efforts, SCAG has prepared the Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide (RCPG). The RCPG is a comprehensive document intended to serve the SCAG region as a framework for decision-making for the next 20 years. The plan includes broad goals for the region and identifies strategies designed to guide local decision making. The Growth Management Chapter of the RCPG focuses on the relationship of land use patterns and transportation in the region. This chapter provides guidelines for development in relation to growth and land use issues.

Employment, housing, and population forecasts are included for each sub-region within the RCPG. These forecasts provide parameters for the development of the Regional Mobility Element. The Regional Mobility Element links the goal of sustaining mobility with the goals of fostering economic development, enhancing the environment, reducing energy consumption, promoting transportation-friendly development patterns, and encouraging fair and equitable access to residents affected by socioeconomic, geographic, and commercial limitations.

SCAG Regional Transportation Plan

In addition to the RCPG, SCAG has prepared the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is a 20-year transportation plan that envisions a future multi-modal transportation system for the region. In compliance with state and federal requirements, SCAG prepares the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) to implement Projects and programs listed in the RTP. Updated every other year, the RTIP includes a listing of all transportation capital Projects proposed for the region over a six-year horizon.

³ Figueroa Corridor, "About Us," <http://www.figueroacorridor.org/about.php>, February 4, 2008.

SCAG Compass Growth Vision Report

In an effort to maintain the region's prosperity, continue to expand its economy, house its residents affordably, and protect its environmental setting, SCAG embarked on a visioning process by soliciting input from public and private stakeholders throughout the region. The 2004 Growth Vision Report represents the out come of this process. The report contains principles to promote and maximize regional mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability. Decisions regarding growth, transportation, land use, and economic development in the region should support and be guided by these principles.

Los Angeles County Congestion Management Plan

Los Angeles is one of 32 "urbanized" counties in California required by state statute to develop a Congestion Management Program (CMP). The Los Angeles County CMP also meets the federal requirements for a Congestion Management System (CMS) pursuant to the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The MTA is the designated Congestion Management Agency for Los Angeles County. The CMP not only addresses regional congestion, but also supports efforts to improve air quality. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) is consulted to ensure that the CMP is developed in accordance with the region's air quality goals. The CMP provides an opportunity to coordinate transportation control measures (TCM) with the SCAQMD's Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP). Increased mobility and reduced congestion also serve the goal of benefiting the local economy. Moreover, the CMP contains specific provisions to pursue economic development opportunities while managing congestion.

South Coast Air Quality Management Plan

The proposed Project is located within the jurisdiction of the SCAQMD. In 2007, the SCAQMD adopted a new AQMP to accommodate growth, to reduce levels of pollutants within the air basin, to return clean air to the region and to minimize the impact of pollutants on the economy. Projects that are considered to be consistent with the AQMP would not be considered to interfere with attainment because this growth is included in the Projections utilized in the formulation of the AQMP. Therefore, Projects, uses and activities that are consistent with the applicable assumptions used in the development of the AQMP would not be considered to jeopardize attainment of the air quality levels identified in the AQMP, even if they exceed the SCAQMD's recommended daily emissions thresholds.

Los Angeles Basin Regional Water Quality Control Plan

The Project site is located within the 414-square-mile Santa Monica Bay Water Management Area (WMA) and within the Central Basin of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board's (LARWQCB) Los Angeles Region. The LARWQCB protects ground and surface water quality in the Los Angeles Region, including the coastal watersheds of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. The LARWQCB has

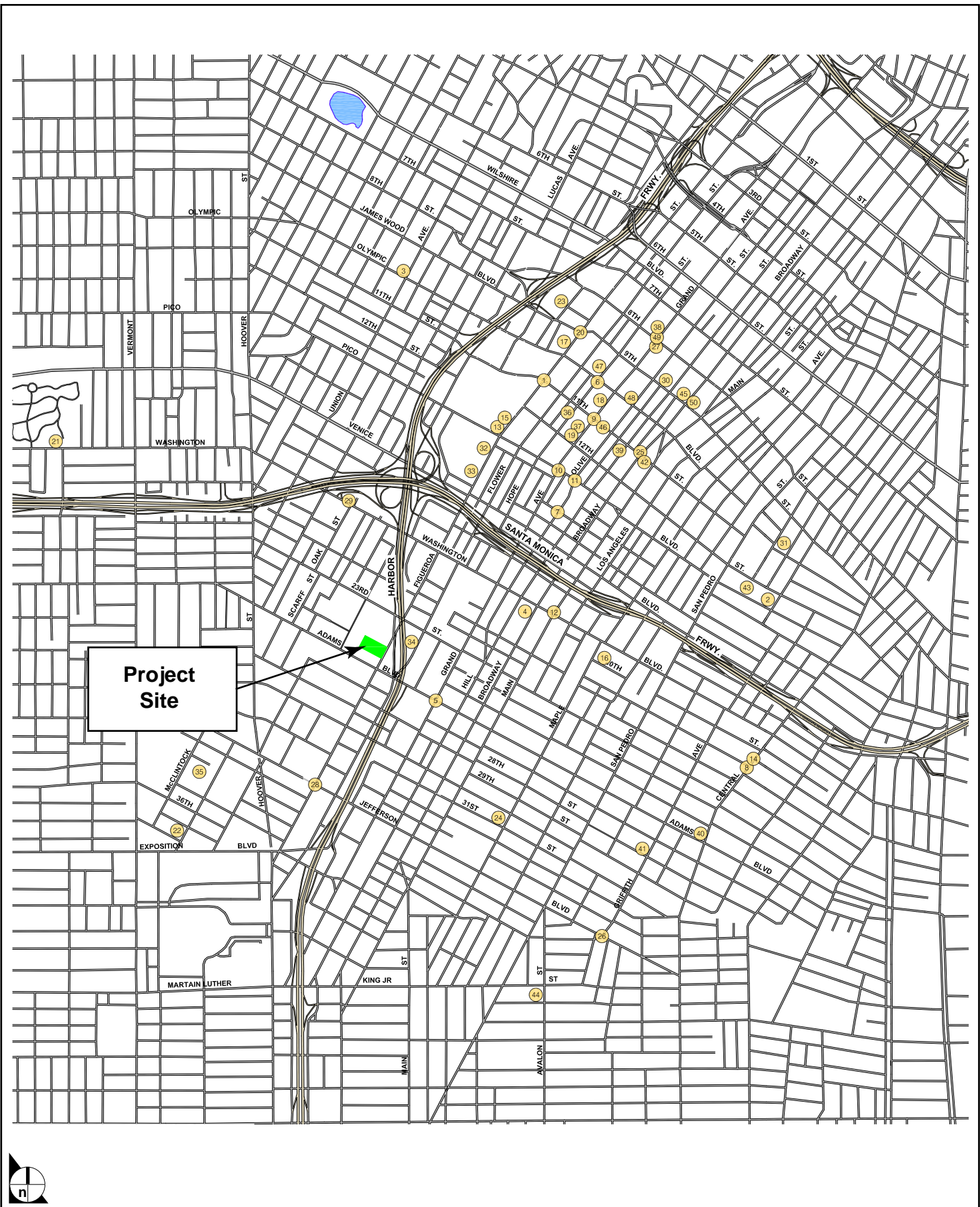
adopted a Water Quality Control Plan for the Los Angeles Basin (the Basin Plan) as a resource, information source and implementation tool for preserving and enhancing water quality in the region. The Basin Plan designates beneficial uses of water bodies, sets water quality objectives to protect those uses, addresses localized water quality problems and sets forth a plan to protect water quality. General discharge permits issued by the LARWQCB under the Basin Plan are used to regulate polluted storm water runoff, treated groundwater, non-hazardous soil disposal and other discharges.

B. RELATED PROJECTS

The analysis contained in **Section IV, Environmental Impact Analysis**, of this EIR examines both Project-specific impacts, and the potential environmental effects associated with the Project in conjunction with cumulative development. CEQA requires that an EIR evaluate cumulative impacts. The *State CEQA Guidelines*, Section 15355, defines “cumulative impacts” in part as “two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.” Section 15130(b)(1) states that cumulative impact analysis should be based on either a list of past, present and probable future Projects or a summary of Projections contained in an adopted General Plan or related document. The selection of methodology is dependent on the appropriateness and availability of the data. When assessing cumulative impacts upon broad regional issues, such as air quality, the analysis takes into consideration Projections of cumulative growth that are contained in adopted planning documents of the City, SCAG or the SCAQMD. Conversely, the analysis of the cumulative effects of localized impacts focuses on a list of related projects in the Project vicinity.

A list of potential projects in the Project vicinity that might be developed within the study time frame was compiled by the traffic consultant for the Project, Crain and Associates, and is based on information currently available from the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, the County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning, the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation, the Los Angeles Unified School District and recent studies of projects in the area. This list is provided in **Table III-1, Related Projects**. The locations of these projects relative to the proposed Project are shown in **Figure III-6, Related Projects**. This list of projects accurately reflects the related project proposals at the time of issuance of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this Project.

As indicated in **Table III-1**, related Projects would result in approximately 11,500 residential units, 1,050,000 square feet of commercial-retail space, 1,200,000 square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of wholesale market space, 400,000 square feet of restaurant space, 510,000 square feet of university space, educational space for approximately 9,250 students, and university administrative space for 34 employees.



SOURCE: Crain & Associates - December 2007

FIGURE III-6

Related Projects

**Table III-1
Related Projects**

Map No.	Location (Address)	Size	Unit	Description
1.	Figueroa Street and 11 th Street	1,200	rm	Hotel
		3,600	seat	Cinema
		345,000	sf	Restaurant
		498,000	sf	Retail
		165,000	sf	Office
		800	du	Apartment
2.	810 E. Pico Boulevard	161,620	sf	Wholesale Market
		20,000	sf	Retail
3.	1630 Olympic Street	5,432	sf	Office
		7,168	sf	Uniform Sales Store
4.	1933 Broadway Street	250,000	sf	Special Wholesale Trade
5.	Grand Avenue and Adams Boulevard	1,066	st	Medical Magnet High School (Grade 9–12)
6.	605 Olympic Boulevard	7,142	sf	Quality Restaurant and Nightclub
7.	1530 Olive Street	31,655	sf	Medical Center/Clinic
8.	2022 Central Avenue	99	du	Apartment
		47,000	sf	Retail
9.	1111 Grand Avenue	417	du	Condominium
		15,000	sf	Retail
10.	3434 S. Grand Avenue	347,000	sf	USC Educational and University Related Uses
		347,000	sf	Warehouse/Manufacturing Building (To Be Removed)
11.	1301 S. Olive Street	105	du	Condominium
		4,500	sf	Retail
12.	400 Washington Boulevard	6,300	st	LA Trade Tech College Master Plan Project
13.	3760 Figueroa Street	120	du	Apartment
		3,200	sf	Restaurant
		10,800	sf	Retail
14.	2000 Central Avenue	51,189	sf	Retail
		93	du	Apartment
15.	3233 S. Figueroa Street	83,000	sf	Retail
		421	du	Apartment
16.	435 20 th Street	143	du	Apartment
17.	948 Figueroa Street	156	du	Apartment
		7,500	sf	Retail
18.	1058 Grand Avenue	128	du	Condominium
		3,472	sf	Retail
19.	1155 Grand Avenue	374	du	Condominium
		17,500	sf	Retail

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Map No.	Location (Address)	Size	Unit	Description
20.	900 Figueroa Street	629 27,000	du sf	Condominium Retail
21.	Budlong Avenue & Washington Boulevard	575	st	Elementary School
22.	920 W. 37 th Street	160,000	sf	University Dormitory
23.	851 Francisco Street	836 988,255 480 46,000	du sf rm sf	Condominium Office Hotel Retail
24.	SWC of Maple Avenue and 31 st Street	575	st	Elementary School
25.	146 11 th St.	575 39,610 39,725	du sf sf	Condominium Shopping Center Office
26.	Jefferson Boulevard and Griffith Avenue	725	st	Elementary School
27.	8 th Street and Grand Avenue	875 34,061 10,000	du sf sf	Condominium Retail Restaurant
28.	605 W. Jefferson Boulevard	421	du	Apartment
		7,000 40,000 36,000	sf sf sf	Quality Restaurant Health Club Retail
29.	902 W. Washington Boulevard	160	du	Condominium
30.	315 W. 9 th Street	210 9,000	du sf	Condominium Retail
31.	1016 Towne Avenue	78,972	sf	Wholesale Mart
32.	1360 Figueroa Street	622	du	Condominium
33.	1500 Figueroa Street	622	du	Condominium
34.	2400 Flower Street	1,500 40,000	du sf	Apartment Retail
35.	925 W. 35 th Street	34	empl	University
36.	1133 Hope Street	159 6,827	du sf	Condominium Restaurant
37.	1150 Grand Avenue	351 12,500 12,500	du sf sf	Condominium Retail Restaurant
38.	609 8 th Street	225 200 30,000	du rm sf	Condominium Hotel Retail
39.	1115 Hill Street	140 6,000	du sf	Condominium Retail

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Map No.	Location (Address)	Size	Unit	Description
40.	1011 Adams Boulevard	80 17,372	du sf	Apartment Retail
41.	2819 S. Griffith Avenue	458	du	Apartment
42.	1111 S. Broadway Street	20	du	Apartment
43.	800 E. Pico Boulevard	131	du	Condominium
44.	4051 S. Avalon Boulevard	11,052	sf	Shopping Center
45.	849 S. Broadway Street	147	du	Condominium
46.	330 W. 11 th Street	66	du	Condominium
47.	1000 S. Hope Street	116	du	Apartment
48.	409 W. Olympic Boulevard	78	du	Apartment
49.	801–803 Grand Avenue	132	du	Condominium
50.	901–909 S. Broadway Street	82	du	Apartment

Source: Traffic Impact Report for the Proposed Figueroa and Adams Apartments at 2455 S. Figueroa Street, Crain & Associates, December 2007.

du = dwelling units; empl = employees; rm = rooms; sf = square feet; st = students