

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The subjects of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) are the proposed Granada Hills–Knollwood Community Plan and implementing ordinances and the proposed Sylmar Community Plan and implementing ordinances (proposed plans). Both Community Plan Areas (CPAs) are located within the City of Los Angeles. The Department of City Planning established a New Community Plan Program in order to comprehensively revise several of the community plans in the City of Los Angeles. Under this program, the existing Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans are being revised to guide development through the year 2030. A detailed description of the proposed plans is contained in Chapter 3 (Project Description) of this EIR.

Because the proposed plans will require approval of certain discretionary actions by the City of Los Angeles and other governmental agencies, the proposed plans are subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City determined that implementation of the proposed plans may have a significant effect on the environment and that an EIR should be prepared.

1.2 LEAD AGENCY

The lead agency for the proposed plans is:

City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
6262 Van Nuys Boulevard, Suite 430
Van Nuys, California 91401

The determination that the Department of City Planning of the City of Los Angeles is the “lead agency” is made in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Sections 15051 and 15367, which define the lead agency as the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project. This EIR reflects the independent judgment of the City regarding the potential environmental impacts, the level of significance of the impacts both before and after mitigation, and the mitigation measures proposed to reduce impacts.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE EIR

The City has prepared this EIR for the following purposes:

- To satisfy the requirements of CEQA (Public Resources Code Sections 21000–21178) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 4, Chapter 14, Sections 15000–15387).
- To inform the general public, the local community, and responsible and interested public agencies of the nature of the proposed Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans and implementing ordinances, their possible environmental effects, possible measures to mitigate those effects, and alternatives.

- To enable the City to consider environmental consequences when deciding whether to approve the proposed Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans and implementing ordinances.
- To provide a basis for preparation of future environmental documents.

As described in CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, public agencies are charged with the duty to avoid or substantially lessen significant environmental impacts, where feasible. In discharging this duty, a public agency has an obligation to balance the project’s significant impacts on the environment with other conditions, including economic, social, technological, legal, and other benefits. This EIR is an informational document, the purpose of which is to identify the potentially significant impacts of the proposed project on the environment and to indicate the manner in which those significant impacts can be avoided or significantly lessened; to identify any significant and unavoidable adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated; and to identify reasonable and feasible alternatives to the proposed project that would eliminate any significant adverse environmental impacts or reduce the impacts to a less-than-significant level.

The lead agency is required to consider the information in the EIR, along with any other relevant information, in making its decision on the proposed plans. Although the EIR does not determine the ultimate decision that will be made regarding implementation of the project, CEQA requires the City to consider the information in the EIR and make findings regarding each significant effect identified in the EIR. Because the two CPAs are contiguous geographically, one EIR is being prepared to analyze the impacts of implementation of the proposed Granada Hills–Knollwood Community Plan and implementing ordinances and the proposed Sylmar Community Plan and implementing ordinances.

The City will certify the EIR for the proposed plans. Once certified, the EIR will serve as the base environmental document for the proposed plans and will be used as a basis for decisions on development in the CPAs. Other agencies may also use this EIR in their review and approval process. Although the EIR analyzes the impacts of both proposed plans, approval and adoption of each of the proposed plans would occur separately.

This EIR was prepared in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15151, which defines the standards for EIR adequacy:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR would summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection; but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

1.4 PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project is the proposed plans, which are intended to:

- a. Update the existing 1996 Granada Hills–Knollwood and 1997 Sylmar Community Plans and guide development in those areas through 2030
- b. Refine and amend the existing General Plan Framework Element (Framework)
- c. Refine and amend any applicable Citywide Elements of the General Plan as necessary

- d. Amend the Transportation Element of the General Plan with respect to policies pertinent to Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar
- e. Adopt Plan Amendments and Zone Changes as necessary to implement the General Plan and accomplish the stated objectives of each of the community plans
- f. Amend the existing Granada Hills Specific Plan and Equinekeeping “K” Supplemental Use Overlay District, and establish a Residential Floor Area District and/or special district(s) to portions of the Granada Hills–Knollwood Community Plan, as necessary, to implement the Framework and community plan policies.
- g. Amend the existing Equinekeeping “K” Supplemental Use Overlay District and establish a Community Plan Implementation Overlay and/or special district(s) to portions of the Sylmar Community Plan, as necessary, to implement the Framework and community plan policies

The Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans are two of the thirty-five Community Plans that comprise the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive General Plan and are intended to promote the arrangement of land uses, streets, and services that will encourage and contribute to the economic, social, and physical health, safety, welfare and convenience of the people who live and work in, and visit these communities. The proposed plans will allocate land for the range of uses that each community will need through 2030, including land for housing, jobs, services and recreation, and improve the link between land use and transportation in a manner that is consistent with the Framework, the citywide growth strategy. The Community Plans’ goals, policies, design guidelines, and programs are specific, action-oriented ideals which the City will promote during the lifespan of the proposed plans.

The Framework is a long-range, citywide, comprehensive growth strategy. It is a special element of the General Plan that plans for the future, as required by law, and replaces the Concept Los Angeles and the Citywide Plan (adopted in 1974). Therefore, the Framework looks at the City as a whole and provides a citywide context within which community planning takes place. The Framework neither overrides nor supersedes the Community Plans but, rather, guides the City’s long-range growth and development policy by establishing citywide standards, goals, policies, and objectives for citywide Elements and Community Plans. The Framework provides demographic estimations and build-out capacity calculations for the CPAs through 2010. The proposed Community Plans will help refine the Framework estimates through 2030. The Citywide elements provide long-range policy direction that takes into account citywide goals and needs, which guide more detailed planning efforts, including Community Plans. The Transportation Element of the General Plan sets forth objectives, policies, and programs to guide the location and development of the City’s transportation facilities and programs linking parts of Los Angeles with each other and other parts of the region.

Adoption of the proposed plans would result in changes to zoning and height districts, initiate plan amendments to land use designations, amend and/or establish Overlay Districts and amend the Granada Hills–Knollwood Specific Plan, as appropriate. General Plan Amendments (GPAs) would potentially change or refine plan designations, plan footnotes, and make changes to other Citywide Elements, as necessary. In concert with the proposed GPAs, new zones may be necessary to maintain General Plan consistency (implemented by ordinance). The zoning would serve to regulate development standards, such as height of structures, setbacks, lot coverage, density and intensity, open space, use of land, parking, and design. Overlay zones, districts, and other plans would additionally be established to

regulate development that is consistent with the General Plan, enhance the unique character of neighborhoods, and accommodate projected growth in the Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar CPAs.

Areas of focused study include, but are not limited to, equine-keeping areas, existing and proposed Granada Hills Specific Plan areas, the proposed Old Granada Hills Residential Floor Area (RFA) District, Devonshire Street, Balboa Boulevard and Chatsworth Street for the Granada Hills–Knollwood CPA, and San Fernando Road, Maclay Street, and portions of Hubbard Street, as well as equine-keeping areas and the Pacoima Wash and the areas near the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station for the Sylmar CPA.

1.5 TYPE OF EIR

The Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans would provide guidance regarding the ultimate development for the CPAs at build-out. Its adoption does not constitute a commitment to any specific project or development. Therefore, this EIR will consider broad program level issues. Any future development projects undertaken during the planning horizon of the Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans would need to be approved individually by the City, in compliance with CEQA. Therefore, the Granada Hills–Knollwood Community Plan and Sylmar Community Plan EIR that evaluates the effects of the entire Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans at a program level. According to the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15151), the EIR need not be exhaustive in its analyses of a project, but should analyze important issues to a sufficient degree that permitting and approving agencies can make informed decisions. Disagreements between experts, for example, do not render an EIR inadequate, but the major points of such disagreements should be summarized in the EIR.

Any subsequent environmental documents may rely on the EIR, as appropriate, for general discussions and for the analysis and cumulative impacts and would focus on more project- and site-specific impacts. CEQA findings would be required for any subsequent projects tiering from the EIR. The thresholds of significance used in the analysis of impacts are based on CEQA Appendix G primarily, and the City’s adopted CEQA Thresholds. Thresholds have been tailored in places as applicable to a program level environmental analysis for a long-range planning document.

Future site-specific approvals may be evaluated pursuant to the rules for tiering set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15152. “[T]iering is a process by which agencies can adopt programs, plans, policies, or ordinances with EIRs focusing on ‘the big picture,’ and can then use streamlined CEQA review for individual projects that are consistent with such ... [first tier decisions] and are ... consistent with local agencies’ governing general plans and zoning” (*Koster v. County of San Joaquin* [1996] 47 Cal. App.4th 29, 36). Before deciding to rely in part on a first-tier EIR in connection with a site-specific project, a lead agency must prepare an “initial study or other analysis” to assist it in determining whether the project may cause any significant impacts that were not “adequately addressed” in a prior EIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152[f], PRC Section 21094[c]). Where this analysis finds such significant impacts, an EIR is required for the later project. In contrast, “[a] negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration shall be required” where there is no substantial evidence that the project may have significant impacts not adequately addressed in the prior EIR or where project revisions accepted by the proponent avoid any such new significant impacts or reduce them “to a point where clearly” they are not significant.

The EIR identifies area-wide environmental impacts that could occur upon implementation of the proposed Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar Community Plans. To the extent that the analysis contained within this EIR remains current and applicable, future projects within the Granada Hills–Knollwood and Sylmar CPAs that are consistent with the plan may tier from EIR pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21094.

1.6 EIR REVIEW PROCESS

1.6.1 Notice of Preparation

For the Granada Hills–Knollwood Community Plan, a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was prepared and distributed to the State Clearinghouse, trustee agencies, responsible agencies, and other interested parties on February 13, 2008. Distribution of the NOP established a 30-day review period for the public and agencies to identify environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR.

For the Sylmar Community Plan, a NOP was prepared and distributed to the State Clearinghouse, trustee agencies, responsible agencies, and other interested parties on February 19, 2008. Distribution of the NOPs for each Community Plan established a 30-day review period for the public and agencies to identify environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR.

1.6.2 Draft EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15205(b)(2), the DEIR will be submitted to the State Clearinghouse for distribution to state agencies. Submittal of the DEIR to the State Clearinghouse will also commence the 45-day review period. This DEIR is being circulated for review and comment to the public and other interested parties, agencies, and organizations for a 45-day review period. During the review period, copies of the DEIR will be available for review at the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning during normal business hours. The following are the addresses for the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning:

City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
6262 Van Nuys Blvd, Suite 430
Van Nuys, CA 91401

and
City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
200 North Spring Street, Room 667
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Interested parties may provide written comments on the EIR. Written comments on the EIR must be postmarked by November 26, 2012, and may be sent via U.S. mail or email and addressed to the following:

Granada Hills–Knollwood
City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
Attn: Anna M. Vidal
6262 Van Nuys Blvd, Suite 430
Van Nuys, CA 91401
anna.vidal@lacity.org

Sylmar
City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
Attn: Emily V. Yllescas
6262 Van Nuys Blvd, Suite 430
Van Nuys, CA 91401
emily.yllescas@lacity.org

1.6.3 Final EIR and EIR Certification

Following the close of the public review and period on the EIR [case numbers CPC-2006-5568-CPU/ENV-2006-5623-EAF (Granada Hills–Knollwood) and CPC-2006-5569-CPU/ENV-2006-5624-EAF (Sylmar)], the City will prepare and publish a document titled “Comments and Responses”, which will contain a summary of all written and recorded oral comments on this EIR and written responses to those comments, along with copies of the letters received, a transcript of the public hearings, and any necessary revisions to the EIR. This EIR and the Comments and Responses document will constitute the Final EIR. The City Council, in an advertised public meeting(s), will consider the documents and then, if found adequate, certify the Final EIR as completed in compliance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines.

1.6.4 CEQA Findings for Project Approval

Where a certified EIR identifies significant environmental effects, CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091 and 15092 require the adoption of findings prior to approval of a project. According to PRC Section 21081, the Lead Agency must make specific Findings of Fact (Findings) before approving a project for which a Final EIR has been certified that identifies one or more significant effects on the environment that may result from that project. The purpose of the Findings is to establish the connection between the contents of the Final EIR and the action of the Lead Agency with regard to approval of the project, if the Lead Agency approves the Project. Prior to approval of a project, one of three findings must be made, as required by PRC Section 21081 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15091:

- Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the Final EIR.
- Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Final EIR.

If the City were to approve the proposed plans, despite significant impacts identified in the Final EIR that cannot be mitigated, if any, the City must state in writing the reasons for its actions, under CEQA Guidelines Section 15093. Those findings, called a Statement of Overriding Considerations, must be supported by substantial evidence in the record, and are used to explain the specific reasons why the benefits of a project make its unavoidable environmental effects acceptable.

1.6.5 Mitigation Monitoring Program

At the time of project approval, CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines require lead agencies to adopt a mitigation monitoring program, which it has adopted or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment (CEQA Section 21081.6; CEQA Guidelines Section 15097). This EIR contains mitigation measures that have been identified to be contained in the Mitigation Monitoring Program for the proposed plans. In addition, subsequent development projects

pursuant to the proposed plans and subject to City approval may be required to implement project-specific mitigation measures or conditions of approval as specified by the City during individual CEQA review, which would be identified in a separate Mitigation Monitoring Program or development agreement.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE DRAFT EIR

This EIR is organized into eight chapters, as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**—This chapter provides an introduction and a description of the intended uses of the EIR and the review and certification process.
- **Chapter 2: Summary**—This chapter includes a summary of the project description, environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed plans, proposed mitigation measures where applicable, and the level of significance of the impact before and after mitigation.
- **Chapter 3: Project Description**—This chapter presents a complete description of the proposed plans, including project location, project characteristics, and project objectives. This section also provides an overview of the study area’s environmental setting, including a description of existing and surrounding land uses, history and background of the project and project area, and a discussion of proposed plan recommendations and revisions to be analyzed in the EIR.
- **Chapter 4: Environmental Analysis**—This chapter is the primary focus of this EIR. Each environmental issue is considered in a separate section and contains a discussion of existing conditions for the project area, including the regulatory setting, analysis methodology, thresholds of significance, and an assessment and discussion of the significance of impacts associated with the proposed project.
- **Chapter 5: Other CEQA Considerations**—This chapter provides a discussion of the potential growth inducement of the proposed project as well as a summary of any associated significant unavoidable impacts.
- **Chapter 6: Alternatives to the Proposed Project**—This chapter includes an analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project (proposed plans) to provide informed decision making in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126(f). The range of alternatives selected is based on their ability to feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project and avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project.
- **Chapter 7: Report Preparers**—This section presents a list of lead agency, other agencies, and consultant team members that contributed to the preparation EIR. This section also identifies persons consulted during preparation of the EIR.

