

IV.B AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the potential impacts of the proposed project on agricultural resources. It provides an analysis of the proposed project's effects on agricultural resources based on information from the California Department of Conservation (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), the City of Los Angeles General Plan, General Plan Framework, and zoning code.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Existing Conditions

The Specific Plan area includes Mudtown Farms, an approximately 2.5-acre community garden located at the northeast corner of the Grape Street/103rd Street intersection at the southeast corner of the Specific Plan area. Mudtown Farms is owned by the Trust for Public Land and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC). Presently, the community garden's 124 plots are tended by 118 local residents, most of whom live in Jordan Downs. Unlike many community gardens cultivated largely for recreation, Mudtown Farms is an important food source for this underserved community as Watts is home to only a single major grocery store. For many gardeners, produce grown at Mudtown Farms is their most reliable source of fresh fruits and vegetables.¹

The Mudtown Farms property, which is located within the City of Los Angeles, is zoned Restricted Density Multiple Dwelling (RD2-1). The RD2-1 zoning designation does not permit the agricultural uses that currently occur within this portion of the Specific Plan area. No other agricultural activities occur within in the vicinity of the Specific Plan area.

Regulatory Framework

Important farmland maps are compiled by the California Department of Conservation (DOC), Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), pursuant to the provisions of Section 65570 of the California Government Code. These maps utilize data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) soil surveys and represent an inventory of agricultural resources. The maps use eight classification categories, the top four (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) of which are all regarded as "Important Farmland" for mapping purposes.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS maps soils and farmland uses to provide comprehensive information necessary for understanding, managing, conserving and sustaining the nation's limited soil resources. The NRCS manages the Farmland Protection Program, which provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses.

California Department of Conservation (DOC). In 1982, the State of California created the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) within the DOC to carry on the mapping activity from the NRCS on a continuing basis. The DOC administers the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act.

¹Watts Labor Community Action Committee, www.wlcac.org/mudtown_w.html, accessed June 22, 2010.

California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act. The Williamson Act is the only established program that directly involves State government in an administrative or fiscal capacity. The Act creates an arrangement whereby private landowners voluntarily restrict their land to agricultural and compatible open space uses under a rolling ten-year contract. In return, parcels are assessed for property tax purposes at a rate consistent with their actual use, rather than their potential market value.

Farmland Security Zones. In August of 1998, the legislature enhanced the Williamson Act with the Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) provisions. The FSZ provision offer landowners greater property tax reduction in return for a minimum rolling contract term of 20 years.

City of Los Angeles General Plan. The most comprehensive land use planning tool is provided by City and County General Plans, which local governments are required by State law to prepare as a guide for future development. General Plans contain goals and policies concerning topics that are mandated by state law or which the jurisdiction has chosen to include. Required topics are land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety.

The Los Angeles General Plan Framework. The General Plan Framework is a strategy for long-term growth that sets a citywide context to guide the subsequent amendments to the City's community plans, zoning ordinances and other pertinent programs. The Framework responds to State and federal mandates to plan for the City of Los Angeles' future. The Framework supersedes Concept Los Angeles and the citywide elements of the City of Los Angeles General Plan. In many respects, the Framework is an evolution of the "centers" concept, adopted in 1974, that provides fundamental guidance regarding the City's future. While the Framework incorporates a diagram that depicts the generalized distribution of centers, districts, and mixed-use boulevards throughout the City, it does not convey nor affect entitlements for any property. Specific land-use designations are determined by the Community Plans. The Framework provides guidelines for future updates of the City's Community Plans. It does not supersede the more detailed Community and Specific Plans.

The Land Use element of the Framework does not include any specific goals, policies or objectives related to agricultural uses. However, the Open Space Element does include the following polices related to agricultural uses:

Objective 6.4: Ensure that the City's open spaces contribute positively to the stability and identity of the communities and neighborhoods in which they are located or through which they pass.

Policy 6.4.7: Consider as part of the City's open space inventory of pedestrian streets, community gardens, shared school playfields, and privately-owned commercial open spaces that are accessible to the public, even though such elements fall outside the conventional definitions of "open space." This will help address the open space and outdoor recreation needs of communities that are currently deficient in these resources.

City of Los Angeles Zoning. City zoning codes provide the set of detailed requirements that implement general plan policies at the level of the individual parcel. Zoning codes present standards for different uses and identify which uses are allowed in the various zoning districts of the jurisdiction.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Significance Thresholds

In accordance with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would have a significant impact on agricultural resources if the proposed project were to:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract;
- Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g));
- Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; and/or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Project Design Features

Mudtown Farms would be retained under the proposed project, and the existing 2.5-acre community garden, which is currently zoned for residential uses, would be changed to an Agricultural zone (A1-1-JD). During construction and operation of the proposed project, Mudtown Farms would continue to be made available to the community for agricultural uses.

Analysis of Proposed Project Impacts

A review of farmland maps compiled by the California Department of Conservation (DOC) indicates that the Specific Plan area is mapped as an “urbanized area,” and no portion of the Specific Plan area is designated Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Likewise, no portion of the Specific Plan area is enrolled under a Williamson Act contract, nor does the Specific Plan area include any forest land or timberland.

Under the proposed project, Mudtown Farms would be retained and the existing community garden, which is currently zoned for residential uses (RD2-1) and does not permit agricultural uses, would be changed to an agricultural zone (A1-1-JD). The A1-1-JD zoning designation would permit agricultural uses limited to nurseries and the growing and harvesting of crops, orchards, and gardens. Accessory buildings to support these uses would be limited to a maximum height of 18 feet. Booths, market stands, or other market facilities for the display and commercial sale of agricultural products would be permitted provided that the stands do not exceed 200 square feet and a maximum height of 10 feet. Implementation of the proposed project would not involve the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses, nor conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use. Therefore, impacts to agricultural resources would be less than significant.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

As with the proposed project, the nine related projects that have been identified within one-mile of the Specific Plan area (shown in Table III-1 and Figure III-1 in Section III Environmental Setting of this Draft EIR) would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that no significant impacts to agricultural resources would occur. However, the proposed project and the related projects are all located within a highly urbanized area of Southeast Los Angeles. With the exception of Mudtown Farms, no other agricultural activities occur within the vicinity of the Specific Plan area. The existing 2.5-acre

community garden would be retained as part of the proposed project, and no other agricultural resources exist within the vicinity of the proposed project. Therefore, impacts related to agricultural resources would not be cumulatively considerable.

MITIGATION MEASRUES

Impacts related to agricultural resources would be less than significant. Therefore, no mitigation measures are necessary.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Impacts related to agricultural resources would remain less than significant.