
V. GENERAL IMPACT CATEGORIES

A. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Section 15126.2(b) of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR describe any significant impacts which cannot be avoided. Specifically, Section 15126.2 (b) states:

“Describe any significant impacts, including those which can be mitigated but not reduced to a level of insignificance. Where there are impacts that cannot be alleviated without imposing an alternative design, their implications and the reasons why the project is being proposed, notwithstanding their effect, should be described.”

Based on the analysis contained in Section IV (Environmental Impact Analysis) of this Draft EIR, the proposed project would result in significant unavoidable environmental impacts with respect to: scenic vistas, scenic resources, existing visual character, aesthetics cumulative impacts, oak trees, recreation, and recreation cumulative impacts.

Scenic Vistas

The proposed project would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. The existing golf course facility is prominently visible within the scenic vistas afforded by the two adjacent scenic highways: La Tuna Canyon Road and the Interstate 210 Freeway. From both of these highways, the foreground of the scenic vistas would be changed from a landscaped, park-like setting to an urban housing development of parallel rows of large homes on small lots. Due to the relatively small lot sizes, there would be a minimal amount of landscaping to soften the views from the scenic highways.

Scenic Resources

The proposed project would substantially damage protected oak and sycamore trees, which are major scenic resources on the project site. Of the 303 oak and 18 western sycamores included in the Tree Survey, 85 oaks (28 percent of the total number on the site) and 11 western sycamores (61 percent of the total number on the site) would be removed. The aesthetic values of the majority of these trees are rated average to outstanding. In addition, the project development would remove 103 of the 120 mature landscape trees that are not protected by ordinance. According to the City’s Protected Trees Ordinance, the protected tree mitigation measures presented in Section IV.F (Biological Resources) would be sufficient to mitigate the biological impacts caused by the loss of these trees. However, because of the very slow growth of oak trees (requiring many decades to replace mature trees), these measures would not mitigate the aesthetic impacts of the tree removals. Other than the redesign of the project, no further mitigation measures to reduce aesthetic impacts to protected trees are available. Therefore, in the absence of a project redesign, aesthetic impacts to protected trees would be significant and unavoidable.

The project site’s open space is also a major scenic resource for the community which would be substantially damaged by the proposed project. First, the proposed project would eliminate the existing lushly landscaped golf course and would replace it with rows of densely situated housing. Second, while

hillsides with gradients steeper than 15 percent would not be graded, a 13.9-acre swath of native habitat on the hillsides surrounding the development area would be subject to the Fire Department's fuel modification requirements, which would substantially degrade the aesthetic character of the remaining open space. Other than the redesign of the project, no further mitigation measures to reduce aesthetic impacts associated with the loss of open space as a scenic resource are available. Therefore, in the absence of a project redesign, the aesthetic impact due to the loss of open space as a scenic resource would be significant and unavoidable.

Existing Visual Character

The project site is situated at the eastern end of La Tuna Canyon, an area that retains a distinctive rural ambiance. Large portions of the south side of the canyon are permanently preserved as open space as are major portions of the north side. The scattered housing in the canyon tends to be on large parcels and equestrian in orientation. The elimination of the existing golf course and its replacement by rows of densely spaced housing will introduce a land use at odds with the character of La Tuna Canyon to the west of the project. The two-fold impact of the proposed project (i.e., the introduction of an urban development adjacent to a rural community and the loss of a major scenic open space resource) would substantially degrade the existing visual character of the site and would compromise the rural character of La Tuna Canyon Road. This would be a significant impact.

In contrast to the more rural character of the La Tuna Canyon area, the land to the east and north of the project site is more suburban in character, consisting largely of established single-family neighborhoods with a scattering of multi-family housing and institutional uses on Tujunga Canyon Road and Honolulu Avenue. Nevertheless, the project's construction of linear rows of new two-story homes on small lots would introduce a major new land use into the Sunland-Tujunga area. Whereas the existing single-family neighborhoods have developed unique characters that reflect the individuality of their residents, architecture and landscaping, these characteristics would be absent from the new development. This change in character, in combination with the loss of 96 protected native trees, 103 mature landscape trees their supporting open space, would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. This would be a significant impact.

Cumulative Impacts – Aesthetics

There is only one related project close enough to the project site to have a direct cumulative visual quality impact at the project site. That is Related Project No. 5, the development of 25 condominium dwelling units on the east side of Tujunga Canyon Road across the street from the proposed project. The effect of the proposed project combined with Related Project No. 5 would be further landform alteration, loss of scenic resources, and further urbanization of the Interstate 210 freeway scenic corridor. However, there are two other projects which, although not simultaneously visible with the proposed project, would also contribute to cumulative aesthetic impacts in the La Tuna Canyon/Verdugo Mountains area. These are the Canyon Hills project (Related Project No. 3), the proposed development of 221 single-family homes, and Related Project No. 26, which would construct an additional 10 single-family homes, both located to the west of the proposed project. These projects would combine with the proposed project to create

substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas as viewed from designated scenic highways (the Interstate 210 Freeway and La Tuna Canyon Road); substantially damage scenic resources (e.g., protected native trees, open space and hillsides); and substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site (i.e., loss of open space and intensification of residential densities). These cumulative impacts are considered significant and the proposed project's incremental contribution to these significant cumulative impacts would be considerable.

Oak Trees

Prior to mitigation, the proposed impact to as many as 117 coast live oaks (85 removals and 31 encroached upon), 11 western sycamores (all removals) and 106 mature ornamental trees (103 removals, 3 encroached upon) would constitute a significant impact.

Over the long-term (i.e., 10 years), the implementation of the conceptual Mitigation Planting Program would be sufficient to mitigate the proposed project's impact on coast live oaks, western sycamores and mature ornamental trees to a less-than-significant level. Over a period of 10 years, the growth of the replacement oaks and sycamores would be sufficient to provide seed production and nesting opportunities in the replacement tree stock to compensate fully for the loss of the mature trees proposed for removal.

However, over the short-term, it is anticipated that, even with the implementation of the conceptual Mitigation Planting Program, the impact on coast live oaks, western sycamores and mature ornamental trees would remain significant due to the loss of canopy coverage, seed production and nesting opportunities. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, this near-term significant impact should be mitigated to a less-than-significant level 10 years following the completion of the conceptual Mitigation Planting Program.

Recreation

The parks and recreational facilities needs of the additional residents, particularly regarding facilities for children and youth, would not be fully met by existing City facilities and, thus, new parks and recreational facilities would be needed with development of the proposed project. Although additional parks and recreational opportunities are provided by non-City parks (i.e., Angeles National Forest, La Tuna Canyon Park, and Verdugo Mountains State Park), without onsite active recreational opportunities, there would be a local deficiency of active recreational opportunities for children and youth at the project site. While the development would set aside approximately 30.3 acres of open space, this area is fairly steep (with slope gradients of 15% and more) and it is covered by dense native vegetation. Hence, this open space dedication is not suitable for recreational purposes and does not address the local deficiency of active recreational facilities.

To the extent the 30.3 acre dedication of open space does not satisfy the requirements of the Quimby Act, the project developer would be required to pay Quimby fees to the City to satisfy the balance of its obligations under the Quimby Act. The payment of Quimby Fees would assist in funding capital improvement projects, upgrades to existing recreational facilities, and acquisition and development of

new park and recreation facilities in the greater project vicinity. However, according to the LADRP, payment of Quimby Fees would not eliminate the proposed project's impact on parks and recreational facilities. Furthermore, the payment of Quimby Fees to fund new nearby facilities would not mitigate the loss of the Verdugo Hills Golf Course for the community. For these reasons, the impact of the proposed project on parks and recreational facilities is considered significant

Cumulative Impacts – Recreation

The cumulative demand for 8.58 acres of new parks and recreational facilities in combination with the loss of the Verdugo Hills Golf Course, in a currently underserved area, constitutes a potentially significant impact to parks and recreational facilities. Furthermore, because the project's contribution to this cumulative impact accounts for 27% of the demand for new park space and the elimination of the Verdugo Hills Golf Course, the proposed project's contribution to the impact would be cumulatively considerable. While the satisfaction of the Quimby Act requirements would constitute the project's fair share of mitigation designed to alleviate the cumulative demand for more park space,¹ the loss of the Verdugo Hills golf Course would remain unmitigated and the cumulative impact would remain significant.

B. GROWTH INDUCING IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECTS

Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of the ways in which a proposed action could be growth inducing. This includes ways in which the project would foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines read as follows:

“Discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this are projects which would remove obstacles to population growth (a major expansion of a waste treatment plant might, for example, allow for more construction in service areas). Increases in the population may tax existing community service facilities, requiring construction of new facilities that could cause significant environmental effects. Also discuss the characteristic of some projects which may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively. It must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.”

¹ CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(a)(3) states: “An EIR may determine that a project's contribution to a significant cumulative impact will be rendered less than cumulatively considerable and thus is not significant. A project's contribution is less than cumulatively considerable if the project is required to implement or fund its fair share of a mitigation measure or measures designed to alleviate the cumulative impact....”

The proposed project would increase the permanent population of the area by approximately 577 persons. The increased residential population would patronize local businesses and services in the area, which would foster economic growth. The proposed project's impacts on population, housing and employment would be less than significant. In addition, the proposed project would not induce growth in an area that is not already developed with infrastructure to accommodate such growth. Off-site utility infrastructure adjacent to the site would adequately service the proposed project. Further, the proposed project, would be adequately served by existing public services such as fire, police, and public schools.

C. SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines states that the "uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely." Section 15126.2(c) further states that "irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified."

The types and level of development associated with the proposed project would consume limited, slowly renewable and non-renewable resources. This consumption would occur during construction of the proposed project and would continue throughout its operational lifetime. The development of the proposed project would require a commitment of resources that would include (1) building materials, (2) fuel and operational materials/resources and (3) the transportation of goods and people to and from the project site.

Construction of the proposed project would require consumption of resources that are not replenishable or which may renew slowly as to be considered non-renewable. These resources would include certain types of lumber and other forest products, aggregate materials used in concrete and asphalt (e.g., sand, gravel and stone), metals (e.g., steel, copper and lead), petrochemical construction materials (e.g., plastics) and water. Fossil fuels, such as gasoline and oil, would also be consumed in the use of construction vehicles and equipment.

The commitment of resources required for the type and level of proposed development would limit the availability of these resources for future generations for other uses during the operation of the proposed project. However, this resource consumption would be consistent with growth and anticipated change in the Los Angeles region.