

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Environmental Document

The proposed project is the adoption and implementation of the Downtown Hawthorne Specific Plan (“Specific Plan” or DHSP). While the proposed Specific Plan, itself, may not create any immediate impacts on the environment, it will provide a vision and direction for future physical, social and economic activities in Downtown Hawthorne that may ultimately result in a physical change in the environment. Therefore, prior to the City of Hawthorne’s adoption of the DHSP, its environmental impacts must be assessed and mitigation measures identified for impacts considered significant in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Section 21000 *et seq.*) (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Regs. Section 15000 *et seq.*) (“CEQA Guidelines”).

Type of Environmental Document

The City of Hawthorne (“City”) has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) would be required to address one or more of the Specific Plan’s potentially significant environmental impacts, and that an Initial Study would not be required (CEQA Guidelines Section 15063(a)). The City has also determined that this environmental document is to be a combined Program and Project EIR. CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 defines a Program EIR as that which evaluates the overall effect of a series of actions that are related through the “... issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program...” Program EIRs are most useful in addressing program-wide impacts, including the secondary or cumulative effects of what would otherwise be a series of individual actions that would be evaluated separately.

The EIR is also a Project EIR, as defined under CEQA Guidelines Section 15161, which examines the environmental impacts of specific development projects. The Project EIR will assess the potential environmental impacts associated with four opportunity areas within the DHSP area, which are known as “Transformative Projects.” Detail descriptions of the Transformative Projects are discussed in Chapter 2: Project Description of this EIR.

The EIR is an informational document that will be used by the appropriate decision-makers, their staff members, other involved public agencies, interested organizations, and the general public in providing an objective and impartial assessment of the potential environmental impacts that could result from the implementation of the DHSP. As an informational document, the EIR is intended to provide a forum for the discussion of the DHSP’s potential impacts through the public review, comment and public hearing process. The EIR is merely an informational tool to be considered during the adoption process of the Specific Plan.

It is anticipated that upon certification of this EIR, no additional CEQA review will be required for the adoption of the proposed DHSP and related actions, including the implementation of development plans for the four Transformative Projects. For each of the four Transformative Projects, this document shall serve as the project EIR.

Legal Authority

The City of Hawthorne is initiating the proposed Specific Plan. With respect to CEQA, Public Resources Code Section 21067, the City, an autonomous governmental body, is the Lead Agency for the Specific Plan because it will have the principal responsibility for carrying out its policies. If the City Council approves the Specific Plan, no other approvals are necessary from other public agencies, including responsible agencies, in order for the Specific Plan to become effective. However, all subsequent individual development projects within the Specific Plan area and the City as a whole will be required to adhere to the standard City procedures for site plan review, approval, permits and environmental clearance.

Environmental Review Process

This EIR has been prepared to meet all of the procedural requirements of CEQA. As previously stated, the City of Hawthorne, as the lead agency, has determined that an EIR is required for the adoption of the Specific Plan. Prior to the preparation of the EIR, a community meeting on the DHSP was conducted at Hawthorne City Hall by the Specific Plan consultant and attended by the environmental consultants. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(a) the Notice of Preparation (NOP) was circulated to responsible and trustee agencies and filed with the California Office of Planning and Research (State Clearinghouse) and posted in the Office of the Los Angeles County Clerk on February 20, 2015. This started a 30-day review period to receive information from agencies in connection with the proposed project. City staff along with the environmental consultant team conducted an environmental scoping meeting on March 4, 2015 at the Hawthorne City Hall Council Chambers, 4455 W. 126th Street, Hawthorne, CA. The NOP and comment letters received from responsible and trustee agencies are presented in **Appendix A** of this Draft EIR.

Once the Draft EIR was prepared, the City filed a Notice of Completion (NOC) and a Notice of Availability (NOA) with the State Clearinghouse on December 21, 2015, in accordance with CEQA Guideline Sections 15085 and 15087(a). In addition, the NOA, which invited public review and comments, was posted with the Los Angeles County Clerk. This initiated the 45-day public review period running December 21 to February 3, 2016. During this review period, the City will conduct a public hearing on the Draft EIR and collect public comments.

Upon completion of the 45-day review period, the City will responded to all comments on the Draft EIR and incorporate the comments in the Final EIR.

The City, through a public hearing, will review and consider the Final EIR prior to the decision to approve, revise or reject the proposed project. If the City finds the Final EIR is adequate and

complete, the City may certify the Final EIR. A decision to approve the proposed Specific Plan would be accompanied by written Findings in accordance with CEQA Guideline Section 15091.

Statutory Exemptions from CEQA Review of Project Consistent with the Specific Plan

Future development projects that are consistent with a specific plan may be exempt from CEQA review. Two key CEQA statutory exemptions for projects implementing a specific plan include: future residential projects consistent with this Specific Plan; and, developments within a specific plan in transit priority areas.

Residential Project Consistent With a Specific Plan

Government Code Section 65457 provides a CEQA statutory exemption for any residential development project, including subdivisions or zone changes, that is consistent with a specific plan for which an EIR has been certified. If the specific plan EIR is subject to any of the conditions under CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 that would require preparation of a subsequent EIR, then this exemption would not apply until the subsequent EIR has been certified.

Purpose of the Specific Plan

The Downtown Hawthorne Specific Plan is a planning document that articulates a vision and identifies goals, policies and actions for how the Hawthorne's downtown area will look, feel and function in the future. This Specific Plan establishes a link between implementing policies of the general plan and the individual development proposals in Downtown Hawthorne. This Specific Plan also sets forth policy concepts and provides direction to the type and intensity of land uses in the designated area.

The specific plan is a tool that the City will use for the systematic implementation of the Hawthorne General Plan. It establishes a link between implementing policies of the General Plan and individual development projects. State law requires the Specific Plan to be consistent with the City of Hawthorne General Plan. Specifically, this Specific Plan is consistent with Land Use Policies 1.2 and 2.3 that provide for review of the Hawthorne Boulevard area to determine a feasible approach for commercial revitalization. In addition, the major goals, policies and strategies of this Specific Plan are consistent with other goals and policies established in the Hawthorne General Plan.

The project goals of the Specific Plan are as follows:

1. Provide a clear vision and flexible strategies framework that will help spur the future evolution of Downtown Hawthorne.
2. Ensure an economically vibrant, safe, healthy and sustainable Downtown Hawthorne that supports a range of users, including residents, business owners, workers and visitors.

3. Capitalize on key transformative projects that will be catalysts for future public and private investment and positive change.
4. Identify opportunities to develop and expand plazas, parks and open space areas to support a livable and healthy downtown.
5. Foster strong connectivity, access and circulation for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and automobiles.
6. Engage the entire community in robust, creative and ongoing engagement and participation processes