



CITY OF WHITTIER

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Whittier, CA 90602-1772
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NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

WHITTWOOD TOWN CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN AMENDMENT

- Lead Agency:** City of Whittier
Community Development Department
13230 Penn Street
Whittier, CA 90602-1772
- Contact Person:** Patti Nahill, Contract Project Manager
Email: pnahill@cityofwhittier.org
Phone: 562-567-9320
- Project Title:** Whittwood Town Center Specific Plan Amendment
- City Project No.:** Specific Plan Amendment No. SPA20-0005, Tentative Tract Map No. TTM22-0022 (TTM83807), and Development Agreement No. DEA22-0001
- Project Location:** The 66.4-acre Whittwood Town Center Specific Plan Area is located in the eastern portion of the City of Whittier and is bounded by Whittier Boulevard to the north, existing residences and Starbuck Street to the south, Santa Gertrudes Avenue to the east, and Scott Avenue to the west. The primary address is 15466 Whittier Boulevard. The Project area is in Section 35, Township 3 south, Range 11 west, San Bernardino Base Meridian (see attached CEQA Initial Study).
- Findings/Determination:** The City has reviewed and considered the proposed Whittwood Town Center Specific Plan Amendment ("Project" or WTCSPA) and has determined that potentially significant impacts could result from the Project. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Report should be prepared (Project EIR). The City has prepared the attached Initial Study and this Notice of Preparation (NOP).
- NOP Comment Period:** This 30-day public review period will commence on November 9, 2022 and end on December 8, 2022. Written comments on the NOP must be received at the City within the public review period. You may email comments to Patti Nahill, Contract Project Manager, at the following address: pnahill@cityofwhittier.org. Copies of the Notice of Preparation are available for review at the above address, at the Whittier Central Library at 7344 Washington Avenue and the Whittwood Branch Library at 10537 Santa Gertrudes Avenue and on the City's website at: www.cityofwhittier.org/government/community-development/environmental-documents-notices.

Scoping Meeting: A scoping meeting on the EIR has been scheduled for November 30, 2022, at 6:00 PM, at the Whittier City Council Chambers, 13230 Penn St, Whittier, CA 90602. The Scoping Meeting will consist of a presentation of the Project components and the issues to be addressed in the Project EIR, to be followed by oral public comment. Written comments can also be submitted at the meeting.

A. Introduction

The Whittwood Town Center is a fully developed, 66.4-acre outdoor retail center that includes approximately 743,293 square feet (sf) of commercial uses and 114 residential dwelling units (du) developed under the existing Whittwood Town Center Specific Plan, which allows up to 900,000 sf of commercial uses and 150 residential du. Land to the north, east, and west of the Project area has been developed with commercial-retail, office, and service-type uses along Whittier Boulevard. Land beyond these areas and to the immediate south of the Project has been predominantly developed with single-family residences. The proposed Whittwood Town Center Specific Plan Amendment (“Project” or “WTCSPA”) is intended to fulfill the City’s desire to revitalize the commercial corridor and landscape treatments on Whittier Boulevard, while creating a sense of place and a central activity focus. The WTCSPA would allow for the Project site to transition to a mixed-use village with a larger residential component.

B. Project Description

The WTCSPA will guide the long-term development and redevelopment of the Project area. It revises the current land use plan in the context of five (5) planning districts and would allow for the Project area to transition to a mixed-use village with a larger residential component, with the following modifications:

- An additional 1,200 dwelling units to the currently entitled 150 units, for a total of 1,350 dwelling units within the Specific Plan area.
- Reduction of commercial square footage from 900,000 sf to 600,000 sf. This change would include the redevelopment of several portions of the Specific Plan area that are currently occupied by big-box anchor retailers into higher density residential and mixed-use development.
- The 600,000 commercial square footage is anticipated to encompass a combination of permitted and conditionally permitted uses, and estimates approximately 379,000 sf of retail, 30,000 sf grocery use, a 47,000 sf cinema, 30,000 sf fitness use and 114,000 square feet of restaurant, food/quick serve uses.
- Introduction of hotel use accommodating up to 300 rooms, which may be one structure or divided into multiple structures.
- Realign Whittwood Parkway to provide improved internal circulation and an urban design framework, with planned open space nodes throughout the Specific Plan area.
- Reoriented transit area to facilitate transit operations within the new design context.

A Tentative Tract Map (TTM 83807/TTM 22-0002) is proposed and designed to implement a significant portion of the WTCSPA as amended. A Development Agreement between the City and Whittwood 1768, Inc. is also being proposed to vest development over properties under their ownership.

C. Environmental Setting and Surrounding Land Uses

The Project area is located in the City of Whittier, Los Angeles County, California. The City of Whittier (City) is located within the southeastern portion of Los Angeles County. The City is bordered by the unincorporated communities of Hacienda Heights and North Whittier and the Cities of La Habra Heights and Industry to the north/northeast, the unincorporated community of West Whittier-Los Nietos and the City of Pico Rivera to the west, the City of La Habra to the southeast, and the unincorporated community of South Whittier and the Cities of Santa Fe Springs, La Mirada, and Norwalk, and unincorporated areas of Orange County to the south. The Project area is in Section 35, Township 3 south, Range 11 west, San Bernardino Principal Meridian.

The 66.4-acre Whittwood Town Center is bounded by Whittier Boulevard to the north, existing residences and Starbuck Street to the south, Santa Gertrudes Avenue to the east, and Scott Avenue to the west. Lands immediately surrounding the project site are currently developed and occupied by commercial/retail and residential uses. The Whittwood Town Center is fully developed with approximately 743,293 sf of commercial uses and 114 medium density residential du.

D. Areas of Potential Environmental Concern

Introduction

The attached Initial Study has been prepared for the proposed WTCSPA in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Implementation of the Project may have impacts on important environmental resources and may be affected by potential environmental hazards. These areas of potential environmental concern have been identified and are briefly described below and in the Initial Study. A more in-depth analysis of each of these areas of concern will be provided in the Project EIR.

Aesthetic Resources

The City of Whittier is in the east San Gabriel Valley with views of the Los Angeles Basin and San Gabriel Valley as well as the surrounding mountain ranges, including the San Gabriel Mountains to the north and San Bernardino Mountains to the east. Scenic resources within the city and the City's Sphere of Influence include the Puente Hills to the north of the city, and scenic roadway corridors such as Colima Road, La Cuerta Street, Turnbull Canyon Road, and Skyline Drive. From the Project area, views of the mountains and Puente Hills are blocked by intervening development in all directions. The WTCSPA proposes revised land uses that could potentially have a significant impact on scenic vistas and light or glare levels and should be considered in project design and analyzed in the Project EIR.

Air Quality

Regional urbanization has contributed to the degradation of air quality due to population growth, increased traffic, construction activities, and other site disturbances. Ozone, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5} are pollutants of concern in the City. The South Coast Air Basin (SCAB) has a history of exceeding regulatory ozone standards and is designated as a non-attainment area for PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) is responsible for establishing air quality management criteria and management policies for the SCAB and neighboring air basins. Future redevelopment of the Project area has the potential to be inconsistent with the AQMP, exceed thresholds of significance established by SCAQMD for criteria pollutants, and expose sensitive receptors to criteria pollutants of concern, which will be further assessed in the Project EIR.

Biological Resources

The Project area is not located within the boundaries of a habitat conservation plan. However, the WTCSPA would facilitate redevelopment of landscaped areas that may harbor bird species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The Project EIR will determine whether and to what extent redevelopment of the WTCSPA area will adversely affect sensitive biological resources.

Cultural Resources

Prior to European contact, the region from the Puente Hills to the northeast and the San Gabriel River to the west was occupied by Native Americans referred to as the Gabrieleño Indians. Native Americans have occupied the region for thousands of years, and the City has been developed by European settlers since the late 1800's. Historic resources in the city include a variety of built resources dating to early Quaker settlement through to post-World War II modernism. The WTCSPA would facilitate future redevelopment and improvements that could result in disturbance to or destruction of sensitive cultural resources in the Project area, including both historic and archaeological resources. Potential Project-related impacts will be part of the Project EIR analysis.

Energy

Redevelopment facilitated by the WTCSPA could increase the consumption of electricity, natural gas, and fossil fuels associated with vehicle use. The Project is not expected to result in significant impacts resulting from wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources. Nonetheless, the Project EIR will evaluate potential Project-related impacts and incorporate appropriate mitigation measures, if necessary.

Geology/Soils

The Project area is in a seismically active region. The nearest earthquake fault is the Whittier Fault of the Elsinore Fault Zone, approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the site. The Whittier Fault can generate a magnitude of approximately 7.0 earthquake. The Project area would be exposed to strong ground shaking during a major quake on nearby faults, with associated potential for ground failure during such events. Local soils are also highly susceptible to wind and water erosion. The Project EIR will evaluate the geotechnical conditions in the Project area and potential impacts resulting from buildout of the WTCSPA.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Air quality emissions include greenhouse gases (GHG) that contribute to climate change and global warming. Redevelopment facilitated by the Project would increase GHG emissions but is also expected to promote more energy efficient buildings and energy systems pursuant to the 2019 California Building Code. Air quality constraints and potential adverse (and beneficial) impacts of Project implementation on air quality, including those associated with GHGs, will be further assessed in the Project EIR.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Existing uses in Project area include commercial, retail, restaurants, services and residential uses. Comparable development and additional residential development would be facilitated by the Project. The WTCSPA land use plan allows residential, commercial, and other development that can be expected to use and store limited quantities and types of potentially hazardous materials, such as cleaning chemicals, solvents, gasoline, and oils. Individual developments may be required to implement requirements of law regarding the storage and transport of hazardous materials. Potential impacts should be further evaluated in the Project EIR.

Hydrology and Water Quality

City surface waters flow in a southwest direction, discharging in Coyote Creek and ultimately in the San Gabriel River and Pacific Ocean. The Project would facilitate redevelopment projects that would result in grading, excavation, construction, paving, and other modifications to the ground surface. Such activities could affect erosion, siltation, surface runoff, and flood flows within and adjacent to the Project area. Appropriate best management practices (BMPs) and stormwater treatment during construction and in the post-construction period must be demonstrated for future development and will be further analyzed in the Project EIR.

Land Use and Planning

The WTCSPA generally maintains the basic land use distribution envisioned in the WTCSP but revises the residential density and redevelopment opportunities. Conflicts between the WTCSPA and other land use plans and policies could cause environmental impacts, and therefore, should be evaluated in the Project EIR.

Noise

Long-term operation of projects facilitated by the WTCSPA could result in permanent increases in ambient noise levels in the Project area and surrounding area. However, proposed land uses are consistent with the existing urban commercial and residential environment, and noise sources and levels are expected to be similar to those already experienced in the Project area, which are governed by the City's noise ordinance. Future redevelopment projects may require site-specific noise monitoring and modeling for both construction and post-construction periods conducted at locations surrounding project sites, including in proximity to sensitive receptors. The Project EIR will further evaluate potential noise impacts associated with the Project.

Population and Housing

According to the U.S. Census, the Whittier population was 85,311 in 2021. SCAG projects the City's population will grow to 98,900 by 2045. There are currently 114 dwelling units and approximately 350 residents in the WTCSP. The Project would facilitate new planned residential development in the Project area that would directly result in population growth. Additionally, new commercial development with job opportunities could attract additional residents to the area. The Project area is well-served by existing roads and water infrastructure. The Project facilitates the redevelopment of underutilized parcels in the Project area that could result in demolition of existing commercial structures. The Project EIR will estimate the buildout population in the Project area and compare it to projections to further evaluate potential population growth impacts.

Public Services and Facilities

Redevelopment of the Project area under the WTCSPA could lead to population growth that would increase the need for fire, police, school and other public services, although the potential increase in demand for these services is not expected to exceed capabilities or capacities or require new or physically altered facilities that could cause significant environmental impacts. Nonetheless, the need for augmented public services and facilities will be further evaluated, and the impacts will be addressed in the Project EIR.

Recreation

Buildout of the WTCSPA would result in population growth in the Project area that could increase the use of existing parks and recreational facilities. However, this potential increase is not expected to result in substantial physical deterioration of these facilities. The WTCSP provides opportunities for future residential developments to include parks and/or recreational facilities, such as swimming pools, gyms, and playgrounds. The Project EIR will further evaluate potential Project-related impacts.

Transportation

Proposed land use designations and densities could impact traffic volumes and intersection operations. The extent to which these may conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy is currently unknown. A Traffic Assessment will be prepared to further analyze the potential effects of the WTCSPA on local circulation plans, as well as transit and other alternative modes of travel. Potential impacts and the need for mitigation measures will be further analyzed in the Project EIR.

Tribal Cultural Resources

Implementation of the WTCSPA would facilitate grading, excavation, and other ground disturbing activities that could impact tribal cultural resources if they occur within the Project area. The WTCSPA involves adoption of a Specific Plan amendment. Therefore, consistent with AB 52 and SB 18, the City will solicit input from the California Native American Heritage Commission and initiate consultation with appropriate tribes, notifying them of the Project. Site-specific cultural resource studies may be required for future development projects facilitated by the Project. The Project EIR will analyze potential Project-related impacts and provide mitigation measures, as appropriate.

Utilities and Service Systems

The Project area is well-served by water and energy transmission lines. Buildout of the WTCSPA would increase water consumption and solid waste generation, but the extent to which these impacts would affect utility and service systems is currently unknown. Potential Project-related impacts will be analyzed in the Project EIR and mitigation measures will be provided, as appropriate.

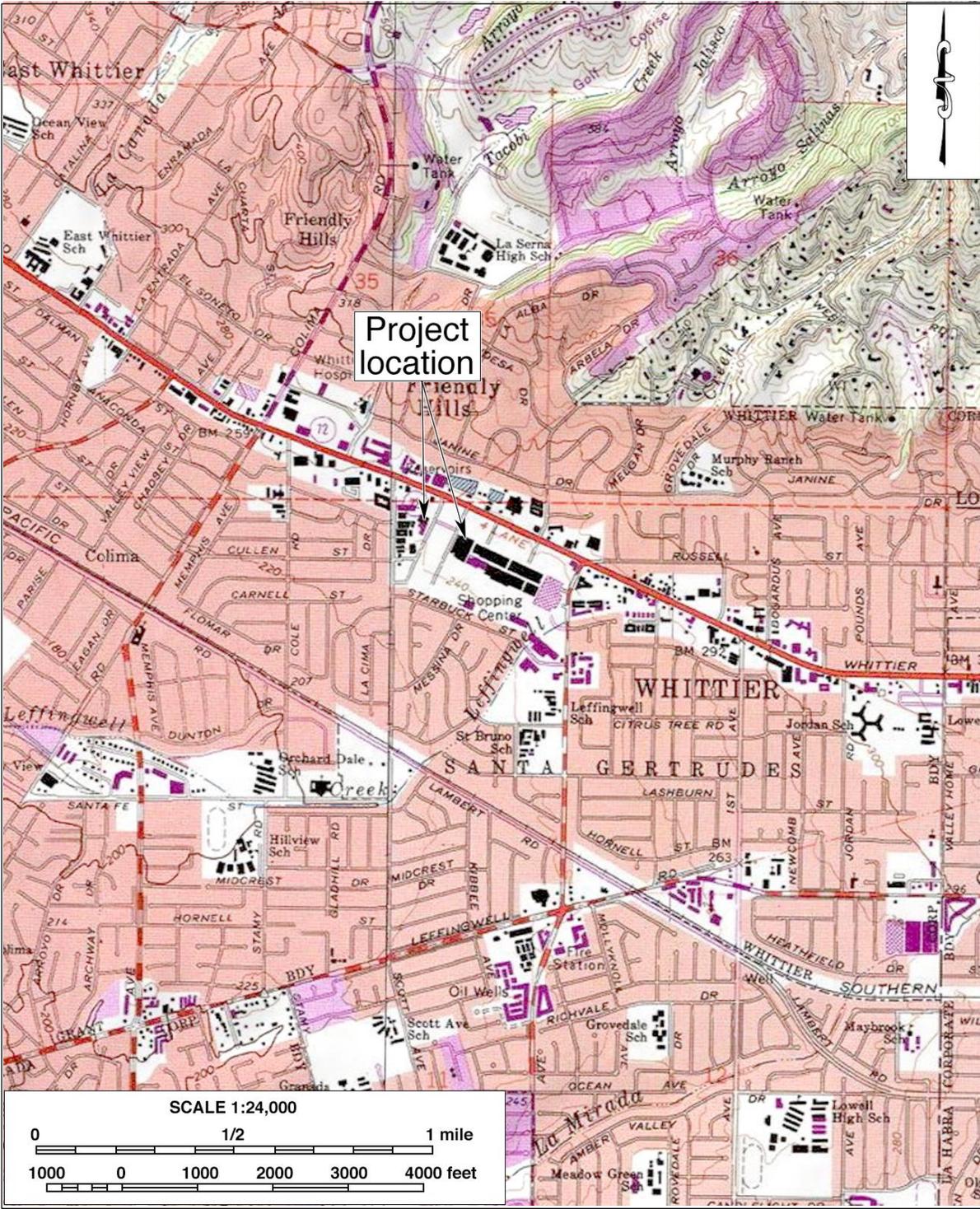


Figure 1. Project location. (Based on USGS La Habra and Whittier, Calif., 1:24,000 quadrangles, 1981 edition)