

Attachment to Notice of Exemption
FOOTHILL RANCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MODERNIZATION PROJECT
Saddleback Valley Unified School District
SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The Saddleback Valley Unified School District (District) is proposing to improve/ modernization to existing classroom buildings and add a new modular building. This supplemental information provides justification for the Categorical Exemption under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301 (14 CCR §§ 15301), 15303 (14 CCR §§ 15303), and 15314 (14 CCR §§ 15314).

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

PROJECT LOCATION

Foothill Ranch Elementary School (ES) is located in the City of Lake Forest, in Orange County. The project site is located at 1 Torino Drive. The City of Lake Forest is in southeast Orange County and is surrounded by the cities of Laguna Woods and Laguna Hills to the south and southwest; Irvine to the west; unincorporated Orange County to the north; and Rancho Santa Margarita and Mission Viejo to the east. Regional access to the school is from State Route 241 (SR-241) running northwest to southeast to the west (see Figure 1, *Regional Location*).

SURROUNDING LAND USES

Foothill Ranch ES is surrounded by a variety of uses. open space and commercial uses to the south; residential, open space, and public facility to the west; residential and open space to the north; and public facilities to the east. The public facilities that bound Foothill Ranch to the west is the Borrego Trail. Public facilities adjacent to the Foothill Ranch ES to the west is the Foothill Ranch Branch, part of the OC Libraries (see Figure 2, *Local Vicinity*).

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Foothill Ranch ES is a TK-6 elementary school with a 2022/2023 enrollment of 1,056 students (CDE 2023). Foothill Ranch ES consists of a Library, 19 classroom buildings (Building A Admin and classroom building), a restroom building (Building R), two innovation labs (Buildings I), two modular classrooms (V1 and V2); seven shade structures; school courtyard; a school blacktop with six foursquares, four basketball courts, and seven tetherball areas; a baseball field and an open field area; and an ES playground structure and a separate kindergarten play structure and area. The campus parking lot on the northeast area of the campus contains five solar panel shade structures, access is provided via an ingress only driveway on the north end of Torino Drive (see Figure 3, *Existing Site*).

DISTRICT

The Saddleback Valley Unified School District provides school services to Foothill Ranch, Laguna Hills, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, Trabuco Canyon, and areas of unincorporated Orange County. The District includes 23 elementary schools, 4 intermediate schools (middle schools), 4 high schools and 4 alternative schools. Districtwide enrollment in the 2022/2023 school year was 23,711 students (CDE 2023).

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Foothill Ranch ES Modernization project includes major renovations and configurations to Building A (Admin), classroom Buildings C, D, F, R, and I, finishing technology upgrades on remaining buildings (Buildings A (classrooms), B, E, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, S, T, V1, and V2), and placement of a new modular building (V3) (see Figure 4, *Foothill Ranch Elementary School Site Plan*). Major renovations and configurations will include altering the existing layout of the admin space/classrooms/labs, the addition/improvements to bathrooms, the demolition of

walls, trimmings, removal of fencing, and electrical demolition, and technology upgrades; however, all renovation will occur within the existing structures. Technology upgrades will include only interior upgrades such as new staff mailboxes, new marker boards, new monitors and Extron systems, a workroom island, the replacement of doors and removal of window blinds.

The new modular classroom (V3) will receive courtyard improvements which will include new concrete, and three single post 10'x10' shade structures. The existing Innovation labs will be modernized, and the LAB courtyard will receive a new 28'x36' four pole shade structure. The library courtyard will receive upgrades which include the removal and repaving of new concrete pavers, painting of the existing metal fence, new landscaping, and new light fixtures. The proposed project includes kindergarten play area upgrades which includes a new awning, new fencing and relocating a gate, vinyl graphics wrap on new and existing chain link fence, new concrete paving as required, and a new 20'x40' four post shade structure. Modernization improvements will include accessibility improvements to the restrooms and drinking fountains across campus (Buildings F, G, R and S). Additionally, the Lunch pavilion includes improvements by removing existing the trellis and BMS and adding fabric shade cloth with steel frames.

The proposed modernization/ improvements are limited to the Foothill Ranch ES campus. Modernization improvements include technology upgrades and classroom learning environment upgrades. The proposed project will increase the number of classrooms from 49 to 51 classrooms, including 2 Innovation lab buildings and kindergarten classrooms.

3. REASONS WHY THE PROJECT CATEGORICALLY IS EXEMPT

The proposed project is exempt from further environmental review under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq.) because it is consistent with the following class of Categorical Exemption:

- » **Class 1, Existing Facilities (CEQA Guidelines CCR § 15301)** consist of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alterations of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use.

The proposed improvements/modernizations of the existing buildings are exempt from CEQA under Class 1, Existing Facilities (Section 15301) which includes “[i]nterior or exterior alterations, involving such things as interior partitions, plumbing, and electrical conveyances” and “[R]estoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment...”. The improvements/modernizations of restrooms and classrooms will be located within the project site and will serve the same purposes. The proposed modernizations will not increase the floor area of the existing structures. Since the modernized structures and improvements are located in the same site and do not involve the expansion of use, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15301.

- » **Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures (CEQA Guidelines CCR § 15303)** consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure. The numbers of structures described in this section are the maximum allowable on any legal parcel.

The proposed construction of six shade structures and fencing for school use are exempt from CEQA under Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures (Section 15303). The proposed shade structures and fencing will be located within the school campus. The six shade structures and fencing improvements will serve the students and will not affect student capacity or enrollment; the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15303.

- » **Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (CEQA Guidelines CCR § 15314)** consist of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

The proposed construction of a new modular classroom building V-3 is exempt from CEQA under class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (Section 15314). The new building will be located within the school campus and will increase the total number of classrooms by two and will not increase student capacity at Foothill ES as students will be dispersed throughout the additional classrooms to create smaller classroom sizes. Since the new building is located within the same campus and will not increase the school classrooms by ten, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15314.

4. REVIEW OF EXCEPTIONS TO THE CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

The project has been reviewed under CEQA Guidelines § 15300.2 - Exceptions, for any characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the project is exempt from CEQA. Each exception is listed below followed by an assessment of whether that exception applies to the project.

(a) Location. Classes 3,4,5,6 and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project would be located—a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

The project site is a built-out elementary school campus in an urbanized neighborhood. No environmental resources of critical concern—such as threatened or endangered species or habitats thereof; or critical habitat designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act—are present onsite (USFWS 2023a; USFWS 2023b). Calavera Hills ES is not a hazardous materials site (see Hazardous Waste Sites below). The Location exception does not apply to the proposed project.

(b) Cumulative Impacts. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

The proposed project is not part of a series of projects at Foothill ES. The Foothill ES project is part of the District's improvement projects at four schools. The nearest is Rancho Canada Elementary School, which is approximately 3 miles southwest of the project site; and would result in no cumulative impact from the District's improvement project. The proposed project at Foothill ES would not trigger the Cumulative impact exception respecting the proposed project as it would include minor improvements to the school and would be within the boundaries of the ES campus. The cumulative impact exception does not apply to the proposed project.

(c) Significant Effects. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

There are no unusual circumstances on or next to the school that would cause significant environmental impacts. The existing school is in operation, and no unusual circumstances are anticipated with the project construction.

The nearest sensitive receptors to noise and hazardous air emissions are residential homes adjacent to the north and approximately 25 feet west of the project site. Project construction and operation would, however, not cause any unusual circumstances resulting in significant environmental impacts. The significant effects exception does not apply to the proposed project.

(d) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

The nearest officially State scenic highway is State Route 91 (SR-91) approximately 14 miles northwest of the school; and the nearest eligible State scenic highway is SR-74 approximately 10.5 miles southeast of the school (Caltrans 2021). Project development would not damage scenic resources in SR-91 or SR-74. Therefore, the Scenic Highways exception does not apply to the proposed project.

(e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code § 65962.5.

California Government Code Section 65962.5 requires the compiling of lists of the following types of hazardous materials sites: hazardous waste facilities subject to corrective action; hazardous waste discharges for which the State Water Quality Control Board has issued certain types of orders; public drinking water wells containing detectable levels of organic contaminants; underground storage tanks with reported unauthorized releases; and solid waste disposal facilities from which hazardous waste has migrated.

Five environmental databases were searched for hazardous materials sites on or within 0.25 mile of Foothill Ranch ES:

- GeoTracker. State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB 2023a)
- EnviroStor. Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2023)
- EJScreen. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2023a)
- EnviroMapper. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2023b)
- Solid Waste Information System. California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle 2023)

According to GeoTracker, one Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) cleanup site was identified within 0.25-mile (SWRCB 2023). The USA gas station #824 (26731 Portola) is an open LUST cleanup site as of 2/22/2022 verification monitoring is occurring. The potential contaminants of concern include diesel and gasoline typical of a gas station. Additionally, the Foothill Ranch ES is at a higher elevation (890 feet above ground level (AGL)) than the LUST site (800 feet AGL) and groundwater below the LUST cleanup site flows in the Southeast direction, away from the project site. (USGS 2023, SWRCB 2023b). The LUST cleanup site is not located on the project site, the LUST cleanup site is 0.20 miles southeast of the project site. The potential for the contaminants of concern to impact the proposed project is unlikely. The project site has not been identified as a hazardous materials site pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5, and therefore, the proposed project will not create a hazard to the public. This exception does not apply to the proposed project.

(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of historical resources. Under Public Resource Code § 21084.1, a historical resource is a resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Additionally, historical resources included in a local register of historical resources are presumed to be historically or culturally significant, and a lead agency can determine whether the resource may be an historical resource.

Foothill Ranch ES is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NPS 2014) or as a California Historical Landmark or California Point of Historical Interest (OHP 2023). Neither the school nor any adjoining property are listed as historic resources or potential historic resources by the County of Orange. No historical resources have been identified on-site during preparation of this Notice of Exemption, and the historical sites exception would not apply to the proposed project.

5. CONCLUSION

The proposed project at Foothill Ranch ES is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to Section 15301 Existing Facilities (CCR §§15301), Section 15303 New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures (CCR § 15303), 15314 Minor Additions to School (CCR §§15314). As discussed above, the exceptions pursuant to Section 15300.2 are inapplicable to the proposed project. As substantiated in this document, the proposed project will not meet the conditions specified in CEQA Guidelines Section 21080.35(d) through (f).

6. REFERENCES

- California Department of Education. 2023, July 13 (accessed). 2022-223 Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade Foothill Ranch Elementary Report (37-73635-6112577).
<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrEthGrd.aspx?cds=30736356112577&aggllevel=School&year=2022-23&ro=y>.
- California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). 2023, July 13 (accessed). SWIS Facticity/Site Search. <https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/SolidWaste/Site/Search>.
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2023, July 13 (accessed). California Highway System. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>.
- Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). 2023, July 13 (accessed). EnviroStor. <https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/map/>.
- National Park Service (NPS). 2014, April. National Register of Historic Places. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm#table>.
- Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). 2023, July 13 (accessed). California Historical Resources. <https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/>.
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). 2023, July 13 (accessed). GeoTracker. <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>.
- _____. 2023, May 9. GeoTracker – Monitoring Reports, First Semi-Annual 2022 Groundwater Monitoring Report. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://documents.geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/esi/uploads/geo_report/7612628519/T10000005936.PDF
- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2023a, July 13 (accessed). EJSCREEN. <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>.
- _____. 2023b, July 13 (accessed). EnviroMapper for EnviroFacts. <https://geopub.epa.gov/>
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2023a, July 13 (accessed). Critical Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species. <https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=9d8de5e265ad4fe09893cf75b8dbfb77>
- _____. 2023b, July 13 (accessed). National Wetlands Inventory – Wetlands Mapper. <https://fwsprimary.wim.usgs.gov/wetlands/apps/wetlands-mapper/>.
- United States Geologic Survey (USGS). 2023, July 13 (accessed). National Map. <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/downloader/>.

FIGURES

Figure 1 - Regional Location



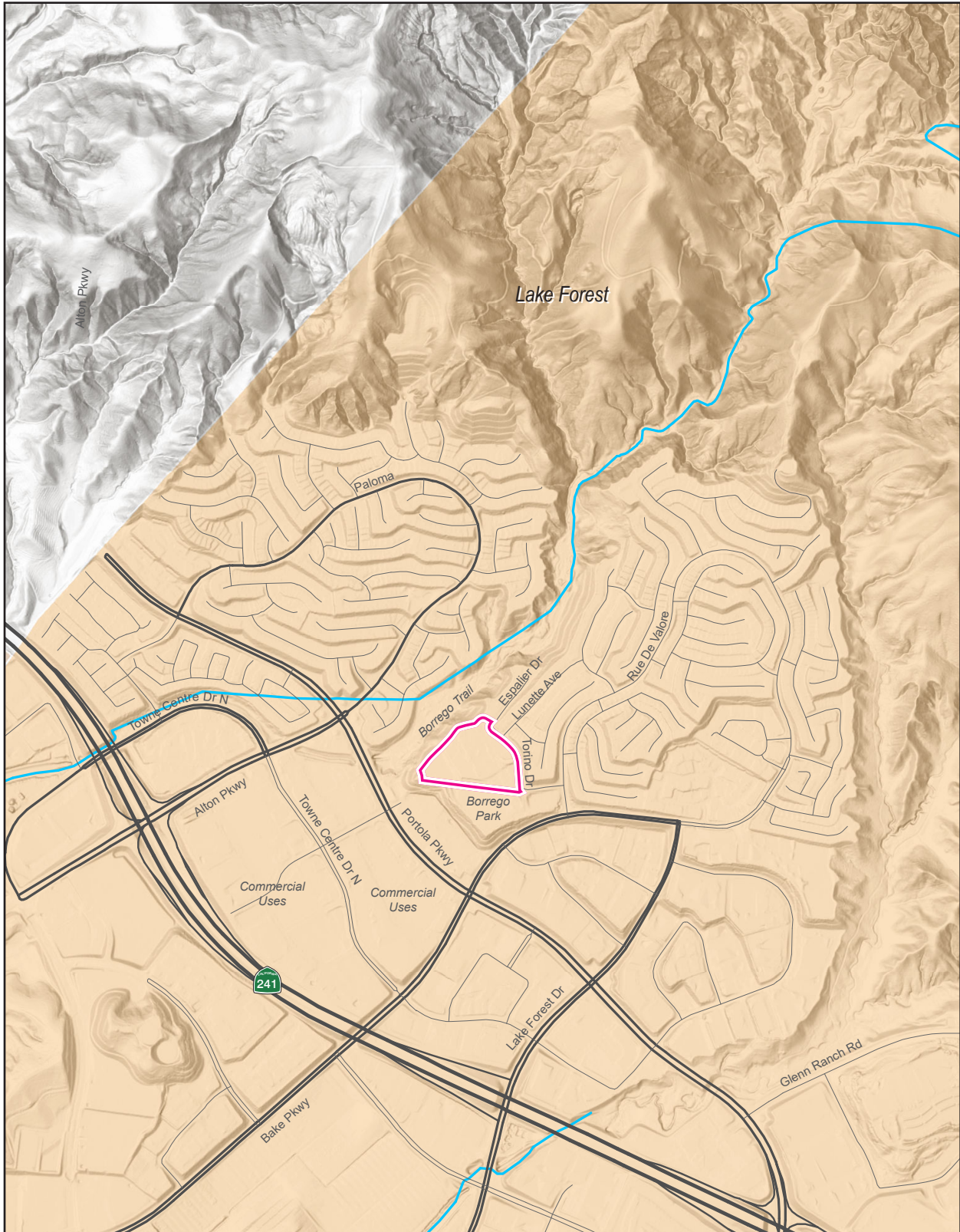
--- County Boundary

Note: Unincorporated county areas are shown in white.

Source: Generated using ArcMap, 2023.



Figure 2 - Local Vicinity



— Rancho Canada Elementary School Boundary

Note: Unincorporated county areas are shown in white.

Source: Generated using ArcMap, 2023.



Figure 3 - Existing Site



— Foothill Ranch Elementary School Boundary

0 260
 Scale (Feet)



Source: Nearmap, 2023.

Figure 4 - Foothill Ranch Elementary School Site Plan



- Buildings Receiving Major Renovation and Configuration
- Buildings Receiving Technology and Finish Upgrades
- New Shade Structures



Source: PJHM Architects, 2022.