Print Form

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk
County of: Tulare
221 S. Mooney Boulevard, Room 102 E
Visalia, CA 93291

From: (Public Agency): Jennifer Gomez, City Manager
City of Farmersville
909 W. Visalia Road, Farmersville, CA 93223
(Address)

Project Title: State Route 198 and Farmersville Boulevard Interchange Beautification Project

Project Applicant: City of Farmersville

Project Location - Specific:

State Route 198 and Farmersville Boulevard Interchange`

Project Location - City: Farmersville Project Location - County: Tulare

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The project proposes to develop landscape improvements to existing Caltrans right-of-way area at the State Route 198 and Farmersville Boulevard interchange within the city limits of the City of Farmersville. See a full Project Description on the attached pages.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: City of Farmersville

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Jennifer Gomez

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Section 15301 (c) and Section 15301 (b)
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

See the attached analysis and justification for the use of the above exemptions.

Lead Agency
Contact Person: Jennifer Gomez, City Manager Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (559) 747-0458

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: 07-27-23 Title: City Manager

☒ Signed by Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

☐

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project is located at the State Route (SR) 198/Farmersville Boulevard Interchange within California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) right-of-way areas within the city limits of the City of Farmersville in Tulare County. The Project would encompass 2.2 acres of improved space within disturbed Caltrans right-of-way.

The gateway monument improvements will be constructed in Caltrans' right-of-way in previously disturbed open spaces on the north and south side of the SR 198/Farmersville Boulevard interchange that were recently graded when dual roundabouts were installed in 2016. See Figure attached.

The main design focus would occur on the south side of the interchange and would be graded, landscaped, and improved with the following elements:

- A two-level gabion wall that will feature the City's name on the top wall and the City's motto on the lower wall. Each wall would be four to six feet tall with three-foot lettering.
- Landscaping will include the planting of drought-tolerant trees and shrubs as approved by Caltrans and the City of Farmersville. Alternating colors of gravel and drought tolerant plantings to mimic row crops would be installed throughout the Project surface.
- Approximately 4,650 linear feet of irrigation lines in a state-of-the-art bubbler and drip irrigation system will be installed and would use 50 to 75 percent less water than allowed by the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (WELO).
- Two metal art installations featuring agricultural themes of each of the triangular gabion walls (west facing). Installations will be backlit to showcase the design at night.
- Installation of LED solar powered rope lighting to illuminate the gabion walls and lettering

The north side of the interchange would be graded, landscaped, and improved with the following elements:

- A monument sign mounted on a triangular gabion wall with the City's name, six feet in height with 3-foot high lettering.
- The embankment will be covered with colored decomposed granite (DG) to mirror the surface design of the south area and additional serpentine band of blue rock symbolizing flowing water running along the embankment.

Earthwork associated with the project as described above will disturb approximately 73,458 square feet of land. Additionally, the project would result in 313 cubic yards (CY) of cut, 5,635 CY of fill with an additional 5,322 CY of import fill being utilized.

Development of these areas will consider the inclusion of sustainable techniques below:

- The Project is to be designated in compliance with the State's Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance.
- The proposed irrigation control systems will incorporate soil moisture sensors and rain sensors linked to an automatic control system which would enable the system to match water use to actual irrigation need. The irrigation control system should also incorporate a flow sensor that will shut down irrigation water when unexpected flows occur.
- The landscape planting palette is to be based in a xeriscape approach. The palette will exclude invasive plants and include minimal maintenance planting consisting of native

and climate appropriate plants which will reduce the need for extensive watering, toxic pesticides, and inorganic fertilizers.

- Energy efficient LED light fixtures to be used for site lighting

EXEMPTIONS:

- Class 1 15301 (c): *Existing Facilities* consists of existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities (this includes road grading for the purpose of public safety, and other alterations such as the addition of bicycle facilities, including but not limited to bicycle parking, bicycle-share facilities and bicycle lanes, transit improvements such as bus lanes, pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other similar alterations that do not create additional automobile lanes).
- Class 4 15304 (b): *Minor Alterations to Land* consist of new gardening or landscaping, including the replacement of existing conventional landscaping with water efficient or fire-resistant landscaping.

REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT

Biological Resources

QK conducted a biological reconnaissance survey of the Project sites to identify any sensitive biological resources that may be affected by Project activities. Prior to the survey, a review of relevant databases and literature sources, including the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), and the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD)/National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) was conducted to determine the potential for special-status biological resources and waters or wetlands that may occur on the Project sites. CNDDB and CNPS database queries found that 13 special-status plant species and 11 special-status wildlife species have been documented within ten miles of the Project site. A reconnaissance survey of the Project sites was conducted on March 7, 2023, to determine the presence or absence of special-status species and other biological resources on or near the Project site (QK, Inc., 2023a). The survey found that both sites are highly disturbed and that the Project sites do not contain suitable habitat for special-status plant or wildlife species. The site survey and literature review indicated no aquatic features on the Project site.

Tribal/Cultural Resources

A Cultural Resource Technical Memo has been prepared to provide a summary of a cultural resources records search that was conducted for the Project. A cultural resources records search (#22-474) was conducted at the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center (SSJVIC), CSU Bakersfield. The records search covered an area within one-half mile of the Project site and included review of the *National Register of Historic Places* (NRHP), *California Points of Historical Interest, California Registry of Historic Resources, California Historical Landmarks, California State Historic Resources Inventory*, and a review of cultural resource reports on file.

The records search indicated that the subject property had never been surveyed for cultural resources. All of Section 36, within which the project is located, was included within the larger (4,000-acre) historic Wylie Hinds Ranch (P-54-003229). The ranch operated from about 1864 to at least the early 20th century. At present, nothing remains of the original ranch on the project site. Two cultural resources have been recorded within one half mile of the project. These include portions

of Tulare Irrigation District Canals (P-54-005296) and an historic residence and sawmill (P-54-004885). Neither of these cultural resources will be impacted by the project.

Additionally, a Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) Sacred Lands File search was conducted and returned negative results. Therefore, the Project site does not contain a known historical or cultural resource and would not result in significant impacts to historical or cultural resources.

Hazardous Waste Sites

A Hazardous Waste Technical Memo has been prepared to provide an analysis of available hazardous waste site resources. CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Section IX.d Hazards and Hazardous Materials indicates that a significant impact would occur if a project is located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result would create a significant hazard to the public or the environment. Government Code Section 65962.5 is commonly referred to as the "Cortese List" and will include, but not be limited to hazardous waste facilities, hazardous waste disposal sites, and underground storage tanks.

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) provides the Envirostor system for tracking cleanup, permitting, enforcement and investigation efforts as hazardous waste facilities and site with known contamination or sites where there may be reasons to investigate. A review of the Envirostor system indicates that the Project site is not located on a permitted hazardous material site or reported cleanup site. There are no listed sites within the Envirostor database within a one-mile radius of the Project site (California Department of Toxic Substances Control, 2023).

The State Water Resources Control Board, GeoTracker database tracks sites that impact, or have the potential to impact water quality in California with emphasis on groundwater. GeoTracker contains records for sites that require cleanup, such as a leaking underground storage tank (LUST) site, Department of Defense site, and cleanup program sites (State Water Resources Control Board, 2023). The GeoTracker database shows that there are two LUST cleanup sites within a one-mile radius of the Project site. However, further review of the two LUST cleanup sites indicates that both cases have been completed.

Therefore, based on available resources, the Project site is not located on a hazardous material/waste site as identified in the Envirostor database, and does not contain a component that can result in the release of a hazardous substance as shown in the Geotracker system. Therefore, the Project is not located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and would not create a significant hazard to the public or environment.

Air Quality

To estimate air pollutant generation resulting from construction, an Air Quality Conformity Analysis has been prepared for the project. The Project site is located in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin (SJVAB) and is under the regulatory umbrella of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD). The SJVAPCD has adopted thresholds of significance for criteria pollutant emissions and is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Criteria Pollutants

Emissions Source	Pollutant					
	ROG	NOx	CO	SOx (tons/year)	PM10	PM2.5
Construction Emissions	0.32	3.03	2.29	0.01	0.34	0.23
SJVAPCD Threshold	10	10	100	27	15	15
Is Threshold Exceeded?	No	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Trinity Consultants 2023, SJVAPCD 2023

Development of the Project is anticipated to occur over a seven-month period with personnel on the ground varying from approximately 4 to 16 workers at any given time. Construction equipment would vary over the course of development. Based on the anticipated activity levels, the development of the Project would not exceed construction emissions thresholds and would have a less than significant impact. Once the Project landscaping improvements to the interchange area are completed, no new or additional operational emissions will be generatedd. Therefore, the Project would not exceed established operational threshold emissions.

Water Quality and Demand

Water use associated with Project construction is anticipated to be utilized in relation to dust control measures, which will be temporary and is not likely to result in significant water use. Once completed, the Project will be designed in compliance with the State of California Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO) and will incorporate best management practices (BMP) for long term water efficiency/conservation. As proposed, the Project will encompass 2.2 acres of improved landscaped space. The new landscaped space would include drought-tolerant trees, shrubs and plantings that would be serviced by approximately 4,650 linear feet of irrigation lines. The irrigation lines would utilize state-of-the-art bubbler and drip-irrigation technology.

MWELO calculations utilize plant factors for classification of various plantings associated with a project (flowers, trees, shrubs, etc.), the irrigation efficiency of the chosen irrigation method, the evapotranspiration adjustment factor (ETAF), which references the evapotranspiration adjustment for plant water requirements and irrigation efficiencies, and the square footage of the Project. Table 1-1 below summarizes the MWELO calculations for the Project.

Table 1-1

MWELO Estimated Total Water Use

HWY 198 Beautification- Water Efficient Landscape Worksheet							
Reference Eto	51.6						
Hydrozone/Plant Description	Plant Factor (PF)	Irrigation Method	Irrigation Efficiency (IE)	ETAF (PF/IE)	Landscape Area (S.F.)	ETAF x Area	Estimated Total Water Use (ETWU)
Regular Landscape Area							
HZ1 - Low (Shrubs & Vines)	0.2	Bubbler	0.81	0.25	22688	5602	179218
HZ2 - Low (Trees)	0.2	Bubbler	0.81	0.25	3672	907	29006
HZ3 -Moderate (Shrubs)	0.4	Bubbler	0.81	0.49	0	0	0
HZ4 -Moderate (Trees)	0.4	Bubbler	0.81	0.49	0	0	0
				Totals	26360	6509	208224
Special Landscape Area							
				1	0	0	0
ETWU Total							208224
MAWA Total	Eto	0.62	ETAF	LA	1-ETAF	SLA	
	51.6	0.62	0.45	26360	0.55	0	379489
MAWA-ETWU=							171265

Per MWELO calculations, the maximum applied water allowance (MAWA) is 379,489 gallons per year. At full buildout the Project anticipates the use of approximately 208,224 gallons of water annually to keep the site irrigated. Therefore, based on MWELO calculations, the Project does not exceed the maximum water allowance and is consistent with MWELO requirements. The amount of water utilized in comparison to the last recorded well production data from the City indicates an approximately 1% increase of water use in relation to maintenance/operation of the Project.

Water Quality

New development that disturbs one acre or more is required to obtain coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and is required to prepare a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to address potential impacts on water quality though erosion, sedimentation, and hazardous waste pollution. The SWPPP specifies BMPs to prevent construction pollutants from contaminating stormwater and will minimize soil erosion from moving offsite and into receiving waters. The intention is to eliminate or reduce non-stormwater discharge into storm sewer systems and other waters. The SWPPP can contain BMPs including, but not limited to: 1) vehicle and equipment cleaning; 2) vehicle and equipment fueling and maintenance requirements; and 3) developing spill containment and cleanup plans prior to and during construction activities. The SWPPP is required to be approved by the Regional Water Quality Control Board prior to construction.

As the Project will disturb more than an acre of dirt, it is required to develop and receive approval of a SWPPP. Once approved and implemented during construction, significant impacts to water quality are not anticipated. The design and implementation of the project will meet City and Caltrans development standards for stormwater drainage. Operation of the project is not anticipated to result in the use materials where significant impacts to water quality could occur.

Conclusion

As noted above, the Project will comply with local and State regulations, including MWELO, through the preparation of a SWPPP and through development standards for water demand and drainage. Based on this analysis, the Project will not result in a significant impact on water usage and water quality. Based on well production data from the City of Farmersville, MWELO calculations, and projected water use needed for irrigation of the Project, the water demand associated with the Project is a small incremental increase in water use and is in compliance with MWELO. Therefore, the Project is not anticipated to substantially reduce water levels or significantly impact City services.

Scenic Resources

Per the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Scenic Highways Systems Map (California Department of Transportation, 2018), eastbound SR 198 from SR 99 up to Sequoia National Park is an eligible scenic highway. Although Caltrans indicates that SR 198 is eligible for scenic highway designation, the road has not been adopted as a scenic highway. In addition, the Project site is located at the intersection of SR 198 and Farmersville Boulevard, which does not contain nor is adjacent to a scenic or natural feature. The surrounding land uses include agricultural, rural residential, and commercial development in the immediate vicinity of subject intersection. The Project intends to improve the visual characteristics of the interchange by incorporating new landscaping elements within Caltrans right-of-way and provide a beautified gateway to the City. The Project itself would not impact scenic or natural features surrounding Project nor would it negatively impact State Route 198.

CONCLUSION

Several technical evaluations were prepared for the Project. These studies confirmed there were no observed biological or known cultural resources that would be impacted or disturbed by the construction and operation of the proposed Project. The Project site does not contain a listed hazardous material/waste facility. The anticipated construction efforts of the Project will not exceed SJVAPCD criteria pollutant thresholds. The Project will not significantly impact available water supply or water quality. Therefore, the Project is not expected to have a significant impact. Therefore, a Categorical Exemption under CEQA is warranted.

References

California Department of Toxic Substances Control. (2023). *California Department of Toxic Substances Control, Envirorstor.* Retrieved from California Department of Toxic Substances Control, Envirorstor: https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/map/?myaddress=Search

California Department of Transportation. (2018). *California State Scenic Highway Systems Map.* Retrieved from Caltrans Scenic Highways: https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aacaa

City of Farmersville. (2015). *City of Farmersville Water Production Data.* Retrieved from Well Pumping Data: https://www.cityoffarmersville-ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/185/WELL-PUMPING-DATA---ANNUAL?bidId=

QK, Inc. (2023a). *Biological Survey for the City of Farmersville Clean California 198 Gateway Improvement Project.*

QK, Inc. (2023b). *Water Demand Technical Memo for the SR 198/Farmersville Boulevard Interchange Beautification Project.*

State Water Resources Control Board. (2023). *State Water Resources Control Board, GeoTracker.* Retrieved from State Water Resources Control Board, GeoTracker: https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/map/?CMD=runreport&myaddress=Search+GeoTracker#

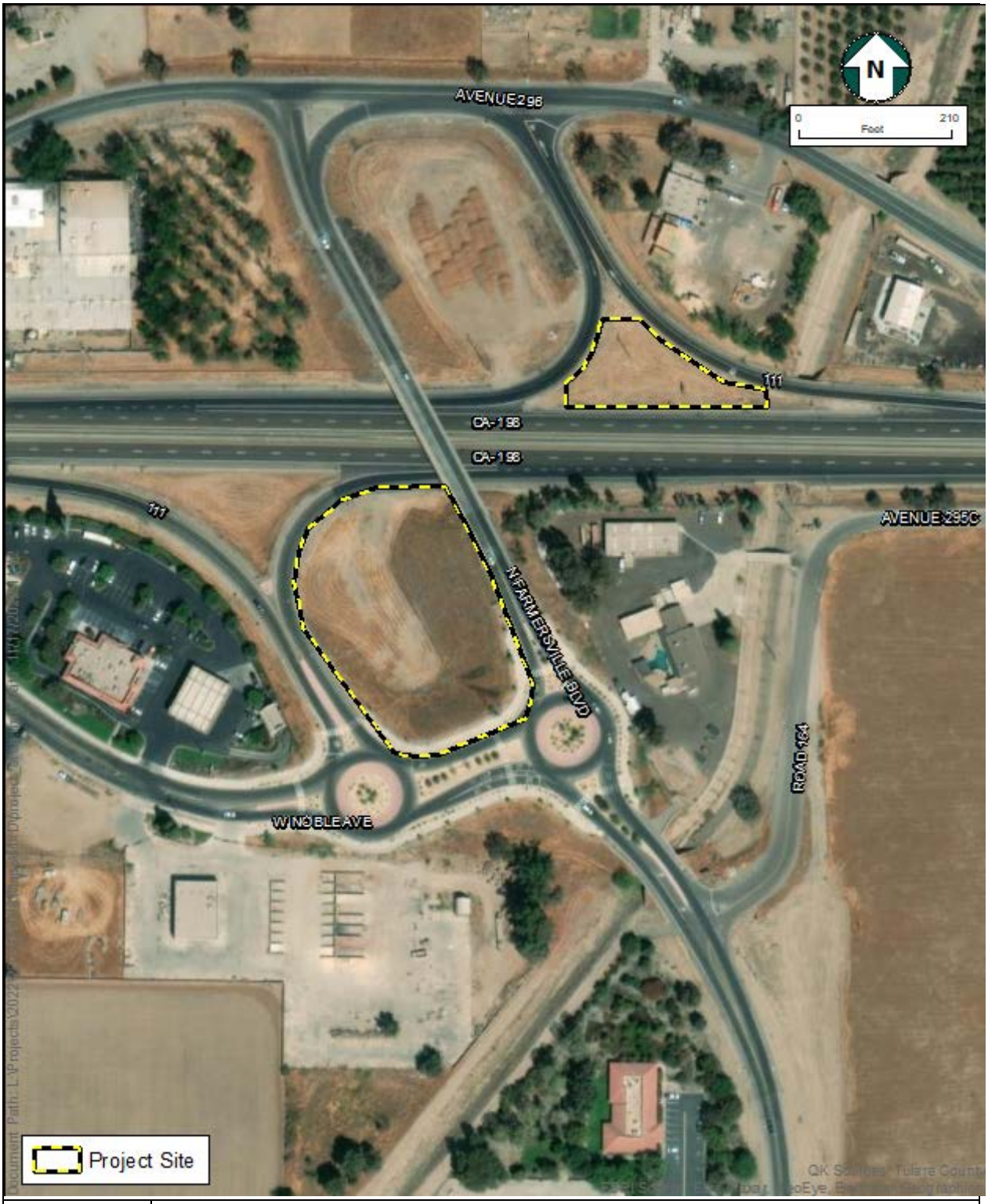

Figure - 2
Project Area