

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Clearinghouse
PO Box 3044/ 1400 Tenth St
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: County of Tulare – RMA
5961 S Mooney Blvd
Visalia CA 93277

Date: December 13, 2023

Subject: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Focused Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Scoping Meeting

Project Title: Touchstone Pistachio Modification

Project Applicant: Touchstone Pistachio

Project Location: Physical Address: 19570 Avenue 88, Terra Bella, CA 93270
Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs): 319-130-024 and 319-130-025
Section/Township/Range: Sec. 2, T. 23 S., R. 26 E, MDB&M
Latitude/Longitude: 35° 56' 59.50" N, 119° 07' 55.75" W

Tulare County Resource Management Agency (RMA) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Focused Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit(s) or other approval(s) for the project. In addition, please provide us with contact information of the person(s) in your agency that we may contact during the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. The NOP is also available on the County website at: <https://tularecounty.ca.gov/rma/planning-building/environmental-planning/environmental-impact-reports/touchstone-pistachio-modification-project/>

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

A scoping meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, December 28, 2023, at 1:30 P.M.** in the Main Conference Room of the Tulare County Resource Management Agency at the address shown above. You can also participate via phone conference at (559) 627-7116.

Please direct your response to **Gary Mills, Chief Environmental Planner**, at the address shown above. He may be contacted by e-mail at gmills@tularecounty.ca.gov or by telephone at 559-624-7199.

Signature: _____
Gary A. Mills

Date: _____

Title: Chief Environmental Planner

Signature: _____
Reed Schenke, P.E.

Date: _____

Title: RMA Director / Environmental Assessment Officer

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The Touchstone Pistachio processing facility is located at 19570 Avenue 88 (on APNs 319-13-024 and -25, Terra Bella, CA). It is situated on 46 acres of land north of Avenue 88 (between Road 192 and Queen Road), west of the Friant Kern Canal. The site is located in an agricultural area and is surrounded by agriculture (pistachio orchards) on all sides. According to historic Tulare County records, the Touchstone Pistachio processing facility (formerly Grandi/ARO Pistachio) has been located and operated at the same location since 1983. The County of Tulare issued a Special Use Permit (PSP 96-074) for the project in 1996 and the project has been modified and expanded several times since the original construction and operation. The proposed modifications would not change the activities on the project site nor would they alter the processing or storage capacity of the facility. The facility has three "Huller Lines" and 36 large storage silos capable of holding approximately 70 million pounds of "finished" pistachios. The facility also has buildings and equipment associated with cleaning and processing the finished nuts to ready them for distribution and sale. There are two lined "Process Water" storage ponds (with a capacity of approximately 69-acre feet each) located on the north side of the site that hold the water that has been used for the production of the finished nut product and stormwater runoff from the site. Adjacent to and east of the processing facilities, a 32-acre parcel exists that is referred to as a "Land Application Area" (LAA) that is also owned by Touchstone Pistachio. The stored process water is applied to this site and used to produce grain crops that are then sold to dairy farmers in the area. In addition, pistachio process water can be trucked to three approved offsite locations if necessary and the "Residual Solids" that build up in the bottom of the 2 lined ponds are periodically removed and are used by farmers in the area as a "soil amendment". The pistachio facility employs approximately 200 people during the harvest season (August - October) and employees approximately 30 people on a year-round basis; the project will neither increase nor decrease the number of employees. Touchstone has implemented internal operational improvements during the harvest period that have resulted in less overall water consumption and a better quality of process water stored in the on-site lined ponds. In addition to regular maintenance, (for example, repair to the pond liners), the use of a Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) system has helped to clean the process water prior to land application.

In summary, the owners/applicants are proposing the following changes/additions to the existing pistachio processing facility:

- Addition of a future metal Pistachio warehouse/multipurpose building: (max. size 160,000 sq. ft. (200' x 800');
- Future regrading/paving of the employee parking lot;
- Addition of 2 future truck scales; and
- Addition of a new "Shipping" office (Approximately 7,280 sq. ft.)

The proposed modifications, when implemented, will result in more efficient facility operations for Touchstone and its employees. The proposed modifications would not add employees or truck trips, and it would not result in additional groundwater consumption. The facility will continue its typical operations of 12 hours per day (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) except during the harvest period when it operates 24 hours per day.

See Figures 1 showing the existing facility's location. Figure 2, which shows the Project features at Page 4 of the NOP, can be accessed at: <https://tularecounty.ca.gov/rma/planning-building/environmental-planning/environmental-impact-reports/touchstone-pistachio-modification-project/>.

Figures Included in this Notice:

Figure 1 – Vicinity Map

Figure 2 – Site Plan. See Page 4 of the NOP which can be accessed at: <https://tularecounty.ca.gov/rma/planning-building/environmental-planning/environmental-impact-reports/touchstone-pistachio-modification-project/>.

Potential Approvals Required:

The following agencies may have jurisdiction/interests concerning the proposed Project:

County of Tulare Health and Human Services Agency
County of Tulare Resource Management Agencies (Building, Fire, Flood, Public Works)
Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District

The following interested persons/parties are also included in this notification:

Jeffrey T. Roberts, Entitlement Director, Assemi Group

Lead Agency Contact:

If you require additional information related to this notice, please contact:

Gary Mills, Chief Environmental Planner
E-mail: gmills@tularecounty.ca.gov
Phone: (559) 624-7199

Figure 1 - Vicinity Map

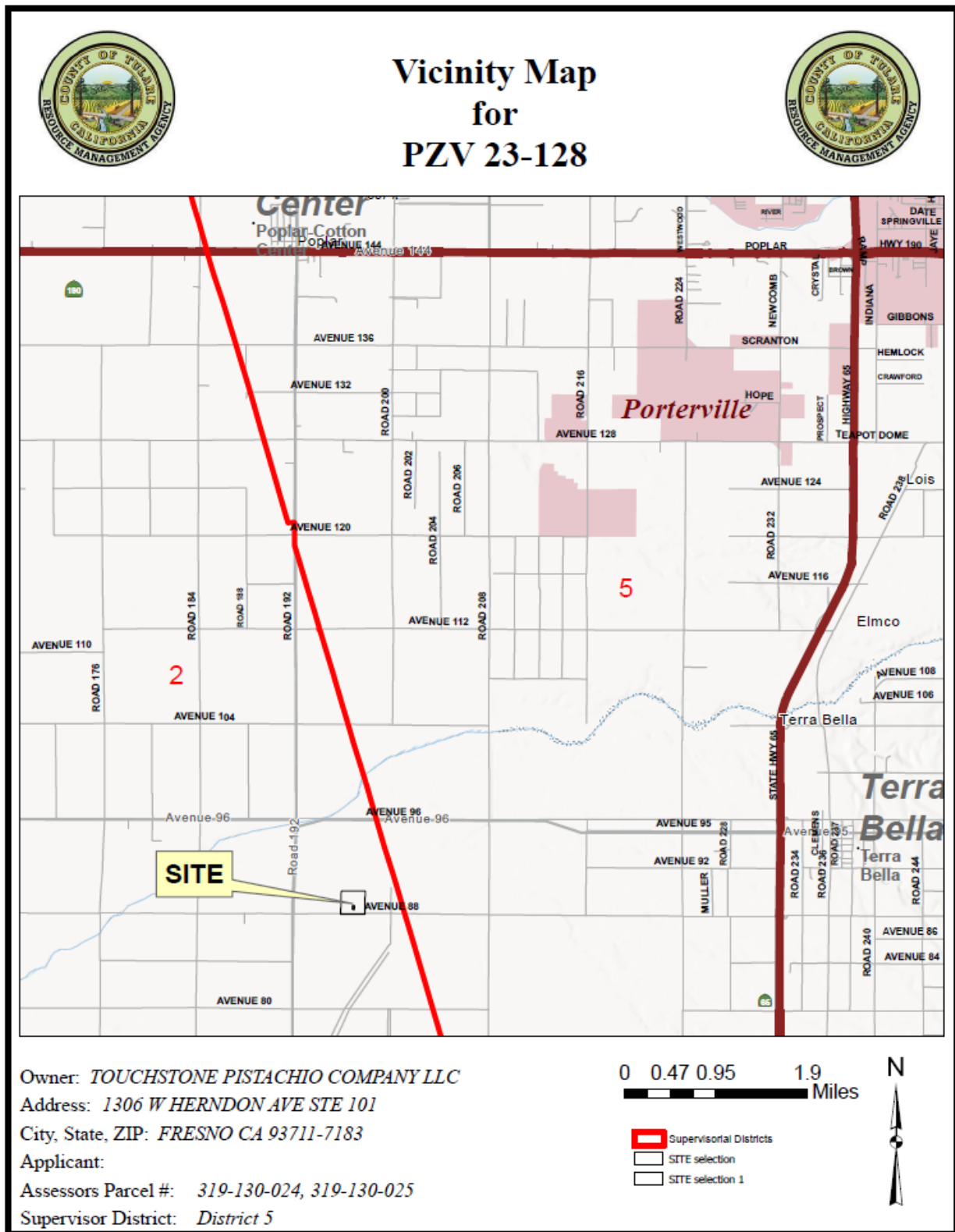
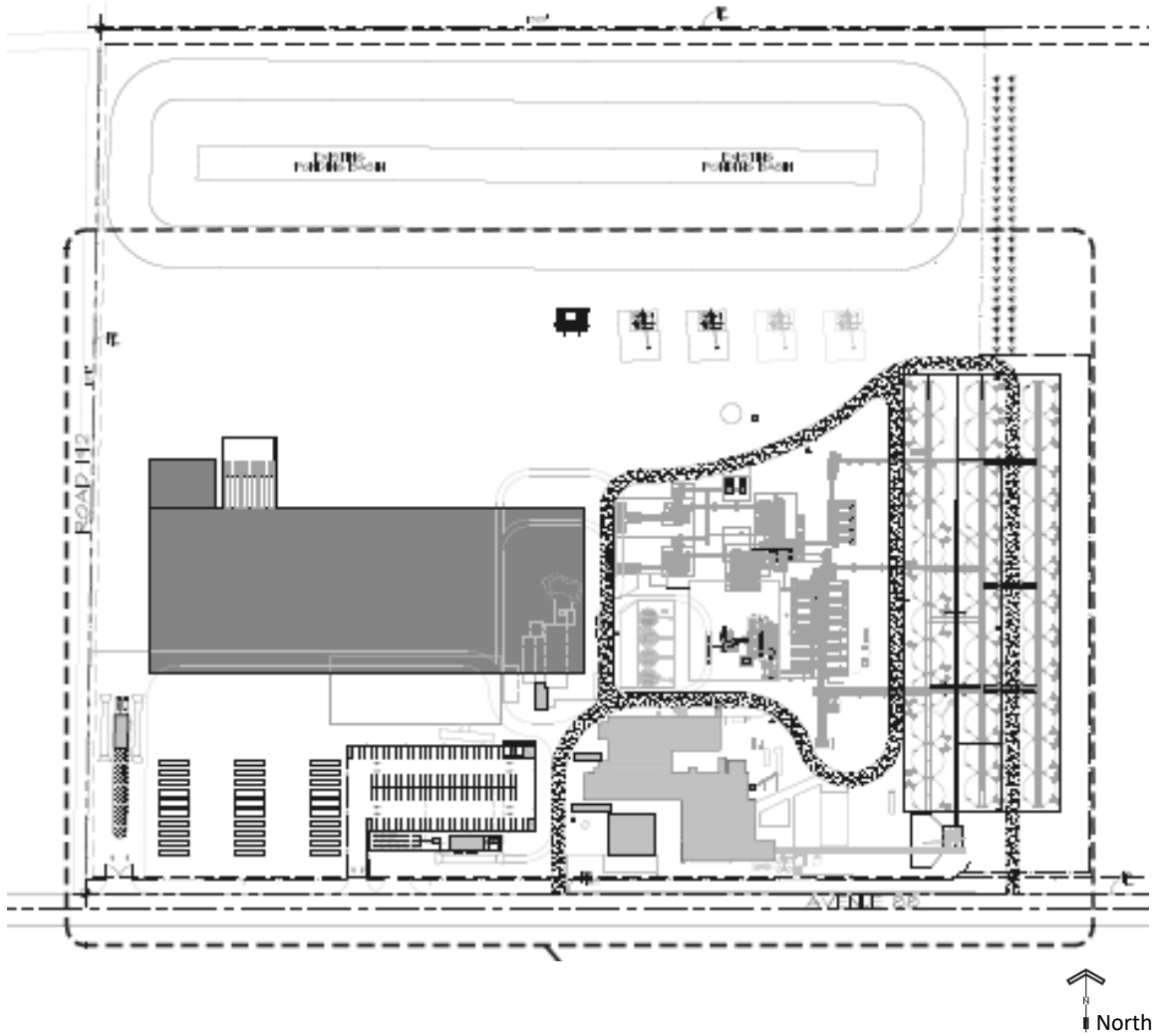


Figure 2 – Site Plan

**ZOOM IN TO SEE DETAIL
(FOLLOWING PAGE)**



PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

As noted earlier, the proposed Project will be located at 19570 Avenue 88, Terra Bella, CA 93270. The existing facility is located 0.5 mile east of the intersection of Avenue 88 and Road 192, approximately 4.25 miles west of the unincorporated community of Terra Bella. The proposed Project is located on County APNs: 319-130-024 and 319-130-025, within Section 2, Township 23 South, Range 26 East, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian.

The proposed Project is in an unincorporated area of Tulare County and is not located within an Urban Development Boundary. State Route 65 is approximately four (4) miles east of the site thereby providing regional access to the proposed Project site. Deer Creek runs approximately one (1) mile north and two (2) miles west of the site and the Friant-Kern Canal runs approximately 0.5 mile east of the site.

The site is designated "Valley Agriculture" and is zoned as AE-40 (Exclusive Agriculture-40 Acre minimum). No expansion of the existing footprint is being proposed. The site is surrounded by intensive agricultural operations in the form of pistachio orchards.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED FACILITIES

As noted earlier, the owners/applicants are proposing the following changes/additions to the existing pistachio processing facility:

- Addition of a future metal Pistachio warehouse/multipurpose building: (max. size 160,000 sq. ft. (200' x 800');
- Future regrading/paving of the employee parking lot;
- Addition of 2 future truck scales; and
- Addition of a new "Shipping" office (Approximately 7,280 sq. ft.)

Also as noted earlier, the proposed modifications would not add employees or truck trips, and it would not result in additional groundwater consumption. The facility will continue its typical operations of 12 hours per day (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) except during the harvest period when it operates 24 hours per day.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The Focused EIR will evaluate, among other things, the probable direct and cumulative environmental impacts associated with expansion of the existing pistachio processing facility. Mitigation measures will be recommended, where feasible, to mitigate potentially significant impacts. The proposed Project will be evaluated on its own merits, resource specific facts, and determinations; therefore, a project specific environmental document will be prepared.

The following resources are proposed for analysis in the Focused EIR:

Air Quality

The EIR will describe regional and local air quality in the vicinity of the proposed Project site and evaluate impacts to air quality associated with the construction, expansion, and continued operation of the proposed Project. It is anticipated that an air quality study will be prepared to establish baseline, project, and cumulative impacts. The proposed Project's estimated air emissions will be compared to emissions thresholds of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD). The EIR will describe existing air quality conditions within the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin and will evaluate the proposed Project's potential air quality impacts. Potential air quality emissions impacts include odor, dust, pathogens, and construction related activities; however, the Project will be required to comply with applicable rules, regulations, permits, health risk assessment, etc.

Biological Resources

The proposed Project's potential to affect biological resources will be analyzed in the EIR. Although highly unlikely due to the proposed modifications, construction of some proposed Project features may modify historic biotic habitats used by sensitive plant and wildlife species. As such, site development may be regulated by state or federal agencies, subject to provisions of the CEQA, and/or covered by policies and ordinances of Tulare County. A technical biological memorandum will be prepared to address issues related to: 1) sensitive biotic resources occurring on the project site; 2) the federal, state, and local laws regulating such resources; and 3) mitigation measures that may be required to reduce the magnitude of anticipated impacts and/or comply with permit requirements of state and federal resource agencies.

Cultural Resources

There are no visible, identifiable, or recognizable historical or cultural resources within the proposed Project area. Native American tribes will be consulted consistent with AB 52; a Sacred Lands File Search will be requested from the California Native American Commission (NACH). A cultural resources records search will be requested of The California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS)/Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center (SSJVIC). The results will be incorporated into the Focused EIR. This Focused EIR will include an analysis of the proposed Project's potential to affect cultural and tribal cultural resources.

Energy

Electrical Service is currently provided to the site. It is not anticipated that energy usage (e.g., gas, gasoline/diesel fuels, electricity) will substantially increase. The EIR will include an analysis of energy resources.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Focused EIR will include a discussion of greenhouse gas emissions and the proposed Project's contribution to potential cumulative impacts on global climate. The proposed Project's estimated greenhouse gas emissions will be evaluated for consistency with the Tulare County 2030 General Plan, the Tulare County Climate Action Plan, and the State's Scoping Plan.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The EIR will evaluate the potential for existing or possible hazardous materials within the project site and the potential for on-site hazardous materials usage. No schools are located proximate to the project site.

Hydrology/Water Quality

FEMA FIRM maps indicate that the proposed Project area site is in Flood Zone B (the 500-year flood boundary) and outside the 100-year flood hazards area. and is also located outside of a Dam Failure Inundation Area. Water is supplied through existing on-site well(s). The EIR will describe the proposed Project's effect, both directly and cumulatively on the hydrology, water quality, and water supply resources. The Focused EIR will analyze the proposed Project's effect on the hydrology, water quality, and water supply resources.

Transportation/Traffic

The EIR will evaluate the Project's impact on regional and local transportation facilities based on a transportation analysis that will assess construction-related impacts (heavy truck trips and construction worker trips), as well as operational impacts (employee trips, incoming and outgoing

materials heavy-duty truck transport, access, and parking). Site access will not be impacted by the proposed Project as there would be no increase in vehicle trips. The EIR will evaluate if there are temporary short-term construction-related transportation impacts or adjustments to long-term operation-related vehicular trips.

Tribal Cultural Resources

See earlier discussion at Cultural Resources.

Utilities/Service Systems

The EIR will evaluate potential impacts related to water, wastewater, and solid waste associated with the project.

ISSUES ANTICIPATED TO BE SCOPED OUT

The following resources will not be impacted by the proposed Project and will not be discussed in the Focused EIR: Aesthetics, Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Geology & Soils, Land Use/Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population/Housing, Public Services, Recreation, and Wildfire.

Aesthetics - The proposed structures to be constructed within the project site will not exceed height limitations as specified in the AE-40 Zone. The structures are typical for agricultural-related pistachio processing operations. As such, the project would not alter the visual character, light, or glare at or near the project site.

Agriculture and Forestry Resources - The project would not alter the existing agricultural uses adjacent to/near the project. As the project would occur on land currently dedicated and used for pistachio processing, no agriculturally active lands would be impacted. Additionally, the project site does not include forested land or forestry resources.

Geology, Soils, and Mineral Resources - The project would be constructed according to current building codes and is not anticipated to result in increased risks due to geologic hazards. Further, as mineral resources are not located within or adjacent to the project site, the project will not impact mineral resources.

Land Use and Planning - The existing use is allowed through its existing special use permit, while the proposed project is also allowed with a minor modification to the existing special use permit. As such, the project is consistent with both its Land Use designation and the AE-40 Zone (Exclusive Agriculture-40 Acre Minimum) and would not impact this resource.

Noise and Vibration - The temporary increase in noise (including off-site, vehicle traffic noise) during construction-related activities would be consistent with county construction noise limits and would not be expected to result in a substantial increase in ambient noise. Operation of the project would not alter existing noise patterns.

Population and Housing - Development of the project would not induce population growth, nor would it displace people or housing. Therefore, no impacts on population and housing are anticipated.

Public Services and Recreation - The project would not alter staff at Touchstone Pistachio and would not induce population growth; as a result, there would be no increased demand for, nor need for construction or expansion of fire protection facilities, law enforcement facilities, school facilities, or park amenities.

Wildfire - There are no lands within the project site nor within the nearby unincorporated community of Terra Bella that are classified as state responsibility areas or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones

by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. As such, the project would not exacerbate wildfire hazards.

GROWTH INDUCEMENT

The EIR will evaluate the proposed Project's potential for growth inducement resulting from expansion or extension of infrastructure improvements, as well as new demand for housing, and goods and services. The effect of primary and secondary increases in employment and economic activity will be discussed.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The EIR will discuss the incremental contribution of the proposed Project to cumulative effects of other past, current, and planned and reasonably foreseeable Projects in the Project vicinity. The summary of projects method will be used where applicable. Also, to the extent feasible, the Cumulative Impacts section will quantify the degree of severity of any cumulative impact.

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED IN THE EIR

In accordance with the CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the EIR will describe a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed Project that are capable of meeting most of the proposed Project's objectives but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the proposed Project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the Lead Agency as infeasible and briefly explain the reasons why. The EIR will also provide an analysis of the No Project Alternative.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Interested individuals, groups, and agencies may provide to the County of Tulare Resource Management Agency, Planning Branch, written comments on topics to be addressed in the EIR for the proposed Project. Because of time limits mandated by state law, comments should be provided no later than **5:00 p.m. January 12, 2024**. Agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed Project should provide the name of a staff contact person. Please send all comments to:

Gary Mills, Chief Environmental Planner
Tulare County Resource Management Agency
Economic Development and Planning Branch
5961 South Mooney Boulevard
Visalia, CA 93277-9394
E-mail at: gmills@co.tulare.ca.us;
Phone: (559) 624-7199