



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CLERK
CEQA FILING COVER SHEET**

THIS SPACE FOR CLERK'S USE ONLY

Complete and attach this form to each CEQA Notice filed with the County Clerk

TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY

Project Title

Watts Empowerment Center Music & Film Studio Expansion & New Outdoor Play Area

Check Document being Filed:

- Environmental Impact Report (EIR)
- Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) or Negative Declaration (ND)
- Notice of Exemption (NOE)
- Other (Please fill in type):

Filing fees are due at the time a Notice of Determination/Exemption is filed with our office. For more information on filing fees and No Effect Determinations, please refer to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, section 753.5.

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: Los Angeles
2400 Imperial Highway, 1st floor Room 1208
Norwalk, CA 90650

From: (Public Agency): Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles
2600 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles CA 90057
(Address)

Project Title: Watts Empowerment Center Music & Film Studio Expansion & New Outdoor Play Area

Project Applicant: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA)

Project Location - Specific:
2250 East 114th Street, Los Angeles, California

Project Location - City: Los Angeles Project Location - County: Los Angeles

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:
HACLA has sought out grants from the Federal and State governments as well as private foundations to improve the Watts Empowerment Center by expanding the building to add a music and film studio for use by residents of Imperial Courts and the surrounding Watts community and to add a new larger playground; improve and update the sports fields and add new landscaping and seating areas.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

- 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));
[X] Categorical Exemption. State type and section number:
[] Statutory Exemptions. State code number:

Reasons why project is exempt:
See Attachment A. The project is exempt per applicable provisions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, 15304, and 15323.

Lead Agency
Contact Person: Jenny Scanlin Area Code/Telephone/Extension: 213.252.2680

- 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: [Signature] Date: 01/08/2024 Title: Chief Development Officer

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code. Date Received for filing at OPR:
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.



THIS NOTICE WAS POSTED
ON January 08 2024
UNTIL February 07 2024



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❖ ATTACHMENT A ❖

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ATTACHMENT A

BACKGROUND, PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION FOR CEQA EXEMPTIONS

1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Imperial Courts Public Housing Project

Imperial Courts located at 11541 Croesus Avenue off Imperial Highway, between Grape Street and Mona Boulevard, totals 36.12 acres and includes 88 structures, including 86 residential buildings, 1 management building, 1 community building and scattered playgrounds and open space. The Imperial Courts is a Federally subsidized project of 490 units that was initiated as war worker housing in May 1944 but redeveloped and fully expanded into a public housing site in 1955. It is operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) and is one of the largest housing projects west of the Mississippi.

The initial build out of Imperial Courts always included a central recreational space with playgrounds, sports fields, and a central gym and community building.

Watts Empowerment Center

The Watts Empowerment Center (primary address: 2250 East 114th Street, Los Angeles, California; and secondary addresses: 11425 and 11513 Gorman Avenue and 1214, 1222, 1234 John Street, 1467 Glen Avenue) is currently occupied as a Recreational Center for commercial use. Onsite operations is branded as Watts Empowerment Center and consists of recreational and children daycare activities. In addition to the primary building, the subject property is also improved with a playground, basketball court, picnic area, skateboard park, softball field, futsal court, modular classroom spaces for childcare and resident meetings, and landscaped areas.

According to available historical sources, the subject property was formerly undeveloped as early as 1896; developed with single-family dwellings between 1922 and 1952; developed with a community building between 1953 and 1963; developed with a community building and two classroom buildings between 1968 and 1998; and developed with the current structures in 1998 and 2000.

Proposed Expansion and Outdoor Improvements

As part of a Choice Neighborhood engagement process in 2019, the community of Watts discussed projects that were important to their community's education and job attainment desires. Out of that process, the community prioritized the development of a Music and Film Studio as an expansion of the Watts Empowerment Center. The Music and Film Studio would be used by onsite Imperial Courts residents and available to youth and young adults throughout Watts to learn the technical and business aspects of music and film production and encourage residents to create their own films and music. The current draft plans assume the studio space will be constructed as a 2,000-3,000 square foot addition to the primary Watts Empowerment Center building in place of an existing outdoor playground.

Initial Community Development Block Grant funding has been set aside by the City of Los Angeles to help with the design and build out of the music and film studio and additional grants from the CA



Arts Council and private donors are assisting with the cost of construction and purchase of various equipment and tools necessary to create a working studio. In October 2022, HACLA undertook a Master Plan Study of the entire recreation center campus with Carrier Johnson as lead architect and came up with a revised schematic for the site that would allow for improved sports facilities, preserve and expand outdoor shade and landscaping as well as play. Based on this plan, HACLA applied for and received funds from the State of California to engage in the rehabilitation of this space. The primary users of the expanded outdoor area will be residents of Imperial Courts.

Demographic Characteristics of Imperial Courts

Amp	Property	Property Name & Address	Acres	Actual Units	Occupied Units	Rate of Occupied Units	No. of Residents	Ethnic Profile			Age/Sex Profile				Average Rent Per Month	Avg. Gross Monthly Income/Family	
								Categories	Count	Percent	Categories	Male	Female	Total			Percent
4019	4019	Imperial Courts 11541 Croesus St. Los Angeles, CA 90059	36.1	486	473	97.3%	1,410	Hispanic	754	53.5%	0-5	66	75	141	10.0%	\$513	\$2,096
								Black	629	44.6%	6-13	163	163	326	23.1%		
								Asian	12	0.9%	14-17	93	87	180	12.8%		
								Am. Indian	0	0.0%	18-21	55	53	108	7.7%		
								Caucasian	12	0.9%	22-40	65	244	309	21.9%		
								Other	3	0.2%	41-60	56	179	235	16.7%		
								Total	1,410	100%	61+	33	78	111	7.9%		
								Total	531		879	1,410	100%				

Additional Stats for Census Tract 2431- 2020 American Community Survey:

Total Population: 6,090 people
 Female: 3,241 people
 Male: 2,849 people

Age
 Median Age: 26 years
 Under 20 years old: 2,559 people

Poverty
 53.9% of the impoverished community are black
 48.2% of community members under 18 live in poverty
 25% of the adult population lives in poverty

Demographics
 62.4% of community members are hispanic or latino
 34.2% of community members are black/african american
 1.9% of community members are white
 1.5% of community members are other

Housing Tenure
 69.4% of housing in the community is renter-occupied
 30.6% of housing in the community is owner-occupied

Labor Force Participation
 38.3% of community members over 16 identify as male
 24.1% of community members over 16 identify as female

Income
 A majority of households making less than \$75,000 spend 30% or more on housing costs
 81.9% of households yearly income is less than \$75,000

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2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) is proposing to add between 2,000 and 3,000 square feet to its existing recreation center at Imperial Courts (branded as the Watts Empowerment Center) to create a new music and film studio and to replace existing outdoor fields and recreation spaces with new landscaping, seating areas, playgrounds and sports courts. Both projects, captured in HACLA's Imperial Courts Recreation Center Master Plan from October 2022 are located in the Watts neighborhood within the City of Los Angeles. The existing Imperial Courts Recreation Area, is 105,200 square feet, with three community buildings totaling 19,570 square feet, and is located at 11541 Croesus Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90059 in the southeastern portion of the Community of Watts. The project site's accessor parcel number (APN) is 6067-013-901, however, it should be noted that this is part of a 13-acre site which also includes a number of residential buildings.

Refer to **Figures 1 and 2** below, which depict the project's location and existing site photographs.

General Plan Land Use and Zoning

The project site has a general plan land use designation of Low Medium II Residential and a zoning designation of Residential Zone (RD2-1) (Refer to **Table 2**).¹

Surrounding Development

The project site is surrounded by an apartment buildings and parking lots to the north, south, east and west.⁷ The surrounding land has similar general plan land use designations of Low Medium II Residential and a zoning designation of Residential Zone (RD2-1) to the east, west, and south (Refer to **Table 2**).⁸



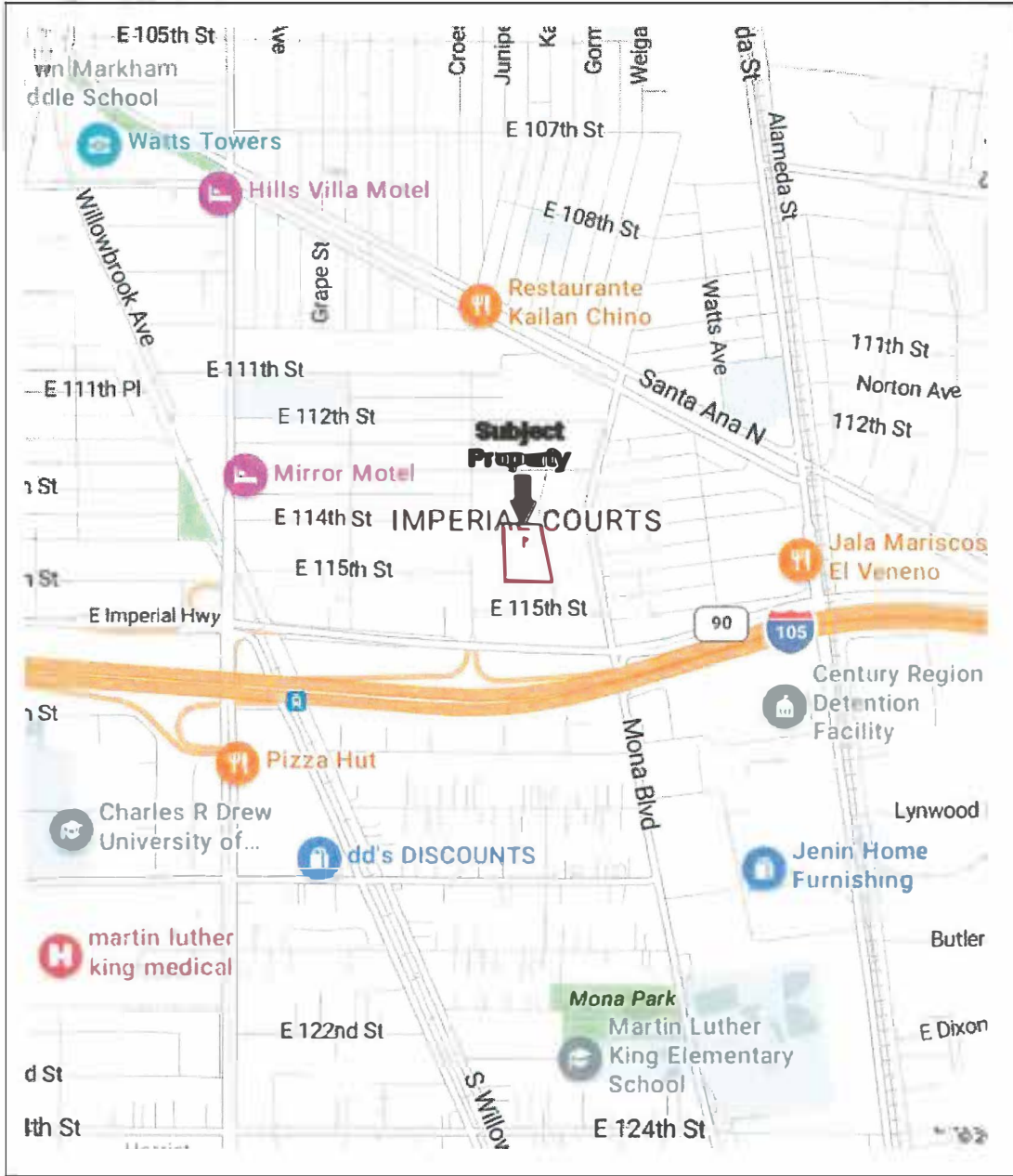
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¹ Zimas, 2023. Accessed online at <http://zimas.lacity.org/>. Accessed on July 24, 2023.



Figure 1
PROJECT LOCATION MAP
& SITE PLAN



Not to Scale

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Figure 2
PROJECT SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1: View of the front of the Watts Empowerment Center



Photo 2: View from the northwest picnic area.



Photo 3: View from the south with ball field.



Photo 4: View of the playground area proposed for music and film studio looking southeast.

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Department of Planning and Development



Table 2
EXISTING LAND USES FOR THE PROJECT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

Location	General Plan Land Use	Zoning Designation	Existing Development
Project Site	Low Medium II Residential	Residential Zone (RD2-1)	Recreation Center and Open Space
North	Low Medium II Residential	Residential Zone (RD2-1)	Apartment buildings
South	Low Medium II Residential	Residential Zone (RD2-1)	Apartment buildings & Computer Lab
East	Low Medium II Residential	Residential Zone (RD2-1)	Apartment buildings
West	Low Medium II Residential	Residential Zone (RD2-1)	Apartment buildings

Source: Zimas, 2023. Accessed online at <http://zimas.lacity.org/>

Building History and Existing Conditions

A recreation center and surrounding recreational and open space was originally constructed in 1955 and has received multiple renovations and additions over time. According to Sanborn maps and LADBS records, the older recreation center was demolished in 1998 and by 2005 the current Watts Empowerment Center and Buildings B and C were constructed and in use. The Watts Empowerment Center and Buildings B and C combine to a total of 19,570 square feet with the primary building estimated at a little over 11,500 square feet. The Watts Empowerment Center has a large main gym, commercial kitchen, offices, bathrooms and a number of rooms for exercise, homework, and engagement. The primary gym has a stage. The surrounding play areas include picnic spaces, shade trees, playgrounds, a child care center, additional classroom/offices and various fields and sports courts.

Project Operations

It is anticipated that the project site will continue to serve the same population after renovations as before. The services and open spaces are primarily used by the over 1,400 residents of Imperial Courts public housing and the surrounding neighborhood in southeast Watts. The project site would continue to operate Monday through Saturday with normal hours of operation between 8am and 6pm, with some extended hours during summer and with special events.

The project is made up of two components. The expansion of the Watts Empowerment Center is expected to include new construction, through a building expansion of approximately 2,000-3,000 square feet. The expansion may require minor renovations to the Empowerment Center building to ensure the property meets California building standards codes. The second component, which includes the rehabilitation of open space, including construction of new playgrounds, ball fields, and seating areas as well as landscaping will take place within the existing envelope of the outdoor area. Renovations or alterations would not substantially change land uses, and are not expected to substantially change existing unit counts.

HACLA currently contracts with RedEye, a nonprofit benefit corporation to operate services in the Watts Empowerment Center and activate programming of the outdoor spaces. Permit applications, would be submitted after architectural and landscape drawings are complete. HACLA will contract with one or more general contractors to complete work. HACLA expects to initiate design drawings in Q1 2024 and hopes to be in permit review and plan check by Q4 2024. The expectation is to begin

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construction of both project components by Q2 2025 and complete all construction by Q3 2026.

REASONS WHY THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT

The proposed project is exempt from CEQA under three categorical exemptions.

Categorical Exemptions

Class 1 (CEQA Guidelines 15301): Existing Structures

Class 1 consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The types of “existing facilities” itemized below are not intended to be all-inclusive of the types of projects which might fall within Class 1. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Interior or exterior alterations involving such things as interior partitions, plumbing, and electrical conveyances;
- Restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment to meet current standards of public health and safety, unless it is determined that the damage was substantial and resulted from an environmental hazard such as earthquake, landslide, or flood;
- Additions to existing structures provided that the addition will not result in an increase of more than:
 - 50 percent of the floor area of the structures before the addition, or 2,500 square feet, whichever is less; or
 - 10,000 square feet if:
 - The project is in an area where all public services and facilities are available to allow for maximum development permissible in the General Plan, and
 - The area in which the project is located is not environmentally sensitive.
- Addition of safety or health protection devices for use during construction of or in conjunction with existing structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment, or topographical features including navigational devices;
- New copy on existing on and off-premise signs;
- Maintenance of existing landscaping

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- Division of existing multiple family or single-family residences into common-interest ownership and subdivision of existing commercial or industrial buildings, where no physical changes occur which are not otherwise exempt;
- Demolition and removal of individual small structures listed in this subdivision;
 - (1) One single-family residence. In urbanized areas, up to three single-family residences may be demolished under this exemption.
 - (2) A duplex or similar multifamily residential structure. In urbanized areas, this exemption applies to duplexes and similar structures where not more than six dwelling units will be demolished.
 - (3) A store, motel, office, restaurant, and similar small commercial structure if designed for an occupant load of 30 persons or less. In urbanized areas, the exemption also applies to the demolition of up to three such commercial buildings on sites zoned for such use.
 - (4) Accessory (appurtenant) structures including garages, carports, patios, swimming pools, and fences.

Justification why Project is Exempt: Any renovation or alteration of the existing structures by implementation of this project would be considered an allowable addition to an existing structure. The project does not propose additions or demolition exceeding the limits set forth in Section 15301 as it is currently proposed for approximately 2,500 square feet. However, if the expansion exceeds this square footage, it will remain far below 10,000 and the project area is already served by existing public services and facilities and the area is not considered environmentally sensitive after conducting a Phase I and Phase II study. Therefore, the project would be exempt from CEQA under a Class 1 categorical exemption.

Class 4 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15304): Minor Alteration to Land

Class 4 consists of minor public or private alternations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Grading on land with a slope of less than 10 percent
- (b) New gardening or landscaping, including the replacement of existing conventional landscaping with water efficient or fire resistant landscaping.
- (c) Filling of earth into previously excavated land
- (d) Minor alterations in land, water and vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas
- (e) Minor temporary use of land having negligible or no permanent effects on the environment
- (f) Minor trenching or backfilling where the surface is restored
- (g) Maintenance dredging where the spoil is deposited in a spoil area authorized by all state and federal regulatory agencies



- (h) The creation of bicycle lanes on existing right-of-way
- (i) Fuel management activities within 30 feet of structures to reduce the volume of flammable vegetation

Justification why Project is Exempt: The project proposes to renovate and replace existing landscape and outdoor spaces in the Imperial Courts Recreation Area. The renovation and replacement does not anticipate currently the reduction or loss of any existing mature trees that are in healthy condition. If any trees are removed, they will be done through local City permit and replaced with two additional trees on site for every one tree removed. The new landscaping and related irrigation systems will replace what is existing at the site and ensure improved use and maintenance standards. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under a Class 4 categorical exemption.

Class 23 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15323): Normal Operations of Facilities for Public Gatherings.

Class 23 consists of normal operations of existing facilities for public gatherings for which the facilities were designed, where there is a past history of the facility being used for the same or similar kind of purpose. Past history means that the same or similar activity has been occurring for at least three years and there is a reasonable expectation that a the future occurrence of the activity would not represent a change in the operation of the facility.

Justification why Project is Exempt: The proposed project consists the expansion and renovation of a community facility and surrounding open space and its continue operation to serve the surrounding population. The proposed operator of the facility will remain the same and the facility currently has a small music studio and film equipment. The proposed expansion will just add new space to help with improved programming and services. The sports fields are not in good condition for regular use or organized games although they were used for such in the past. The renovations of the outdoor area will allow for the continuation of outdoor play and engagement. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under a Class 23 categorical exemption.

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