

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To: County Clerk, Peter Aldana
County of Riverside
2724 Gateway Dr.
Riverside, CA 92507

From: Desert Sands Unified School
District
47-950 Dune Palms Road
La Quinta, CA 92253

Project Title:

La Quinta High School Grounds Building

Project Location - Specific:

79-255 Blackhawk Way, La Quinta, CA 92253

Project Location - City: La Quinta

Project Location - County: Riverside

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The proposed project consists of the construction of a new grounds building for the storage of equipment used to maintain the baseball/softball fields, concessions area, and restrooms for the sports fields at La Quinta High School. Construction is expected to begin in spring of 2025 and conclude by December 2025.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

Desert Sands Unified School District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

Desert Sands Unified School District

Exempt Status:

- 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: CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 Class 3, 15314 Class 14, and Section 15332 Class 32
- Statutory Exemption: (PRC §21080.23, CEQA Guidelines Section 15284)

Reasons why project is exempt:

See the Attachment for a discussion on why the project is exempt from CEQA.

Lead Agency Contact Person:

Patrick Cisneros

Telephone:

760-771-8516

If filed by applicant:

1. Attached certified document of exemption findings
2. Has NOE been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Agency Representative Signature: _____

Title: Director, Facilities Services

Date: 09/10/2024

- Signed by Lead Agency
- Signed by Applicant

Date Received for Filing at OPR _____

FILED / POSTED

County of Riverside
Peter Aldana
Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder
E-202400978
09/11/2024 09:35 AM Fee: \$ 50.00
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CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

**LA QUINTA HIGH SCHOOL
NEW GROUNDS BUILDING PROJECT**

This document assesses the use of categorical exemptions in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed addition of a new grounds building adjacent to the baseball fields at La Quinta High School under California Public Resources Code Section 21084 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15303 Class 3, 15314 Class 14, and 153332 Class 32 (California Code of Regulations Title 14 Sections 15000 et seq.).

1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD or District) is proposing improvements at the baseball fields at La Quinta High School, La Quinta, California (the proposed project). The school opened in 1994 and the District has determined that a new grounds building, including concessions area, and restrooms, are needed adjacent to the baseball fields at the school. The existing school includes two baseball fields adjacent to each other, one for varsity and one for junior varsity (JV) baseball teams. The existing fields include baseball diamonds, protective fencing, bleachers, lighting, walkways, and batting cages.

The proposed project consists of the construction of a new, approximately 1,500 square foot grounds building to store field maintenance equipment, concession area, as well as restrooms to service competitors and visitors that use the baseball fields. The grounds building will be located in between the two baseball fields and adjacent to the fence that separates the school from the Coachella Valley Storm Channel that runs adjacent to the school on the south side. The project will not add classrooms or remove any classrooms or other structures from the school site.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND ZONING

The proposed project site is located at 79-255 Blackhawk Way, La Quinta, California, 92253. The campus is located east of Adams Street on the south side of Blackhawk Way, and west of Dune Palms Road in the city of La Quinta. Regional access to the site is provided by Interstate 10 (I-10) via Dune Palms or Adams Street, (Jefferson Street off-ramp), approximately 3 miles north of the site. State Route 111 (CA-111), is located approximately one-half mile south of the site school and is accessed via Dune Palms or Adams Street.

1.2 EXISTING FACILITIES

La Quinta High School contains multiple single-story and two-story buildings and classrooms, as well as a cafeteria, tennis courts, football and track stadium; baseball fields, gymnasium, swim pool and stadium, restroom buildings, multipurpose room, hardscape areas, and a library. Parking is provided in two parking lots: (1) one located on the northern

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side of the school adjacent to Blackhawk Way; and (2) one located on the eastern side of the school site adjacent to Dune Palms Road. A student pick up and drop off area is located on the northern portion of the site with access to Blackhawk Way and a second pick up and drop off area is located within the parking lot on Dune Palms Road. The areas surrounding La Quinta High School are largely residential on the north and east, and includes the La Quinta Park north of the school on Blackhawk Way. Undeveloped land that consists of the north bank of the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel (CVSC) is located immediately south of the site, with a commercial area on the southern banks of the stormwater channel.

The La Quinta High School site is designated for Major Community Facilities (MC) in the La Quinta General Plan (La Quinta, 2012) and the Zoning Map. The Major Community Facilities designation allows the use of schools and other types of public facilities. This area of the City has been developed and surrounding land uses include low density residential to the north and east, open space – recreation (La Quinta Park) to the north; open space – natural (the stormwater channel) to the south; and General Commercial uses to the south, on the other side of the storm channel.

1.3 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY

La Quinta High School serves Grade 9 through Grade 12 and had an enrollment of 2,488 students in the 2023-2024 school year. Table 1 shows student enrollment at La Quinta High School over the last 10 years averaged approximately 2,616 students per year.

TABLE 1

La Quinta High School Enrollment History

SCHOOL YEAR	ENROLLMENT
2023-2024	2,488
2022-2023	2,500
2021-2022	2,582
2020-2021	2,511
2019-2020	2,535
2018-2019	2,635
2017-2018	2,691
2016-2017	2,666
2015-2016	2,740
2014-2015	2,814
10-Year Average Enrollment	2,616

Source: CDE, 2024

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2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project proposes to construct a new grounds building adjacent to the existing at baseball fields at La Quinta High School. The existing school includes two baseball fields adjacent to each other, one for varsity and one for the JV baseball teams. The existing fields have been recently modernized and include reconfigured baseball diamonds, protective fencing, new aluminum bleachers, lighting, batting cages, concrete access road, and a concrete pedestrian sidewalk (from the baseball fields to the football stadium).

The proposed project consists of the construction of a new approximately 1,500 square foot grounds building to store field maintenance equipment, as well as the addition of restrooms to service visitors that use the baseball fields. The grounds building will be located in between the two existing baseball fields and adjacent to the fence that separates the school from the Coachella Valley Storm Channel that runs adjacent to the school on the south side. The project will not add or remove any classrooms from the school site. Therefore, there will be no change in the number of classrooms or the student capacity of the school following completion of the project.

3.0 CEQA EVALUATION

**3.1 CLASS 3 EXEMPTION – NEW CONSTRUCTION OR CONVERSION OF
SMALL STRUCTURES**

A Class 3 Exemption (CEQA Section 15303 – New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) applies to the “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.” Examples of this exemption include:

- a. Structures not exceeding 2,500 square feet and not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances. In urbanized areas, the exemption also applies to commercial buildings not exceeding 10,000 square feet in floor areas on sites zoned for such uses and not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances.
- b. Accessory structures.

The proposed project would add a new approximately 1,500 sq ft. grounds maintenance building for the storage of field equipment and restroom facilities to service the baseball fields at La Quinta High School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. Therefore, the project includes the construction of one small structure. The overall purpose of the school and the baseball fields would not change. The project would not result in any expansion of the existing use and there will be no increase in the number of classrooms or overall student capacity.

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Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15303 Class 3 exemption for the following reasons:

- (1) The proposed new building is small (approximately 1,500 sq. ft. building) and consists of one accessory structure to the existing baseball fields that will be used to store equipment, as well as provide restrooms for visitors to the existing ball fields.
- (2) The new structure would be small and not exceed 2,500 square feet.
- (3) The new building will not result in a change in purpose of the existing baseball fields and they will continue to be used for athletic purposes.

3.2 CLASS 14 EXEMPTION – MINOR ADDITIONS TO SCHOOLS

CEQA guidelines include exemptions for certain types of minor projects, including school projects. A Class 14 Exemption (CEQA Section 15314 – Minor Additions to Schools) applies to “minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or 10 classrooms, whichever is less.”

The objective of the proposed project is to construct a new grounds building and restroom facilities at the existing baseball fields at La Quinta High School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. The number of classrooms at La Quinta High School would not change (increase or decrease) after construction activities are complete. The capacity of the school would not change and thus the student capacity is not expected to increase (i.e., increase in capacity would be less than 25%).

All of the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are within the confines of the existing school. The proposed project would not result in any increase in classrooms or result in an increase in student capacity. Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15314 Class 14 exemption for the following reasons:

- (1) The proposed project would not result in an increase in classrooms (which is less than 10 classrooms); and
- (2) There would be no increase in student capacity (which is less than 25 percent).

3.3 CLASS 32 EXEMPTION – IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

A Class 32 Exemption (CEQA Section 15332 – In-Fill Development Projects) include exemptions for in-fill development that consists of the following:

- a. The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designations and regulations.

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- b. The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses.
- c. The project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.
- d. Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic noise, air quality, or water quality.
- e. The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

The proposed project would add a new approximately 1,500 sq ft. grounds maintenance building for the storage of field equipment and restroom facilities to service the baseball fields at La Quinta High School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. Therefore, the project includes the construction of one small structure as in-fill development. The overall purpose of the school and the baseball fields would not change.

All of the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are within the confines of the existing school which is currently zoned for school purposes. Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15332 Class 32 exemption for the following reasons:

- a. The La Quinta High School site is designated for Major Community Facilities (MC) in the La Quinta General Plan (La Quinta, 2012) and the Zoning Map. The Major Community Facilities designation allows the use of schools and other types of public facilities. Therefore, the project is consistent with the existing land use and zoning designations of the site.
- b. The development occurs within the La Quinta city limits. The building would be approximately 1,500 square feet. Therefore, the project would be much less than five acres and is largely surrounded by urban uses as described in Section 1.2 above.
- c. The location of the grounds building is where non-native, existing turf is located to support the baseball fields which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.
- d. Construction of the grounds building would provide: (1) storage for landscaping and field equipment; concession space, and (2) restrooms for visitors to use when competing in or observing games. The project would not expand the existing fields or bleachers or increase the number of attendees at a game. The project would be built where existing turf is located, which has already been graded. Impacts to noise, air quality or water quality would be limited to the several month period when construction activities would occur. Construction activities are expected to be minor because the construction of the new building is small (approximately 1,500 square feet) which would require minimal construction workers and equipment as the site is already graded. Following the construction of the foundation, equipment would be limited to hand held equipment, air compressors, etc. Further, construction activities that generate noise would be limited to daylight hours, which minimizes the potential for noise impacts.

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Air quality impacts would also be minimal as very little construction equipment (e.g., graders, rollers, excavators) would be required and limited to the construction of the foundation. Once construction activities are completed, no additional air quality impacts would be generated over the existing school site.

Traffic impacts would also be limited to the construction period. The number of construction workers would be small because the building will be approximately 1,500 square feet and is not expected to require more than 10-15 workers at any given time. After construction, the project will not increase the size or capacity of the bleachers or generate additional visitors or traffic to the site.

Water use would be limited to a small amount used to suppress dust generation during construction activities. Because of the arid nature of the environment in La Quinta, no water runoff from the site would be expected due to the use of water during construction activities. Water from the restrooms will be directed to the existing sewer system and eventually treated at a public wastewater treatment plant. As discussed above, the project will not increase the size or capacity of the bleachers, generating additional visitors to the site. Therefore, the project is not expected to result in an increase in wastewater generated by the school site or result in significant water quality impacts.

Based on the above, the project would not result in significant impacts to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality.

- e. La Quinta High School is currently served by all public utilities and public services and no changes in those utilities or services are expected due to be required due to the proposed project.

3.3 EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXEMPTIONS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2, Exceptions, identifies conditions under which categorical exemptions would not be applicable. The proposed project has been reviewed under Section 15300.2 for characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project is exempt.

A. Location

CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(a) states that Class 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 exemptions are qualified by consideration of whether the project is located in a uniquely sensitive environment, such that it impacts an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern that has been designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies. This exception does not apply to Class 14 and 32 exemptions. Under the Class 3 exemptions, all modifications would occur within an existing high school campus in an urban community where turf associated with baseball

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fields is currently located and there are no known sensitive environmental conditions. Therefore, this exemption does not apply to this project.

B. Cumulative Impact

Exemptions are not applicable when there is a significant cumulative impact of "successive projects of the same type in the same place over time." Beyond the proposed project, the District has no other planned improvements at La Quinta High School.

The District has completed school modernization improvements at other schools in the District, including: (1) Abraham Lincoln Elementary School located on Rutledge Way in Palm Desert, approximately 5 miles northwest of La Quinta High School; (2) Gerald Ford Elementary School on Warner Trail in Indian Wells, approximately 2 miles northwest of La Quinta High School; and (3) Carter Elementary School located on Hovley Lane, in Palm Desert, approximately 5.6 miles northwest of La Quinta High School. Two other school modernization projects in Indio, James Madison Elementary School (1.5 miles) and John F. Kennedy Elementary School, have also been implemented by the DSUSD and these school sites are located 1.5 and 2.3 miles, respectively, east of La Quinta High School. The construction activities associated with these school improvements have been completed. Therefore, there are no cumulative impacts with the proposed project.

The District recently improved the baseball fields at La Quinta High School which included upgrades to the varsity and junior varsity baseball fields including new turf, reorienting the varsity field, new bleachers, a new access roadway, a new crosswalk, and a new pedestrian sidewalk from the football stadium at La Quinta High School. These improvements modernized and improved the fields and added safe access to the baseball fields and the football stadiums but did not expand the uses of these facilities. The modernization activities have been completed and the grounds building will compliment and complete the needed upgrades to the baseball fields. No additional cumulative impacts with these facilities are expected as the construction activities for the baseball fields and related facilities have been completed.

Environmental effects caused by the modernization and improvements to other schools would be localized, limited to construction activities, and not within range of project effects at the other school sites, e.g., traffic, noise, etc. Each school's modernization project would comply with applicable local, state, and federal regulations and District best management practices. Therefore, any potential overlap of construction activities/schedules would not result in a significant adverse impact and would not be cumulatively considerable. Additionally, there are no related projects near La Quinta High School whose environmental effects could be combined with the proposed project's to create cumulatively significant construction and operational impacts. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

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C. Significant Effects

A categorical exemption cannot 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 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(c)). The determination whether this exception applies involves two distinct questions: (1) whether the project presents unusual circumstances, and (2) whether there is a reasonable possibility that a significant environmental impact will result from those unusual circumstances. The lead agency considers the second prong of this test only if it first finds that some circumstance of the project is unusual. *Berkeley Hillside Preservation v. City of Berkeley (2015) 60 C4th 1086, 1104.*

The proposed facility improvements at La Quinta High School are not unusual. The proposed project, including the addition of a grounds building and restrooms to service the existing baseball fields, would be confined to the boundaries of the existing school campus. The facility improvements would be common for school facility construction projects, which must adhere to strict standards established by California Code of Regulations Title 5, California Building Code, and California Education Code and are overseen by the California Department of Education and Division of the State Architect.

La Quinta High School serves an urbanized area and the District does not forecast substantial enrollment growth at the school or within the District. The proposed project implementation will not result in an increase in student capacity as no additional classrooms will be built. The proposed project would result in normal construction activities within the confines of the existing campus. The project would add a building and restrooms at the baseball fields, but is not expected to result in substantial changes and school operations would be substantially the same as current operations.

There are no known unusual circumstances related to the project site or the proposed project, and there is also no evidence that the project would cause significant direct or indirect environmental effects. The District and its construction manager will comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and best management practices that would minimize potential environmental impacts caused by construction activities. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

D. Scenic Highways

A categorical exemption cannot 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 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(d)). The closest officially designated scenic highway is State Route 74 which runs southwest from CA-111 in Palm Desert, CA (Cal Trans, 2024). La Quinta High School is located approximately eight miles northeast of the portion of State Route 74 where the scenic highway designation begins. Due to the distance, topography, and intervening hills/structures, the school site would not be visible or result in a visual

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impact to a scenic resource. Further, the project would add one small, one-story building (approximately 1,500 square feet) and would not be visible to a scenic highway. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

E. Hazardous Waste Sites

A categorical exemption cannot be used for a project on a site that is on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(e)). Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code specifies: (1) lists of hazardous materials sites and hazardous waste facilities; (2) hazardous waste discharges for which the State Water Quality Control Board has issued certain types of orders; (3) public drinking water wells containing detectable levels of organic contaminants; (4) underground storage tanks with reported unauthorized releases; and (5) solid waste disposal facilities from which hazardous waste has migrated. Three regulatory agency databases were searched including: (1) GeoTracker, maintained by the State Water Resources Control Board (RWQCB, 2024); (2) EnviroStor, maintained by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC, 2024); and (3) EnviroMapper, maintained by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA, 2024).

Using these search databases, no active hazardous sources were found within over 4,000 feet of La Quinta High School. Two gas stations cases were located over 3,000 feet from the school (RWQCB, 2024). Both sites had completed cleanup activities approximately 18 years ago and have been closed by the RWQCB, meaning that cleanup of the sites have been completed to applicable standards and there is very little chance for potential impacts to off-site properties of any significance. Further, these sites are located over one-half mile away from La Quinta High School. No significant potential impacts are expected as a result of contamination that would impact La Quinta High School. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

F. Historic Resources

A categorical exemption cannot be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. Historical resources are defined as buildings, structures, or objects that are more than 50 years old (CCR 4852(d)(2)). La Quinta High School first opened in 1994 and does not meet the minimum age requirement of 50 years to be considered for historical significance. The school site is not listed on an official local register of historical resources, the California Register of Historical Resources, nor the National Register of Historic Places (OHP, 2024). The structures at the school do not embody distinctive characteristics or a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represent the work of an important creative individual or possess high artistic values (CEQA Guidelines §1604.5(a)(3)(C)). Further, no buildings will be demolished at the school site. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a direct impact to historical resources and this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

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4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15303 Class 3 exemption, §15314 Class 14 exemption and §15332 Class 32 exemption for the following reasons:

- (1) The proposed new grounds building is small (less than 2,500 square feet) and consists of one accessory structure to the existing baseball fields.
- (2) The new building will not result in a change in purpose of the existing baseball fields and they will continue to be used for athletic purposes.
- (3) The proposed project would not result in an increase in classrooms (which is less than 10 classrooms).
- (4) The proposed project would not result in an increase in student capacity; therefore, the capacity of the school would not increase more than 25 percent.
- (5) The proposed project is consistent with the existing land use and zoning designations of the site by the City of La Quinta.
- (6) The development will occur within the urbanized portion of the city of La Quinta.
- (7) The proposed new building would be approximately 1,500 square feet and less than five acres.
- (8) The location of the grounds building will be constructed where existing turf is currently located and which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.
- (9) The proposed project would not expand the existing fields or bleachers or increase the number of attendees at a game. Therefore, the project would not permanently change or increase traffic, noise, air quality or water quality.
- (10) The school site is currently served by all public utilities and public services and no changes in those utilities or services are expected to be required due to the proposed project.
- (11) None of the exceptions to the exemptions apply to the proposed project.

Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School meet the requirements of CEQA Guidelines §15303 Class 3 exemption, §15314 Class 14 exemption and §15332 Class 32 exemption and the proposed project is exempt under CEQA.

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5.0 REFERENCES

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