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CEQA: California Environmental Quality Act

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KERN COUNTY

OCT 16 2024

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

AIMEE X. ESPINOZA
AUDITOR CONTROLLER-COUNTY CLERK
BY U.H. DEPUTY

To: Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Sierra Sands Unified School District
113 W. Felspar Avenue
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

County Clerk-Recorder
County of Kern
1115 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Murray Middle School Improvements Project
Project Title

200 E Drummond Avenue
Project Location - Specific

Ridgecrest
Project Location - City

Kern
Project Location - County

The District proposes to implement a new 93-space parking lot (parking lot C) along the northeastern boundary campus, and two new classroom buildings. Building C1 will be a one-story, 10-980-square foot building that will be located directly south of the existing Building C, and will contain three new classrooms, a teachers workroom, custodial closets, and boys/girls restrooms. Additionally Building E will be a one-story, 6,865-foot building that will contain six new classrooms, mechanical and electrical storage rooms, and one faculty restroom.

All project improvements will occur on campus, and no off-site improvements will be included as part of the proposed project.

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project

Sierra Sands Unified School District
Name of Public Agency Approving Project

Sierra Sands Unified School District
Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project

Exempt Status: (check one below)

- 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: Class 11, CCR §15311, Accessory Structures; Class 14, CCR §15314, Minor Additions to Schools
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Notice of Environmental Document
Posted by County Clerk on 10-16-2024
and for 30 days thereafter, Pursuant to
Section 21192(C), Public Resources Code

25222

The proposed new 93-space parking is exempt from CEQA under the Class 11, Accessory Structures (Section 15311). The new parking lot will be located in the northeastern corner of the campus that is current vacant land will be consisted accessory structures for elementary school use, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

The proposed construction of two new classroom buildings (Building C1 and E) are exempt from CEQA under Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (Section 15314). The new classroom buildings will be located within the school campus and will increase the total number of classrooms by nine. Since the new buildings will be located within the same campus and will not increase the school classrooms by more than ten, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15314.

Therefore, the proposed project will not alter or expand the existing school use, will not increase the school classrooms by more than ten, and will only make minor modifications to the existing campus. No off-campus improvements will occur.

The proposed project was also reviewed for possible exceptions under Section 15300.2 and found that the exceptions do not apply. See Attachment to Notice of Exemption for further explanation of the evaluation.

Reasons why project is exempt

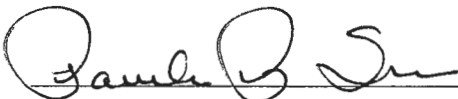
Maurice Macare
Contact Person:

(805) 440-9013
Area Code/Telephone/Extension:

If filed by applicant:

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

Date
Received for
Filing: _____

Signature:  Title: ASST SUPT OF BUSINESS

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: _____

Attachment to Notice of Exemption
Murray Middle School Improvements Project
Sierra Sands Unified School District
SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The Sierra Sands Unified School District (SSUSD or District) proposes to implement a new 93-space parking lot (parking lot C) along the northeastern boundary campus, and two new classroom buildings (Building C1 and Building E) at Murray Middle School (project). This supplemental information provides justification for the Categorical Exemption pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15311 and Section 15314.

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

PROJECT LOCATION

The Murray Middle School (MS) campus is at 200 E Drummond Avenue in the City of Ridgecrest in Kern County (project site). The Murray MS campus is bound by Knox Road to the east and Drummond Avenue to the south (see Figure 1, *Local Vicinity*). The campus has a land use designation of Military (MIL), and a zoning designation of Urban Reserve (UR).

Regional access to the campus is provided via State Route 178 (SR-178) located approximately 0.75 mile south of the campus, and United States Route 395 (US 395) located approximately 6.5 miles west of the campus.

SURROUNDING LAND USES

The Murray MS campus is surrounded by additional MIL land uses to the north with a zoning designation of UR, Commercial (C) land uses with a zoning designation of General Commercial (GC) to the west, Institutional (I) land uses with a zoning designation of UR to the east, and Park land uses (P) with a zoning designation of Recreation/School/Public Use (RSP) to the south across Drummond Avenue (City of Ridgecrest 2009).

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Murray Middle School is a 6th grade through 8th grade public school with a 2023-2024 enrollment of 686 students, according to the California Department of Education (CDE) (CDE 2024). The campus is currently developed with permanent nine existing buildings (Building A1, A2, B, C, D1, D2, D3, D4, and D5).

The existing parking lot A has 8 parking spaces, and the existing parking lot B has 79 parking spaces. Vehicular drop off/pick areas for the campus is provided on the south end of the campus along Drummond Avenue.

DISTRICT

The SSUSD provides school services to the cities of Ridgecrest, Inyokern, China Lake, Johannesburg, and Kernville. The District includes six elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one continuation high school and one adult education school. Districtwide enrollment in the 2023-2024 school year was 5,122 students (CDE 2024).

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The District proposes to implement a new 93-space parking lot (parking lot C) along the northeastern boundary campus, and two new classroom buildings. Building C1 will be a one-story, 10-980-square foot building that will be located directly south of the existing Building C, and will contain three new classrooms, a teachers workroom, custodial closets, and boys/girls restrooms. Additionally Building E will be a one-story, 6,865-foot building that will contain six new classrooms, mechanical and electrical storage rooms, and one faculty restroom.

All project improvements will occur on campus, and no off-site improvements will be included as part of the proposed project (see Figure 2, *Project Improvements Area*, and Figure 3a-3b, *Proposed Project Improvements*).

CONSTRUCTION

Construction of the proposed project will occur over approximately 15 months beginning in the summer 2024. All construction equipment and workers will be located within the boundaries of the project site and contractors will adhere to construction noise regulations to avoid disruption to campus operations.

3. REASONS WHY THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT

The proposed project is exempt from further environmental review under the requirements of the CEQA (Public Resources Code §§ 21000 et seq.) because it is consistent with a Class 11 and Class 14 exemption.

- » **Class 11, Accessory Structures (CEQA Guidelines § 15311)** consists of construction, or replacement of minor structures accessory to existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities including but not limited to: (b) Small parking lots.

The proposed new 93-space parking is exempt from CEQA under the Class 11, *Accessory Structures* (Section 15311). The new parking lot will be located in the northeastern corner of the campus that is current vacant land will be consisted accessory structures for elementary school use, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

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

The proposed construction of two new classroom buildings (Building C1 and E) are exempt from CEQA under Class 14, *Minor Additions to Schools* (Section 15314). The new classroom buildings will be located within the school campus and will increase the total number of classrooms by nine. Since the new buildings will be located within the same campus and will not increase the school classrooms by more than ten, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15314.

Therefore, the proposed project will not alter or expand the existing school use, will not increase the school classrooms by more than ten, and will only make minor modifications to the existing campus. No off-campus improvements will occur.

4. REVIEW OF EXCEPTIONS TO THE CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

The proposed project has been reviewed under CEQA Guidelines § 15300.2 - Exceptions, for any characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project is exempt from CEQA. Each exception is listed below followed by an assessment of whether that exception applies to the proposed 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 have an 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 on an existing middle school campus. The campus has buildings, concrete walkways, play areas, and ornamental landscaping. Due to the school's developed nature and frequent human disturbance, it does not contain any sensitive biological species or habitat. No mapped wetlands exist on the project site (FWS 2024).

Additionally, there is no evidence of hazardous materials or substances on the campus (see section (e) below). Therefore, this 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 improvements are the only known and planned improvements to the campus during the planned construction. No other cumulative projects are ongoing at the project site. Similar projects at nearby schools will not have an impact on the proposed project and the project site. When combined with proposed cumulative District projects, the proposed project will not create a cumulative impact under CEQA. Cumulative impacts will not apply. Therefore, this 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.

The project site is on a currently occupied middle school campus. There is no reasonable possibility that the project will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

Proposed improvements will not change access and circulation of the surrounding area. The construction manager will execute construction activities per current local, state, and federal laws, regulations, construction Best Management Practices (BMPs), and District standards and guidelines. Therefore, this exemption 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.

There are no designated State scenic highways near the campus. According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) California Scenic Highway Mapping System, the closest eligible state scenic highway is State Highway 14, approximately 15 miles to the north of the project site (Caltrans 2024). All proposed project improvements will occur within the boundaries of the existing campus; thus, the proposed project will not affect this highway. Therefore, the proposed project will not affect any scenic resources along any officially designated or eligible scenic highways, and this 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 the site and within a quarter mile radius:

- » EnviroStor. Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2024)
- » GeoTracker. State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB 2024)
- » EJScreen. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2024a)
- » EnviroMapper. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2024b)

- » Solid Waste Information System. California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle 2024)

The database search did not identify any sites within a 0.25-mile (1,320 feet) radius, and the project site is not identified on any of the databases listed above. Thus, the project site is not identified as a hazardous materials site pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and the project will not create a hazard to the public. Therefore, 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.

Murray MS is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a California Historical Landmark, California Point of Historical Interest nor is there a listed historic resource within a 0.25-mile radius of the project site (NPS 2024; OHP 2024). Neither the school nor any adjoining property are listed as historic resources or potential historic resources by the City of Ridgecrest. No historical resources have been identified on-site during preparation of this Notice of Exemption. Therefore, the historical sites exception does not apply to the proposed project.

5. CONCLUSION

The proposed project at Murray MS is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301. As substantiated in this document, the proposed project will not meet the conditions specified in § 15300.2, *Exceptions*, of the CEQA Guidelines, and the project is categorically exempt under Class 11 and Class 14.

6. REFERENCES

California Department of Education (CDE). 2024. DataQuest. Enrollment Report. 2023-2024 Enrollment by Grade. Sierra Sands Unified Report (15-73742).

<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/enrgrdlevels.aspx?aggllevel=District&year=2023-24&cds=1573742>

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2024. California Scenic Highway Mapping System.

<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>.

City of Ridgecrest. 2009. General Plan Land Use Diagram. <https://www.ridgecrest-ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/164/General-Plan-Map-PDF>

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Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). 2024. EnviroStor. <http://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/>.

National Park Service (NPS). 2024. National Register of Historic Places.

<https://www.nps.gov/maps/full.html?mapId=7ad17cc9-b808-4ff8-a2f9-a99909164466>

Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). 2024a. California Historical Resources.

<https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/?view=county&criteria=19>

Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). 2024b. California Historical Landmarks.

https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21427

State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). 2024. GeoTracker. <http://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>.

US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2024. EJSCREEN. <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>.

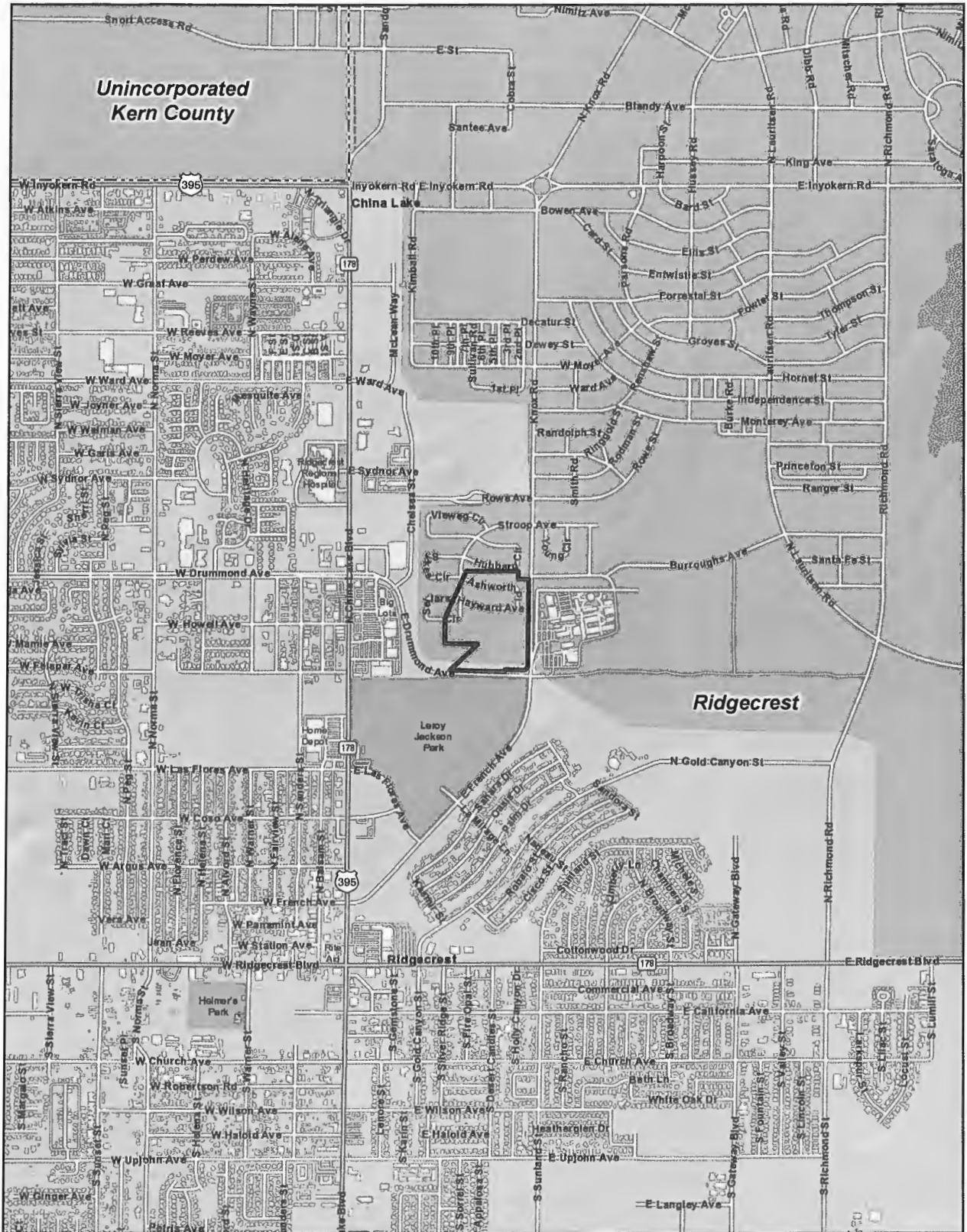
US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2024. EnviroMapper for EnviroFacts.
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). 2024. National Wetlands Inventory – Wetlands Mapper.
<https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/mapper.HTML>.

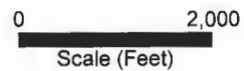
7. FIGURES

- Figure 1** Local Vicinity
- Figure 2** Project Improvement Area
- Figure 3a** Proposed Project Improvements
- Figure 3b** Proposed Project Improvements

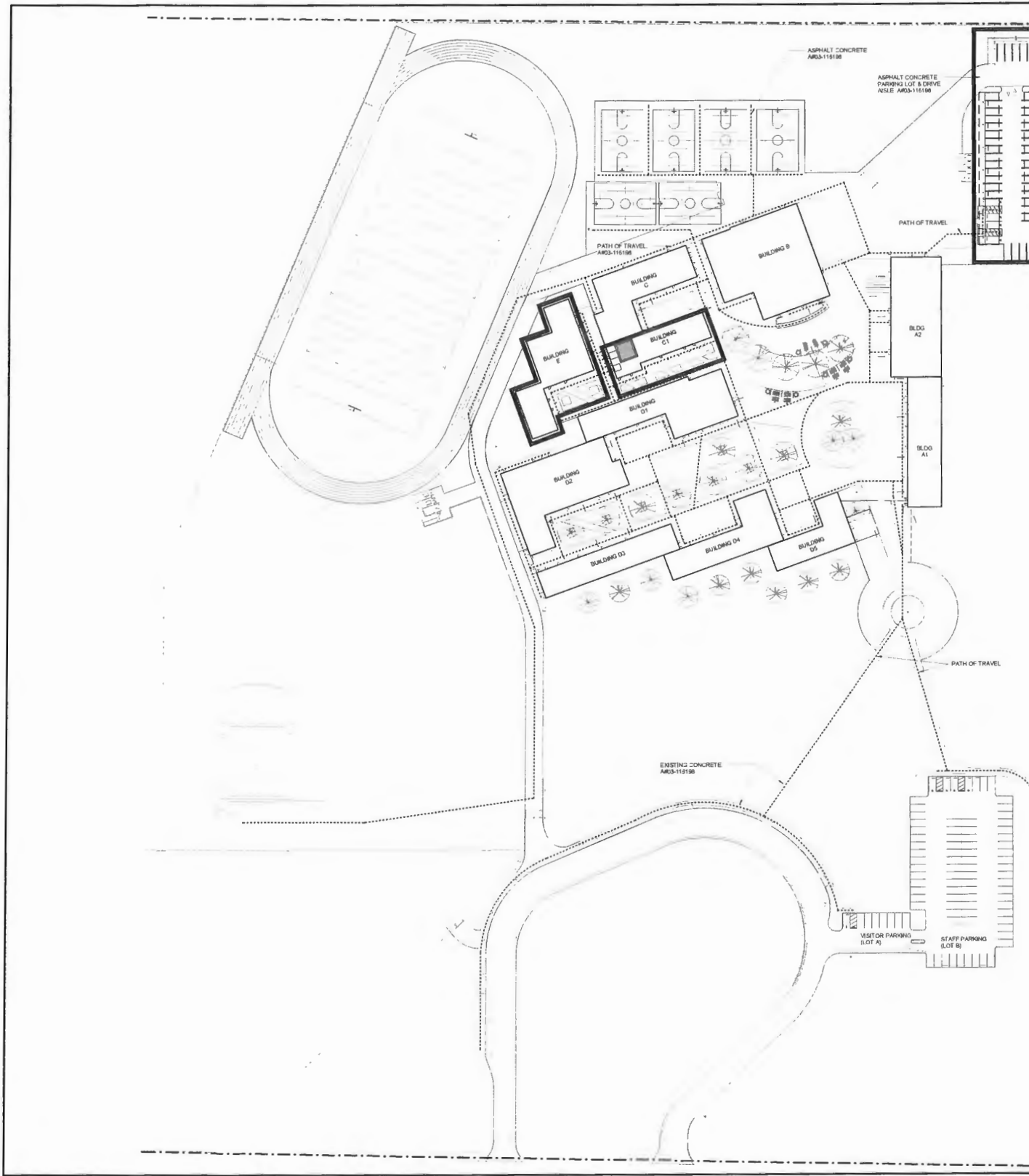
Figure 1 - Local Vicinity Map



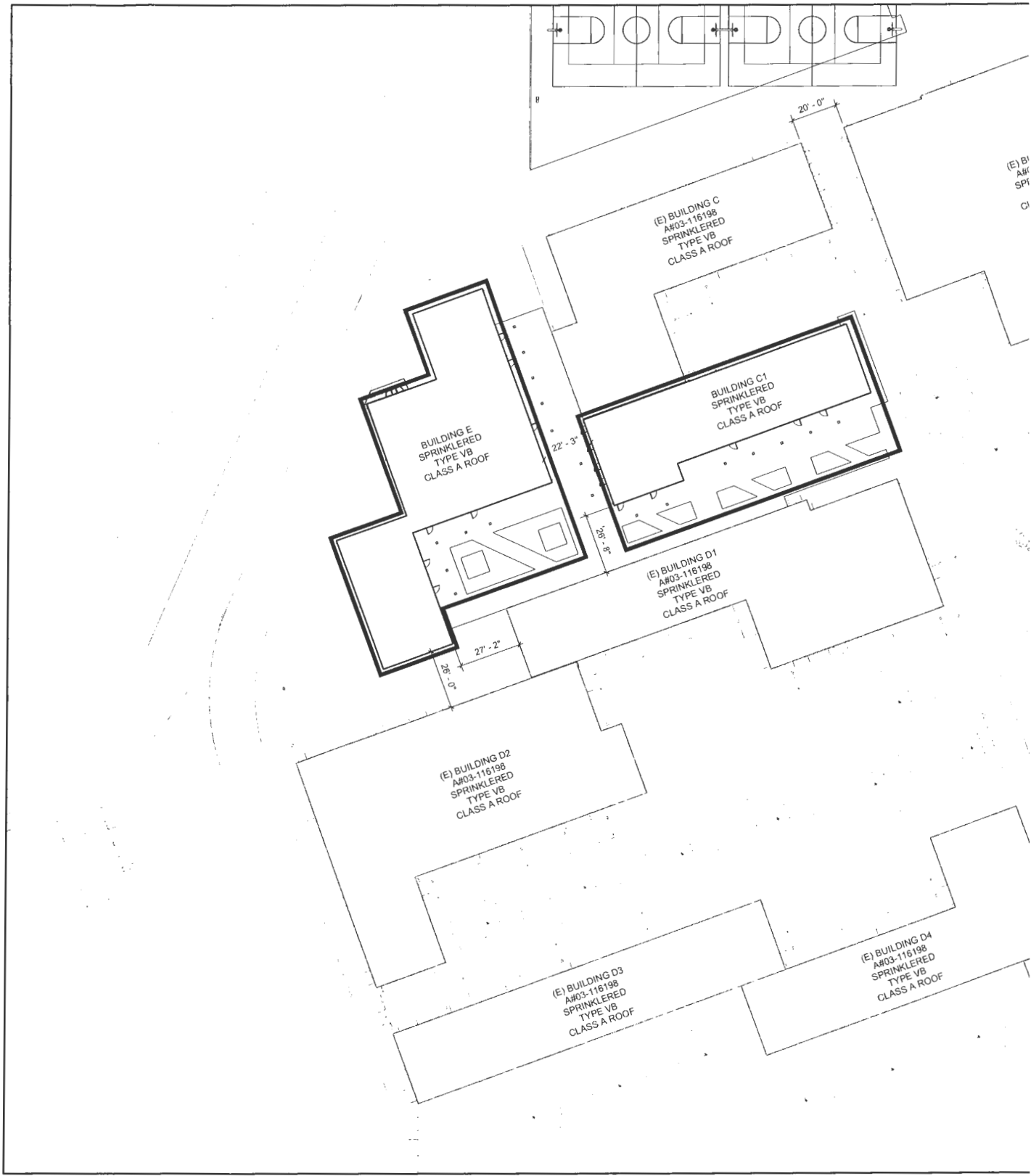
- School Boundary
- - - - - City Boundary



Source: Generated using ArcMap 2024.

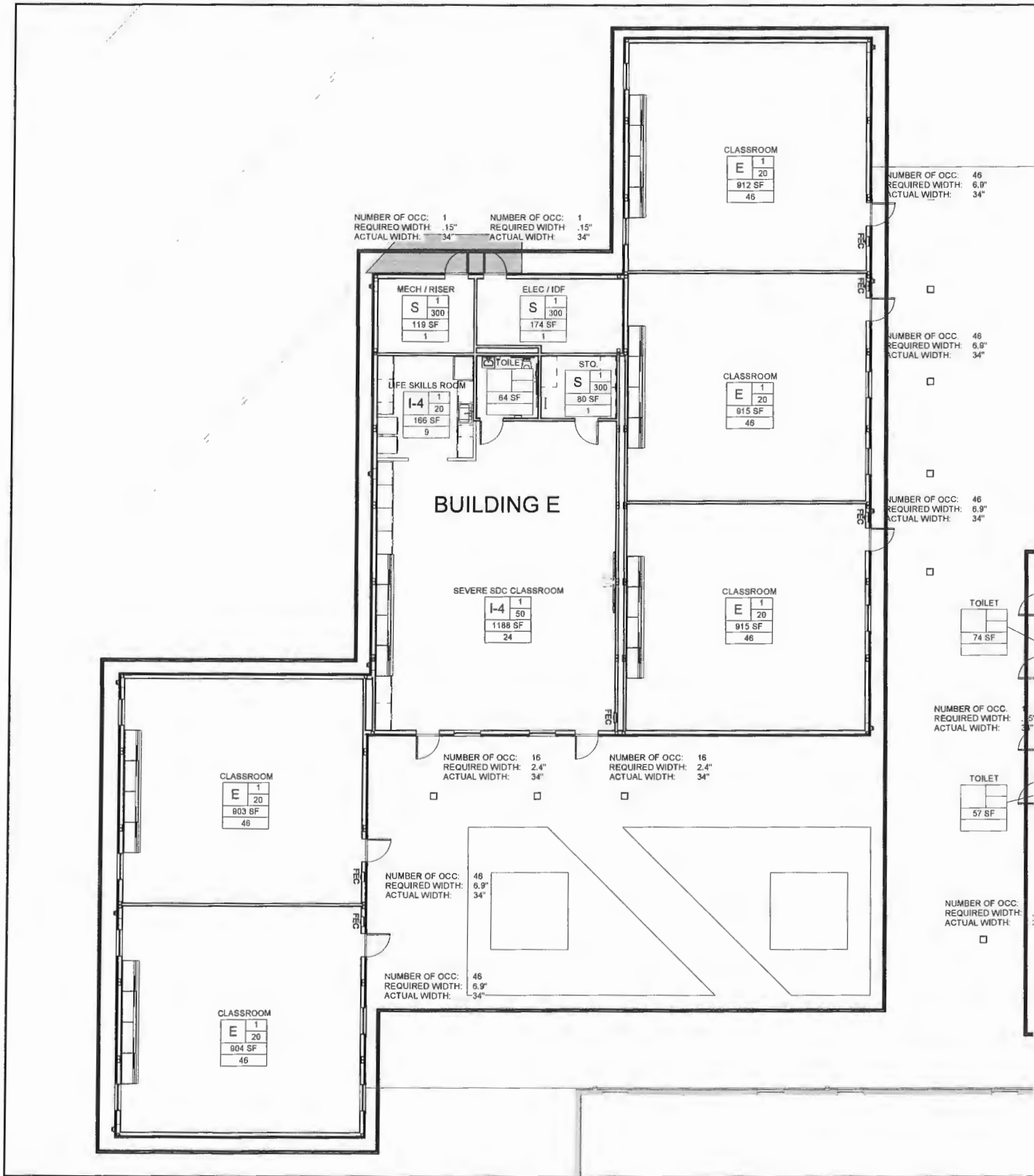


— Project Improvements Area



— Project Improvements Area

Source: Arcadis 2023.



Project Improvements Area