

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The proposed Section 31 Specific Plan ("Section 31 Specific Plan" or "Project") would implement the City's General Plan to allow the development of a mixed-use, master-planned community on approximately 618 acres of land in the City of Rancho Mirage (City), as shown in **Section 3.0: Project Description, Figure 3.0-2: Local Vicinity Map**. The Project would provide for a mix of resort hotel, residential, commercial, and open space/recreation uses oriented around a Grand Oasis Crystal Lagoon (Grand Oasis lagoon). The Project would allow development of up to 1,932 residential units, 400 hotel/resort units, and 175,000 square feet of nonresidential development, including combined restaurant and entertainment destinations, retail, and service space. This section provides information on the background of the Project, as further described in **Section 3.0** and assessed in this Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR), the environmental review process being conducted by the City for this Project, and the organization and content of this Draft EIR. See **Section 9.0** for a definition of terms and acronyms used in this Draft EIR.

A. PURPOSE OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This Draft EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2018081074) has been prepared by the City, in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15000 et seq.) to evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Project. This Draft EIR identifies and discusses potential Project-specific and cumulative environmental impacts that may occur should the Project be implemented. The intent of this EIR is to (1) be an informational document, which serves to inform public agency decision makers and the general public of the potential environmental impacts of the Project; (2) identify possible ways to minimize or avoid any potential significant impacts either through mitigation or the adoption of alternatives; and (3) disclose to the public required agency approvals.

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, public agencies are required to make written findings for each environmental impact of the project identified in the EIR. If the lead agency and responsible agencies decide that the benefits of the proposed project outweigh any identified unmitigated significant environmental effects, they will be required to adopt a statement of overriding considerations supporting their actions. The discretionary actions involved in the implementation of the Project by the City as well as responsible and trustee agencies are described in **Section 3.0**.

B. STANDARDS FOR ADEQUACY

The principal use of an EIR is to provide input and information to the comprehensive planning analysis undertaken for the proposed Project. Given the role of the EIR in this planning and decision-making

process, it is important that the information presented in the EIR be factual, adequate, and complete. The standards for adequacy of an EIR, defined in Section 15151 of the State CEQA Guidelines, are as follows:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The CEQA Guidelines define a process for environmental review that includes a series of steps that must be completed prior to the Lead Agency's taking action on a project.

Scoping Process

In compliance with Section 15201 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the City has taken steps to provide opportunities for public participation in the environmental process. An Initial Study (IS) and Notice of Preparation (NOP) were distributed on August 27, 2018 to federal, State, regional, and local government agencies and interested parties for a 30-day public review period to solicit comments and to inform agencies and the public of the Project. The Project was described; potential environmental effects associated with Project implementation were identified; and agencies and the public were invited to review and comment on the Initial Study and NOP. A copy of the IS/NOP and responses received are included in **Appendix A: Notice of Preparation (NOP), Initial Study (IS), Comment Letters on the NOP and IS, and Distribution List** of this Draft EIR.

The City received comments from six public agencies, two organizations, and five Native American tribes. The NOP and received comments are contained in **Appendix A** of this Draft EIR. Agencies or interested persons, whether they responded during the public review period of the NOP or not, will have an opportunity to comment on the EIR during the public review period or during public hearings to be conducted by the City on the EIR and Project. Additionally, the City held a public scoping meeting on September 11, 2018 from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM at the Rancho Mirage City Hall.

Topics evaluated in this Draft EIR have been identified based on the responses to the NOP and the review of the project by City staff. The City determined through this initial review process that impacts related to the following environmental topics are potentially significant and require an assessment in this Draft EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Traffic and Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems

Other environmental issues were eliminated or scoped out from detailed review in this Draft EIR during the NOP and Initial Study process because the impacts were determined to have no impact, less than significant impacts, or significant impacts that could be mitigated to a less than significant level. These environmental issues are not discussed in detail within this Draft EIR. For a complete discussion of the environmental issues that were scoped out from this Draft EIR, refer to **Appendix A** and **Section 8.1: Effects Not Found to Be Significant**.

Review and Comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report

CEQA requires that the Lead Agency provide the public and agencies the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft EIR. The City is providing a 45-day period for review and comment on this Draft EIR, starting [insert date], and ending [insert date].

Copies of this Draft EIR have been sent to the State Clearinghouse, responsible agencies, other agencies that have commented on the NOP, as well as to all interested parties that have requested notice and copies of the Draft EIR.

The Draft EIR is also available for review at the following locations:

- City of Rancho Mirage Planning Division – 69-825 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270, (760) 328-2266; and
- City of Rancho Mirage Public Library – 71-100 CA-111, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270, (760) 341-7323

In addition, the Draft EIR is available at the City's website at:

<http://ranchomirageca.gov/our-city/city-departments/planning/>

Interested individuals, organizations, responsible agencies, and other agencies can provide written comments about the Draft EIR addressed to:

Jeremy Gleim, AICP, Development Services Director
City of Rancho Mirage
(760) 328-2266
jeremyg@ranchomirageca.gov

When submitting comments, please note "**Section 31 Specific Plan EIR**" in the subject line and include the name of the contact person within the commenting agency (if applicable).

After completion of the 45-day review period, a Final EIR will be prepared that includes responses to comments submitted on the Draft EIR and any necessary corrections or additions to the Draft EIR. The Final EIR will be made available to agencies and the public prior to the City's determination on the Project. Once the Final EIR is complete, the City may certify the Final EIR, prepare Findings, adopt a mitigation monitoring and reporting program, and issue a Notice of Determination, which is the final step in the CEQA process.

D. ORGANIZATION OF THE DRAFT EIR

As stated, a principal objective of CEQA is to ensure that the environmental review process be a public one. In meeting this objective, an EIR informs members of the public, reviewing agencies, and decision makers of the physical impacts associated with a project. To this end, specific features have been incorporated into this Draft EIR to make it more understandable for non-technically oriented reviewers while providing the technical information necessary for the City to proceed with processing the Project. Sections of the Draft EIR are organized as follows:

Section 1.0: Introduction, provides information on the background of the Project, the environmental review process, and organization of the Draft EIR.

Section 2.0: Summary, presents a concise summary of the environmental information, analysis and conclusions in this EIR.

Section 3.0: Project Description, presents a description of the Project which addresses the location of the Project Site, the objectives of the Project, the characteristics of the Section 31 Specific Plan, and identification of all discretionary actions requiring approval to allow the implementation of the Project.

Section 4.0: Environmental Setting, describes the existing physical setting of the Project Site and the surrounding area.

Section 5.0: Environmental Impact Analysis, contains information and analysis of the potential for the Project to result in significant environmental effects for each of the topics evaluated in this Draft EIR.

Section 6.0: Alternatives, discusses alternatives to the Project that have been developed and analyzed to provide additional information on ways to avoid or lessen the impacts of the Project.

Section 7.0: Growth-Inducing Impacts, discusses the growth-inducing impacts of the Project.

Section 8.0: Other Environmental Impacts

- **Section 8.1: Effects Not Found to Be Significant**, discusses the potential impacts of the Project that were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in this Draft EIR.
- **Section 8.2: Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes**, discusses the significant irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources associated with the implementation of the Project.

Section 9.0: Terms, Definitions, and Acronyms, provides a list of specially defined terms and acronyms used throughout this Draft EIR.

Section 10.0: Organizations and Persons Consulted, lists persons involved in the preparation of this Draft EIR or who contributed information incorporated into this Draft EIR.

Section 11.0: References, lists the principal documents, reports, maps, and other information sources referenced in this Draft EIR.

Appendices to this EIR include technical information and other materials used in the preparation of this Draft EIR.