

I.0 INTRODUCTION

I.1 BACKGROUND AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Los Angeles (City) is proposing to construct and operate the Los Angeles Zoo Vision Plan (Project). The Project would guide future development and modernization of the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens (Zoo) for the next 20 years. The Project would include comprehensive redesign and redevelopment of the Zoo to replace outdated buildings and infrastructure and upgrade animal care and guest amenities. The Project would result in the following:

- Expanded and revitalized immersive exhibit space for improved animal welfare and the Zoo’s conservation and endangered species propagation and preservation programs;
- New and redeveloped visitor-serving facilities for enhanced visitor experience, including three visitor centers, picnic and restaurant locations, and internal circulation and walking paths;
- Expanded and modernized administrative and services facilities to support state of the art exhibits and upgraded visitor support facilities;
- Circulation improvements for access roads, pedestrian walkways and paths, an enhanced entry way and plaza, and new parking facilities;
- Inclusion of environmentally sustainable design features within the Zoo’s built structure; and
- Operational excellence of the Zoo.

Improved and expanded facilities would allow for annual visitation to grow from by approximately 1.2 million annual guests to 3.0 million guests annually by 2040. Improvements would be made through seven sequential phases of development. Project implementation would involve demolition of existing buildings, installation of new facilities, and construction of new pathways and circulation infrastructure.

The proposed Project is located at 5333 Zoo Drive in the City of Los Angeles, in the southern portion of Los Angeles County. It is generally bordered by the Golden State Freeway or Interstate 5 to the east and the Ventura Freeway or California State Route 134 to the north. The 142-acre Project site is in the northeastern portion of Griffith Park, at the base of the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains. The Los Angeles River flows within 900 feet of the Project site at the base of Griffith Park. Project site topography is undulating with approximately 150 feet of elevation change; however, interior portions of the Zoo are relatively flat resulting from the previous placement of fill soils during Zoo construction.

1.2 PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE OF THIS EIR

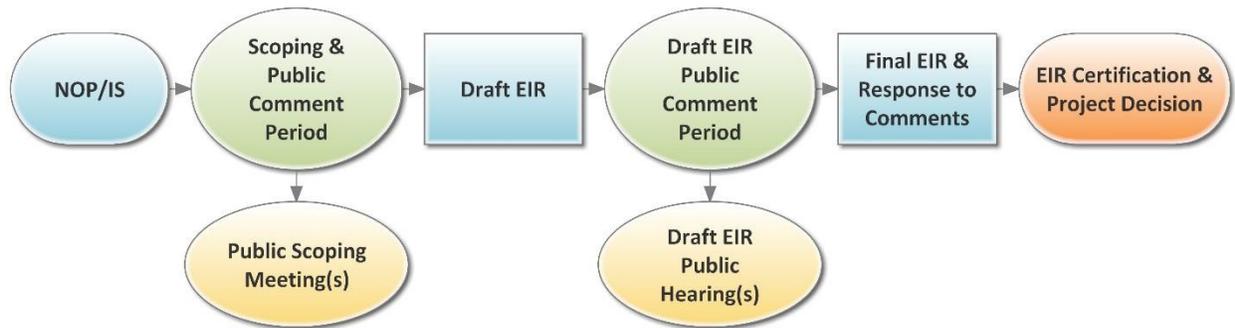
The purpose of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is to inform decision-makers, responsible and trustee agencies, and the public of the potential environmental impacts that could result from a project. Under the provisions of CEQA, “the purpose of the environmental impact report is to identify the significant effects of a project on the environment, to identify alternatives to the project, and to indicate the manner in which significant effects can be mitigated or avoided” (Public Resources Code 21002.1[a]). The CEQA process was established to enable public agencies to evaluate a project in terms of its environmental consequences, to examine and implement methods of eliminating or reducing any potentially adverse impacts, and to consider alternatives to the project. CEQA Section 15021(a) requires that major consideration be given to avoiding environmental damage. CEQA requires full disclosure and consideration of the unavoidable environmental risks, as applicable, against the economic, legal, social, or other benefits of the project as part of decision-maker approval proceedings.

The City is the Lead Agency for the proposed Project, pursuant to Section 15367 of the CEQA Guidelines. This EIR has been prepared by and under the direction of the Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering (BOE). This EIR was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.); the Guidelines for the Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines) (California Code of Regulations Sections 15000 et seq.); and the City’s environmental guidance documents (i.e., Los Angeles City CEQA Guidelines and L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide: Your Resource for Preparing CEQA Analyses in Los Angeles).

Responsible and trustee agencies are public agencies responsible for certain discretionary Project approvals or implementing specific onsite and/or offsite components of the Project. For the purposes of CEQA, a “responsible agency” includes all public agencies other than the Lead Agency which have discretionary approval power over the Project (CEQA Section 15381). A “trustee agency” is defined as a state agency having jurisdiction over certain resources held in trust for the people of California but do not have legal authority for approval of the Project (CEQA Section 15386).

The CEQA process is initiated when the Lead Agency identifies a proposed project. The proposed Project requires several discretionary approvals (see Section 2.0, *Project Description*). Therefore, the proposed Project is subject to environmental review requirements under CEQA. The EIR process overview and key milestones is depicted here:

EIR Process Overview & Milestones



1.3 PUBLIC OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

1.3.1 Notice of Preparation & Scoping

On January 24, 2019, the City issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to request comments on the scope of the EIR on and included a brief description and background of the Project, key Project components, and a description of potential environmental resource areas affected by the proposed Project. The NOP/Initial Study (IS) was circulated for public review for a 45-day period from January 24, 2019 to March 11, 2019. The NOP was made available in both English and Spanish and published online at: <https://eng.lacity.org/los-angeles-zoo-vision-plan> and <http://www.visionplan.lazoo.org/>. Copies of the document were also made available for review at the following locations:

- Los Angeles Central Library, 630 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90071
- Los Feliz Branch Library, 1874 Hillhurst Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90027
- Atwater Village Library, 3379 Glendale Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90039
- Cahuenga Branch Library, 4591 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90029
- Burbank Central Library, 110 N. Glenoaks Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502
- Glendale Downtown Central Library, 222 E. Harvard St., Glendale, CA 91205
- North Hollywood (Amelia Earhardt Regional) Library, 5211 Tujunga Ave., North Hollywood, CA 91601
- Buena Vista Branch Library, 300 N. Buena Vista, Burbank, CA 91506
- LA Zoo Administration Offices, 5333 Zoo Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90027
- City of Los Angeles, Bureau of Engineering, 1149 S. Broadway, Suite 600, Los Angeles, CA 90015

Two public scoping meetings were held separately during the public review period to solicit comments from interested parties on the content of the EIR. Spanish translating services were provided for both meetings. These meetings were held on Thursday, February 7, 2019, from 6:00-8:00 p.m. and Saturday, February 9, 2019 from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. in the Witherbee Auditorium at 5333 Zoo Drive Los Angeles, California 90027.

Appendix B contains the NOP and comments and input received during the review period which was considered in preparing the scope of this EIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15082). The City received approximately 60 sets of comments in the form of letters, emails, interviews verbal comments, and comment or speaker cards provided at public scoping meetings, from community residents, stakeholders, agencies, and organizations. These comments are provided in Appendix C. All comments were considered by BOE during preparation of this EIR.

In addition to EIR scoping in compliance with CEQA requirements, the City also engaged in stakeholder outreach and interviews to solicit input and comments directly. The City conducted a total of 13 in-person stakeholder interviews, included Los Angeles City Council staff, representatives from nearby neighborhood councils and/or homeowner and tenant associations, Griffith Park representatives, schools, and members of environmental and transit organizations. Through these interviews, the City learned of key concerns for these stakeholders, including transportation and traffic, land use and planning, urban forest, construction emissions, and habitat and biological resources impacts, and factored these issues into this EIR analysis.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE DRAFT EIR

This EIR assesses the potential environmental impacts that would occur with implementation of the proposed Project. The EIR evaluates potentially significant environmental impacts including issues raised in public comments received in response to the NOP/IS and at public scoping meetings (See Appendix B and C). This scoping process determined that the EIR should analyze the following issues (See Section 3.0, *Environmental Impact Analysis and Mitigation.*):

- Aesthetics
- Biological Resources
- Energy
- Geology & Soils
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Land Use & Planning
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Utilities & Service Systems
- Air Quality
- Cultural & Tribal Cultural Resources
- Urban Forestry Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hydrology & Water Quality
- Noise and Vibration
- Recreation
- Utilities & Service Systems
- Wildfire

This EIR addresses the issues referenced above and identifies potential environmental impacts associated with the Project, in accordance with the provisions of the State CEQA Guidelines. The EIR identifies feasible mitigation measures where necessary that would reduce or eliminate adverse environmental effects. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines

Section 15128 (Effects Not Found to Be Significant), environmental impacts related to Agriculture Resources, Mineral Resources and Population and Housing would be less than significant and therefore are not fully analyzed in this EIR (see Section 5.0, *Other CEQA Considerations* of this EIR).

A summary of cumulative impacts, which considers other projects or plans in the vicinity, is described in Section 3.18, *Cumulative Impacts*. Cumulative project analyses represent a comprehensive assessment of potential impacts on City resources using a list of past, present, and probable future projects capable of producing related or compounded impacts.

Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(d), this EIR includes an assessment of a reasonable range of alternatives to the Project that could feasibly attain the Project objectives while avoiding or substantially lessening any of the significant effects of the Project. The alternatives analysis includes alternatives that were considered but discarded from further analysis, and two alternatives fully analyzed in accordance with the CEQA Statute and Guidelines. Please refer to Section 4.0, *Alternatives Analysis*.

1.4.1 Areas of Known Public Controversy

CEQA Guidelines Section 15123 states that an EIR shall identify areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency, including issues raised by the agency and the public. Based on comments received during the scoping public meetings and NOP/IS comment period, the following issues are known to be of concern and may be controversial. Each issue is further evaluated in the EIR:

- Transportation impacts to local roads;
- Parking adequacy;
- Improved multi-modal access;
- Loss of trees and vegetation;
- Impacts to sensitive species;
- Visual impacts of Zoo redevelopment on Griffith Park visitors, including hikers and equestrians on public trails;
- Animal welfare during construction and operation
- Discovery of cultural and/or tribal cultural resources during construction;
- Water use and conservation, including recycled water;
- Disabled access and stroller access to Zoo exhibit areas;
- Noise and light impacts to sensitive receptors, including Griffith Park;
- Air quality and GHG emissions from construction and operation;
- Recycling and disposal of construction/demolition waste; and
- Impacts of nighttime events.

1.5 REVIEW OF THE DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR has been distributed to federal, state, regional, and local agencies, key stakeholders, interested parties, neighborhood groups, and NOP commenters, as well as the State CEQA Clearinghouse.

Due to the ongoing public health crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent Regional Stay Home Order issued by the Governor, the Zoo closed to the public on December 7, 2020 for a minimum of three weeks and will reopen in the future based on public health guidance. Therefore, the environmental review process will be conducted online. The Draft EIR will be made available online and the public meeting will occur virtually.

The Draft EIR is available for review online at:

<https://eng.lacity.org/los-angeles-zoo-vision-plan> and <http://lazoo.org/>

CEQA requires a Draft EIR to be submitted to the State Clearinghouse for circulation and for a 45-day review and comment period. This provides agencies and the public an opportunity to review and comment on the adequacy of the analysis and the findings regarding potential environmental impacts of a proposed Project.

The Draft EIR public review period runs for 60 days from **December 17, 2020 to February 15, 2021**.

All comments must be submitted by email or mail (please include “**LA Zoo Vision Plan EIR Comments**” in the subject line) to:

Norman Mundy, Environmental Supervisor II
Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Environmental Management Group
1149 S. Broadway, Suite 600, Mail Stop 939
Los Angeles, CA 90015
Norman.Mundy@lacity.org

A virtual public meeting will be held during the public review period to solicit comments from interested parties on the content of the EIR. The meeting will be held at the following date and time:

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

5:30 p.m.

The presentation for the virtual public meeting will be recorded and available on-demand from links posted at: <https://eng.lacity.org/los-angeles-zoo-vision-plan> and <http://www.lazoo.org/>.

The City will consider all comments, written and oral, in preparation of the Final EIR, which will be incorporated in the Draft EIR or a revision to the Draft EIR, Draft EIR comments and a list of commenters, and responses to comments. In addition, the Lead Agency must prepare the Findings of Fact, and if necessary, a Statement of Overriding Considerations if there are significant impacts that cannot be mitigated to a level below significance, as well as a

Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) if there are mitigation measures that must be incorporated and adopted. These are the components of a Final EIR. The Zoo Commission will consider the Final EIR and make a recommendation to the City Council, as the governing body of the City of Los Angeles, regarding certification of the Final EIR and the Vision Plan.

I.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE EIR

This EIR is organized into the following sections:

- Section 1.0, *Introduction*, summarizes the background of the Project and explains the environmental review process.
- Section 2.0, *Project Description*, provides a detailed description of the Project site, Project objectives, and all proposed Project components, including Project phasing and implementation.
- Section 3.0, *Environmental Impact Analysis and Mitigation*, provides analysis of applicable federal, state, and local regulations, existing environmental conditions, specific direct and indirect Project impacts, cumulative impacts, mitigation measures, secondary impacts, and residual impacts.
- Section 4.0, *Alternatives*, describes alternatives to the Project, and identifies the Environmentally Superior Alternative.
- Section 5.0, *Other CEQA Sections*, identifies significant and irreversible, growth-inducing, and unavoidable effects, and a brief discussion of resource areas that would not be significantly affected by the Project.
- Section 6.0, *List of Preparers*, identifies the EIR Project team.
- Section 7.0, *References*, provides information about resources used in preparation of the EIR.

Appendices to the EIR include the IS/NOP, NOP comment letters, the Draft Vision Plan, and supporting technical studies used as a basis of information and analyses in preparation of the EIR.

