

III. Environmental Setting

A. Overview of Environmental Setting

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CEQA Guidelines Section 15125 requires that an EIR include a description of the existing physical environment. This chapter provides a general overview of the existing regional and local setting in which the Project Site is located, and a brief description of the existing conditions at the Project Site. Detailed information on existing conditions for each environmental topic is provided in Chapter IV, *Environmental Impact Analysis*, of this Draft EIR. This chapter also provides an overview of other potential reasonably foreseeable projects (i.e., related projects) in the vicinity of the Project Site that the City has determined could potentially result in cumulative impacts and are considered as part of the cumulative impacts analysis.

a) On-Site Conditions

The Project Site, which is located at 555 Universal Hollywood Drive, is located in Universal City within the City's Sherman Oaks–Studio City–Toluca Lake–Cahuenga Pass Community Plan Area. The Project Site is located to the north of U.S. Highway 101 (US-101 or Hollywood Freeway) and west of the intersection of Universal Hollywood Drive and Hotel Drive. The Project Site totals approximately 316,249 square feet or 7.26 acres.

The Project Site is situated on a promontory (a point of high land) that descends moderately to the west, south, and east at a grade of approximately 50 percent (2:1 horizontal-to-vertical gradient). The top of the promontory is approximately 707 feet above mean sea level (amsl), and the on-site low point is approximately 670 feet amsl, with an overall elevation change of approximately 37 feet across the Project Site.¹

The primary on-site improvements (described from north to south) consist of (a) a motorcourt and porte cochere entryway to the Existing Ancillary Hotel Building and landscaping (collectively, the North Plaza); (b) the low-rise Existing Ancillary Hotel Building; (c) a motorcourt with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible parking spaces, landscaped median, and a porte cochere entryway to the Existing Hotel Building's lobby area (collectively, the South Plaza); (d) the Existing Hotel Building; (e) the Existing Outdoor Pool Area; (f) service road along the eastern edge of the Project Site and existing development. The Project Site is currently developed with a total of 397,521

¹ Based on the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD 88), which is the vertical datum for orthometric heights established for vertical control surveying in the United States based upon the General Adjustment of the North American Datum of 1988.

square feet, including 26,030 square feet of meeting/banquet space; 5,050 square feet of restaurant/lounge floor area; 924 square feet of retail/sundry space; 9,665 square feet of lobby/circulation floor area; and 495 hotel rooms. The pool area, which includes a pool, spa, pool bar and grill, and landscaped area occupies 8,819 square feet.

Vehicle access to the Project Site is via a driveway on Universal Hollywood Drive that leads to an internal roadway along the north and west perimeter of the Project Site. This internal roadway provides vehicle access to the North Plaza, the parking garage, and the South Plaza. The South Plaza porte cochere entryway provides primary pedestrian access to the Existing Hotel Building and also serves as the pick-up/drop-off area for the complimentary Universal Studios Hotel Shuttle.

The Existing Ancillary Hotel Building is one to two stories in height and located south of the North Plaza. The Existing Ancillary Hotel Building includes a lobby area, concierge/tour desk, gift/sundry shop, atrium areas, meeting/banquet rooms, the Café Sierra Restaurant, the Atrium Lounge, a lobby bar, and a small coffee shop. The Existing Ancillary Hotel Building also includes internal corridors that connect to the 24-story Existing Hotel Building, which is located south of the Existing Ancillary Hotel Building, northeast of the Existing Hotel Pool Area, and east of the South Plaza. The Existing Hotel Building is approximately 258 feet in height, as measured from the South Plaza, and contains 495 existing guestrooms.

The approximately 8,819-square-foot Existing Outdoor Pool Area is the southernmost improvement on the Project Site and consists of a pool, pool deck, spa, pool bar and grill, and ornamental landscaping.

The North Plaza, Existing Ancillary Hotel Building, internal roadway, and South Plaza are located above a three-level parking garage. The three parking levels are accessible via a ramp extending from the west side of the North Plaza, just north of the Existing Ancillary Hotel Building. Overall, the Project Site currently contains a total of 652 vehicle parking spaces. Ornamental landscaping is planted along the periphery of the parking garage to screen it from view from surrounding public roadways.

The Project Site is located within a Transit Priority Area (TPA) because it is located within 0.5 miles of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) B Line (Red Line) Universal City/Studio City Station, which is located at the intersection of Lankershim Boulevard and Universal Hollywood Drive, approximately 0.25 miles west of the Project Site.

b) Surrounding Uses

The Project Site is in Universal City within an area that is highly urbanized and generally built out. The Project Site is located in an active area that serves as both a commercial center for Studio City and the surrounding communities, and as an entertainment center of regional importance.

The Project Site is bordered on the north by an undeveloped parcel, entertainment and production-related uses associated with Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal Hollywood Drive; on the east by a surface parking lot operated by Universal Studios Hollywood, Hotel Drive, an undeveloped hillside parcel, and Universal Studios Hollywood; on the south by an undeveloped parcel and a shuttle parking lot (both owned and maintained by Universal Studios Hollywood); and on the west by the Sheraton Universal Hotel. The Sheraton Universal Hotel consists of a 20-story hotel building at the center of the property, with hotel-related uses surrounding the building, including a three-level parking structure located adjacent to the Project Site. W.C. Fields Drive is located approximately 130 feet south of the Project Site and provides vehicle access to the Project Site via Hotel Drive, with Universal Hollywood Drive as an alternate entrance and exit. A landscaped roadway shoulder and the travel lanes of the Hollywood Freeway are located south of W.C. Fields Drive, approximately 200 feet south/southwest of the Project Site. South of the Hollywood Freeway is the Cahuenga Boulevard corridor, which consists of one- to three-story commercial uses. Further south, land uses consist of the single-family residential homes of the Cahuenga Pass foothills.

The Existing Hotel Building is one of three high-rise buildings located between the Hollywood Freeway and Universal Hollywood Drive, east of Lankershim Boulevard. The other two high-rise buildings are the 20-story Sheraton Hilton Hotel, located immediately west of the Project Site, and the 36-story 10 Universal City Plaza Office Building, located west of the Sheraton Hilton Hotel at the northeast corner of Lankershim Boulevard and the Hollywood Freeway. Each of the three high-rise buildings is supported by two- to six-level parking structures.

The Hilton Universal City Hotel is the closest hotel to Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal CityWalk, both of which are located across Universal Hollywood Drive from the Project Site. Both entertainment venues are part of the larger Universal City, which consists of a number of interrelated entities that have evolved because of their association with the entertainment industry, including Universal Studios Hollywood, Universal CityWalk, and the facilities that comprise Universal Studios, with soundstages, backlot sets, and offices largely occupied by entertainment-related companies. The majority of Universal City is located within unincorporated Los Angeles County, generally located just north and east of the Project Site, which is also generally north and east of Universal Hollywood Drive.

The front admissions gate (Front Gate) to Universal Studios Hollywood is located approximately 650 feet east of the Project Site at its closest point adjacent to Hotel Drive, with pedestrian access provided between the Project Site and the Front Gate via sidewalks and pedestrian crosswalks at the intersection of Universal Hollywood Drive and Hotel Drive. Universal Hollywood Drive also serves as the primary vehicle access to parking facilities for Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal CityWalk, with public travel lanes terminating at the West Gate admission booths on Universal Hollywood Drive approximately 530 feet south of the driveway to the Project Site. General Parking (the Frankenstein Parking Garage) for Universal Studios Hollywood is also located across

Universal Hollywood Drive from the Project Site's driveway. Universal Studios operates a complimentary shuttle for hotel guests/visitors to Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal CityWalk on a 15- to 20-minute cycle to and from both the Sheraton Universal Hotel and Hilton Universal City Hotel as a courtesy for park attendees staying at the hotels.

c) Existing Transportation System

Regional vehicle access to the Project Site is provided by the Hollywood Freeway via on- and off-ramps at Lankershim Boulevard (0.25 miles west of the Project Site) and Universal Studios Boulevard (0.4 miles east of the Project Site). Local access to the Project Site is provided via Lankershim Boulevard, W.C. Fields Drive (via Universal Studios Boulevard), Hotel Drive, and Universal Hollywood Drive. In addition, the Golden State/Santa Ana Freeway (Interstate 5) is located approximately 2 miles to the east and the Ventura Freeway (State Route 134) is located approximately 1 mile to the north. The Project Site is located approximately 3.75 miles south of the Burbank Bob Hope Airport.

The Project Site is served by a variety of transit options, including the Metro B Line (Red Line) Universal City/Studio City Station, located approximately 0.25 miles west of the Project Site at the intersection of Lankershim Boulevard and Universal Hollywood Drive. The Metro B Line (Red Line) provides direct linkages to downtown Los Angeles and to other rail lines within the Metro Rail system, including a connection to the Metro G Line (Orange Line) in North Hollywood and a connection to the Metro D Line (Purple Line) in Koreatown. The Metro B Line (Red Line) terminates at Union Station, a major hub for public transportation, including Amtrak, Metrolink, and bus lines providing national, regional, and local access. During the AM and PM peak hours, the Metro B Line (Red Line) provides headways of approximately 10 minutes per train (i.e., five trains per hour). Metro also operates bus lines along Lankershim Boulevard in the Project vicinity. Metro Local 155, Local 222, and Local 224 bus stops are maintained at the intersection of Lankershim Boulevard and Universal Hollywood Drive. Metro Local 155 provides local service between Sherman Oaks and Burbank, Metro Local 222 provides service between Hollywood and Sun Valley, and Metro Local 224 provides local service between Sylmar and the Metro B Line (Red Line) Universal City/Studio City Station.² The Metro B Line (Red Line) Universal City/Studio City Station acts as a transfer hub for these local bus lines. Metro Local 240, as well as the Burbank Bus Pink Route, also stop off-street at the Universal/Studio City Station. As indicated above, Universal Studios operates a complimentary shuttle to Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal CityWalk on a 15- to 20-minute cycle to and from both the Sheraton Universal Hotel and Hilton Universal City Hotel as a courtesy for park attendees staying at both hotels.

Maps and aerial photos depicting the Project Site and surrounding uses are provided in Chapter II, *Project Description*, of this Draft EIR.

² Metro Maps and Schedules. 2022. Maps & Schedules - LA Metro. Accessed October 2022.

d) Existing Conditions

Detailed descriptions of the environmental setting relevant to each of the environmental topics evaluated in this Draft EIR have been prepared and are included in Chapter IV, *Environmental Impact Analysis*, in Sections IV.A through IV.M, of this Draft EIR.

e) Land Use Plans

City land use plans applicable to the Project Site include the City of Los Angeles General Plan and the Sherman Oaks–Studio City–Toluca Lake–Cahuenga Community Plan. While the Project Site is not located within a Specific Plan area, the nearby unincorporated Los Angeles County area to the north and east of the Project Site is part of the Universal Studios (County) Specific Plan area. Regional plans that are applicable to the Project Site include Connect SoCal, which is the Southern California Association of Governments' 2020–2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy and the South Coast Air Quality Management District's 2016 Air Quality Management Plan.

2. Related Projects

CEQA Guidelines Section 15130 requires that the EIR discuss cumulative impacts of a project when the project's incremental effect is cumulatively considerable. Cumulative impacts are defined in Section 15355 of the CEQA Guidelines as "an impact which is created as a result of the combination of a project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts." As identified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(b), the discussion of cumulative impacts shall "reflect the severity of the impacts and their likelihood of occurrence, but the discussion need not provide as great detail as is provided for the effects attributable to the project alone."

Either of the following is necessary to conduct an adequate analysis of cumulative impacts:

- A list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts, including, if necessary, those projects outside the control of the agency; or
- A summary of projections contained in an adopted local, regional, or statewide plan, or related planning document, that describes or evaluates conditions contributing to the cumulative effect.

Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(b)(3), the City has determined in its independent judgement, based on the size and scale of the Project analysis and related projects in the area, that 1.15 miles is the appropriate radius for the identification of related projects for the proposed Project. This distance includes a portion of the County of Los Angeles and known development projects in Universal City and neighboring areas of the City, including a portion of the City of Burbank. This distance was established following the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) 2022 Transportation Assessment Guidelines' (2022 TAG) approach for identifying related projects, which is to include the

associated trip generation for known development projects within a 0.5-mile (2,640-foot) radius of the Project Site, and 0.25-mile (1,320-foot) radius of the farthest outlying study intersections.³ The 1.15-mile (6,027-foot) radius for the identification of related projects was established based on the farthest outlying study intersection, which is Barham Boulevard / W.C. Fields Drive – Cahuenga Boulevard East, located approximately 4,500 feet from the Project Site.

A review of the 1.15-mile radius for related projects revealed that there are 15 known projects (14 in the City of Los Angeles and 1 in the County of Los Angeles) that may potentially contribute to cumulative impacts. **Table III-1, Related Projects List**, identifies the related projects and **Figure III-1, Related Projects Map**, presents the location of each related projects. Although the projects listed in Table III-1 serve as the primary basis for evaluation of cumulative impacts, the individual projects considered may vary from one environmental issue to the next as the geographic context of certain issue areas varies. The cumulative analysis for each environmental issue, including a discussion regarding the identification of relevant related projects, is provided in each environmental section in Chapter IV, *Environmental Impact Analysis*, of this Draft EIR.

**TABLE III-1
RELATED PROJECTS LIST¹**

Project	Project Address	Land Use	Size ²	Unit
County of Los Angeles				
1	NBC Universal Evolution Plan – 100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608	Studio	307.95	ksf
		Studio Office	647.32	ksf
		Office	470.25	ksf
		Entertainment	177.45	ksf
		Entertainment Retail	39.22	ksf
		Amphitheater	(50.6)	ksf
		Hotel	900.0	ksf
City of Los Angeles				
2	10601–10623 Riverside Drive (Cohen Apts.)	Apartments	68	du
		Retail	12.45	ksf
3	11036 W. Moorpark Street	Apartments	96	du
		Single-Family	(8)	du
4	4215 Vineland Avenue	Condominiums	85	du
		Apartments	(32)	du
5	10850 Riverside Drive (Lankershim/Riverside Mixed-Use Project)	Single-Family	(1)	du
		Apartments	179	du
		Retail	5.68	ksf
6	3077 Cahuenga Boulevard	Apartments	179	du

³ City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation, Transportation Assessment Guidelines (TAG), August 2022.

**TABLE III-1
RELATED PROJECTS LIST¹**

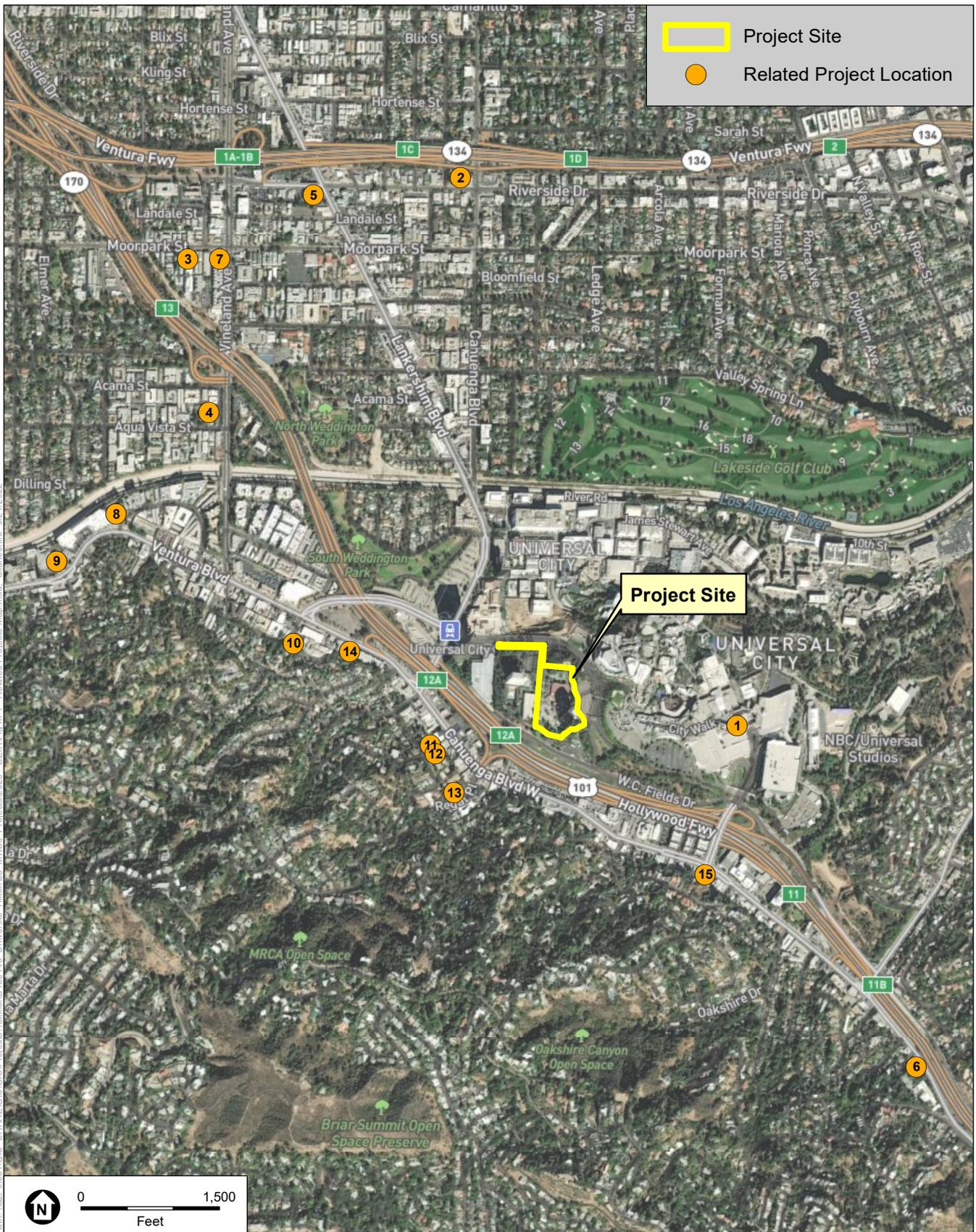
Project	Project Address	Land Use	Size²	Unit
7	4377 N. Vineland Avenue	Convenience Store	2.56	ksf
		Car Wash	1.10	ksf
8	11201 Ventura Boulevard	Apartments	94	du
		Affordable Family Housing	12	du
		Retail	12	ksf
		Assisted Living	(58)	beds
9	11265–11321 Ventura Boulevard (Studio City Crossing)	Supermarket	34.83	ksf
		Commercial	5.05	ksf
		Restaurant	2.78	ksf
		Commercial	(13.63)	ksf
		Health/Fitness Club	(17.81)	ksf
10	10867 Fruitland Drive	Restaurant	(2.78)	ksf
		Apartments	16	du
		Affordable Family Housing	3	du
11	3910 Kentucky Drive	Apartments	(5)	du
		Apartments	8	du
12	3902 Kentucky Drive	Condominiums	21	du
13	3657 Regal Place	Apartments	28	du
		Apartments	(5)	du
14	10740–10744 Ventura Boulevard	Hotel	46	rooms
		Restaurant	1.84	ksf
		Rooftop Bar	3.50	ksf
15	3361–3429 Cahuenga Boulevard West	Apartments	64	du
		Affordable Family Housing	8	du
		Hotel	119	rooms
		Restaurant	4.43	ksf
		Supermarket	18.43	ksf
		Restaurant	(3.40)	ksf
Office	(29.20)	ksf		

NOTES: ksf = thousand square feet; du = dwelling units

¹ Projects provided by LADOT and City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning as of August 2022.

² Parenthesis represent a reduction, or what is being removed from the existing site.

SOURCE: Linscott, Law & Greenspan, Engineers, 2022.



SOURCE: Mapbox, 2022

Hilton Universal City Project
Figure III-1
 Related Projects Map