Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model

MEAD VALLEY COMMERCE CENTER PROJECT PREPARED BY: T&B PLANNING, INC. 2023

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model for the Mead Valley Commerce Center Project

County of Riverside, California

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Abstract

The Mead Valley Commerce Center Project site encompasses a total of approximately 64.97 acres within the Mead Valley Area Plan community of unincorporated Riverside County. The Project site comprises a total of two (2) disjointed parcels generally located south of Cajalco Road and west of Seaton Avenue. The Project consists of the following applications: General Plan Amendment No. Pending, Change of Zone (CZ 2200062), Plot Plan (PPT 220050), and Tentative Parcel Map (TPM) No. 38601. Collectively, approval of these applications would allow for the development of one (1) warehouse building with up to 1,003,510 square feet (s.f.) of building area on 50.04 acres and 13.35 acres of public park. The Project is subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In this report, the California Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model is used as an evaluation tool to determine if the subject property qualifies as an important agricultural resource. Based on the methodology established by the California LESA Model, this report concludes that the Project site is considered to have a relatively low value for agricultural production and implementation of the Project would result in a less-than-significant impact to agricultural lands.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Document Purpose

The Mead Valley Commerce Center Project (hereafter, "Project") includes the following applications: General Plan Amendment No. Pending, Change of Zone (CZ 2200062), Plot Plan (PPT 220050), and Tentative Parcel Map (TPM) No. 38601 for the construction and operation of one (1) warehouse building and one 13.35-acre public park. The purpose of this Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model is threefold: 1) to determine the presence or absence of important agricultural resources on the Project site; 2) assess potential effects, if any, to any important agricultural resources that may be present on the Project site; and 3) if any impacts to important agricultural Quality Act (CEQA).

CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a) requires that environmental documentation "*identify and focus on the significant environmental effects*" of a proposed project. The CEQA Guidelines definition of environment "means the physical conditions which exist within the area which will be affected by a proposed project including <u>land</u>, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historical or aesthetic significance." (<u>emphasis added</u>, CEQA Guidelines § 15360). Per the CEQA Guidelines, the Project will result in a significant effect on the environment if the site contains important agricultural resources that would be converted to a non-agricultural use.

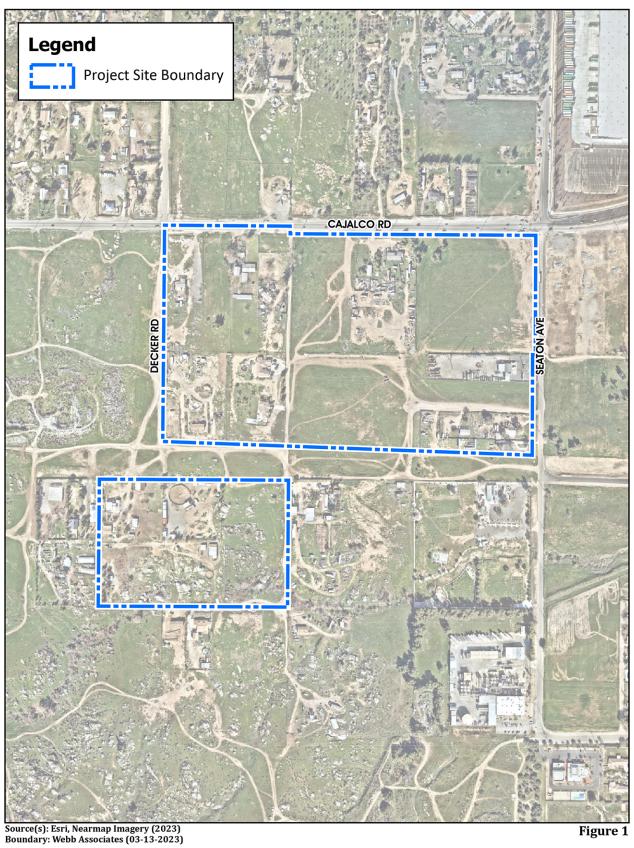
According to CEQA Guidelines § 21060.1(a), "agricultural land" is defined as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California.

1.2 Project Location

The Project site comprises of two (2) disjointed parcels totaling 64.97 acres located south of Cajalco Road and west of Seaton Avenue within Unincorporated Western Riverside County, California. Specifically, the Project site is within the Mead Valley Area Plan (MVAP) community. The northern portion of the Project site, which is proposed for development with one warehouse building, comprises 50.04 gross acres and is located south of Cajalco Road, west of Seaton Avenue, east of Decker Road, and north of Rider Street. The southern portion of the Project site, which is proposed for development with a public park, comprises 14.93 gross acres located both east and west of Decker Road, approximately 185 feet south of the proposed warehouse building site. The Project site encompasses Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs) 317-080-(003 through 008, 013, 014, 019 through 023, and 027 through 029), 317-090-(002 through 008). (see Figure 1, *Aerial Photograph*).

1.3 Project Summary

The Project involves General Plan Amendment No. Pending, Change of Zone (CZ 2200062), Plot Plan (PPT 220050), and Tentative Parcel Map (TPM) No. 38601, and associated grading for the development of one warehouse building on approximately 50.04 acres and public park use on approximately 13.35 acres. The proposed warehouse use would include 983,510 square feet (s.f.) of warehouse space, 10,000 s.f. of office space, and 10,000 s.f. of mezzanine space for a total of 1,003,510 s.f. of building area. The Project's proposed public park is conceptually designed to include play fields, hard surfaces sport courts, a playground, walking paths, dog parks, and other amenities.



0 125 250 500 Feet

Aerial Photograph

2.0 AGRICULTURE IN CALIFORNIA

2.1 Williamson Act

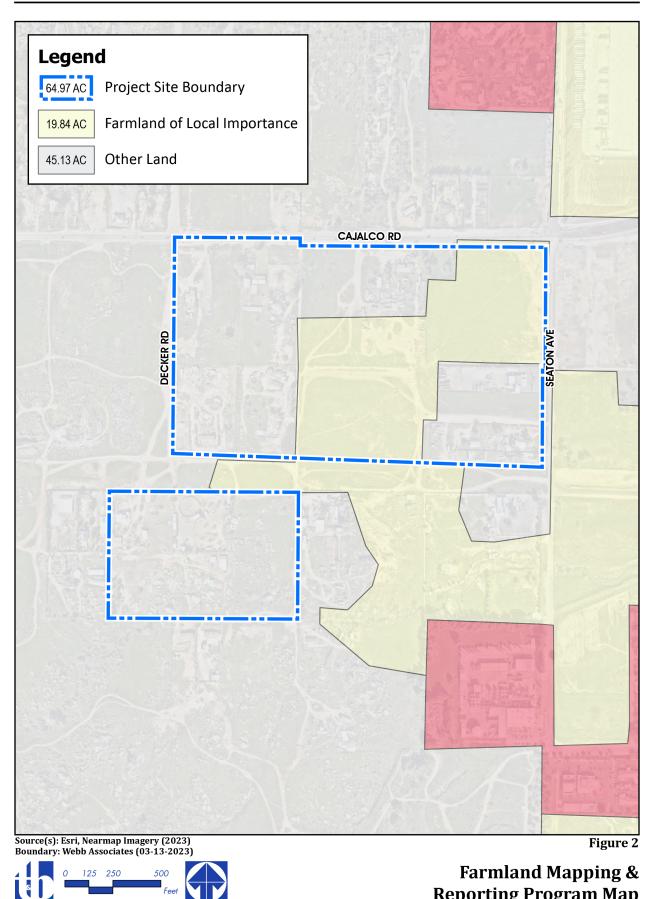
In 1965, the California Assembly established the California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, in response to the increasing pressure occurring throughout California during the post-World War II period to convert agricultural lands to urban development. The Williamson Act allows local governments to enter contracts with landowners to restrict property to agricultural or related open space uses for a minimum of 10 years in exchange for a lower property tax assessment to the landowner. After the initial 10-year contract term, the contract remains in effect until canceled by the landowner or the local government. Once canceled, a contract winds down over a period of 10 years (CDC, 2019a). The Project site is not subject to a Williamson Act contract or agricultural preserve. (Riverside County, 2023; CDC, 2022)

2.2 Farmland Classification

As part of the State's efforts to protect agricultural resources, the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 to provide data to public, academia, and government entities for the purposes of making informed decisions regarding the use of California's agricultural land resources. The FMMP is required by California Government Code § 65570 to report on the conversion of agricultural lands in the *California Farmland Conversion Report* and maintain the *Important Farmland Maps* database system to record changes in the use of agricultural lands over time (CDC, 2019b).

- <u>Prime Farmland:</u> "Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term agricultural production. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date."
- <u>Farmland of Statewide Importance:</u> "Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date."
- <u>Unique Farmland:</u> "Farmland of less quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date."
- <u>Farmland of Local Importance:</u> "Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and local advisory committee."
- <u>Grazing Land:</u> "Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities."

According to the California Department of Conservation (CDC) Important Farmland Finder Map (see Figure 2, *Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program Map*), the Project site is classified as "Farmland of Local Importance" and "Other Land." (CDC, 2018)



Feet

Reporting Program Map

3.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

3.1 LESA Model

The LESA Model is a point-based approach that uses measurable factors to quantify the relative value of agricultural land resources and assist in the determination of the significance of agricultural land conversions. Many states have developed LESA Models specific to their local contexts. The California LESA Model was created as a result of Senate Bill 850 (Chapter 812/1993) and provides lead agencies with an optional methodology to ensure that potentially significant effects on the environment associated with agricultural land conversions are quantitatively and consistently considered in the environmental review process (CDC, 1997, p. 4). The California LESA Model is the methodology used by the County of Riverside to determine whether important agricultural resources are present on a property.

3.2 California LESA Model Scoring System

The California LESA Model is made up of two components, known as "Land Evaluation" (LE) and "Site Assessment" (SA), that are scored and weighted separately to yield a total LE subscore and SA subscore. The Final LESA Score is the sum of the LE and SA subscores and has a maximum possible score of 100 points. Based on the Final LESA Score, numerical thresholds are used to determine the significance of a project's impacts on agricultural resources (CDC, 1997, p. 31).

3.2.1 Land Evaluation (LE)

The LE subscore consists of two factors, including the Land Capability Classification (LCC) rating and the Storie Index rating, which were devised to measure the inherent soil-based qualities of land as they relate to agricultural production. The LCC Rating and Storie Index rating scores are based upon the soil map unit(s) identified on a property and the acreage of each soil mapping unit relative to the property's total acreage. Data for the soil map unit(s), LCC, and Storie Index are obtained from soil survey data provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (CDC, 1997, pp. 7-9).

A. LCC Rating

There are eight (8) classes of LCC (I through VIII). Soils designated "I" have the fewest limitations for agricultural production and soils designated "VIII" are least suitable for farmland. The LCC is further divided into subclasses (designated by lowercase letters *e*, *w*, *s*, or *c*) to describe limitations, including a soil's susceptibility to erosion ("e"), limitations due to water in or on the soil ("w"), shallow or stony soils ("s"), or climate ("c") (USDA, 2023).

Once the LCC for each soil mapping unit is obtained from the USDA NRCS soil survey, the LCC classification is converted into a numeric score established by the California LESA Model. Table 3-1, *Numeric Conversion of Land Capability Classification Units,* summarizes the LCC numeric conversion scores used by the LESA model. The LCC Score accounts for 25 percent of the total California LESA Model Score (CDC, 1997, p. 7).

LCC	Ι	IIe	IIs, w	IIIe	IIIs, w	IVe	IVs, w	V	VI	VII	VIII
Rating	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0

Source: (CDC, 1997)

For properties with multiple soil mapping units, the LCC Score used in the LESA Model is determined by multiplying the LCC Rating for each map unit by the corresponding map unit's proportion of the property's total acreage. The LCC Score for each map unit is summed together for a total, single LCC Score for the property (CDC, 1997, p. 7).

B. Storie Index Rating

The Storie Index is a quantitative method of rating the agricultural capability of soils. The Storie Index has been used in California for over 50 years, with the most recent version of the Storie Index being published in 1978. The Storie Index is based on four factors: 1) degree of soil profile development; 2) surface texture; 3) slope; 4) other soil and landscape conditions including drainage, alkalinity, nutrient level, acidity, erosion, and microrelief. Soils are graded on a 100-point scale that represents the relative value of a given soil when used for intensive agricultural purposes (University of California, 1978, p. 1). The Storie Index Score accounts for 25 percent of the total California LESA Model Score (CDC, 1997, p. 12).

For properties with multiple soil mapping units, the Storie Index Score is calculated by multiplying the Storie Index rating by the map unit's proportion of the property's total acreage. The Storie Index Score for each map unit is added together to provide a single Storie Index Score for the property (CDC, 1997, p. 12).

3.2.2 Site Assessment (SA)

The SA subscore consists of four (4) factors that measure social, economic, and geographic features that contribute to the overall value of agricultural land. The SA factors include Project Size, Water Resource Availability, Surrounding Agricultural Land, and Protected Resource Land (CDC, 1997, p. 13).

A. Project Size

The Project Size rating evaluates the potential viability of potential agricultural productivity on a property. Generally, high quality soils (high rate of economic return per acre planted) only need to be present in relatively small quantities on a property to be considered important, whereas lower quality soils (low or moderate rate of economic return per acre planted) need to be present in larger quantities to be considered important.

The Project Size rating corresponds with the acreage of each LCC Class identified on a property. Table 3-2, *Project Size Scoring*, summarizes the different Project Size scoring combinations. For properties with multiple map units within the subject property, the mapping unit that generates the highest Project Size score is used as the final Project Size score for the Project site. The Project Size score accounts for 15 percent of the total California LESA Model Score (CDC, 1997, pp. 13-15).

LCC Class I or	r II soils	LCC Clas	s III soils	LCC Class IV or lower		
Acreage	Points	Acreage	Points	Acreage	Points	
80 or above	100	160 or above	100	320 or above	100	
60-79	90	120-159	90	240-319	80	
40-59 80		80-119	80	160-239	60	
20-39	50	60-79	70	100-159	40	
10-19	30	40-59	60	40-99	20	
Fewer than 10	0	20-39	30	Fewer than 40	0	
		10-19	10			
		Fewer than 10	0			

Table 3-2Project Size Scoring

Source: (CDC, 1997)

B. Water Resources Availability

The Water Resources Availability rating measures the reliability of a property's water resources that could be used for agricultural production during non-drought and drought years (water availability score) and the proportion of the property served by each water source (weighted availability score). The water availability score established by the California LESA Model is summarized in Table 3-3, *Water Resources Availability Scoring.* The total Water Resources score is the sum of the weighted availability score(s). The Water Resources Availability score accounts for 15 percent of the total California LESA Score (CDC, 1997, pp. 16, 29).

No	on-Drought Yea	rs	Drought Years			
	Restrictions		Restrictions			SCODE
Irrigation	Irrigation Physical Economic			Physical	Economic	SCORE
Feasible	Restrictions	Restrictions	Feasible	Restrictions	Restrictions	
YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	100
YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	95
YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	90
YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	85
YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	80
YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	75
YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	65
YES	NO	NO	NO			50
YES	NO	YES	NO			45
YES	YES	NO	NO			35
YES	YES	YES	NO			30
Irrigated production not feasible, but rainfall adequate for dryland production in both						
drought and non-drought years						
Irrigated prod	20					
drought years	(but not in drou	ight years)				
Neither irrigat	ed nor dry land	production feas	ible			0

Table 3-3	Water Resources	Availability Scoring
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Source: (CDC, 1997)

C. Surrounding Agricultural Land

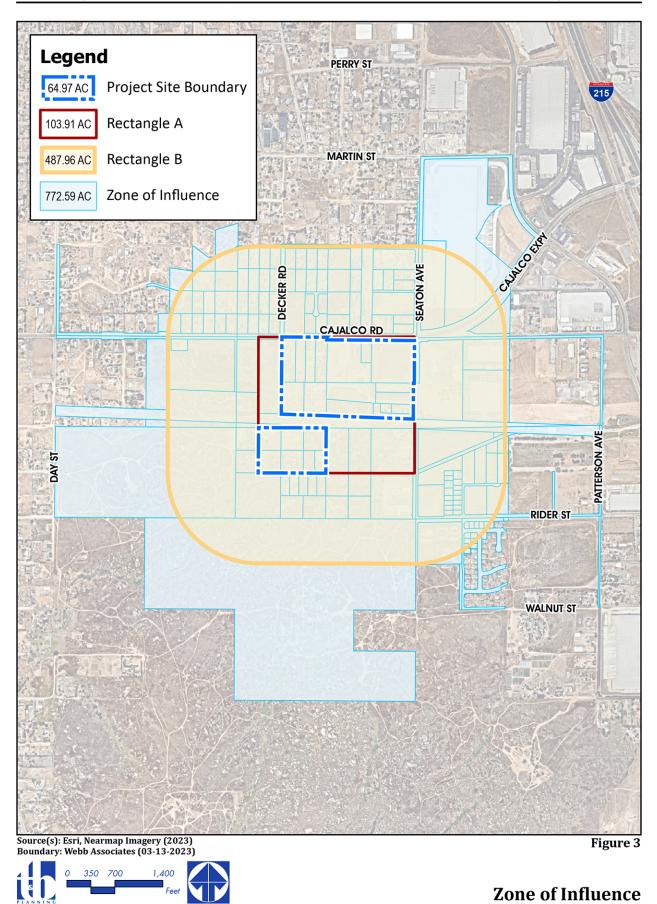
The Surrounding Agricultural Land rating accounts for the potential effect of development on properties containing important agricultural resources that surround a project site. The Surrounding Agricultural Land rating is dependent on the amount of agricultural land or related open space within a project's "Zone of Influence" (ZOI). The ZOI is determined by drawing the smallest rectangle that will completely contain the Project site on a map (Rectangle A) and creating a second rectangle that extends 0.25-mile beyond Rectangle A on all sides (Rectangle B). All parcels that are within or intersected by Rectangle B are included within the project's ZOI (CDC, 1997, pp. 23-25). The ZOI for the Project site is illustrated on Figure 3, *Zone of Influence*.

The Surrounding Agricultural Land rating is determined by the proportion of land within a project's ZOI that is currently used for agricultural production. The Surrounding Agricultural Land score established by the California LESA Model is summarized in Table 3-4, *Surrounding Agricultural Land Score*. Data for surrounding agricultural land can be obtained from the Department of Conservation's Important Farmland Map Series, the Department of Water Resources' Land Use Map Series, locally derived maps, and/or inspection of the site. The surrounding agricultural land score accounts for 15 percent of the total California LESA Model Score (CDC, 1997, pp. 26, 29).

Percent of Project's ZOI in Agricultural Use	Surrounding Agricultural Land Score
90 – 100 percent	100 Points
80 - 89	90
75 – 79	80
70 - 74	70
65 - 69	60
60 - 64	50
55 - 59	40
50 - 54	30
45 - 49	20
40 - 44	10
<40	0

Source: (CDC, 1997)

Zone of Influence



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D. Surrounding Protected Resource Land

Similar to the Surrounding Agricultural Land rating, the California LESA Model considers the potential effect of development on protected resource lands surrounding a project site. Protected resource lands include Williamson Act contracted lands, publicly owned lands maintained as park, forest, or watershed resources, and lands with natural resource easements (e.g., agricultural, wildlife habitat, open space).

The Surrounding Protected Resource Land rating is determined by the proportion of protected resource lands within a project's ZOI. The Surrounding Protected Resource Land scoring system established by the California LESA Model is summarized in Table 3-5, *Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score*. The Surrounding Protected Resource Land score accounts for 5 percent of the total California LESA Score (CDC, 1997, pp. 28-29).

Percent of Project's ZOI Defined as Protected	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score (Points)
90 - 100	100
80 - 89	90
75 – 79	80
70 - 74	70
65 - 69	60
60 - 64	50
55 - 59	40
50 - 54	30
45 - 49	20
40 - 44	10
<40	0

Table 3-5Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score

Source: (CDC, 1997)

4.0 **PROJECT SITE EVALUATION**

In this section, the California LESA Model is applied to the Project site to evaluate whether the Project site contains important agricultural resources.

4.1 Land Evaluation (LE)

As discussed in Subsection 3.2.1, the LE subscore measures the agricultural suitability of soils identified on a property by using the LCC Rating and Storie Index for each present soil map unit. The Project study area consists of twelve (12) soil map units including: Cieneba rocky sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, eroded (CkD2), Cieneba rocky sandy loam, 15 to 50 percent slopes, eroded (CkF2), Fallbrook sandy loam, shallow, 5 to 8 percent slopes, eroded (FbC2), Fallbrook rocky sandy loam, shallow, 8 to 15 percent slopes, eroded (FcD2), Hanford coarse sandy loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes (HcC), Monserate sandy loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes (MmB), Monserate sandy loam, 5 to 8 percent slopes, eroded (MmC2), Ramona sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes, eroded (RaB2), Vista coarse sandy loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes (VsC), Vista coarse sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, eroded (VsD2), and Vista rocky coarse sandy loam, 2 to 35 percent slopes, eroded (VtF2).

4.1.1 Land Capability Classification

Refer to Table 4-1, *Land Capability Classification Score*, below, for the LCC Scores of the Project site. The Project site's overall LCC Score is 46.2.

Soil Map Unit	Acres	Proportion of Project Site (percent)	LCC	LCC Rating	LCC Score
CkD2	6.8	10.5	VIe	20	2.1
CkF2	6.0	9.2	VIIe	10	0.92
FcC2	4.5	6.9	IVe	50	3.45
FcD2	1.9	2.9	VIe	20	0.58
HcC	0.1	0.2	IIIe	70	0.14
MmB	16.8	25.9	IVe	50	13.0
MmC2	0.1	0.2	IVe	50	0.1
MmD2	7.0	10.8	IVe	50	5.4
RaB2	13.6	20.9	IIIe	70	14.6
VsC	2.8	4.3	IVe	50	2.15
VsD2	4.7	7.2	IVe	50	3.6
VtF2	0.6	0.9	VIe	20	0.18
Totals	64.9	1001			46.2

 Table 4-1
 Land Capability Classification Score

Source: (USDA, 2023)

¹Rounded to the nearest 10th.

The non-irrigated LCC was utilized because under existing conditions, the Project site does not have an irrigation system.

4.1.1 <u>Storie Index</u>

Refer to Table 4-2, *Storie Index Score*, below, for the total Storie Index scores for the Project site. The Project site's overall Storie Index score is 42.0.

Soil Map Unit	Acres	Proportion of Project Site (percent)	Storie Index	Storie Index Score
CkD2	6.8	10.5	24	2.52
CkF2	6.0	9.2	18	1.66
FcC2	4.5	6.9	35	2.42
FcD2	1.9	2.9	34	0.99
HcC	0.1	0.2	82	0.16
MmB	16.8	25.9	30	7.77
MmC2	0.1	0.2	29	0.06
MmD2	7.0	10.8	28	3.02
RaB2	13.6	20.9	88	18.4
VsC	2.8	4.3	42	1.81
VsD2	4.7	7.2	40	2.88
VtF2	0.6	0.9	37	0.33
Totals	64.9	100 ¹		42.0

Table 4-2Storie Index Score

Source: (USDA, 2023)

¹Rounded to the nearest 10th.

4.2 Site Assessment (SA)

As previously noted, the SA subscore is based on a combination of a property's size, the availability of water resources, the presence/absence of surrounding agricultural lands, and the presence/absence of surrounding protected resource lands.

4.2.1 Project Size

Refer to Table 4-3, *Project Size Score*, below, for the total Project Size scores for the Project site. The Project's overall Project Size score is 20.

	Soil Class		
	LCC Class I-II	LCC Class III	LCC Class IV-VIII
Acres of Project site	0	13.7	51.2
Project Size Scores	0	10	20

Table 4-3Project Size Score

Source: (USDA, 2023)

Refer to Table 3-2 for Project Size Scoring, which is based on LCC Class and acreage.

4.2.2 <u>Water Resource Availability</u>

The Project site does not have existing irrigation systems; therefore, the California LESA model considers irrigated production to be infeasible on the Project site (CDC, 1997, p. 18). Notwithstanding, the LESA Model analyzes the potential for dryland production. The County is characterized as having an arid climate and receives little rainfall throughout the year. The average annual precipitation in the general Project site vicinity is approximately 11 inches (Best Places, 2023). Dryland farming can be productive with as little as 10-12 inches of rain per year (CAWSI, 2022). Accordingly, at the Project site, dryland farming is considered feasible during normal years but not feasible during drought years, which corresponds to Water Resources Availability scores of 20 (refer to Table 3-3).

4.2.3 <u>Surrounding Agricultural Land</u>

The Surrounding Agricultural Land score is dependent on the presence or absence of active agricultural production land within a project's ZOI. Figure 4, *Surrounding Agricultural and Protected Resources Land*, illustrates the active agricultural production lands in the ZOIs for the Project site. As illustrated on Figure 4, there are no active agricultural production land with the Project site's ZOI. Table 4-4, *Surrounding Agricultural Land Score*, summarizes the Surrounding Agricultural Land score for the Project site; the Project site's Surrounding Agricultural Land score is 0.

Zone of Influence			
Total Acres	Acres of Surrounding Agricultural Land	Percent Surrounding Agricultural Land	Surrounding Agricultural Land Score
772.59	0	0.0	0

Table 4-4 Surrounding Agricultural Land Score

4.2.4 Surrounding Protected Resource Land

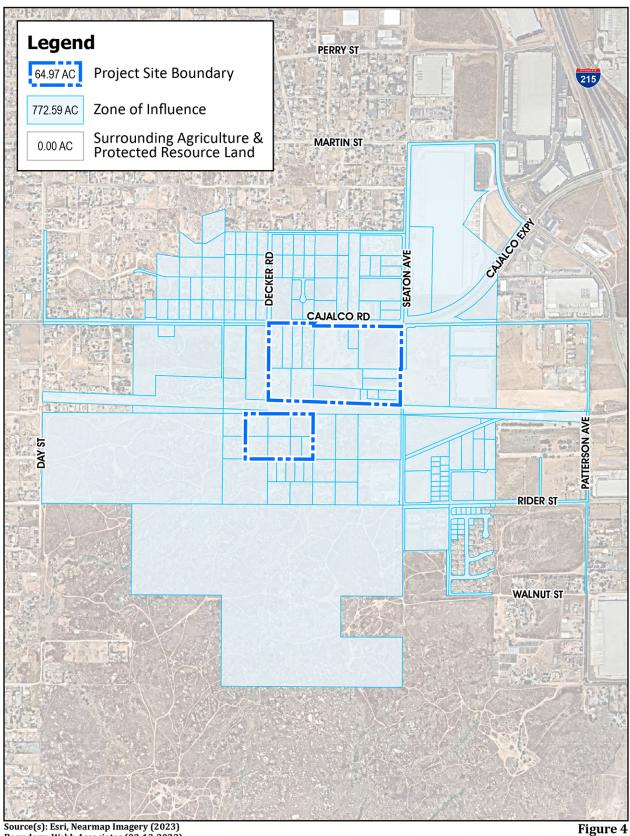
The Surrounding Protected Resource Land score is dependent on the presence or absence of lands within a project's ZOI that have long-term use restrictions that are compatible with or supportive of agricultural uses. Figure 4 illustrates the protected resource lands in the Project site's ZOI. As illustrated on Figure 4, there are no protected resource lands within the Project site's ZOI. Table 4-5, *Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score*, summarizes the Surrounding Protected Resource Land score for the Project site; the Project site's Surrounding Protected Resource Land score is 0.

Table 4-5	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score
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Zone of Influence			
Total Acres	Acres of Protected Resource Land	Percent Protected Resource Land	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score
772.59	0	0.0	0

4.3 Total LESA Score

The total LESA Score is calculated by summing the Project site's LE and SA subscores. The Project site's LESA subscores are summarized in Table 4-6. The Project site's final LESA score is 28.1.



Source(s): Esri, Nearmap Imagery (2023) Boundary: Webb Associates (03-13-2023)



Surrounding Agricultural & **Protected Resources Land**

	Factor Scores	Factor Weight	Weighted Factor Scores
LE Factors			
LCC	46.2	0.25	11.6
Storie Index	42.0	0.25	10.5
		LE Subtotal	22.1.
SA Factors			
Project Size	20	0.15	3.0
Water Resource Availability	20	0.15	3.0
Surrounding Agricultural Land	0	0.15	0.0
Protected Resource Land	0	0.05	0.0
		SA Subtotal	6.0
Final LESA Score			28.1

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Project site received a LESA score of 28.1. As shown in Table 5-1, impacts to land that receives a LESA score between 0 and 39 are not considered significant under CEQA. Thus, the Project site is determined to have a relatively low value for agricultural production and Project impacts on agricultural resources would be less-than-significant.

Total LESA Score	Scoring Decision
0 to 39	Not Considered Significant
40 to 59	Considered Significant <u>only</u> if LE <u>and</u> SA subscores are <u>each</u> greater than or equal to 20 points
60 to 79	Considered Significant <u>unless</u> either LE <u>or</u> SA subscore is <u>less</u> than 20 points
80 to 100	Considered Significant

 Table 5-1
 California LESA Model Scoring Thresholds

Source: (CDC, 1997, Table 9)

6.0 **REFERENCES**

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