

MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Project Title: Ritchie Ranch Tentative Subdivision Map No. 5600 and Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-23.

Project Description:

Ritchie Ranch Subdivision Map No. 5600 is a request by Lennar Homes of California LLC to subdivide a parcel totaling approximately 44.89 acres into 320 lots for single-family residential use, six outlots for landscaping, and two outlots for use as pocket parks, to be located within the R-1-5 (Single-Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area) zone.

Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-23 is a request by Lennar Homes of California LLC for a planned residential development on a 44.89-acre parcel, consisting of 320 single-family residential lots, located within the R-1-5 (Single-Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area) zone. The proposal will include non-standard lots that will be less than 5,000 square feet in size, with reduced lot widths, and reduced setbacks.

The project will include the construction of local streets within the subdivision, connection to North Demaree Street and West Shannon Parkway to the east, and connection to West Riverway Avenue to the north. Right of way dedications and frontage street improvements will be conducted along the listed streets, to include construction of curb, gutter, sidewalks, installation of park strip landscaping, block walls, and installation of streetlights throughout the subdivision. Lastly the subdivision will include development of two pocket parks for use by the general public.

The development of the property, if approved, will create additional housing units in the northwest quadrant of the City at a density of 7.13 dwelling units to the gross acre within the Low Density Residential designation area; which is consistent with the General Plan.

Project Location: The project site is located on the southwest corner of West Riverway Avenue and North Demaree Street (APN: 077-060-022).

Project Facts: Refer to Initial Study for project facts, plans and policies, and discussion of environmental effects.

Attachments:

Initial Study	(X)
Environmental Checklist	(X)
Location Map	(X)
Mitigation Measures	(X)
Traffic Impact Study	(X)
Biological Study	(X)
Noise Study	(X)
Cultural Study	(X)
Air Impact Assessment	(X)

DECLARATION OF NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT:

This project will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

- (a) The project does not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory.
- (b) The project does not have the potential to achieve short-term environmental goals to the disadvantage of long-term environmental goals.
- (c) The project does not have environmental effects which are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. Cumulatively considerable means that the incremental effects of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.
- (d) The environmental effects of the project will not cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly.

This Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared by the City of Visalia Planning Division in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, as amended. A copy may be obtained from the City of Visalia Planning Division Staff during normal business hours.

APPROVED
Brandon Smith, AICP
Environmental Coordinator

By: 

Date Approved: July 29, 2025

Review Period: 20 days

INITIAL STUDY

I. GENERAL

A. Project Name and Description:

Ritchie Ranch Subdivision Map No. 5600 is a request by Lennar Homes of California LLC to subdivide a parcel totaling approximately 44.89 acres into 320 lots for single-family residential use, six outlots for landscaping, and two outlots for use as pocket parks, to be located within the R-1-5 (Single-Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area) zone.

Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-23 is a request by Lennar Homes of California LLC for a planned residential development on a 44.89-acre parcel, consisting of 320 single-family residential lots, located within the R-1-5 (Single-Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area) zone. The proposal will include non-standard lots that will be less than 5,000 square feet in size, with reduced lot widths, and reduced setbacks.

The project will include the construction of local streets within the subdivision, connection to North Demaree Street and West Shannon Parkway to the east, and connection to West Riverway Avenue to the north. Right of way dedications and frontage street improvements will be conducted along the listed streets, to include construction of curb, gutter, sidewalks, installation of park strip landscaping, block walls, and installation of streetlights throughout the subdivision. Lastly the subdivision will include development of two pocket parks for use by the general public.

The development of the property, if approved, will create additional housing units in the northwest quadrant of the City at a density of 7.13 dwelling units to the gross acre within the Low Density Residential designation area; which is consistent with the General Plan.

The project site is located on the southwest corner of West Riverway Avenue and North Demaree Street (APN: 077-060-022).

B. Identification of the Environmental Setting:

The project area is composed of one parcel totaling 44.89 acres. The parcel is currently employed for agricultural production and contains a single family residence, accessory storage buildings, and an agricultural well. The project site is directly bounded to the north by the Modoc Ditch and West Riverway Avenue (a two-lane local street), to the east by North Demaree Street (a four lane minor arterial street), and to the south by the Modoc Ditch. The site will also be bisected by West Shannon Parkway, a two lane collector street, which will run east to west through the middle of the project site. Development surrounding the project site consists of single family residential subdivisions to the north, south, and east, and agriculture to the west. City ponding basins are also found just east and west of the project site.

The surrounding uses, Zoning, and General Plan are as follows:

	General Plan (2014 Land Use)	Zoning (2017)	Existing uses
North:	Residential Low Density, Residential Medium Density	R-1-5 (Single Family Residential, 5,000 square foot	Wildhorse Ranch Subdivision, Belissa Subdivision (in development)

		minimum site area), R-M-2 (Multifamily Residential, 3,000 square foot minimum site area)	
South:	Residential Low Density	R-1-5	Avalon Subdivision
East:	Residential Low Density, Conservation, Parks/Recreation, Residential Medium Density, Office, Commercial Mixed Use	R-1-5, QP (Quasi Public), R-M-2, O-PA (Professional Administrative Office), C-MU (Mixed Use Commercial)	Shannon Ranch Subdivision, City ponding basin, City trail, Kaweah Delta Urgent Care, Quail Park at Shannon Ranch Senior Living Facility, The Village at Willow Creek Shopping Center
West:	Residential Low Density, Residential Medium Density	R-1-5, R-M-2, QP	Agricultural land, City ponding basin.

Fire and police protection services, street maintenance of public streets, refuse collection, and wastewater treatment will be provided by the City of Visalia upon the development of the area.

C. Plans and Policies:

The General Plan Land Use Diagram, adopted October 14, 2014, designates the site as Residential Low Density and the Zoning Map, adopted in 2017, designates the site as R-1-5 (Single Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area). The proposed development is consistent with the Land Use Element of the General Plan, and consistent with the standards for residential zone development pursuant to the Visalia Municipal Code Title 17 (Zoning Ordinance) Chapter 17.12.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

No significant adverse environmental impacts have been identified for this project that cannot be mitigated to a *less than significant impact*. The City of Visalia Land Use Element, Zoning Ordinance, and Oak Tree Ordinance contain policies and regulations that are designed to mitigate impacts to a level of non-significance.

III. MITIGATION MEASURES

The following mitigation measures, which are listed below under IV. Mitigation Monitoring Program, will reduce potential environmental impacts related to traffic, cultural, and biological impacts to a less than significant level as described below:

Transportation / Traffic – A Traffic Impact Study prepared for the proposed projects (ref.: Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Traffic Impact Study. VRPA Technologies, Inc., July 25, 2025) has

concluded that roadway operating conditions for intersections and roadways in the vicinity of the project area either are or will be significantly impacted with the addition of the proposed project. To ensure that intersections and roadways will operate at acceptable LOS “D” or better through the year 2030, the report recommends mitigation to be incorporated into the project.

Cultural Resources – A Cultural Resources Study prepared by Applied EarthWorks, Inc. (ref.: Cultural Resources Assessment and Evaluation for Ritchie Ranch, City of Visalia, Tulare County, California, March 2025) assessed the project site to determine whether cultural resources are present within the Project area. The investigation included a records search through the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center (SSJVIC) to identify previously recorded cultural resources and prior studies in the project vicinity, a request to the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) to review its Sacred Lands File (SLF) for known resources, and a pedestrian survey of the proposed Project area.

Consultant archaeologists observed four historic-era artifacts (two pieces of glass, and two ceramic fragments) widely scattered across the northern portion of the Project area, which previously contained a historic-era farmhouse. Because the consultant observed isolated historic-era artifacts in the northern half of the project area, it is possible that buried historic-era refuse deposits, objects, or structural remains may be uncovered during construction. As such mitigation measures as outlined in Section IV below are proposed in the event of unanticipated archaeological discovery or exposure of human remains during construction. Mitigations include recommendations that if a potential cultural resource is identified, a Native American monitor from the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi-Yokut Tribe (SRR) and an archaeological monitor be contracted to monitor the project for the duration of earthmoving activities. In the event of accidental discovery of unidentified archaeological remains during development or ground-moving activities in the Project area, all work within the immediate vicinity (within a 50-foot radius) should be halted until a qualified archaeologist can identify the discovery and assess its significance. Lastly, if human remains are uncovered during construction, the Tulare County Coroner is to be notified to investigate the remains and arrange proper treatment and disposition. If the remains are identified to be those of a Native American person, California Health and Safety Code 7050.5 requires that the county coroner notify the Native American Heritage Commission within 24 hours of discovery. The NAHC will then identify the Most Likely Descendant, who will be afforded the opportunity to recommend means for treatment of the human remains following protocols in California PRC 5097.98.

Biological Resources – A biological evaluation prepared by Live Oak Associates, Inc. (ref.: Biological Evaluation, Ritchie Ranch Development, Tulare County, California, June 21, 2024) assessed the project site and identified that the site has the potential to be used for nesting by a variety of migratory birds and raptors, including the Loggerhead Shrike, a California species of special concern, and Swainson’s hawk, a state-listed species. The project site’s mature trees also have the potential to be used for roosting by various bat species, possibly including the pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), a California species of special concern. Lastly, valley oak trees were identified in the northern portion of the project site. Valley oaks are protected by the City of Visalia Oak Tree Protection Ordinance. The biological evaluation identified that impacts would be considered less than significant with mitigations pertaining to construction timing.

Staff has incorporated mitigation measures, as indicated in Section IV (Mitigation Monitoring Program) below, based on the conclusions of the above environmental factors. The City of Visalia Zoning Ordinance also contains guidelines, criteria, and requirements for the mitigation of potential impacts

related to light/glare, visibility screening, noise, and traffic/parking to eliminate and/or reduce potential impacts to a level of non-significance.

IV. MITIGATION MONITORING PROGRAM

<u>Mitigation Measure</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
<p>Transportation / Traffic Impact Mitigation Measure 1.1: Demaree Street at Shannon Parkway:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a 300-foot northbound left turn storage pocket. • Provide a 100-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket. 	Project Applicant	Mitigation shall be enforced and improvements completed prior to final occupancy of any building within the first phase of development.
<p>Transportation / Traffic Impact Mitigation Measure 1.2: Street L/Winslow Street at Shannon Parkway:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a 100-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket. • Provide a 100-foot westbound left turn storage pocket. 	Project Applicant	Mitigation shall be enforced and improvements completed prior to final occupancy of any building within the first phase of development.
<p>Transportation / Traffic Impact Mitigation Measure 1.3: Demaree Street at Riggins Avenue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the southbound left turn storage pocket, the City of Visalia will monitor signal timing at the intersection and make adjustments as necessary to maximize vehicular flow at the intersection, since there is insufficient space to extend the southbound left due to the constraint of the northbound left turn pocket at the Demaree Street and Jerome Avenue intersection. • Provide a 300-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket. 	Project Applicant, City of Visalia	Mitigation shall be enforced. The City of Visalia will monitor signal timing at the intersection, and improvements will be completed within five years or as warranted, after the occupancy of the first building within the first phase of development.
<p>Transportation / Traffic Impact Mitigation Measure 1.4: Linwood Street at Riggins Avenue. Since this intersection is currently a ‘T’ intersection, the City of Visalia will monitor the need for intersection improvements and signalization. Once the north leg of Linwood Street is developed by others, the following improvements are recommended:</p>	Project Applicant, City of Visalia	Mitigation shall be enforced. The City of Visalia will monitor traffic counts at the intersection, and improvements will be completed within five years or as warranted, after the occupancy of the first building within the first phase of development.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a 100-foot northbound left turn storage pocket. • Provide a 100-foot southbound left turn storage pocket. • Provide a 100-foot eastbound right turn storage pocket. • Provide a 100-foot westbound right turn storage pocket. 		
<p>Biological Resources Mitigation Measure 2.1 (Nesting Raptors and Migratory Birds Including Loggerhead Shrike):</p> <p>Construction Timing: If feasible, the project will be implemented outside of the avian nesting season, typically defined as February 1 to August 31.</p> <p>If construction must occur between February 1 and August 31, a qualified biologist will conduct pre-construction surveys for active bird nests within 10 days prior to the start of construction. The survey area will encompass the site and accessible surrounding lands within 250 feet for nesting migratory birds and 500 feet for raptors.</p> <p>Should any active nests be discovered in or near proposed construction zones, the biologist will identify a suitable construction-free buffer around the nest. This buffer will be identified on the ground with flagging or fencing and will be maintained until the biologist has determined that the young have fledged and are capable of foraging independently.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during operation.</p>

<p>Biological Resources Mitigation Measure 2.2 (Swainson's Hawk):</p> <p>Construction Timing: Should any active nests be discovered in or near proposed construction zones, the biologist will identify a suitable construction-free buffer around the nest. This buffer will be identified on the ground with flagging or fencing and will be maintained until the biologist has determined that the young have fledged and are capable of foraging independently.</p> <p>Pre-Construction Surveys: If the project must be constructed between March 1 and September 15, a qualified biologist will conduct pre-construction surveys for Swainson's hawk nests on and within ¼ mile of the project site within 10 days of the onset of these activities.</p> <p>Establish Buffers: Should any active nests be discovered in or near proposed construction zones, the biologist will identify a suitable construction-free buffer around the nest. This buffer will be identified on the ground with flagging or fencing and will be maintained until the biologist has determined that the young have fledged.</p> <p>Monitor Nest: Should construction activity be necessary within the designated buffer around an active Swainson's hawk nest, a qualified biologist will monitor the nest daily for one week, and thereafter once a week, for the duration of the activity or until the nest is no longer active, whichever comes first. Should construction activity within the buffer change such that a higher level of disturbance will be generated, monitoring will occur daily for one week and then resume the once-a-week regime. If, at any time, the biologist determines that construction activity may be compromising nesting success, construction activity within the designated buffer will be altered or suspended until the biologist determines that the nest is no longer at risk of failing.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during operation.</p>
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<p>Biological Resources Mitigation Measure 2.3 (Pallid Bat):</p> <p>Construction Timing: If feasible, demolition and removal of the mature trees will occur outside of the period between April 15 and September 30. This is the time frame within which colony-nesting bats in the vicinity generally assemble, give birth, nurse their young, and ultimately disperse.</p> <p>Pre-Construction Surveys: Within 10 days prior to the removal of the site's trees, a qualified biologist will survey them for roosting bats. The biologist will look for individuals, guano, and staining, and will listen for bat vocalizations. If necessary, the biologist will wait for nighttime emergence of bats from roost sites.</p> <p>Avoidance of Maternity Roosts: Should any active maternity bat roosts be discovered, the biologist will identify a suitable construction-free buffer around the maternity roost. The buffer will be identified on the ground with flagging or fencing, and will be maintained until the biologist has determined that the nursery is no longer active.</p> <p>Humane Eviction of Non-Breeding Bats: If a non-breeding bat colony is found in tree cavities, the individuals will be humanely evicted, under the direction of a qualified biologist, to ensure that bats are not physically harmed by demolition and removal of the trees.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during operation.</p>
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<p>Biological Resources Mitigation Measure 2.4 (Valley Oaks):</p> <p>Avoidance: Should the applicant choose to avoid oak trees, a Valley Oak Management plan will be prepared and implemented, in accordance with the City of Visalia Parks and Recreation Department Urban Forestry Division’s Standard Specifications for Building Around Valley Oaks (2007; Appendix D).</p> <p>Mitigation Fees or Replacement Planting: Should avoidance of oak trees not be possible, the applicant will obtain an oak tree removal permit from the City of Visalia, if required by the City of Visalia Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Chapter 12.24) at the time of development. Based on the City’s tree protection ordinance, compensation for Valley Oak removal will consist of either payment of a mitigation fee (\$120 multiplied by diameter at breast height (DBH) for each tree removed), replacement planting at a ratio of one new oak tree for every inch of DBH of the tree removed, or some combination of the two, as determined in consultation with the City.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during operation.</p>
<p>Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.1:</p> <p>If unknown precontact or historic-era cultural resources are encountered during Project activities, all ground-disturbing activities within 50 feet of the find shall cease. A Secretary of the Interior-qualified archaeologist and/or historian, as appropriate to the resource and approved by the City, shall evaluate the significance of the resource and recommend appropriate management measures. The City shall consult with interested Native American representatives in determining appropriate mitigation for unearthened cultural resources if the resources are precontact or Native American in nature. Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(b)(3), project redesign and preservation in place shall be the preferred means to avoid impacts to significant cultural resources (i.e., historical resources). Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(b)(3)(C), if it is demonstrated that a historical resource cannot be avoided, the qualified archaeologist shall develop mitigation in consultation with the City and interested Native</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during the initial ground disturbance stages of construction for each phase of development.</p>

<p>American representatives if the resources are tribal in nature, which may include data recovery or other appropriate measures. If preservation in place is not possible and additional studies or data recovery mitigation is necessary, the qualified archaeologist will prepare a plan outlining the mitigation steps to be approved by the City and the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Yokut Tribe (SRR). Once the plan has been implemented and the resources mitigated, construction can recommence based on the direction of the archaeologist and City concurrence. A formal report documenting the results of mitigation must be prepared as outlined in Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.2.</p>		
<p>Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.2: In the event that potential cultural resources are identified, a Secretary of the Interior-qualified archaeologist, approved by the City, will be contracted to provide archaeological monitoring services for the duration of the earthmoving activities. All remaining soils that have not been previously disturbed as part of the project will require archaeological observation. Within 60 days of conclusion of the construction activities, the qualified archaeologist shall prepare a report documenting the results of the monitoring activities, including any finds or other resources observed during the project. All discovered cultural resources will be documented on California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 series forms. A copy of the report shall be provided to City, the SRR, and the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center (SSJVIC).</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during development or ground moving activities for each phase of development.</p>
<p>Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.3: As requested by the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Yokut Tribe, the City also will notify the SRR of any inadvertent discoveries within 24 hours of the find. If inadvertent tribal cultural resources are identified, the SRR will be contracted to provide tribal monitoring services for the duration of the earthmoving activities. All remaining soils that have not been previously disturbed as part of the project will require tribal observation.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during construction of the entire project.</p>

<p>Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.4: In the event human remains are uncovered during Project activities, the Tulare County Coroner is to be immediately notified to evaluate the remains, and follow the procedures and protocols set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5 (e)(1). If the remains are identified to be those of a Native American person, California Health and Safety Code 7050.5 requires that the county coroner notify the Native American Heritage Commission within 24 hours of discovery. The NAHC will then identify the Most Likely Descendant, who will be afforded the opportunity to recommend means for treatment of the human remains following protocols in California PRC 5097.98.</p>	<p>Project Applicant</p>	<p>Mitigation shall be enforced by the project applicant and carried out during construction of the entire project.</p>
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IV. PROJECT COMPATIBILITY WITH EXISTING ZONES AND PLANS

The project is compatible with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance as the project relates to surrounding properties.

V. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The following documents are hereby incorporated into this Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study by reference:

- Visalia General Plan Update. Dyett & Bhatia, October 2014.
- Visalia City Council Resolution No. 2014-38 (Certifying the Visalia General Plan Update) passed and adopted October 14, 2014.
- Visalia General Plan Update Final Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2010041078). Dyett & Bhatia, June 2014.
- Visalia General Plan Update Draft Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2010041078). Dyett & Bhatia, March 2014.
- Visalia City Council Resolution No. 2014-37 (Certifying the EIR for the Visalia General Plan Update) passed and adopted October 14, 2014.
- Visalia Municipal Code, including Title 17 (Zoning Ordinance).
- California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines.
- City of Visalia, California, Climate Action Plan, Draft Final. Strategic Energy Innovations, December 2013.
- Visalia City Council Resolution No. 2014-36 (Certifying the Visalia Climate Action Plan) passed and adopted October 14, 2014.
- City of Visalia Storm Water Master Plan. Boyle Engineering Corporation, September 1994.
- City of Visalia Sewer System Master Plan. City of Visalia, 1994.
- City of Visalia Zoning Ordinance Update. City of Visalia, March 2017.
- Acoustical Analysis, Ritchie Ranch Residential Development, Visalia, California, WJVA Project No. 24-23. WJV Acoustics, May 20, 2024 (Revised April 1, 2025).

- Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Traffic Impact Study. VRPA Technologies, Inc., July 25, 2025.
- Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025.
- Cultural Resource Study and Evaluation for Ritchie Ranch, City of Visalia, Tulare County, California. Applied EarthWorks, Inc., March 2025.
- Biological Evaluation, Ritchie Ranch Development, Tulare County, California. Live Oak Associates, Inc., June 21, 2024.

VI. NAME OF PERSON WHO PREPARED INITIAL STUDY



Cristobal Carrillo
Associate Planner



Brandon Smith, AICP
Environmental Coordinator

established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

- 3 e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?
- 1 f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

- 3 a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 15064.5?
- 3 b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 15064.5?
- 3 c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?

VI. ENERGY

Would the project:

- 2 a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?
- 1 b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?

VII. GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Would the project:

- a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:
 - 1 i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.
 - 1 ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?
 - 1 iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?
 - 1 iv) Landslides?
- 1 b) Result in substantial soil erosion or loss of topsoil?
- 1 c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?
- 1 d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?
- 1 e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?
- 3 f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

VIII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Would the project:

- 2 a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?
- 2 b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

IX. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Would the project:

- 1 a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?
- 1 b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?
- 1 c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?
- 1 d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?
- 1 e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area?
- 1 f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?
- 1 g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?

X. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

Would the project:

- 2 a) Violate any water quality standards of waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or groundwater quality?
- 2 b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?
- 2 c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:
 - 2 i) result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;
 - 2 ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite; or
 - 2 iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff?
- 2 d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?
- 2 e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

XI. LAND USE AND PLANNING

Would the project:

- 1 a) Physically divide an established community?
- 1 b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

XII. MINERAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

- 1 a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?
- 1 b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

XIII. NOISE

Would the project result in:

- 2 a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?
- 2 b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?
- 1 c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

XIV. POPULATION AND HOUSING

Would the project:

- 2 a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?
- 1 b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

XV. PUBLIC SERVICES

Would the project:

- 1 a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:
 - 1 i) Fire protection?
 - 1 ii) Police protection?
 - 1 iii) Schools?
 - 1 iv) Parks?
 - 1 v) Other public facilities?

XVI. RECREATION

Would the project:

- 1 a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?

- 1 b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?

XVII. TRANSPORTATION / TRAFFIC

Would the project:

- 1 a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?
- 3 b) Conflict with an applicable congestion management program, including, but not limited to level of service standards and travel demand measures, or other standards established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways?
- 2 c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?
- 1 d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

XVIII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

- 1 a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or
- 3 b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

XIX. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Would the project:

- 2 a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or stormwater drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?
- 2 b) Have sufficient water supplies available to service the project and reasonable foreseeable future development during normal, dry, and multiple dry years?
- 1 c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?
- 1 d) Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?
- 1 e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?

XX. WILDFIRE

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

- 1 a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?
- 1 b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?
- 1 c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?
- 1 d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

XXI. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Would the project:

- 3 a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?
- 2 b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?
- 2 c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

Note: Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21083.05, Public Resources Code. Reference: Section 65088.4, Gov. Code; Sections 21080(c), 21080.1, 21080.3, 21083, 21083.05, 21083.3, 21093, 21094, 21095, and 21151, Public Resources Code; *Sundstrom v. County of Mendocino*, (1988) 202 Cal.App.3d 296; *Leonoff v. Monterey Board of Supervisors*, (1990) 222 Cal.App.3d 1337; *Eureka Citizens for Responsible Govt. v. City of Eureka* (2007) 147 Cal.App.4th 357; *Protect the Historic Amador Waterways v. Amador Water Agency* (2004) 116 Cal.App.4th at 1109; *San Franciscans Upholding the Downtown Plan v. City and County of San Francisco* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 656.

Revised 2019

Authority: Public Resources Code sections 21083 and 21083.09

Reference: Public Resources Code sections 21073, 21074, 21080.3.1, 21080.3.2, 21082.3/ 21084.2 and 21084.3

DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

I. AESTHETICS

- a. This proposed project is a new subdivided residential construction which will meet City standards for setbacks, landscaping, and height requirements. The project will not adversely affect the view of any scenic vistas. The Sierra Nevada Mountain range may be considered a scenic vista; however, the view will not be adversely impacted by the project
- b. There are no scenic resources on the site. However, there are oak trees located on the project site. The City of Visalia has an Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance, which the project shall comply with. Compliance is part of the mitigation measures for the project (See Section II.E).
- c. The project site is located within an urbanized area and the City has development standards related to landscaping and other amenities that will ensure that the visual character of the area is enhanced and not degraded upon development. Thus, the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the site and its surroundings.
- d. The project will facilitate the construction of a new subdivision, as well as the required infrastructure and development such as streetlights, creating new sources of light that are typical of that use. The City has development standards that require light to be directed and/or shielded so it does not fall upon adjacent properties.

II. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

- a. The project is located on property that is identified as Prime Farmland on maps prepared by the California Department of Conservation, and will involve the conversion of the property to non-agricultural use.

The City of Visalia 2030 General Plan has designated the Project site for urban uses under the Urban Growth Development Tier 1. The implementation of this Project will support the General Plan designation for urban land use and Policy LU-P-20 for urban uses, including commercial development, which may develop within Tier 1 at any time consistent with the City's Land Use Diagram.

The Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has already considered the environmental impacts of the conversion of properties within the Planning Area into non-agriculture uses. Overall, the General Plan results in the conversion of over 14,000 acres of Important Farmland to urban uses, which is considered significant and unavoidable. Aside from preventing development altogether the conversion of Important Farmland to urban uses cannot be directly mitigated, through the use of agricultural conservation easements or by other means. However, the General Plan contains multiple policies that together work to limit conversion only to the extent needed to accommodate long-term growth. The General Plan policies identified under Impact 3.5-1 of the EIR serve as the mitigation that assists in reducing the severity of the impact to the extent possible while still achieving the General Plan's goals of accommodating a certain amount

of growth to occur within the Planning Area. These policies include the implementation of a three-tier growth boundary system that assists in protecting open space around the City fringe and maintaining compact development within the City limits.

The project will be consistent with Policy LU-P-34. The conversion of the site from an agricultural use to urban development does not require mitigation to offset the loss of prime farmland as stated in Policy LU-P-34. The policy states: "the mitigation program shall specifically allow exemptions for conversion of agricultural lands in Tier I."

Because there is still a significant impact to loss of agricultural resources after conversion of properties within the General Plan Planning Area to non-agricultural uses, a Statement of Overriding Considerations was previously adopted with the Visalia General Plan Update EIR.

- b. The project is not located on property that is party to a Williamson Act contract. Existing City zoning for the area is R-1-5 (Single Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area). As such zoning for agricultural use will not be affected.
- c. There is no forest land or timberland currently located on the site, nor does the site conflict with a zoning for forest land, timberland, or timberland zoned timberland production.
- d. There is no forest or timberland currently located on the project site.
- e. The project will not involve any changes that would promote or result in the conversion of farmland to non-agriculture use. The subject property is currently designated for an urban rather than agricultural land use. Properties that are vacant may develop in a way that is consistent with their zoning and land use designated at any time. The adopted Visalia General Plan's implementation of a three-tier growth boundary system further assists in protecting open space around the City fringe to ensure that premature conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses does not occur.

III. AIR QUALITY

- a. The project site is located in an area that is under the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD). The project does not disrupt implementation of the San Joaquin Regional Air Quality Management Plan and will therefore be a less than significant impact.
- b. Development under the Visalia General Plan will result in emissions that will exceed thresholds established by the SJVAPCD for PM10 and PM2.5. The project will contribute to a net increase of criteria pollutants and will therefore contribute to exceeding the thresholds. Also, the project could result in short-term air quality impacts related to dust generation and exhaust due to construction and grading activities. This site was evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update EIR for conversion into urban development.

Development under the General Plan will result in increases of construction and operation-related criteria pollutant impacts, which are considered significant and unavoidable. General Plan policies identified under Impacts 3.3-1 and 3.3-2 serve as the mitigation which assists in reducing the severity of the impact to the extent possible while still achieving the General Plan's goals of accommodating a certain amount of growth to occur within the Planning Area.

The project is required to adhere to requirements administered by the SJVAPCD to reduce emissions to a level of compliance consistent with the District's grading regulations. Compliance with the SJVAPCD's rules and regulations will reduce potential impacts associated with air quality standard violations to a less than significant level.

In addition, development of the project will be subject to the SJVAPCD Indirect Source Review (Rule 9510) procedures that became effective on March 1, 2006. The Applicant will be required to obtain permits demonstrating compliance with Rule 9510, or payment of mitigation fees to the SJVAPCD.

The Tulare County area is nonattainment for Federal and State air quality standards for ozone, in attainment of Federal standards and nonattainment for State standards for PM10, and nonattainment for Federal and State standards for PM2.5. The SJVAPCD has prepared the 2016 and 2013 Ozone Plans, 2007 PM10 Maintenance Plan, and 2012 PM2.5 Plan to achieve Federal and State standards for improved air quality in the SJVAB regarding ozone and PM. Inconsistency with any of the plans would be considered a cumulatively adverse air quality impact. As discussed in Section 4.1.1 of the Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment (AQGGIA) (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025) conducted for this proposal, the Project is consistent with the currently adopted General Plan for the City of Visalia and is therefore consistent with the population growth and VMT applied in the plan. Therefore, the Project is consistent with the growth assumptions used in the 2016 and 2013 Ozone Plan, 2007 PM10 Maintenance Plan, and 2012 PM2.5 Plan.

Project specific emissions that exceed the thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants would be expected to result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the County is in non-attainment under applicable federal or state ambient air quality standards. It should be noted that a project is not characterized as cumulatively insignificant when project emissions fall below thresholds of significance. As discussed in Section 3.1 of the AQGGIA (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025), the SJVAPCD has established thresholds of significance for determining environmental significance which are provided in Table 6 of the study.

As discussed above in Section 3.2 and 3.3 of the AQGGIA (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025), results of the analysis show that emissions generated from construction and operation of the Project will be less than the applicable SJVAPCD emission thresholds for criteria pollutants. Table

7 within Section 3.2 (Short-Term Impacts) of the study shows the CalEEMod estimated construction emissions that would be generated from construction of the Project. Results of the analysis show that emissions generated from construction of the Project will not exceed the SJVAPCD emission thresholds. For long-term emissions, Section 3.3 of the AQGGIA studied potential impacts from localized operational emissions (ex. ozone/particulate matter, carbon monoxide, toxic air contaminants, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.) and determined that the annual operational emissions from the Project will be less than the SJVAPCD and CalEEMod emission thresholds for criteria pollutants, per Tables 8 through 10 of the study. Therefore, no mitigation is needed.

- c. Tulare County is designated non-attainment for certain federal ozone and state ozone levels. The project will result in a net increase of criteria pollutants. This site was evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update EIR for conversion into urban development. Development under the General Plan will result in increases of construction and operation-related criteria pollutant impacts, which are considered significant and unavoidable. General Plan policies identified under Impacts 3.3-1, 3.3-2, and 3.3-3 serve as the mitigation which assists in reducing the severity of the impact to the extent possible while still achieving the General Plan's goals of accommodating a certain amount of growth to occur within the Planning Area.

The project is required to adhere to requirements administered by the SJVAPCD to reduce emissions to a level of compliance consistent with the District's grading regulations. Compliance with the SJVAPCD's rules and regulations will reduce potential impacts associated with air quality standard violations to a less than significant level.

In addition, development of the project will be subject to the SJVAPCD Indirect Source Review (Rule 9510) procedures that became effective on March 1, 2006. The Applicant will be required to obtain permits demonstrating compliance with Rule 9510, or payment of mitigation fees to the SJVAPCD.

An AQGGIA (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025) was also submitted to identify air quality impacts that may result from the project. To evaluate the potential for impacts from the Project a screening level analysis was performed, using a screening tool found in the CARB Handbook: Air Quality and Land Use Handbook: A Community Perspective. This handbook includes a table (depicted in Table 4 of the AQGGIA) with recommended buffer distances associated with various types of common sources. The screening level analysis for the Project shows that impacts are not a concern based upon the recommendations provided in Table 4. An evaluation of nearby land uses considering CARB's Pollution Mapping Tool shows that the Project will not place sensitive receptors in the vicinity of existing toxic sources. Table 4 indicates that new sensitive land uses shouldn't be sited within 500 feet of freeway/urban roads with 100,000 vehicles/day, or rural roads with 50,000 vehicles/day. The Project meets this requirement. Therefore, no mitigation is needed.

Short-Term Impacts

The annual emissions from the construction phase of the Project will be less than the applicable SJVAPCD emission thresholds for criteria pollutants as shown in Table 8 of the AQGGIA. The construction emissions are therefore considered less than significant with the implementation of the SJVAPCD applicable Regulation VIII control measures, which are provided below.

1. All disturbed areas, including storage piles, which are not being actively utilized for construction purposes, shall be effectively stabilized of dust emissions using water, chemical stabilizer/suppressant, covered with a tarp or other suitable cover or vegetative ground cover.
2. All on-site unpaved roads and off-site unpaved access roads shall be effectively stabilized of dust emissions using water or chemical stabilizer/suppressant.
3. All land clearing, grubbing, scraping, excavation, land leveling, grading, cut & fill, and demolition activities shall be effectively controlled of fugitive dust emissions utilizing application of water or by presoaking.
4. When materials are transported off-site, all material shall be covered, or effectively wetted to limit visible dust emissions, and at least six inches of freeboard space from the top of the container shall be maintained.
5. All operations shall limit or expeditiously remove the accumulation of mud or dirt from adjacent public streets at the end of each workday. The use of dry rotary brushes is expressly prohibited except where preceded or accompanied by sufficient wetting to limit the visible dust emissions. Use of blower devices is expressly forbidden.
6. Following the addition of materials to, or the removal of materials from, the surface of outdoor storage piles, said piles shall be effectively stabilized of fugitive dust emissions utilizing sufficient water or chemical stabilizer/suppressant.
7. Within urban areas, track out shall be immediately removed when it extends 50 or more feet from the site and at the end of each workday.

Naturally Occurring Asbestos (NOA)

The proposed Project's construction phase may cause asbestos to become airborne due to the construction activities that will occur on site. In order to control naturally occurring asbestos dust, the Project will be required to submit a Dust Control Plan under the SJVAPCD's Rule 8021. The Dust Control Plan may include the following measures:

1. Water wetting of road surfaces;
2. Rinse vehicles and equipment;
3. Wet loads of excavated material; and
4. Cover loads of excavated material.

Long-Term Impacts

Long-Term emissions from the Project are generated primarily by mobile source (vehicle) emissions from the project site and area sources such as lawn maintenance equipment. Emissions from long-term operations generally represent a project's most substantial air quality impact.

Table 8 of the AQGGIA summarizes the Project's operational impacts by pollutant. Results indicate that operational emissions from the Project will not exceed the SJVAPCD emissions threshold for any emissions, hence no mitigations are required.

- d. The proposed project will not involve the generation of objectionable odors that would affect a substantial number of people.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- a. A Biological Habitat Assessment was submitted by Live Oak Associates, Inc (Biological Evaluation, Ritchie Ranch Development, Tulare County, California, June 21, 2024). Live Oak staff surveyed the project site on May 23, 2024, for its biotic habitats, the plants and animals occurring in those habitats, and significant habitat values that may be protected by state and federal law. At the time, the site consisted of a residential area, a disked field, and an almond orchard. The site supported several mature trees and herbaceous plants used for landscaping in the residential portion and grasses and forbs typical of a disturbed agricultural environment within the disked field and almond orchard. The project site did not contain wildlife movement corridors, sensitive natural communities, designated critical habitat, or federally protected waters or wetlands.

Three special status species known from the vicinity have some potential to occur on site, and project related impacts to these species are considered potentially significant under CEQA. These include Swainson's hawk, loggerhead shrike, and pallid bat. Project related impacts are also considered potentially significant for nesting birds and raptors. Impacts to Swainson's hawks, loggerhead shrike, and other nesting birds and raptors will be reduced by either constructing the project outside of the nesting season or, if construction must occur during the nesting season, by conducting preconstruction surveys and avoiding active nests. Impacts to pallid bat will be reduced by either constructing the project outside of pupping season, or, if construction must occur during pupping season, by conducting preconstruction surveys and avoiding active roosts. If construction occurs outside of pupping season but pallid bats are found to be roosting in tree cavities, they will be humanely evicted by a qualified biologist. If Oak trees can be avoided, then a Valley Oak management plan will be prepared and implemented. If avoidance of oak trees is not possible, then an oak tree removal permit will be obtained from the City of Visalia to ensure compliance with local policies and plans. These recommendations are included as Biological Resources Mitigation Measures No. 2.1 through 2.13. With incorporation of the mitigation, impacts would be less than significant with mitigation incorporation.

The project will either have no impact or a less than significant impact, as defined by CEQA, on the following biotic resources: all eighteen special plant species known to occur in the area; fourteen special status animal species that would not likely use the site (i.e., the project site is outside their typical range or habitats of the site are not suitable for them); one special status animal species (western mastiff bat) that may occasionally use habitats of the project site for foraging; jurisdictional waters; wildlife movement corridors; and sensitive natural communities and designated critical habitat.

Furthermore, Citywide biological resources were evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR concluded that certain special-status species or their habitats may be directly or indirectly affected by future development within the General Plan Planning Area. This may be through the removal of or disturbance to habitat. Such effects would be considered significant. However, the General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.8-1 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts on special-status species likely to occur in the Planning Area. With implementation of these policies, together with the mitigation measures contained in the Assessment, impacts on special-status species will be less than significant with mitigation.

- b. The project is not located within an identified sensitive riparian habitat or other natural community. The Modoc Ditch is located along the northern and southern boundaries of the project, with the northern portion to be removed as part of the project. The ditch only holds water seasonally when it's available. Consequently, amphibians such as western toad (*Anaxyrus boreas*) and Pacific tree frog (*Pseudacris regilla*) would only be found on the site in small numbers, if at all. At the time of the survey, the ditch and basin to the west of the project were holding water. Reptile species like the side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), gopher snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*), and common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getulus*) may forage in the orchard and disked field, but numbers are expected to be low as well. Furthermore, the ditch does not meet the criteria to be considered a Water of the United States. As such, no impacts to riparian habitats or Waters of the United States are anticipated.

Furthermore, City-wide biological resources were evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR concluded that certain sensitive natural communities may be directly or indirectly affected by future development within the General Plan Planning Area, particularly valley oak woodlands and valley oak riparian woodlands. Such effects would be considered significant. However, the General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.8-2 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts on woodlands located within in the Planning Area. With implementation of these policies and being that the project is not located within or adjacent to an identified sensitive riparian habitat or other natural community, including woodlands, impacts on woodlands will be less than significant.

- c. The project is not located within or adjacent to federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

City-wide biological resources were evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR concluded that certain protected wetlands and other waters may be directly or indirectly affected by future development within the General Plan Planning Area. Such effects would be considered significant. However, the General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.8-3 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts on wetlands and other waters located within the Planning Area. With implementation of these policies, impacts on wetlands will be less than significant.

- d. This development would not interfere with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites.

Citywide biological resources were evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR concluded that the movement of wildlife species may be directly or indirectly affected by future development within the General Plan Planning Area. Such effects would be considered significant. However, the General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.8-4 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts on wildlife movement corridors located within in the Planning Area. With implementation of these policies, impacts on wildlife movement corridors will be less than significant.

- e. The project will not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources. Three valley oaks were identified in the northern portion of the residential habitat. These trees are protected by City of Visalia's Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance (Visalia Municipal Code Chapter 12.24). In order to ensure compliance with the Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance, Biological Resource Mitigation Measure No. 2.4 shall be incorporated. Implementation of these measures will ensure the project is consistent with local policies and habitat conservation plans.

With the exception of the proposed removal of valley oaks on site, which is addressed in these mitigation measures, the project is in compliance with all other local policies and plans.

- f. There are no local or regional habitat conservation plans for the area.

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES

- a. Applied EarthWorks, Inc. (Æ) completed a cultural resource study for the proposed Ritchie Ranch Project (Cultural Resource Study and Evaluation for Ritchie Ranch, City of Visalia, Tulare County, California. Applied EarthWorks, Inc., March 2025) to determine if historical resources are present within the Project area that could be impacted by the proposed development. For this study Æ conducted a records search at the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center (SSJVIC) of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS); desktop research to better understand the history of land use in the Project area; a search of the Native American Heritage Commission's (NAHC) Sacred Lands File and nongovernmental outreach to local tribes and individuals; an intensive pedestrian survey of the Project area to identify archaeological and historical built environment cultural resources; and an evaluation of those resources for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR).

The SSJVIC records search revealed three cultural resource investigations have occurred within the Project area and one investigation has occurred in the 0.5-mile search radius. They further reported one previously recorded cultural resource within the Project area—the historical Modoc Ditch (P-54-003602)—and one previously recorded cultural resource within a 0.5-mile search radius—the historical Wutchumna Canal (P-54-004875). A search of the NAHC's Sacred Land File did not identify Native American cultural resources within or near the Project area,

and no specific information was gleaned from outreach with local tribal representatives.

Æ conducted an archaeological and historic built environment pedestrian survey of the Project area on August 30, 2024. Archaeologists surveyed 43.6 acres (97 percent) of the 44.9-acre Project area and identified four historic-era artifacts widely dispersed primarily in the northeast corner of the Project area. Æ recorded the items as an isolated find on California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523-series forms under the temporary number AE-4633-ISO-01, which has now been assigned a permanent CHRIS designation of P-54-005811. Historical research indicated that the scattered items are in the vicinity of a late 1800s farmhouse that was removed in the 1970s. Isolated artifacts, by definition, are not eligible for listing in the CRHR because they lack context and association with other archaeological materials. Additionally, Æ identified two historic-era built environment resources within the Project area—a previously unrecorded residence at 3629 N. Demaree Street and two segments of the previously recorded Modoc Ditch. Æ evaluated the residence and segments of the Modoc Ditch for CRHR-eligibility and found both resources ineligible for listing because they do not possess significance under any CRHR evaluation criteria. No further action is recommended for the management of these cultural resources.

Æ's cultural resource study found no historical resources within the Project area that could be impacted by the proposed development. However, because Æ observed isolated historic-era artifacts in the northern half of the Project area that once contained a late nineteenth-century farmhouse, it is possible that buried historic-era refuse deposits, objects, or structural remains may be uncovered during construction. Cultural Resources Mitigation Measures 3.1 through 3.4 are proposed in the event of unanticipated archaeological discovery or exposure of human remains during construction. This will ensure that impacts will be less than significant with mitigation incorporation.

- b. There are no known archaeological resources located within the project area. Implementation of Cultural Resources Mitigation Measures 3.1 through 3.4 will ensure that potential impacts to unknown archeological resources will be less than significant with mitigation incorporation.
- c. There are no known human remains buried in the project vicinity. If human remains are unearthed during project construction, there is a potential for a significant impact. As such, implementation of Cultural Resources Mitigation Measures 3.1 through 3.4 will ensure that impacts remain less than significant with mitigation incorporation.

VI. ENERGY

- a. Development of the site includes construction of 320-unit single-family subdivision, as well as the required infrastructure such as the construction of streets, extension of sewer lines and laterals, future connection to storm drainage system and extension of other utilities and services (gas, electricity, water) and improvements such as curb and gutter, sidewalks, streetlights. This development may increase the energy consumption related to worker trips and operation of construction equipment. This increase would be temporary and limited through the compliance with local, state, and federal regulations. Once

the subdivision is complete, the energy consumption would be typical of a single-family home subdivision, similar to what is located directly east of the site.

Policies identified under Impacts 3.4-1 and 3.4-2 of the EIR will reduce any potential impacts to a less than significant level. With implementation of these policies and the existing City standards, impacts to energy will be less than significant.

- b. The project will not conflict with or obstruct any state or local plans for renewable energy or energy efficiency. The proposed project will comply with all state and local policies related to energy efficiency.

VII. GEOLOGY AND SOILS

- a. The State Geologist has not issued an Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Map for Tulare County. The project area is not located on or near any known earthquake fault lines. Therefore, the project will not expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse impacts involving earthquakes.
- b. The development of this site will require movement of topsoil. Existing City Engineering Division standards require that a grading and drainage plan be submitted for review to the City to ensure that off- and on-site improvements will be designed to meet City standards.
- c. The project area is relatively flat and the underlying soil is not known to be unstable. Soils in the Visalia area have few limitations with regard to development. Due to low clay content and limited topographic relief, soils in the Visalia area have low expansion characteristics.
- d. Due to low clay content, soils in the Visalia area have an expansion index of 0-20, which is defined as very low potential expansion.
- e. The project does not involve the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems since sanitary sewer lines are available for connection for the disposal of wastewater at this location.
- f. There are no known unique paleontological resources or geologic features located within the project area. In the event that potentially significant cultural resources are discovered during ground disturbing activities associated with project preparation, construction, or completion, work shall halt in that area until a qualified Native American Tribal observer, archeologist, or paleontologist can assess the significance of the find, and, if necessary, develop appropriate treatment measures in consultation with Tulare County Museum, Coroner, and other appropriate agencies and interested parties.

Implementation of Cultural Resources Mitigation Measures 3.1 through 3.4 will ensure that potential impacts to unique paleontological resources or geologic features will be less than significant with mitigation incorporation.

VIII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

- a. Per the AQGGIA (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment, VRPA Technologies, Inc, January 2025) conducted for this project, the project is expected to generate Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in the short-term as a result of the construction of the project, and long-term as a result of day-to-day operation of the development. In 2009, the

SJVAPCD adopted the following guidance documents applicable to projects within the San Joaquin Valley:

- Guidance for Valley Land-use Agencies in Addressing GHG Emission Impacts for New Projects under CEQA (SJVAPCD 2009), and
- District Policy: Addressing GHG Emission Impacts for Stationary Source Projects Under CEQA When Serving as the Lead Agency (SJVAPCD 2009).

As shown in Table 9 of the Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment (AQGGIA), the Project would generate 5105.91 Metric Tons of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent per year (MTCO₂eq./year) using an operational year of 2005, which includes area, energy, mobile, waste, and water sources. "Business as usual" (BAU) is referenced in CARB's AB 32 Scoping Plan as emissions projected to occur in 2020 if the average baseline emissions during the 2002-2004 period grew to 2020 levels, without control or Best Performance Standards (BPS) offsets. As a result, an estimate of the Project's operational emissions in 2005 were compared to operational emissions in 2020 in order to determine if the Project meets the 29% emission reduction. The SJVAPCD has reviewed relevant scientific information related to GHG emissions and has determined that they are not able to determine a specific quantitative level of GHG emissions increase, above which a project would have a significant impact on the environment, and below which would have an insignificant impact. As a result, the SJVAPCD has determined that projects achieving at least a 29% GHG emission reduction compared to BAU would be determined to have a less than significant individual and cumulative impact for GHG. Results of the analysis show that the Project's GHG emissions in the year 2020 are 4203.90 MTCO₂eq./year. This represents an achievement of 16% GHG emission reduction on the basis of BAU, which does not meet the 29% GHG emission reduction target.

In the event that a local air district's guidance for addressing GHG impacts does not use numerical GHG emissions thresholds, at the lead agency's discretion, a neighboring air district's GHG threshold may be used to determine impacts. In December 2008, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) Governing Board adopted the staff proposal for an interim GHG significance threshold for projects where the SCAQMD is lead agency. The SCAQMD guidance identifies a threshold of 10,000 MTCO₂eq./year for GHG for construction emissions amortized over a 30-year project lifetime, plus annual operation emissions. This threshold is often used by agencies, such as the California Public Utilities Commission, to evaluate GHG impacts in areas that do not have specific thresholds (CPUC 2015)³. Therefore, because this threshold has been established by the SCAQMD in an effort to control GHG emissions in the largest metropolitan area in the State of California, this threshold is considered a conservative approach for evaluating the significance of GHG emissions in a more rural area, such as Tulare County. Though the Project is under SJVAPCD jurisdiction, the SCAQMD GHG threshold provides some perspective on the GHG emissions generated by the Project. Table 10 of the AQGGIA shows the yearly GHG emissions generated by the Project as determined by the CalEEMod model, which is approximately 62% less than the threshold identified by the SCAQMD.

CARB's California GHG Emissions Inventory provides estimates of anthropogenic GHG emissions within California, as well as emissions associated with imported electricity; natural sources are not included in the inventory. California's GHG emissions for 2020 totaled approximately 358.76 million MTCO₂eq. The proposed Project's GHG emissions represent less than 0.001% of the total GHG emissions for the state of California when compared to year 2018 emissions data.

Based on the assessment above, the Project will not generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment.

The City has also prepared and adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) which includes a baseline GHG emissions inventories, reduction measures, and reduction targets consistent with local and State goals. The CAP was prepared concurrently with the proposed General Plan and its impacts are also evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update EIR.

The Visalia General Plan and the CAP both include policies that aim to reduce the level of GHG emissions emitted in association with buildout conditions under the General Plan. Although emissions will be generated as a result of the projects, implementation of the General Plan and CAP policies will result in fewer emissions than would be associated with a continuation of baseline conditions. Thus, the impact on GHG emissions will be less than significant.

- b. California passed the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. AB 32 requires that statewide GHG emissions be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020. Under AB 32, CARB must adopt regulations by January 1, 2011, to achieve reductions in GHGs to meet the 1990 emission cap by 2020. On December 11, 2008, CARB adopted its initial Scoping Plan, which functions as a roadmap of CARB's plans to achieve GHG reductions in California required by AB 32 through subsequently enacted regulations. CARB's 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan builds on the efforts and plans encompassed in the initial Scoping Plan.

SB 375 requires MPOs to adopt an SCS or APS that will prescribe land use allocation in that MPO's regional transportation plan. CARB, in consultation with MPOs, has provided each affected region with reduction targets for GHGs emitted by passenger cars and light trucks in the region for the years 2020 and 2035.

Executive Order B-30-15 establishes a California greenhouse gas reduction target of 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 to ensure California meets its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Executive Order B-30-15 requires MPO's to implement measures that will achieve reductions of greenhouse gas emissions to meet the 2030 and 2050 greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets.

As required by California law, city and county General Plans contain a Land Use Element that details the types and quantities of land uses that the city or county estimates will be needed for future growth, and that designate locations for land uses to regulate growth. FCOG uses the growth projections and land use information in adopted general plans to estimate future average daily trips and then VMT, which are then provided to SJVAPCD to

estimate future emissions in the AQPs. The applicable General Plan for the project is City of Visalia 2035 General Plan Update, which was adopted in 2014.

The Project is consistent with the currently adopted General Plan for the City of Visalia and the adopted RTP/SCS and is therefore consistent with the population growth and VMT applied in those plan documents. Therefore, the Project is consistent with the growth assumptions used in the applicable AQP. It should also be noted that yearly GHG emissions generated by the Project (Table 9 of the AQGGIA) are approximately 62% less than the threshold identified by the SCAQMD (see the discussion for Impact 4.2.1 above).

CARB's 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan builds on the efforts and plans encompassed in the initial Scoping Plan. The current plan has identified new policies and actions to accomplish the State's 2030 GHG limit. Below is a list of applicable strategies in the Scoping Plan and the Project's consistency with those strategies.

- California Light-Duty Vehicle GHG Standards – Implement adopted standards and planned second phase of the program. Align zero-emission vehicles, alternative and renewable fuel, and vehicle technology programs for long-term climate change goals.
 - The Project is consistent with this reduction measure. This measure cannot be implemented by a particular project or lead agency since it is a statewide measure. When this measure is implemented, standards would be applicable to light-duty vehicles that would access the Project. The Project would not conflict or obstruct this reduction measure.
- Energy Efficiency – Pursuit of comparable investment in energy efficiency from all retail providers of electricity in California. Maximize energy efficiency building and appliance standards.
 - The Project is consistent with this reduction measure. Though this measure applies to the State to increase its energy standards, the Project would comply with this measure through existing regulation. The Project would not conflict or obstruct this reduction measure.
- Low Carbon Fuel – Development and adoption of the low carbon fuel standard.
 - The Project is consistent with this reduction measure. This measure cannot be implemented by a particular project or lead agency since it is a statewide measure. When this measure is implemented, standards would be applicable to the fuel used by vehicles that would access the Project. The Project would not conflict or obstruct this reduction measure.

Based on the assessment above, the Project will not conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases. Therefore, any impact would be less than significant.

IX. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

- a. No hazardous materials are anticipated with the project.
- b. Construction activities associated with development of the project may include maintenance of on-site construction equipment that could lead to minor fuel and oil spills. The use and handling of any hazardous materials during construction activities would occur in accordance with applicable federal, state, regional, and local laws. Therefore, impacts are considered to be less than significant.
- c. There are no schools located within one-quarter mile from the project. There is no reasonably foreseeable condition or incident involving the project that could affect existing or proposed school sites within one-quarter mile of school sites.
- d. The project area does not include any sites listed as hazardous materials sites pursuant to Government Code Section 65692.5.
- e. The City's adopted Airport Master Plan shows the project area is located outside of all Airport Zones. There are no restrictions for the proposed project related to Airport Zone requirements.

The project area is not located within 2 miles of a public airport.
- f. The project will not interfere with the implementation of any adopted emergency response plan or evacuation plan.
- g. There are no wild lands within or near the project area.

X. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

- a. The project will not violate any water quality standards of waste discharge requirements. Development of the project site into a single-family subdivision would be required to meet the City's improvement standards for directing storm water runoff to the existing City storm water drainage system, consistent with the City's adopted City Storm Drain Master Plan.

Furthermore, the Visalia General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.6-2 and 3.9-3 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts to water quality. With implementation of these policies and the existing City standards, impacts to water quality will be less than significant.
- b. The project will not substantially deplete groundwater supplies in the project vicinity. The project site will be served by a water lateral for domestic, irrigation, and fire protection use.

The project area also overlies the southern portion of the San Joaquin unit of the Central Valley groundwater aquifer. The project will result in an increase of impervious surfaces on the project site, which might affect the amount of precipitation that is recharged to the aquifer. However, as the City of Visalia is already largely developed and covered by impervious surfaces, the increase of impervious surfaces through this project will be small by comparison.

The project therefore might affect the amount of precipitation that is recharged to the aquifer. The City of Visalia's water conservation measures and explorations for surface water use over groundwater extraction will assist in offsetting the loss in groundwater recharge.

- c.
- i. The development of this site will require movement of topsoil. Existing City Engineering Division standards require that a grading and drainage plan be submitted for review to the City to ensure that off- and on-site improvements will be designed to meet City standards.
 - ii. Development of the site will create additional impervious surfaces. However, existing and planned improvements to storm water drainage facilities as required through the Visalia General Plan policies will reduce any potential impacts to a less than significant level.

Policies identified under Impact 3.6-2 of the EIR will reduce any potential impacts to a less than significant level. With implementation of these policies and the existing City standards, impacts to groundwater supplies will be less than significant.

- iii. Development of the site will create additional impervious surfaces. However, existing and planned improvements to storm water drainage facilities as required through the Visalia General Plan policies will reduce any potential impacts to a less than significant level.

Policies identified under Impact 3.6-2 of the EIR will reduce any potential impacts to a less than significant level. With implementation of these policies and the existing City standards, impacts to groundwater supplies will be less than significant.

Lastly, the project will be required to meet the City's improvement standards for directing storm water runoff to the City's storm water drainage system consistent with the City's adopted City Storm Drain Master Plan. These improvements will not cause significant environmental impacts.

- d. The project area is located sufficiently inland and distant from bodies of water, and outside potentially hazardous areas for seiches and tsunamis. The site is also relatively flat, which will contribute to the lack of impacts by mudflow occurrence. Therefore there will be no impact related to these hazards.
- e. The project will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality plan or sustainable groundwater management plan. The General Plan contains multiple policies that address the issue under Impact 3.6-1, and the County of Tulare maintains the Tulare County Hazard Mitigation Plan and a Mass Evacuation Plan that will help to reduce the impact. The project will comply with all applicable rules and regulations regarding water quality and groundwater management and there is no impact.

XI. LAND USE AND PLANNING

- a. The project will not physically divide an established community. The project proposes the establishment of residential uses on a property zoned R-1-5 (Single-Family Residential, 5,000 square foot minimum site area), which is consistent with the surrounding land uses. The project

would continue to operate as the same designation following project implementation.

The Visalia General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact 3.1-2 of the EIR, that together work to reduce the potential for impacts to the development of land as designated by the General Plan. With implementation of these policies and the existing City standards, impacts to land use development consistent with the General Plan will be less than significant.

- b. The project site is within the Urban Development Tier 1 Boundary. Development of residential lands in Tier 1 may occur at any time. The proposed project is consistent with Land Use Policy LU-P-19 of the General Plan. Policy LU-P-19 states; "Ensure that growth occurs in a compact and concentric fashion by implementing the General Plan's phased growth strategy."

The project as a whole does not conflict with any land use plan, policy or regulation of the City of Visalia. The site's General Plan Land Use Designation of Residential Low Density and the Zoning Designation of R-1-5 are consistent with each other based on the underlying allowed land uses and density ranges as identified in Table 9-1 "Consistency between the Plan and Zoning" of the General Plan. As such there is no impact.

XII. MINERAL RESOURCES

- a. No mineral areas of regional or statewide importance exist within the Visalia area.
- b. There are no mineral resource recovery sites delineated in the Visalia area.

XIII. NOISE

- a. An acoustical analysis for the project was conducted by WJV Acoustics (Acoustical Analysis, Ritchie Ranch Residential Development, Visalia, California, WJVA Project No. 24-23, May 20, 2024. Revised April 1, 2025). The study determined that the 320-lot single-family residential development will comply with applicable City of Visalia exterior and interior noise level criteria. Mitigation measured are not required for project noise compliance and compatibility requirements. The project will not result in noise generation typical of urban development.

Noise levels will increase temporarily during the construction of these facilities but shall remain within noise limits and will be restricted to the allowed hours of construction defined by the City of Visalia Noise Ordinance. Temporary increase in ambient noise levels is considered to be less than significant.

Furthermore, the Visalia General Plan contains multiple policies, identified under Impact N-P-3 through N-P-5, that work to reduce the potential for noise impacts to sensitive land uses. With the implementation of Noise Impact Policies and existing City Standards, noise impacts to new noise sensitive land uses would be less than significant

- b. Ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels may occur as part of construction activities associated with the project. Construction activities will be temporary and will not expose persons to such vibration or noise levels for an extended period of time; thus, the impacts will be less than significant. There are no existing uses near the project area that create ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels.

- c. The project area is not within two miles of a public airport, and there is no private airstrip near the project area. The project will not expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels resulting from aircraft operations.

XIV. POPULATION AND HOUSING

- a. The United States Census Bureau stated the population in the City of Visalia to be 141,214 as of April 2020. The project proposes to construct 320 new single family residential lots. The US Census Bureau states that the City's average household size is 2.99 persons. Based on this average household size, the anticipated population increase because of the proposed project is 957 persons. The construction of housing at this location would not be unplanned, as the Visalia General Plan designated the proposed project site for low density residential use. Additionally, the city is planning for more businesses, services, and infrastructure to accommodate the new population. Overall, the project will not constitute an unplanned increase in growth and population. There is no impact
- b. There is one existing house on the site which will be removed. Overall, the project will have a net increase the amount of available housing in the community. There is no impact.

XV. PUBLIC SERVICES

- a.
- i. Current fire protection facilities are located at Visalia Station 55, located approximately two miles southwest of the property, and can adequately serve the site without a need for alteration. Impact fees will be paid to mitigate the project's proportionate impact on these facilities.
- ii. Current police protection facilities can adequately serve the site without a need for alteration. Impact fees will be paid to mitigate the project's proportionate impact on these facilities.
- iii. The project will generate new students for which existing schools in the area would need to accommodate. In addition, to address direct impacts, the project will be required to pay residential impact fees. These fees are considered to be conclusive mitigation for direct impacts.
- iv. Current park facilities can adequately serve the site without a need for alteration. Impact fees will be paid to mitigate the project's proportionate impact on these facilities.
- v. Other public facilities can adequately serve the site without a need for alteration.

XVI. RECREATION

- a. The project will directly generate new residents and will therefore directly increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated. Residential developments will pay impact fees to mitigate impacts.
- b. The proposed project includes development of two pocket parks. However, the project does not include any recreational facilities, or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, that would have an

adverse physical effect on the environment.

XVII. TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

- a. Development and operation of the project is not anticipated to conflict with applicable plans, ordinances, or policies establishing measures of effectiveness of the City's circulation system. The project will result in an increase in traffic levels on arterial and collector roadways, although the City of Visalia's Circulation Element has been prepared to address this increase in traffic.
- b. Development of the site will result in increased traffic in the immediate area; but will not cause a substantial increase in traffic Citywide. This site was evaluated in the Visalia General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Low Density Residential urban use.

A Traffic Impact Study has been provided by the applicant (Ritchie Ranch Residential Development Traffic Impact Study. VRPA Technologies, Inc., July 25, 2025), for the purpose of analyzing traffic conditions related to the Ritchie Ranch Residential Development (Project).

The Project is located at the southwest corner of River Way Drive and Demaree Street in the City of Visalia. The Project proposes to develop 320 single-family residential units and public park space on 44.9 acres of land. Primary vehicular access to the site would be provided at the Demaree Street/Shannon Parkway intersection with secondary access provided along Demaree Street and River Way Drive.

The following intersections and roadway segments included in this TIS were determined in consultation with City of Visalia staff and include:

- Demaree St/Ave 320
- Demaree St/Pratt Rd
- Demaree St/River Way Dr
- Demaree St/Shannon Pkwy
- Demaree St/Riggin Ave
- Linwood St/Riggin Ave
- Linwood St/Shannon Pkwy (Future Intersection)

The TIS completed for the Project includes level of service (LOS) analysis for the following traffic scenarios.

- Existing Conditions
- Opening Year Without Project
- Opening Year Plus Project
- 5 Year Horizon Without Project
- 5 Year Horizon Plus Project

The TIS concluded that with addition of the project all study area intersections are expected to operate at level of service D or better under the Existing and Opening Year scenarios except for the Demaree Street and Shannon Parkway intersection. It should be noted that this intersection does not meet peak hour signal warrants because the minor approach does not carry enough traffic to justify signalization.

All of the study area intersections are expected to operate at level of service D or better with or without the Project for Future Year 2030 conditions. By 2030, traffic signals are expected to be needed at the intersections of Demaree Street with Avenue 320, and Pratt Road, and at the intersection of Riggin Avenue and Linwood Street.

The Analysis concluded that the Project is screened out of requiring a detailed Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) analysis based on the screening criteria included in the City of Visalia's VMT guidelines. The project is located in a low VMT area north of Riggin Avenue and west of Demaree Street. Therefore, the project is screened out of requiring a detailed VMT analysis. As a result, VMT impacts are presumed to be less than significant and no mitigation measures are required pertaining to VMT.

The Analysis recommends improvements to storage pocket lengths, as presented in Table E-1 of the Study, considering the Future Year 2030 study scenario. The timing of recommended storage pocket length improvements is shown below:

Opening Year Plus Project

Demaree Street at Shannon Parkway

- Provide a 300-foot northbound left turn storage pocket.
- Provide a 100-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket.

Street L at Shannon Parkway

- Provide a 100-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket.
- Provide a 100-foot westbound left turn storage pocket.

Future Year 2030 Plus Project

Demaree Street at Riggin Avenue

- For the southbound left turn storage pocket, the City of Visalia will monitor signal timing at the intersection and make adjustments as necessary to maximize vehicular flow at the intersection, since there is insufficient space to extend the southbound left due to the constraint of the northbound left turn pocket at the Demaree Street and Jerome Avenue intersection.
- Provide a 300-foot eastbound left turn storage pocket.

Linwood Street at Riggin Avenue. Since this intersection is currently a 'T' intersection, the City of Visalia will monitor the need for intersection improvements and signalization. Once the north leg of Linwood Street is developed by others, the following improvements are recommended.

- Provide a 100-foot northbound left turn storage pocket.
- Provide a 100-foot southbound left turn storage pocket.
- Provide a 100-foot eastbound right turn storage pocket.
- Provide a 100-foot westbound right turn storage pocket.

These recommended improvements have been included as Transportation / Traffic Impact Mitigation Measures 1.1 to 1.4.

- c. There are no planned geometric designs associated with the project that are considered hazardous. West Shannon Parkway will feature a curvilinear pathway that is designed to align with West Riverway Drive upon development of the

property to the west of the project site. The design has been evaluated by the City of Visalia Traffic Engineering and Engineering Divisions and is compliant with City standards and circulation plans.

- d. The project will not result in inadequate emergency access.

XVIII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

The proposed project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe.

Tribal notification was circulated in accordance with Senate Bill 52. A response was received from the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Yokut Tribe (see Cultural Resource Study and Evaluation for Ritchie Ranch, City of Visalia, Tulare County, California. Applied EarthWorks, Inc., March 2025, Appendix C – Native American Outreach). Comments received have been incorporated as mitigation via Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.3.

- a. The site is not listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k).
- b. The site has been determined to not be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

Pre-consultation letters were sent to local tribes in accordance with AB 52, providing tribes with a 30-day early review period. Staff did receive correspondence from the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Yokut Tribe and mitigation incorporated via Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure 3.3.

Furthermore, the EIR (SCH 2010041078) for the 2014 General Plan update included a thorough review of sacred lands files through the California Native American Heritage Commission. The sacred lands file did not contain any known cultural resources information for the Visalia Planning Area.

XIX. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

- a. The project will be connecting to existing City sanitary sewer lines, consistent with the City Sewer Master Plan. The Visalia wastewater treatment plant has a current rated capacity of 22 million gallons per day, but currently treats an average daily maximum month flow of 12.5 million gallons per day. With the completed project, the plant has more than sufficient capacity to accommodate impacts associated with the proposed project. The proposed project will therefore not cause significant environmental impacts.

The development onsite will be required to install City storm water drainage lines that handle on-site and street runoff. Usage of these lines is consistent with the City Storm Drain Master Plan. These improvements will not cause significant environmental impacts.

- b. California Water Service Company has determined that there are sufficient water supplies to support the site, and

that service can be extended to the site. A will serve letter was provided to the City, dated May 5, 2025.

- c. The City has determined that there is adequate capacity existing to serve the site's projected wastewater treatment demands at the City wastewater treatment plant.
- d. Current solid waste disposal facilities can adequately serve the site without a need for alteration.
- e. The project will be able to meet the applicable regulations for solid waste. Removal of debris from construction will be subject to the City's waste disposal requirements.

XX. WILDFIRE

- a. The project is located on a site that is adjacent on multiple sides by existing development. The site will be further served by multiple points of access. In the event of an emergency response, coordination would be made with the City's Engineering, Police, and Fire Divisions to ensure that adequate access to and from the site is maintained.
- b. The project area is relatively flat and the underlying soil is not known to be unstable. Therefore, the site is not in a location that is likely to exacerbate wildfire risks.
- c. The project is located on a site that is adjacent on multiple sides by existing development. New project development will require the installation and maintenance of associated infrastructure extending from adjacent off-site locations to the project site; however the infrastructure would be typical of residential development and would be developed to the standards of the underlying responsible agencies.
- d. The project area is relatively flat and the underlying soil is not known to be unstable. Therefore, the site is not in a

location that would expose persons or structures to significant risks of flooding or landslides.

XXI. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

- a. This initial study/mitigated negative declaration found the project could have significant impacts on biological resources, transportation / traffic, and tribal cultural resources. However, implementation of the identified mitigation measures for each respective section would ensure that impacts are less than significant with mitigation incorporation.

Furthermore, this site was evaluated in the Program EIR (SCH No. 2010041078) for the City of Visalia's General Plan Update for conversion to urban use. The City adopted mitigation measures for conversion to urban development. Where effects were still determined to be significant a statement of overriding considerations was made.

- b. This site was evaluated in the Program EIR (SCH No. 2010041078) for the City of Visalia General Plan Update for the area's conversion to urban use. The City adopted mitigation measures for conversion to urban development. Where effects were still determined to be significant a statement of overriding considerations was made.
- c. This site was evaluated in the Program EIR (SCH No. 2010041078) for the City of Visalia General Plan Update for conversion to urban use. The City adopted mitigation measures for conversion to urban development. Where effects were still determined to be significant a statement of overriding considerations was made.

DETERMINATION OF REQUIRED ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

- I find that the proposed project **COULD NOT** have a significant effect on the environment. **A NEGATIVE DECLARATION WILL BE PREPARED.**
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measures described on the attached sheet have been added to the project. **A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION WILL BE PREPARED.**
- I find the proposed project **MAY** have a significant effect on the environment, and an **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT** is required.
- I find that the proposed project **MAY** have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT** is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- I find that as a result of the proposed project no new effects could occur, or new mitigation measures would be required that have not been addressed within the scope of the Program Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2010041078). The Environmental Impact Report prepared for the City of Visalia General Plan was certified by Resolution No. 2014-37 adopted on October 14, 2014. **THE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT WILL BE UTILIZED.**



Brandon Smith, AICP
Environmental Coordinator

July 29, 2025

Date