Chapter 4 Environmental Analysis

Sections 4.1 through 4.11 in this chapter contain a discussion of the potential environmental effects from implementation of the proposed French Hotel Project (Project), including: Environmental Setting; Regulatory Setting; Existing Conditions; Method of Analysis; Thresholds of Significance; Plans, Programs, and Policies; Environmental Impacts; Cumulative Impacts; Level of Significance Before Mitigation; Mitigation Measures; and Level of Significance After Mitigation.

Scope of the Environmental Impacts Analysis

In accordance with Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the potential environmental effects from the Project are analyzed for the following environmental issue areas:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils (liquefaction)
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Noise
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources

Format of the Environmental Impact Analysis

The following sections compose each of the 11 environmental issue area sections in Sections 4.1 through 4.11 of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

Environmental Setting

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15125, the physical environmental condition for purposes of establishing the setting of an EIR is the environment as it existed at the time the EIR's notice of preparation was released for public review. The notice of preparation for this EIR was released for public review on March 19, 2026. The following subsections provide a description of the Project site's physical environmental condition ("existing conditions") as of that approximate date. The site's current physical conditions and surrounding areas are shown on Figure 2-3, Aerial Photograph. More detailed information regarding the Project Site's environmental setting as it relates to a specific environmental issue area is provided in this chapter.

Regulatory Setting

This section provides a summary of regulations, plans, policies, and laws that are relevant to each environmental issue area at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.

Existing Conditions

This section describes the baseline conditions for each environmental issue area evaluated in this EIR, including the physical characteristics of the Project Site and surrounding area relevant to the analysis.

Method of Analysis

This section provides a description of the method used to analyze the potential impacts of the Project on the evaluated environmental issue areas.

Thresholds of Significance

This section identifies the criteria used to determine whether potential environmental effects are significant. The thresholds of significance used in this analysis were primarily based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. However, in some cases, thresholds were developed specifically for this analysis or were adapted from standards adopted by other agencies or entities. This section defines the type, amount, and extent of impact that would be considered a significant, adverse change in the environment. Some thresholds of significance, such as those used in Sections 4.2, Air Quality; 4.9, Noise; and 4.10, Transportation, are quantitative, while others, such those used in Section 4.1, Aesthetics, are qualitative. The thresholds of significance are intended to assist the reader in understanding how and why this EIR reaches a conclusion that an impact is significant, potentially significant, or less than significant.

Plans, Programs, and Policies

This section identifies existing plans, programs, and policies applicable to the Proposed Project that reduce or avoid potential environmental impacts. These measures are standard regulatory requirements or project commitments that are incorporated into the Proposed Project and are not considered mitigation measures.

Environmental Impacts

This section describes the potential environmental impacts of the Project and based on the thresholds of significance, concludes if the environmental impacts would be significant, potentially significant, or less than significant or if no impact would occur. Each impact criterion is addressed in its own section. This format is designed to assist the reader in quickly identifying the subject of each impact analysis and for use in Table ES-1, Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures, which forms the basis of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program. For each impact criterion, applicable standards of significance are identified and potential impacts are discussed in the Impact Analysis section. Mitigation measures are also included and discussed when applicable.

Impact Analysis. The analysis of environmental impacts considers both the construction and operational phases associated with implementation of the Project. As required by Section 15126.2(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, direct, indirect, long-term, short-term, on-site, and off-site impacts are addressed, as appropriate, for the environmental issue area being analyzed. This EIR uses the following terms to describe the level of significance of impacts identified during the course of the environmental analysis:

- **No Impact:** "No impact" refers to implementation of the Project having no impact on environmental conditions.
- **Less than Significant:** "Less than significant" refers to two conditions:
  - Impacts resulting from implementation of the Project that are not likely to exceed the defined standards of significance.
  - Potentially significant impacts before implementation of mitigation measures. If implementation of the specified mitigation measures would reduce the potentially significant impact to a level that does not exceed the defined standards of significance, the impact is considered less than significant.
- **Potentially Significant:** "Potentially significant" refers to impacts resulting from implementation of the Project that may exceed defined standards of significance before mitigation is considered.
- **Significant and Unavoidable:** "Significant and unavoidable" refers to impacts resulting from implementation of the Project that cannot be eliminated or reduced to below the defined standards of significance or a less than significant level through implementation of feasible mitigation measures.

A "significant effect" is defined by Section 15382 of the CEQA Guidelines as "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions in the area affected by the Project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment . . . [but] may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant."

Cumulative Impacts

CEQA requires that EIRs discuss cumulative impacts in addition to Project impacts. In accordance with CEQA, the discussion of cumulative impacts must reflect the severity of the impacts and the likelihood of their occurrence; however, the discussion need not be as detailed as the discussion of environmental impacts attributable to the Project alone. Further, the discussion should be guided by the standards of practicality and reasonableness (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130[b]). According to Section 15355 of the CEQA Guidelines, "cumulative impacts" are defined as follows:

> Two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.
>
> (a) The individual effects may be changes resulting from a single project or a number of separate projects.
>
> (b) The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment, which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.

Section 15130(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines further states that a "cumulative impact consists of an impact which is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts."

In addition, Section 15130(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that EIRs discuss the cumulative impacts of a project when the project's incremental effect is cumulatively considerable. As further clarified by Section 15065 of the State CEQA Guidelines, "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. Therefore, the discussion of cumulative impacts in an EIR evaluates whether the impacts of the Project would be significant when considered in combination with past, present, and future reasonably foreseeable projects, and whether the Project would make a cumulatively considerable contribution to those impacts. The State CEQA Guidelines indicate that, where a lead agency is examining a project with an incremental effect that is not cumulatively considerable, it need not consider the effect significant but shall briefly describe the basis for its conclusion. The State CEQA Guidelines allow for a project's contribution to be rendered less than cumulatively considerable with implementation of mitigation.

The geographic scope of the cumulative impact analysis varies depending on the specific environmental issue area being analyzed. The geographic scope defines the geographic area in which projects may contribute to a specific cumulative impact. Therefore, past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the defined geographic area for a given cumulative issue must be considered.

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130(b), presents the following two possible approaches for considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects and indicates that either could be used:

1. A list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts, including, if necessary, those projects outside the control of the agency

2. A summary of projections contained in an adopted local, regional, or statewide plan, or related planning document, that describes or evaluates conditions contributing to the cumulative effect

This EIR uses the first approach. Existing development is included as part of the existing environmental baseline when evaluating Project impacts and is not included in Table 4-1, Cumulative Projects. Active projects within approximately 1 mile of the Project Site are listed in Table 4-1. Collectively, those cumulative projects are in various stages of development, including the planning phase, design stage, or construction phase.

Table 4-1. Cumulative Projects

No.	Name/Applicant	Description	Project Location	Land Use
1	CalTrout Trabuco Creek Fish Ladder	Construction of engineered hydraulic fishway structures and channel improvements in Trabuco Creek to restore aquatic connectivity and remediate fish-passage barriers.	Trabuco Creek in NWOS	Natural Resources/ Conservation Infrastructure
2	J. Serra Catholic High School	Expansion of the existing private high school to accommodate up to 2,000 new students.	North and south of J. Serra Road, west of I-5	Institutional (school)
3	Distrito La Novia	Construction of up to 96 residential units and 65,000 square feet of quasi-industrial uses.	North of La Novia Avenue and east of Valle Road	Industrial and Residential
4	San Juan Meadows	Construction of up to 94 single-family detached residential lots and an equestrian center for up to 500 horses.	South of La Novia Avenue and east of Valle Road	Equestrian and Residential
5	The River Street Project	Construction of 56,067 square feet of new commercial uses.	North of Del Obispo Street on Paseo Adelanto through to Los Rios	Commercial
6	The Farm on Del Obispo	Construction of 169 new residential units.	32382 Del Obispo	Residential
7	Petra Avelina	Construction of up to 132 new residential units, including townhome and detached single-family residential units.	Terminus of Callee Arroyo	Residential
8	Mission Place	Construction of 14,977 square feet of retail/restaurant space and 12,480 square feet of office uses.	26874 Old Mission Road	Retail/Restaurant and Office
9	In N Out	Construction of a 3,879-square-foot sit-down and drive-through restaurant.	31791 Del Obispo Street	Restaurant
10	City Hall/Affordable Housing	Construction of 50 multi-family residential uses and the expansion of City Hall to provide an additional 16,021 square feet of municipal office uses.	32400 Paseo Adelanto	Residential and Municipal Office
11	Swallows Creek	Construction of 136,308 square feet of industrial uses.	30700 Rancho Viejo Road	Industrial
12	St. John Church	Construction of an additional 21,358 square feet of religious space at St. John Church.	29742 Rosenbaum Road	Religious

Table 4-1. Cumulative Projects

No.	Name/Applicant	Description	Project Location	Land Use
13	French Hotel	Development of a 70-room boutique hotel, including the restoration and rehabilitation of the Domingo Yorba and Casa Manual Garcia Adobes for guest rooms and dining, an event space, on-site valet parking, and related amenities.	31861–31871 Camino Capistrano	Hotel
14	Capistrano Business Park	Creation of a new Specific Plan area, which would facilitate construction of up to 200 single-family residential units and 50 multi-family residential uses on 15 acres previously zoned for industrial uses.	27122, 27124, 27126, 27128, 27130 27132, 27134, and 27136 Paseo Espada and 27121, 27123, 27125, 17127, 27129, and 27131 Calle Arroyo	Residential
15	Camino Twelve	Construction of 12 residential uses on approximately 0.61 acre of the land.	25642 Camino Del Avion	Residential
16	Performing Arts Center	Construction of a new approximately 49,000-square-foot performing arts center.	31872 El Camino Real	Commercial
17	Forster Mixed Use Project	Construction of approximately 7,000 square feet of commercial space and up to 95 new apartment units.	31878 El Camino Real	Commercial and Residential
18	San Juan Plaza Mixed Use Project	Construction of a mixed-use development consisting of 278 dwelling units, 14,881 square feet of neighborhood-servicing commercial, retail, and restaurant uses, and 400 on-site parking spaces.	32211–32281 Camino Capistrano	Commercial and Residential
19	Chipotle	Construction of a 2,592-square-foot sit-down and drive-through restaurant.	31787 Del Obispo Street	Restaurant
20	Los Rios Theater	Construction of a 23,930-square-foot theater for live entertainment.	26762 Verdugo Street	Entertainment Venue
21	Saint Margaret's Episcopal Student Commons	Construction of a 35,400-square-foot student commons area at the existing Saint Margaret's Episcopal Private School.	31732 Rancho Viejo Road	Institutional (school)

Sources: City of San Juan Capistrano, 2026.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

This section identifies the level of significance of Project impacts before mitigation measures are implemented.

Mitigation Measures

Section 15126.4 of the CEQA Guidelines requires an EIR to "describe feasible measures which could minimize significant adverse impacts." The CEQA Guidelines define "feasibility" as capable of being accomplished in a successful manner in a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, social, technological, legal, or other considerations. The Mitigation Measures

section discusses mitigation measures that could reduce the severity of impacts identified in the Impact Analysis section.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

This section identifies the level of significance of Project impacts after mitigation measures are implemented.