Chapter 1 Introduction

The City of San Juan Capistrano (City) has prepared this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to inform the public, local community, organizations, responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and other interested public agencies about potential significant environmental effects resulting from implementation of the proposed French Hotel Project (Project) and possible measures to mitigate those significant effects and alternatives to the Project. This EIR was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.), CEQA Guidelines (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15000 et seq.), and the City's procedures for implementing CEQA. This EIR is a "Project EIR" pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15161. A Project EIR examines the environmental impacts of a specific project. This EIR focuses on the environmental effects particular to the Project as contemplated by the CEQA Guidelines.

1.1 Project Overview

The Project is located at 31861–31871 Camino Capistrano in the City's historic downtown area. The Project Site is currently developed with the vacant Domingo Yorba and Manuel Garcia Adobes, which are located along Camino Capistrano. The remainder of the Project Site consists of largely disturbed, unpaved, and unmaintained land, including areas of bare soil, overgrown vegetation, and remnants of former outbuildings and storage areas.

The Project includes a 70-room boutique hotel to be comprised of two existing buildings, three new buildings, and a car lift structure, as follows: the Casa Manuel Garcia Adobe, a new one-story building for the hotel's kitchen and dining, a new one-story barn-style event building, a new three-story building with lobby and guest rooms, the Domingo Yorba Adobe, and the car lift structure. The Project will include hotel amenities such as a pool area, gym, outdoor patio, and a public gathering area. The Project proposes rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of both adobes consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Although the Project introduces new buildings behind the historic adobes, these structures have been designed to be compatible in scale and character. The removal of non-contributing additions will further improve the integrity and condition of the historic adobes.

1.2 Purpose and Use of the Environmental Impact Report

The City of San Juan Capistrano has prepared this EIR for the following purposes:

- To satisfy the requirements of CEQA, pursuant to California Public Resources Code, Section 21080
- To inform the public, local community, organizations, and responsible, trustee, and other interested public agencies of the nature of the project, its potentially significant environmental effects, its potentially feasible measures to mitigate those impacts, and the reasonable potentially feasible alternatives to the project

- For consideration by responsible agencies in issuing permits and approvals for the development that would occur from the implementation of the project

CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines require the decision-making agency to balance, as applicable, the economic, social, technological, legal, or other benefits of a project against its unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve a project. As noted previously, this EIR is an informational document, the purpose of which is to identify the potentially significant effects of the Project on the environment and to indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be avoided or reduced to a less than significant level, to identify any significant and unavoidable adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated to below a level of significance, and to identify reasonable and potentially feasible alternatives to the Project that would avoid or substantially lessen any significant, adverse environmental effects associated with the Project.

The CEQA lead agency (i.e., City of San Juan Capistrano) is required to consider the information in this EIR and any other relevant information in the administrative record in making its decision on the Project. This EIR does not determine the ultimate decision that will be made regarding the Project. Nevertheless, CEQA requires the City of San Juan Capistrano to consider the information in this EIR before approving the Project and to make Findings of Fact regarding each significant effect identified in this EIR.

This EIR will be circulated to responsible and trustee agencies with jurisdiction over resources affected by the Project, including local, state, and federal agencies, and interested parties and individuals. In reviewing this EIR, reviewers should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing potentially significant effects on the environment and avoiding or mitigating the significant effects of the Project.

This EIR will be used by the City of San Juan Capistrano to evaluate the environmental implications of adopting the Project. If certified, this EIR will be relied upon by agencies with permitting or approval authority over the Project.

1.3 Lead Agency

In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15050 through 15053 and 15367, the City of San Juan Capistrano is the designated lead agency, which is defined as the "public agency which has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project." The lead agency is also responsible for determining the scope of the environmental analysis, preparing the EIR, and responding to comments received on the Draft EIR. Before making a decision to approve a project, the lead agency is required to certify that the EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA, the decision-making body has reviewed and considered the information in the EIR, and the EIR reflects the independent judgment of the lead agency.

1.4 Environmental Impact Report Review Process

1.4.1 Notice of Preparation

The City complied with CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15082 and 15083, by providing opportunities for early responsible and trustee agency participation in the environmental review process, as well as opportunity for early public consultation with interested organizations and individuals. Specifically, a Notice of Preparation of a Draft EIR providing notice of a public scoping meeting was distributed on March 19, 2026, to federal, state, regional, and local government agencies and interested parties. The Notice of Preparation was distributed to solicit comments and to inform agencies and the public of the Project during a 30-day public review period that extended from March 19, 2026, through April 20, 2026. The purpose of the Notice of Preparation is to provide notification that a Draft EIR for the Project is being prepared and to solicit guidance on the scope and content of the document.

Table 1-1, Notice of Preparation Written Comments Summary, provides a summary of the Notice of Preparation responses and issues raised. A copy of the Notice of Preparation and responses received are included in Appendix A to this EIR.

Table 1-1. Notice of Preparation Written Comments Summary

Commenting Agency/Person	Letter Dated	Summary of Comments	Issue Addressed In:
State Agencies			
Caltrans	April 20, 2026	Caltrans provides comments related to transportation, circulation, and site design considerations for the Project due to its proximity to Interstate 5 and State Route 74. Caltrans encourages the incorporation of Complete Streets principles, including safe and accessible pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, and emphasizes coordination with existing transit services and infrastructure. Caltrans requests that the EIR include a detailed evaluation of project-related traffic and operational impacts, including vehicle miles traveled (VMT), freight and delivery activity, loading zone adequacy, truck circulation and queuing, potential conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists, and effects on nearby roadways and freeway ramps. The agency also recommends analysis of construction-related disruptions, impacts to sensitive receptors (e.g., schools and pedestrian areas), and measures to reduce vehicle trips, such as transit-oriented amenities and improvements to nearby bus stops. Additionally, Caltrans notes that any work in state right-of-way would require permits and coordination, including preparation of traffic control plans and compliance with applicable design and engineering requirements.	Section 4.10, Transportation

Table 1-1. Notice of Preparation Written Comments Summary

Commenting Agency/Person	Letter Dated	Summary of Comments	Issue Addressed In:
Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC)	March 23, 2026	The NAHC summarizes requirements for Native American consultation pursuant to Senate Bill (SB) 18 and Assembly Bill (AB) 52 and provides standard guidance on the scope of the analysis of potential impacts to Native American resources and recommendations for mitigation.	Section 4.11, Tribal Cultural Resources
Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)	March 25, 2026	DTSC recommends that the Project evaluate and properly manage potential hazardous materials associated with demolition and construction activities. Specifically, DTSC advises conducting pre-demolition surveys for hazardous building materials (e.g., lead-based paint, asbestos, mercury, and PCBs), performing soil sampling in accordance with DTSC guidance, and ensuring that any imported soil or fill material is tested, documented, and suitable for the intended land use.	Section 4.8, Hazards and Hazardous Materials
Organizations			
UNITE HERE Local 11	April 20, 2026	UNITE HERE Local 11 requests to be included on the Project's notification list and supports preparation of a full EIR. The commenter raises concerns regarding potential impacts to historical and Tribal Cultural Resources, including building height and massing near historic structures, preservation of on-site barns and mature orchard trees, and the need for cumulative analysis of related historical resource actions. The commenter also requests early and meaningful Tribal consultation pursuant to AB 52. Additional concerns include the adequacy of the VMT analysis, potential inconsistencies in floor area ratio calculations, and the need for stronger and enforceable noise mitigation, including analysis of low-frequency noise. The commenter recommends preparation of a full project-level EIR (rather than a focused EIR), evaluation of a reasonable range of alternatives (including reduced project scale and preservation options), and use of visual aids such as story poles during public review.	Chapter 2, Project Description; Section 4.4, Cultural Resources; Section 4.9, Noise; Section 4.10, Transportation; Section 4.11, Tribal Cultural Resources
Local Native American Tribes			
Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation-Belardes	April 14, 2026	The Tribe requests formal consultation under AB 52, noting that the Project Site is located in a culturally sensitive area with known burial and village sites nearby. The Tribe recommends implementation of mitigation measures to protect Tribal Cultural Resources, including Tribal monitoring during ground disturbance and preparation of an inadvertent discovery plan. The Tribe also requests that the Project include a designated reburial location on site to allow for respectful reinterment of any Tribal Cultural Resources encountered during construction.	Section 4.11, Tribal Cultural Resources

Notes: EIR = Environmental Impact Report

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15082, the City of San Juan Capistrano held a public Draft EIR scoping meeting on April 6, 2026. Public agencies and members of the public were invited to attend and provide input on the scope of the Draft EIR. City staff described the Project to the Planning Commissioners and provided a conceptual site plan for the Project and proposed architectural renderings. Following a brief explanation of the environmental review process by the EIR consultant, comments from the public were solicited. In summary, members of the public brought up the following topics:

- **Alternatives.** Consideration of other uses.
- **Misleading Project Renderings.** Representation of the Project on certain platforms makes it appear that the Project would destroy historic adobes and replace with new development.
- **Concern with Parking**. Parking in the area is already challenging, there is concern that the Project would make it even more difficult.
- **Transportation**. Commenter wants to assure that there is safe access/turning.

1.4.2 Draft Environmental Impact Report and Public Review

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15105, this EIR is being circulated for public review and comment for a period of 45 days. During this period, the public and public agencies can submit comments on this EIR's accuracy and completeness to the lead agency. The 45-day public review period for this EIR will be from July 9, 2026 through August 24, 2026. The public can review this EIR at the following locations:

- City of San Juan Capistrano, Development Services Department, 32400 Paseo Adelanto, San Juan Capistrano, California 92675
- San Juan Capistrano Library, 31495 El Camino Real, San Juan Capistrano, California 92675
- City's website at the following address: https://sanjuancapistrano.org/221/EnvironmentalDocuments

The City encourages all comments on this EIR to be submitted in writing. Comments or questions regarding this EIR should be addressed to the following:

Izzak Mireles, Senior Planner
City of San Juan Capistrano.
32400 Paseo Adelanto
San Juan Capistrano, California 92675
(949) 443-6321
imireles@sanjuancapistrano.org

1.4.3 Final Environmental Impact Report and Certification

Upon completion of the Draft EIR public review period, a Final EIR will be prepared. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15132, the Final EIR will consist of (1) the Draft EIR; (2) the comments and recommendations received on the Draft EIR; (3) a list of people, organizations, and public agencies that commented on the Draft EIR; (4) the City's responses to significant environmental points raised by the public and agency comments submitted during the review and consultation process; and (5) any other information the City has added to the Draft EIR. The Final EIR will also include a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program prepared in accordance with CEQA (California Public Resources Code, Section 21081.6). The Final EIR will address any revisions to the Draft EIR made in response to public or public agency comments. These components will compose the Final EIR for the Project. Before the City can review the Project for approval, it must first certify that the EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA, that it has reviewed and considered the information in the EIR, and that the EIR reflects the independent judgment of the City. The City will also be required to adopt Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations (if any significant, unavoidable impacts are identified). If no significant, unavoidable impacts (assuming the City finds the proposed mitigation measures to be feasible) are identified, the City will not be required to adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations if it approves the Project (California Public Resources Code, Section 21081).

1.5 Documents Incorporated by Reference

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15150, allows for incorporation by reference of "all or portions of another document which is a matter of public record or is generally available to the public." Incorporation by reference is used principally as a means of reducing the size of EIRs. This EIR relies in part on data, environmental evaluations, mitigation measures, and other components of EIRs and plans prepared by the City for areas in the Project vicinity. These documents are listed here and used as source documents for this EIR. These documents are available for public review during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), at the City's Planning Division Counter (Planning Division), 32400 Paseo Adelanto, San Juan Capistrano, California 92675.

- City of San Juan Capistrano General Plan, prepared by the City of San Juan Capistrano, 2002
- City of San Juan Capistrano Municipal Code
- City of San Juan Capistrano, City of San Juan Capistrano Historic Town Center Master Plan Repeal Final Environmental Impact Report, October 2020

The Draft EIR also relies on previously adopted regional and statewide plans and programs, agency standards, and background studies in its analyses, such as the South Coast Air Quality

Management District's air quality management plans and CEQA Air Quality Handbook. Chapter 9, References, provides a complete list of references used in preparing the Draft EIR.

1.6 Scope of the Environmental Impact Report

Based on a review of the Project and comments received during the notice of preperation public review period and preparation of an Initial Study (Appendix A), the City determined that an EIR that addresses the following environmental issue areas should be prepared:

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

The specific topics evaluated are detailed in Chapter 4, Environmental Analysis, of this EIR.

As detailed in Chapter 5, Effects Found Not to Be Significant, the City determined that the following environmental impact categories were not significantly affected by or did not affect the Project:

- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Geology and Soils (excluding liquefaction)
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

This EIR evaluates direct impacts, reasonably foreseeable indirect impacts, and cumulative impacts resulting from planning, construction, and operation of the Project using the most current information available and in accordance with the provisions set forth in CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines. In addition, this EIR recommends potentially feasible mitigation measures, where possible, and project alternatives that would reduce or eliminate significant, adverse environmental effects.

No Impact or Less Than Significant Impact

The EIR identified the following impacts as less than significant or no impact in the Draft EIR:

- Aesthetics

- Air Quality
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Noise

Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated

The EIR identified the following impacts as less than significant with the implementation of mitigation measures:

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Tribal Cultural Resources

Unavoidable Significant Adverse Impacts

- Transportation

Chapter 7, Alternatives, of this EIR was prepared in accordance with Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines. CEQA requires that the lead agency adopt mitigation measures or alternatives, where feasible, to substantially lessen or avoid significant environmental impacts that would otherwise occur. However, project modification or alternatives are not required where significant environmental impacts would not occur.

This EIR evaluates the following alternatives to the Project:

- **Alternative 1: No Project/No Development Alternative.** Under the No Project/No Development Alternative, the Project would not be implemented.
- **Alternative 2: Subterranean Parking Alternative.** Under the Subterranean Parking Alternative, the car lift structure ("Building 5") would be eliminated in favor of a subterranean parking structure to be constructed below existing grade.
- **Alternative 3: Reduced Intensity Alternative.** Under the Reduced Intensity Alternative, a reduction of approximately 30 percent (30%) of hotel rooms as compared to the Project would occur, resulting in a 46-room boutique hotel including adaptive reuse of the two historic structures.

1.7 Organization of the Environmental Impact Report

This EIR is organized into two parts. The Draft EIR addresses the potential environmental impacts of the physical development of the Project and associated technical appendices in Part 1. When the EIR is finalized, the Final EIR will contain the public, organization, and public agency

comments received on the Draft EIR, the City's responses to those comments, a summary of EIR revisions or enhancements, and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Project.

This Draft EIR includes the following:

Executive Summary. Summarizes the Project, environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the Project, proposed mitigation measures that would avoid or reduce impacts, and the level of significance of impacts both before and after mitigation.

Chapter 1, Introduction. Provides an introduction and overview of this EIR process and describes the intended use and scope of this EIR and the review process.

Chapter 2, Project Description. Provides a detailed description of the Project, including its location; background information; project objectives; technical, economic, and environmental characteristics; and intended uses for this EIR.

Chapter 3, Environmental Setting. A description of the physical environmental conditions within the vicinity of the Project as they existed at the time the notice of preparation was published, from local and regional perspectives. These provide the baseline physical conditions from which the lead agency determines the significance of the Project's environmental impacts.

Chapter 4, Environmental Analysis. Describes the baseline environmental setting and provides an assessment of potential project impacts for each environmental issue area presented. Each section is divided into 11 subsections: Environmental Setting; Regulatory Setting; Existing Conditions; Methods 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.

Chapter 5, Effects Found Not to Be Significant. Describes the potential impacts of the Project that were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in this EIR.

Chapter 6, Other CEQA Considerations. Provides information required by CEQA regarding impacts that would result from the Project, including significant and unavoidable environmental impacts; significant and irreversible environmental impacts, and growth-inducing impacts.

Chapter 7, Alternatives. Describes and compares the proposed alternatives to the Project.

Chapter 8, List of Preparers and Agencies Consulted. Lists the individuals and agencies that were consulted during the preparation of this EIR.

Chapter 9, References. Provides a list of references used in preparation of the analysis presented in this EIR.

Appendices. Includes various documents and data that support the analysis presented in this EIR.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction 1-1

1.1 Project Overview 1-1
1.2 Purpose and Use of the Environmental Impact Report 1-1
1.3 Lead Agency 1-2
1.4 Environmental Impact Report Review Process 1-3
1.4.1 Notice of Preparation 1-3
1.4.2 Draft Environmental Impact Report and Public Review 1-5
1.4.3 Final Environmental Impact Report and Certification 1-6
1.5 Documents Incorporated by Reference 1-6
1.6 Scope of the Environmental Impact Report 1-7
1.7 Organization of the Environmental Impact Report 1-8

Figures

No table of figures entries found.

Tables

Table 1-1. Notice of Preparation Written Comments Summary 1-3