Attachment to Notice of Exemption

Terra Cotta Middle School New Classroom Building Project
Lake Elsinore Unified School District

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Lake Elsinore Unified School District (District) proposes to replace existing modular classrooms with a new classroom building and fire lane (proposed project) on the Terra Cotta Middle School (MS) campus (project site). This supplemental information provides justification for the Categorical Exemptions pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301, 15302, and 15314. The District is the lead agency for the proposed project in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15051(c).

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Project Location

The Terra Cotta MS campus is a 26.72-acre school site located at 29291 Lake Street (Assessor's Parcel Numbers 389-040-006 and 389-040-063) in the City of Lake Elsinore, Riverside County. The proposed project would be constructed in the eastern portion of the campus.

The Terra Cotta MS campus is bounded by residential uses to the north and west, Lake Street/Grand Avenue to the east, and Summerlake Park to the south. Regional access to the campus is provided by Interstate 15, approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the campus, and State Route 74, approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the campus. Vehicular access to the campus is provided via Lake Street (see Figure 1, *Project Location* and Figure 2, *Aerial Photograph*).

Existing Land Use and Zoning

The project site contains the existing Terra Cotta MS campus. The Terra Cotta MS campus has General Plan land use and zoning designation of Public/Institutional (PI), which is applied to City-owned and maintained properties identified; this zone/designation is acknowledged as generally unsuitable for residential purposes, but may contain a variety of facilities or campuses for the provision of public services (Lake Elsinore 2012, 2026).

Surrounding General Plan Land Use Designations

Surrounding land uses primarily consist of single-family homes to the north, west, and east, with a General Plan land use and zoning designation of Low-Medium Residential and Single Family Residential (R-1). Additionally, Summerlake Park is located to the south of the campus and has a land use and zoning designation of PI (Lake Elsinore 2012, 2026).

Lake Elsinore Unified School District

The District provides school services for students from transitional kindergarten (TK) through 12th grade in Southwest Riverside County. District boundaries include the cities of Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, and Wildomar, as well as several unincorporated communities, including Lakeland Village and Horsethief Canyon. The District consists of 13 elementary schools, two K–8 schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and two alternative schools. The District also offers adult transition programs at one school and preschool programs at four campuses. Districtwide enrollment in the 2025–2026 school year is 20,821 students (CDE 2026a).

Terra Cotta Middle School

According to the California Department of Education, Terra Cotta MS is a 6th to 8th grade public school with a 2025–2026 enrollment of 985 students (CDE 2026b).

The existing Terra Cotta MS campus contains a variety of permanent and portable structures that support educational and extracurricular functions. The campus includes classroom buildings, administration buildings, hardscaped play areas, and a parking lot at the southeastern portion of the campus.

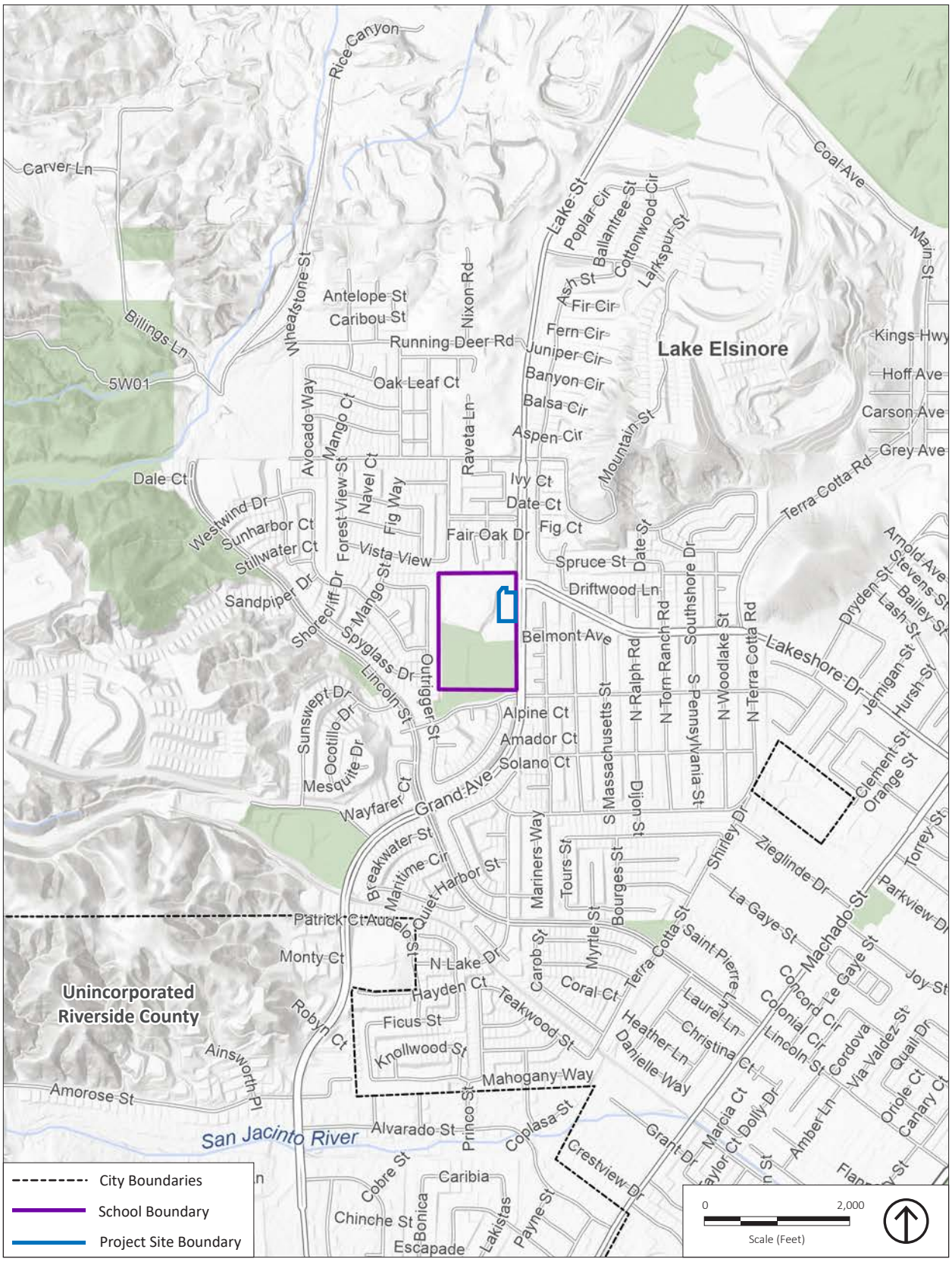
The campus is currently fully developed with on-site circulation, parking, and utilities features, as well as hardscaping and landscaping. Infrastructure (water, sewer, storm drainage, electrical, lighting, walkways) is already in place and supports current operations.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A proposed project plan is provided in Figure 3a, *Proposed Site Plan*.

Modular Classroom Removal

The proposed project would include the removal of 16 modular classrooms and associated improvements on the eastern portion of the campus, along Grand Avenue. The proposed project would also require removal of one shade structure and modular restroom building. Seven existing modular buildings and two modular restroom buildings would remain.



Source: Generated using GIS Pro 2026.

Figure 1
Project Location

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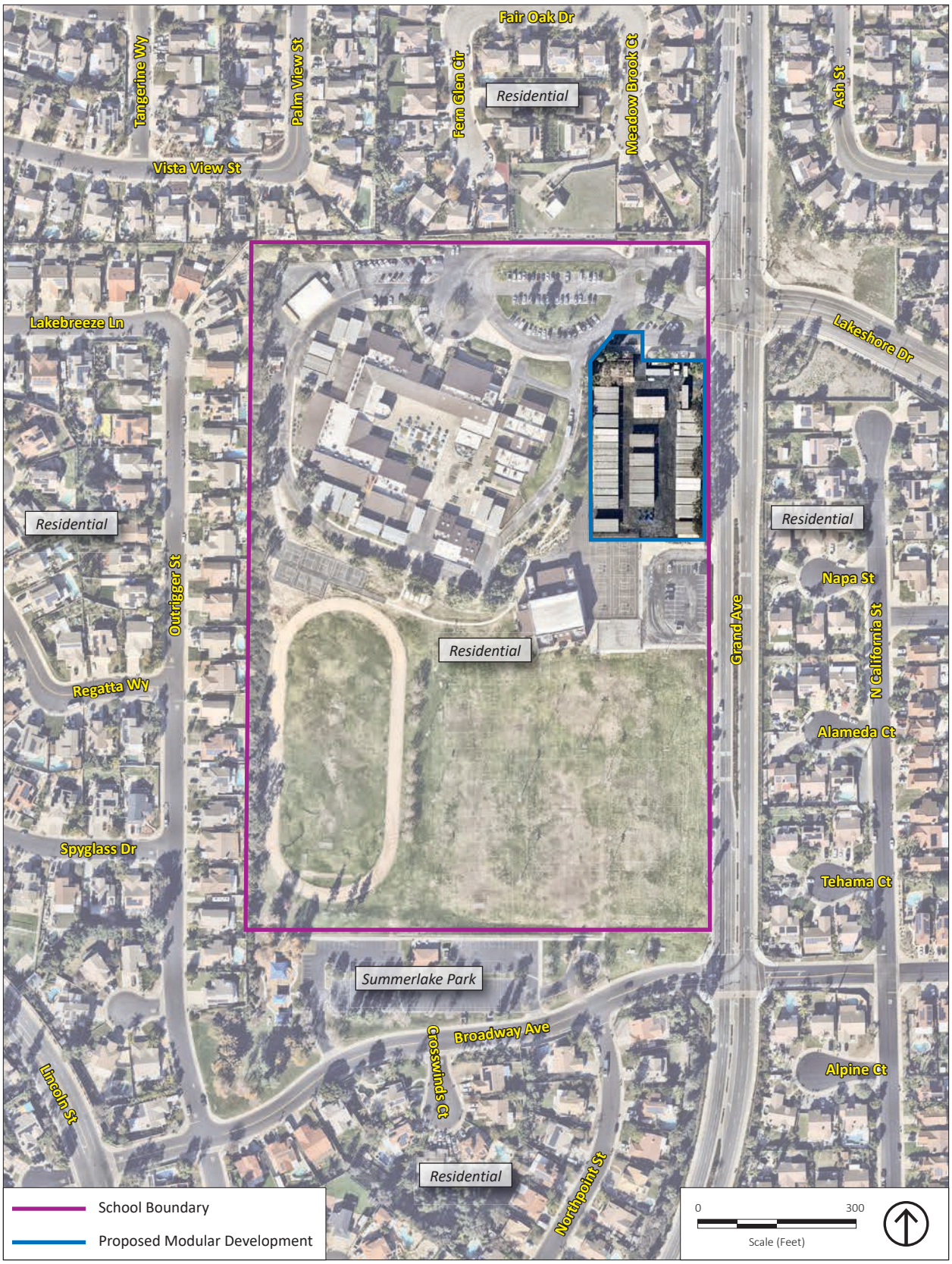

Source: Nearmap 2026.

Figure 2
Aerial Photograph

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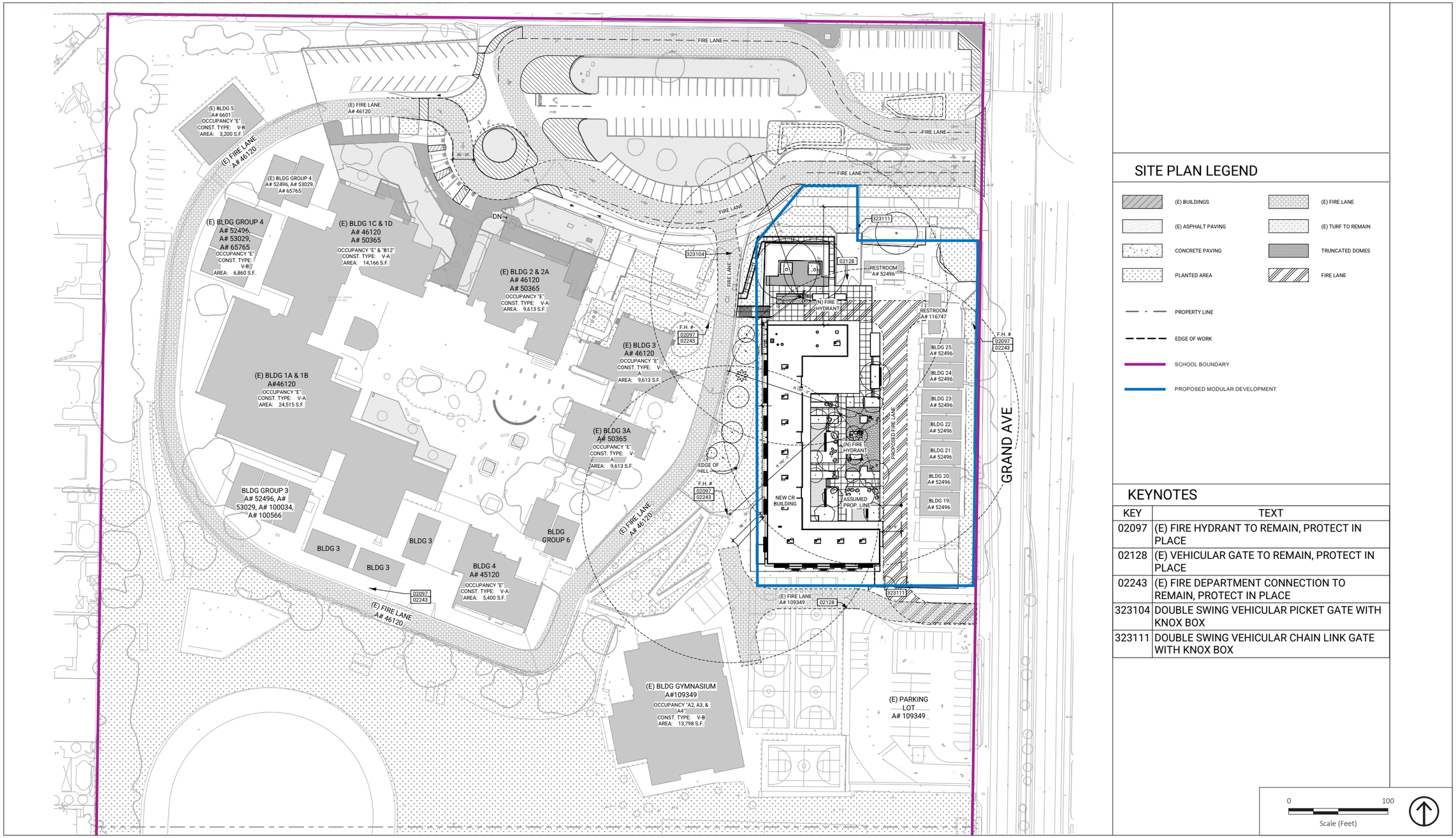

KEYNOTES

KEY	TEXT
02097	(E) FIRE HYDRANT TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
02128	(E) VEHICULAR GATE TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
02243	(E) FIRE DEPARTMENT CONNECTION TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
323104	DOUBLE SWING VEHICULAR PICKET GATE WITH KNOX BOX
323111	DOUBLE SWING VEHICULAR CHAIN LINK GATE WITH KNOX BOX

Source: A4E 2026.

Figure 3a
Proposed Site Plans

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New Classroom Building

The new 15,720 square-foot classroom building would replace the modular classrooms that would be removed and would contain 10 classrooms, restrooms, and a kitchen, storage room, and mechanical room. Additionally, the exterior of the building would include a covered lunch shelter (see Figure 3b, *Proposed Classroom Building*). The modular classrooms would meet the current needs of the campus and would not increase the student capacity of Terra Cotta MS.

Campus Improvements

The proposed project would install a new fire lane and fire hydrant on the eastern portion of the project site, between the new classroom building and the existing modular classrooms to remain. The new fire lane would connect to an existing fire lane to the south that connects to Grand Avenue (see Figure 3a*)*.

Project Construction

Construction of the proposed project would be completed in one phase, anticipated to occur from February 2027 to March 2028. Construction will include grading and utility trenching. Utility lines, including electric, fiber optic, gas, and water, would be connected to the existing campus utility lines.

All construction equipment and workers would be located within the boundaries of the project site and contractors would be required to adhere to Section 17.176.060, *Exterior noise limits*, of the City of Lake Elsinore Municipal Code, to avoid disruption to campus operations. Additionally, the proposed project would comply with all construction noise regulations of the LEMC, including Section 17.176.080, Prohibited Acts, which states that construction activities on the site are permitted only between the hours of 7:00 am and 7:00 pm (except in emergency situations). All project improvements would occur within the existing campus, and no off-site improvements would be required as part of the proposed project.

3. REASONS WHY THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT

Article 19 (Categorical Exemptions) of the CEQA Guidelines includes, as required by CEQA Statute Section 21084 (List of Exempt Classes of Projects; Projects Damaging Scenic Resources), a list of classes of projects that have been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment and, as a result, are exempt from review under CEQA.

This section describes how the proposed project qualifies for a CEQA Exemption under Class 1 (Existing Facilities), Class 2 (Replacement or Reconstruction), and Class 14 (New Construction or

Conversion of Small Structures), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Section 15302, and Section 15314, respectively.

Class 1 (Existing Facilities)

CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 states:

> Class 1 consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. […] The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use.

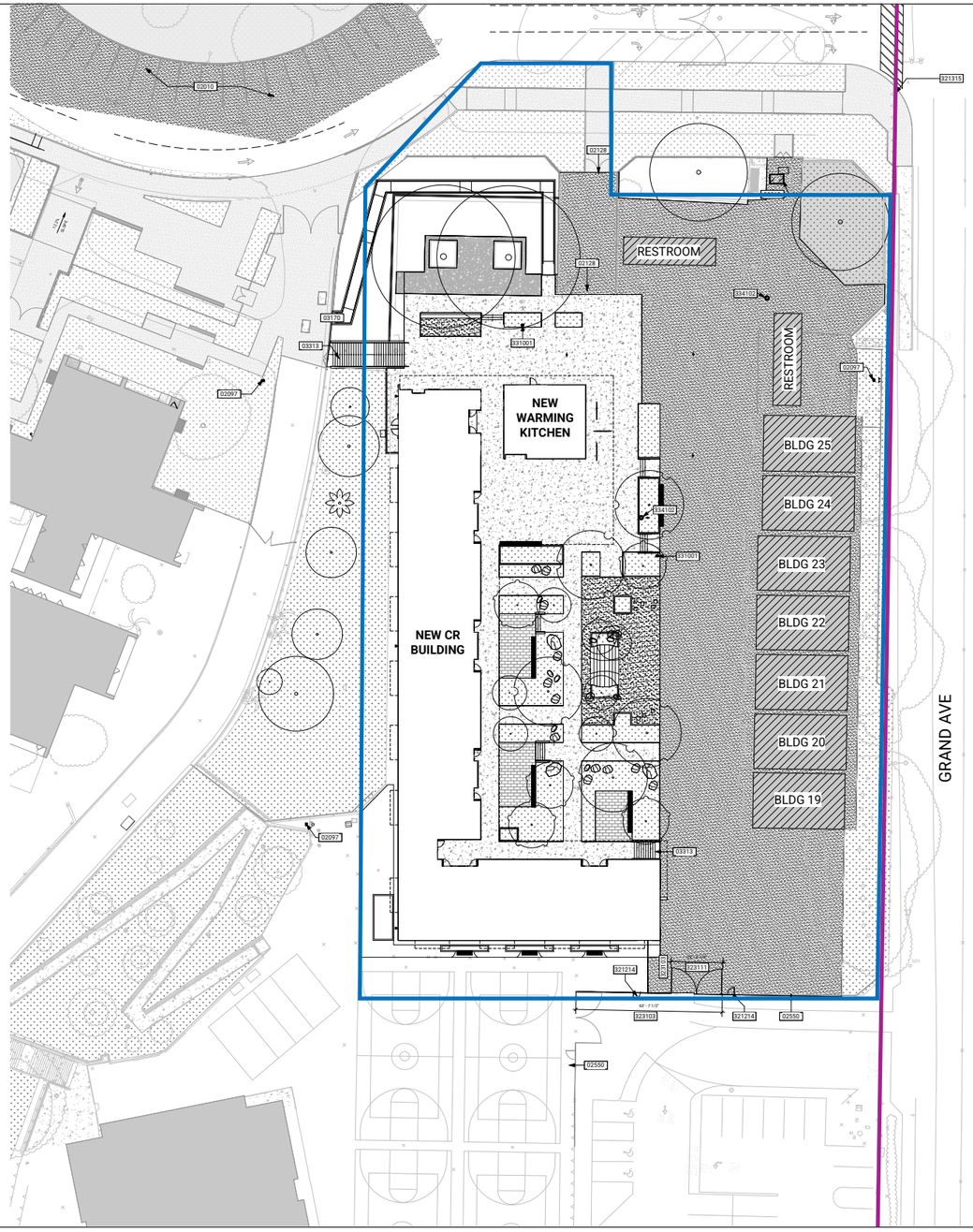
The proposed project consists of the replacement of existing school facilities and associated improvements within an established campus, with no expansion of use. The project would replace 16 existing modular classrooms with a new permanent classroom building containing 10 classrooms, resulting in a net reduction in the number of classrooms. All proposed improvements would occur within the boundaries of the fully developed and operational Terra Cotta MS campus, and the proposed project would not expand the existing campus or change its use. As such, the proposed project fits within the requirements of the Class 1 exemption.

Class 2 (Replacement or Reconstruction)

CEQA Guidelines Section 15302 states:

> Class 2 consists of replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced.

Section 15302 provides a list of example projects that would qualify for a Class 2 exemption; the list of examples is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of all qualifying projects. Examples provided include: the replacement or reconstruction of existing schools and hospitals to provide earthquake-resistant structures that do not increase capacity more than 50 percent; replacement of commercial structures with new structures of substantially the same size, purpose, and capacity; replacement or reconstruction of existing utilities involving negligible or no expansion of capacity; and others.



SCHOOL BOUNDARY

PROPOSED MODULAR DEVELOPMENT

SITE PLAN LEGEND

- (E) BUILDINGS - NOT IN CONTRACT. PROTECT IN PLACE
- (E) ASPHALT TO REMAIN
- (E) CONCRETE TO REMAIN
- (E) LANDSCAPING TO REMAIN
- EXISTING WORK TO REMAIN - PROTECT IN PLACE
- PROPERTY LINE
- (N) CHAIN LINK FENCE
- (E) CHAIN LINK FENCE TO REMAIN
- (E) WIRE MESH FENCE TO REMAIN
- (E) WIRE MESH FENCE TO REMAIN
- (N) CONCRETE
- (N) TACTILE WARNING SURFACING
- (N) DECOMPOSED GRANITE
- (N) PLANTING AREA
- (N) ACCENT PAVING
- (N) ASPHALT
- 01011 SHEET NOTE
- (N) PICKET FENCE
- (E) PICKET FENCE
- ROOF OVERHANG

KEYNOTE LEGEND

02010	(E) PARKING STALLS TO REMAIN PROTECT IN PLACE
02097	(E) FIRE HYDRANT TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
02128	(E) VEHICULAR GATE TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
02550	(E) CHAINLINK FENCE TO REMAIN, PROTECT IN PLACE
03170	(N) ACCESSIBLE RAMP. SEE CIVIL DRAWINGS FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
03313	NEW CONCRETE STAIR AND HANDRAIL. REFER TO CIVIL AND LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
28318	TRANSFORMER AND ELECTRICAL PANELS ON UTILITY PAD, SEE ELECTRICAL DWGS
321214	SINGLE SWING GATE WITH PANIC HARDWARE
321315	CURB RAMP, SEE CIVIL FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND DETAILS
323103	CHAIN LINK FENCE, MATCH EXISTING HEIGHT
323111	DOUBLE SWING VEHICULAR CHAIN LINK GATE WITH KNOX BOX
331001	NEW FIRE HYDRANT. SEE CIVIL FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
334102	(E) POWER POLE, PROTECT IN PLACE

0 55
Scale (Feet)

Source: A4E 2026.

Figure 3b
Proposed Classroom Building

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The proposed project consists of the demolition and replacement of existing school facilities and associated improvements within an established campus, with a net decrease in the number of classrooms and no increase in student capacity. The proposed project would serve the existing school population with the same purpose and capacity as the structures to be replaced. All proposed improvements would occur within the boundaries of the fully developed and operational Terra Cotta MS campus. Thus, the proposed project meets the requirements of the Class 2 exemption.

Class 14 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures)

CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 states:

> Class 14 consists of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

The proposed project would replace existing facilities and result in a net reduction in the number of classrooms. The proposed project would not increase student capacity. All improvements would take place entirely within the developed Terra Cotta MS campus. The proposed project would not alter or expand the existing school use or increase student capacity. No off-campus improvements would occur. As such, the proposed project meets the requirements of the Class 14 exemption.

4. REVIEW OF EXCEPTIONS TO THE CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

The proposed project has been reviewed under CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2, Exceptions, for any characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project qualifies for a categorical CEQA exemption. Each exception is listed below followed by an assessment of whether that exception applies to the proposed project.

Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project would be located—a project that ordinarily has no significant impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may have an impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

> The project site is located on the existing Terra Cotta MS campus that includes classroom buildings, athletic fields and facilities, parking lots, concrete walkways, and ornamental landscaping. Due to the school's developed nature and frequent human disturbance, it does not contain any environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern. The

project site is in an urbanized and developed area of the City. No mapped riparian habitats or wetlands exist on or near the project site (USFWS 2026a). There are no critical habitats on or within one mile of the project site (USFWS 2026b). Additionally, there is no evidence of hazardous materials or substances on the campus (see item [e], Hazardous Waste Sites). As such, the project site is not considered a particularly sensitive environment. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

a. **Cumulative Impacts.** All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

   There are no other projects proposed on the campus at this time, and no off-campus improvements would occur as part of the proposed project. The proposed project would not increase student capacity or otherwise result in changes outside of the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not have the potential to result in any cumulative effects when combined with proposed development projects near the campus or elsewhere in the District. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

b. **Significant Effects.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

   The project site is on an existing middle school campus that is already fully developed. The project site does not contain any unique features that would be affected by the proposed project or otherwise cause significant effects on the environment. Under oversight of the District, the construction manager would execute construction activities per current local, state, and federal laws, regulations, construction best management practices, and District standards and guidelines. Therefore, no unusual circumstances exist for the proposed project, and this exemption does not apply to the proposed project.

c. **Scenic Highways.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

   There are no officially designated state scenic highways near the campus. According to the California Department of Transportation California Scenic Highway Mapping System, the closest officially designated state scenic highway is State Route 91 from Post Mile (PM) R9.2 to PM R14.4R, approximately 24 miles northwest of the project site (Caltrans 2026). The closest eligible state scenic highway is State Route 74 from PM 0 to PM R92.34, approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the project site. The project site is not

visible from any of these eligible or designated scenic highways due to intervening vegetation, buildings, and distance. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

d. Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5.

California Government Code Section 65962.5 requires the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to compile, maintain, and update specified lists of hazardous release sites. CEQA requires the lead agency to consult the lists compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 to determine whether a project and any alternatives are identified. The required lists of hazardous material release sites are commonly referred to as the "Cortese List" named after the legislator who authored the legislation.

Because the statute was enacted more than 20 years ago, some of the provisions refer to agency activities that were conducted many years ago and are no longer being implemented and, in some cases, the information required in the Cortese List does not exist. Those requesting a copy of the Cortese Lists are now referred directly to the appropriate information resources contained on internet websites hosted by the boards or departments referenced in the statute, including, but not limited to, California Department of Toxic Substance Control's online EnviroStor database and the State Water Resources Control Board's online GeoTracker database. These two databases include hazardous material release sites, along with other categories of sites or facilities specific to each agency's jurisdiction.

The project site is not included on the following data resources, which are compiled by CalEPA to meet Cortese List requirements:

- **EnviroStor.** Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List. Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2026a)
- GeoTracker. Leaking Underground Storage Task Sites. State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB 2026)
- CalEPA. Solid Waste Disposal Sites Identified by the Water Board with Waste Constituents above Hazardous Waste Levels Outside the Waste Management Unit (CalEPA 2026a)
- CalEPA. List of Active Cease and Desist Orders and Cleanup and Abatement Orders from the Water Board (CalEPA 2026b)
- Hazardous Waste Facilities Subject to Corrective Action. Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2026b)

Because the project site is not identified as a hazardous materials site on a list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

e. **Historical Resources.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of historical resources. Under Public Resource Code Section 21084.1, a historical resource is a resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Additionally, historical resources included in a local register of historical resources are presumed to be historically or culturally significant, and a lead agency can determine whether the resource may be a historical resource.

   The Terra Cotta MS campus is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places or listed as a California Historical Landmark or California Point of Historical Interest, nor is there a listed historic resource within a 0.25-mile radius of the project site (NPS 2026; OHP 2026a, 2026b). Additionally, neither the school nor any adjoining property is listed as a historic resource or potential historic resource by the City of Lake Elsinore. No historical resources have been identified on site during preparation of this Notice of Exemption. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

5. CONCLUSION

As substantiated in this document, the proposed project at El Warren ES is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, 15302, and Section 15314. Additionally, no exceptions identified in Section 15300.2, Exceptions, of the CEQA Guidelines apply to the proposed project. Thus, the project is categorically exempt from CEQA review, and a Notice of Exemption may be used for the proposed project.

6. REFERENCES

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