

**VCWD HQ Demonstration Garden Project
Notice of Exemption (NOE)**

The Valley County Water District (District or VCWD), as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), proposes to construct and operate a new 16,000 square-foot Demonstration Garden area and Visitor Parking area (Proposed Project) adjacent to the VCWD Headquarters site.

Project Location

The Proposed Project site lies on the south side of Arrow Highway, between Calmview Avenue and Lante Street, at 15250 Arrow Highway, Baldwin Park, CA 91706 (see Figure 1, Project Vicinity Map). The Parcel Numbers for the Proposed Project site are 902 and 903. The main ingress and egress for the Proposed Project site would be from Lante Street; a secondary access to the Proposed Project site would be from Arrow Highway. Properties surrounding the site are a mix of commercial/industrial and residential. Arrow Highway is the boundary between the City of Irwindale to the north and City of Baldwin Park to the south.

Description of Project

The VCWD is proposing the construction and operation of a Demonstration Garden that will be an extension of the District Headquarters (Proposed Project). The Demonstration Garden will be used primarily for education purposes and the various amenities on the site will be designed to support this intent. The focal point of the expansion is a 100-plus-seat amphitheater that will be used for presentations and gatherings. The circular sunken space incorporates seating, a stage, and shade structures. A 200 square-foot restroom building will be available for the additional occupants who would be expected for these events. Other shade structures would be scattered throughout the site and would act as points of interest for informational and educational displays. Various landscaped areas will incorporate shade trees and drought-tolerant species to illustrate adaptive planting and irrigation techniques. Other areas of the Demonstration Garden will include a sculpture garden with a hand operated water pump, an outdoor work space, and multiple places for outdoor seating. All of these site elements are connected by a series of criss-crossing pathways that provide access to these educational components.

The Parking Area extension includes the addition of a second driveway for ease of access and expands the 19 public parking stalls to 27 to address increased visitors for the enhanced educational program.

Figure 1 - Project Vicinity Map



Reasons Why Project Is Exempt:

The proposed activity is a project subject to CEQA. However, it is exempt from further environmental analysis under Class 1, *Existing Facilities* (CEQA Guidelines §15301), Class 4, *Minor Alterations to Land* (CEQA Guidelines §15304), and Class 32 *In-fill Development Projects* (CEQA Guidelines §15332). Class 1 categorical exemption 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 use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. Class 4 consists of minor public or private alterations to the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not include the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. Class 32 consists of in-fill developments that are consistent with: general plan and zoning designations and policies, project site is less than 5 acres, does not support habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species, no significant effects to traffic/noise/air quality/water quality, and being adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

The Proposed Project will result in creation of a Demonstration Garden with amphitheater for presentations and gatherings, restroom, educational displays, and shade structures. The Proposed Project will not result in significant environmental impacts and is exempt from further review under the conditions in Article 19. Therefore, the application of Class 1, Class 4, and Class 32 categorical exemptions is appropriate for the Proposed Project. The Proposed Project does not have the potential to trigger any of the exceptions identified in CEQA Guidelines §15300.2. Consequently, as documented below, the Proposed Project is exempt from further CEQA review.

- (a) **Location.** The improvements will occur entirely within the listed parcels, which are located in an urbanized community. The existing conditions on and around the Project site are disturbed and paved ground, and are not considered environmentally sensitive. Ground disturbance would occur during construction but will be limited to previously disturbed surfaces. The Proposed Project will not impact environmentally sensitive areas or an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern. This exception does not apply to the Proposed Project.
- (b) **Cumulative Impact.** The Proposed Project would be constructed after completion of the new VCWD headquarters, which is expected to take 12 months for construction. The properties surrounding the site are fully built out or are analyzed for buildout in a separate CEQA document, in the case of the VCWD Headquarters project. Details of any other future projects in the area are not known and thereby cannot be further evaluated at this time. Further, the majority of impacts associated with the Proposed Project will be temporary (the construction timeframe) and are limited to the immediate vicinity of the Project site. As such, no other cumulatively considerable projects have been identified that could incrementally contribute to the impacts associated with the Proposed Project. This exception does not apply to the Proposed Project.
- (c) **Significant Effect.** The Demonstration Garden including amphitheater, restroom, and shade structures would demonstrate what can be done with limited water resources. The Proposed Project would provide a beneficial use to the public by demonstrating various water saving strategies. All upgrades associated with the Proposed Project would be installed on or adjacent to the VCWD Headquarters facility boundaries. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not appear visually incompatible with existing equipment and accessories on the Project site.

The Proposed Project is located within a disturbed, urbanized environment in Baldwin Park. No vegetation currently exists onsite, and it is anticipated that no candidate, sensitive, or special status species are anticipated to exist on or around the Project site (VCWD 2020). Thus, the Proposed Project will not involve the removal of any vegetation or scenic trees, nor would it impact any scenic vistas within the immediate area.

Therefore, no reasonable possibility exists that the Proposed Project would have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Therefore, this exception does not apply to this Project.

- (d) **Scenic Highways.** The nearest highways to the Proposed Project site are Interstate 605 (I-605) and Interstate 210 (I-210), Interstate 10 (I-10), California State Highway 39. I-605 runs approximately 1.67 miles northwest of the site, I-210 runs approximately 1.63 miles north of the site, I-10 runs approximately 2.34 mile south of the site, and Highway 39 is located 2.25 miles east of the site. Although portions of California State Highway 39 are classified as eligible for state scenic highway designation, the section nearest the Proposed Project site (south of I-210) is not identified as being eligible or officially designated (Caltrans 2019). Therefore, no impact to scenic highways would occur, and this exception does not apply to the Project.
- (e) **Hazardous Waste Sites.** The Proposed Project site is not on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65862.5 (SWRCB 2022; DTSC 2022); therefore, implementation of the Proposed Project would not result in an impact associated with known hazardous materials sites. This exception does not apply to the Notice of Exemption.
- (f) **Historical Resources.** The Project site was previously investigated for historic resources, and none were identified on site (VCWD 2020). The addition of the Proposed Project would not impact any historic resources. This exception does not apply to the Project.

References:

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2019. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. Online URL:

<https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>

State Water Resources Control Board. 2022. GeoTracker Database. Online URL:

<https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov>

Department of Toxic Substances Control. 2022. EnviroStor Database. Online URL:

<http://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/>

Valley County Water District (VCWD). 2020. Valley County Water District New Headquarters Project Draft Initial Study Checklist/Mitigated Negative Declaration. Online URL:

https://files.ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/260077-2/attachment/IkRU_nV8JhFqqdnJH0XiSZGCKT7JhA4IC84g8GO3kEe1Joz3IHtg4fcZoEkfrFC4ugZcEJHLPwzG9_K0