



# VENTURA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

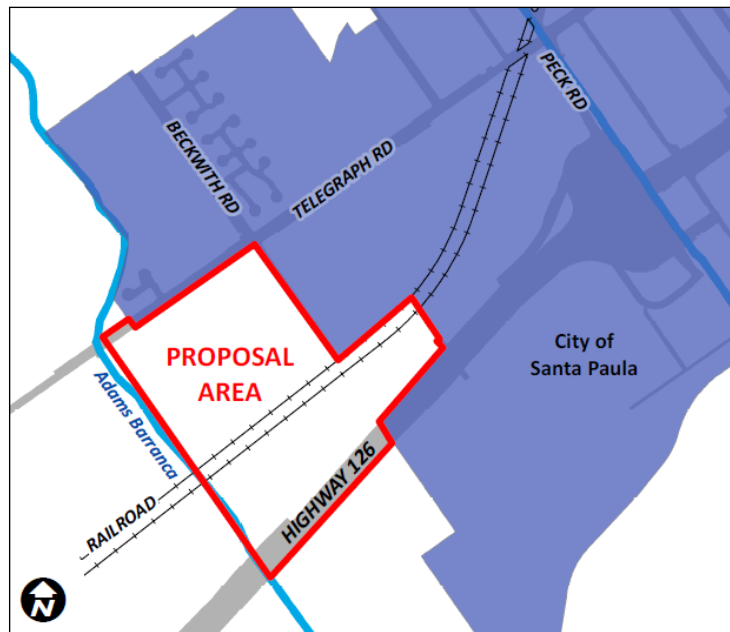
Meeting Date: September 18, 2024

**LAFCo Case:** LAFCo 20-06 City of Santa Paula Reorganization – Santa Paula West Business Park

**Project:** The proposal consists of the following requested actions to allow for new commercial and light industrial development within the City of Santa Paula:

- Annexation to the City of Santa Paula
- Detachment from the Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD)
- Detachment from the Ventura County Resource Conservation District (VCRCD)
- Detachment from Ventura County Service Area No. 32 (CSA 32)

The proposal involves the annexation to the City of Santa Paula of an approximately 64-acre area, consisting of approximately 54 acres of agricultural land, plus the contiguous sections of: (1) Telegraph Road to the north, (2) the Santa Paula Branch Line railroad right-of-way that bisects the proposal area (owned by the Ventura County Transportation Commission) (VCTC),<sup>1</sup> and (3) Faulkner Road and Highway 126 to the south (see the map to the right and Attachment 1). The proposal includes the detachment of the proposal area from the GCTD, VCRCD, and CSA 32, as these agencies do not provide services within the City of Santa Paula.



<sup>1</sup> According to the VCTC website, "Today, the Santa Paula Branch Line (SPBL) extends for 32 miles from the East Ventura/Montalvo train station, through the Cities of Ventura, Santa Paula, and Fillmore, to the unincorporated community of Piru, with 29 miles of active track. Originally built in 1887 by the Southern Pacific railroad, the SPBL remains an active short line railroad with freight, tourist and excursion, film and television, and research and development rail operations."

## COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF

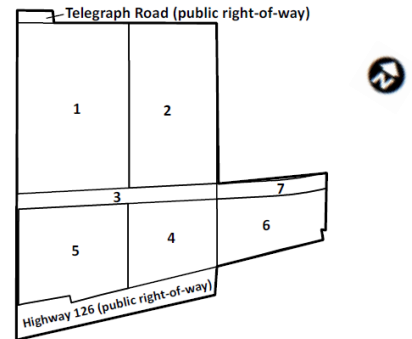
COUNTY	CITY	DISTRICT	PUBLIC
Jeff Gorell	Jenny Crosswhite, Chair	Raul Avila, Vice-Chair	Pat Richards
Janice S. Parvin	John C. Zaragoza	Mary Anne Rooney	
<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Alternate</i>
Matt LaVere	Susan Santangelo	Mohammed A. Hasan	David J. Ross
Executive Officer	Deputy Executive Officer	Office Manager/Clerk	Legal Counsel
Kai Luoma	Andrea Ozdy	Richelle Beltran	Jeffrey Barnes

The reorganization would accommodate the development of a variety of commercial and light industrial uses (approximately 563,187 square feet of floor area with an estimated 839 employees).

**Size:** Approximately 64 acres.

**Location:** The parcels that constitute the proposal area are summarized as follows, and include railroad right-of-way, as well as the surrounding road rights-of-way to the north and south:

	Assessor's Parcel Number	Property Owner
1	098-0-010-15	McGaelic Group LP
2	098-0-010-16	Bender Realty, Ltd.
3	098-0-010-17 (portion)	VCTC
4	098-0-010-18	Bender Realty, Ltd.
5	098-0-010-19	McGaelic Group LP
6	098-0-020-04	Bender Realty, Ltd.
7	098-0-020-22	VCTC



The area to be developed is located immediately south of Telegraph Road, west of Beckwith Road and Todd Lane, north of Faulkner Road and Highway 126, and east of Adams Barranca. The proposal area is entirely within the City of Santa Paula's sphere of influence,<sup>2</sup> contiguous to and west of the City of Santa Paula (Attachment 1).

**Proponent:** City of Santa Paula, by resolution.

**Notice:** This matter has been noticed as prescribed by law.

**Recommendations:**

- A. Certify that the Commission has reviewed and considered the information contained in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) entitled "Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report" (December 2018) and Addendum (December 2023), prepared for and by the City as the lead agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and adopt the findings and mitigation measures in the EIR, as addended (provided to the Commission under separate cover).
- B. Adopt Resolution LAFCo 20-06 making determinations and approving a reorganization for the City of Santa Paula (Attachment 4).

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<sup>2</sup> Government Code Section 56076 defines a sphere of influence as the probable physical boundary and service area of a local agency, as determined by the commission.

## **Project Description:**

### **Background:**

On February 20, 2019, the City Council of the City of Santa Paula approved the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, to accommodate new commercial and light industrial development (e.g., manufacturing, research and development, professional offices, and limited commercial uses) on currently-unincorporated land to the southwest of the City. The City Council's actions included the approval of a General Plan amendment, Specific Plan, pre-zoning designations within the Specific Plan area, a tentative tract map, and certification of the Final EIR for the project. The City Council also adopted a resolution of application to LAFCo.

The territory included within the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan is located within the area identified in the City's General Plan as the West Area 2 Expansion Area. The Specific Plan excludes an approximately 10-acre portion of the proposal area consisting of the existing railroad right-of-way (which bisects and is within the proposal area) and existing public roadways along the proposal area's northern and southern boundaries. Access to the project site would occur from Telegraph Road to the north and from Faulkner Road (as extended) to the south. Future development on the site would receive municipal services from the City; therefore, annexation to the City is necessary to implement the project.

The application for the reorganization was submitted to LAFCo in June 2020, and LAFCo staff issued a certificate of filing for the application in July 2020. During the course of evaluation of the proposal by reviewing agencies, in July 2020 the Ventura County Watershed Protection District (VCWPD) informed LAFCo staff that there were outstanding flooding issues associated with the proposed development that would need to be addressed. Since that time, the City worked to resolve the issues identified by the VCWPD. Specifically, the City revised the drainage and flood protection plan associated with the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, and amended the Specific Plan to incorporate the revised drainage and flood control features, in order to ensure sufficient protection against flooding within and outside of the proposal area. These design changes affected other aspects of the anticipated development pursuant to the Specific Plan, and resulted in the reduction in the amount of developable land from 42 acres to 37 acres, and an increase in passive open space area from 5 acres to 11 acres.

### **Request:**

The City's request involves annexation of territory to the City, as well as detachment of territory from the following special districts: GCTD (which provides public transit service in the unincorporated County area and cities of Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and San Buenaventura), VCRCD (which provides soil and water conservation services in unincorporated County areas only), and CSA 32 (which monitors and regulates septic systems in all areas outside cities and sanitation districts).

## **General Analysis:**

Government Code § 56668 identifies several factors that the Commission must consider as part of its review of a change of organization proposal. These factors are discussed as follows:

### **1. Land Use and Population (Government Code §§ 56668(a), 56668(g), and 56668(o))**

#### **Land Area, Land Use, and Consistency with Plans**

The proposal area consists of land currently used for agricultural cultivation and facilities in support of agricultural uses. The proposed development is consistent with the City's General Plan designations for land within the proposal area. The existing and proposed General Plan and zoning designations are as follows:

<b>Existing County General Plan Designation</b>	<b>Existing County Zoning Designation</b>	<b>Proposed City General Plan Designations</b>	<b>Proposed City Zoning (Pre-zoning) Designations<sup>3</sup></b>
<i>Agricultural – Urban Reserve</i>	<i>AE-40 ac (Agricultural Exclusive, 40 acre minimum parcel size)</i>	<i>Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan and Open Space: Parks and Recreation</i>	<i>Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan (includes the following zoning designations: Commercial/Light Industrial, Light Industrial, and Passive/Open Space</i>

The City establishes the allowable land uses for territory within its jurisdiction. If the proposal area is annexed to the City, the anticipated zoning designations would allow for commercial/light industrial uses (approximately 37 acres), and open space/passive uses (approximately 11 acres), internal and surrounding roadways (approximately 11 acres), and railroad use (approximately 5 acres).

Surrounding uses, General Plan designations, and zoning designations will not be altered, and are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> While the VCTC-owned Santa Paula Branch Line is included in the proposal area and bisects the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, it is not a part of the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan. The City does not assign zoning designations for any of the public streets or rights-of-way (e.g., the railroad) within its jurisdiction, and therefore such areas are excluded from the City's pre-zoning designation process.

	<b>Current Use</b>	<b>General Plan Designation</b>	<b>Zoning Designation</b>
<b>North</b>	Residential (single-family dwellings and mobile home park)	<i>Single Family Residential and Mobile Home Park (City)</i>	<i>R-1 (Single Family Residential) and MHP (Mobile Home Park) (City)</i>
<b>South</b>	Highway 126 and Agricultural (row crops and orchards)	<i>Mixed Use Commercial/Light Industrial and Industrial (City) and Agricultural (County)</i>	<i>Industrial (City) and AE-40 ac (Agricultural Exclusive, 40 acre minimum parcel size) (County)</i>
<b>East</b>	Commercial and Industrial (e.g., offices, warehouses, and construction equipment storage)	<i>Mixed Use Commercial/Light Industrial (City)</i>	<i>C-LI (Commercial – Light Industrial) and C-G (General Commercial) (City)</i>
<b>West</b>	Adams Barranca and Agricultural (orchards and livestock)	<i>Agricultural (County)</i>	<i>AE-40 ac (Agricultural Exclusive, 40 acre minimum parcel size) (County)</i>

The project site is surrounded by Telegraph Road and residential uses to the north, commercial and industrial development to the east, Highway 126 and agriculture to the south, and agriculture to the west.

The proposal area is located entirely within the City’s urban restriction boundary (CURB) established through the City’s Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) ordinance. The CURB establishes a boundary outside of which voter approval is generally required prior to the extension of City services or a change in general plan designation. Because the proposal area is located within the CURB, approval by City voters is not required for the proposal area to be annexed to the City.

Based on application materials submitted, it appears that the proposed development is consistent with the City’s General Plan.

#### *Likelihood of Growth in the Area*

The reorganization involving annexation of the proposal area to the City would allow for the development of a variety of light industrial and commercial uses, totaling approximately 563,187 square feet of floor area. The proposal area is surrounded to the north and east by existing development within the City.

#### *Topography, Natural Features and Drainage*

The proposal area is relatively flat, gently sloping from north to south. It has undergone extensive grading and disturbance to accommodate historical agricultural use, and does not contain natural features or drainage channels. However, it is bordered on the west by Adams Barranca.

### Population

According to the County Registrar of Voters, there are no registered voters who reside within the proposal area. As such, the annexation proposal area is considered to be uninhabited, pursuant to Government Code § 56046.

### Regional Transportation Plan

The *City of Santa Paula Municipal Service Review* (MSR) accepted by the Commission in February 2018 documents that the City's population as of January 1, 2016, was estimated to be 30,752, and the California Department of Finance estimated the City's population as of January 1, 2024, to be 31,355. The *Growth Forecast* appendix of the *2024-2050 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)* (adopted by the Southern California Association of Governments on April 4, 2024) estimates that the City's population will reach 35,400 by 2045. Development of the proposal area within the City would result in exclusively non-residential uses; therefore, its annexation to the City will not result in any changes to the City's population. LAFCo staff did not identify any conflicts of the proposal related to the RTP/SCS.

## **2. Services and Controls – Need, Cost, Adequacy and Availability (Government Code §§ 56668(b), 56668(k), and 56668(l))**

The City of Santa Paula established the allowable land uses for the proposal area. It appears that the proposed development is consistent with the City's General Plan. The fiscal analysis of the proposed City annexation that was prepared for the City documents a projected recurring annual surplus in the City's General Fund. The following details are based on information contained in the 2018 MSR, the application materials submitted to LAFCo, and information provided by other public agencies (as necessary):

Fire Protection Services: The Ventura County Fire Protection District provides fire protection services within the City's jurisdictional area. The closest fire station to the proposal area is VCFPD Station No. 26 located at 536 W. Main Street (approximately 1.2 miles from the proposal area). According to information supplied by the VCFPD, the average response time for fire/emergency service calls for fire protection is expected to be 8.5 minutes or less, 90 percent of the time, which is consistent with the VCFPD's response time goal and current actual response times within suburban areas.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> VCFPD response time goals and response statistics are based on population density (i.e., suburban areas and rural areas) throughout its service area which includes the unincorporated County area and the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Ojai, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks.

Flood Control Services: The application materials state that the property would be served by storm drain facilities that are operated and maintained by the City, and that an extension to the City's storm drain infrastructure will be necessary to accommodate the proposed development. The developer would be responsible for construction of improvements including the installation of interceptor channels and a detention basin, in order to meet the flood control requirements of the VCWPD, as well as for complying with standard City requirements pertaining to protection of the new development from inundation during a 100-year flood (i.e., a flood event that has a 1-percent probability of occurring in a given year).

Law Enforcement/Police Services: The City provides law enforcement services within its jurisdiction, the majority of which are financed through the City's General Fund. The closest police station to the proposal area is the City's Police Headquarters located at 214 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street (approximately 2.3 miles from the proposal area). The City's response time goal is three minutes for priority calls, and it anticipates the ability to respond to calls within this timeframe. The City anticipates that revenues generated within the proposal area to support police services will be sufficient to provide these services.

Library Services: The Blanchard/Santa Paula Library District provides library services within the City and operates one public library within the City. As the proposal area would accommodate solely commercial and industrial development (i.e., it would not support new residential uses), no increased demand for library services is expected to occur.

Recreation and Parks Services: The City provides recreation and park services within its jurisdictional area. As the proposal area would accommodate strictly commercial and industrial development (i.e., it would not support new residential uses), no increased demand for recreation and parks services is expected to occur.

Schools: The proposal area is located within the Briggs School District and Santa Paula Unified School District. As the proposal area would accommodate only commercial and industrial development (i.e., it would not support new residential uses), no increased demand on local schools is expected to occur.

Street Maintenance: According to the City, the planned road extensions would be public streets and would be maintained by the City, funded through the City's public works budget. Faulkner Road would be extended from its existing terminus westward, and Beckwith Road would be extended from its existing terminus southward (i.e., across the Santa Paula Branch Line) to meet Faulkner Road (as extended). The City anticipates that revenues generated within the proposal area would be sufficient to finance street maintenance costs. Interior streets and drive aisles within the development area will be private and will be maintained privately.

Wastewater: The City provides sewer service (i.e., wastewater conveyance and treatment) within its jurisdiction and would provide sewer service to the proposal area. Development of the project requires an approximately 750-foot extension of the existing 12-inch sewer main in Faulkner Road and installation of an on-site lift station. According to City staff, upon build-out of the project site, development is expected to generate approximately 0.026 million gallons per day (mgd), or 26,000 gallons, of approximately 2.35 mgd remaining capacity at the City's wastewater treatment plant. Existing treatment capacity by the City can accommodate all existing and approved but as-of-yet unbuilt development projects. Therefore, it appears that there is adequate treatment capacity to serve development within the proposal area. At the time of development, the developer would be responsible for financing the installation of the necessary wastewater service infrastructure to the proposal area. Ongoing maintenance and service of the wastewater infrastructure would be provided by the City and financed through user fees.

Water: The City provides water service within its jurisdiction, and therefore would supply water to new development within the proposal area. According to the City's 2020 UWMP, the City's water supply comes exclusively from groundwater; the City obtains its groundwater from five wells in the Santa Paula Groundwater Basin. City water would be provided to the proposal by means of two points of connection to the existing water conveyance system adjacent to the proposal area: (1) within Faulkner Road at Todd Lane, and (2) within Telegraph Road at three separate points. Water is then distributed through a network of pipeline within the proposal area. The application materials submitted and the analysis of the anticipated water supply and demand indicate that the City has sufficient long-term water supply (an estimated availability of 2,300 acre-feet<sup>5</sup> per year (AFY) of potable water supply) to serve the 36.94 acres of commercial/light industrial area within the proposal area with the anticipated necessary 62.2 AFY of water (i.e., (1) 26 AFY<sup>6</sup> average of potable water to support the anticipated development, and (2) 36.2 AFY<sup>7</sup> average of non-potable water for landscape irrigation, to be provided initially as potable water until, eventually, the City has the infrastructure and capacity to provide as non-potable water from its wastewater treatment plant). At the time of building permit issuance, the developer would be responsible for financing the installation of the necessary water service infrastructure to the proposal area. Ongoing maintenance and service of the water line within the development would be provided by the City and financed through user fees.

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<sup>5</sup> An acre-foot (AF) is the volume of water that would cover a one-acre area in one foot of water, or approximately 326,000 gallons.

<sup>6</sup> 36.94 acres (converted to square feet) available commercial/light industrial area multiplied by a floor-to-area ratio of 0.35 specified in the Specific Plan is 563,187 square feet of development, multiplied by 15 gallons per square foot of potable water demand is 26 AFY.

<sup>7</sup> Fifteen percent landscaped area of 36.94 acres (converted to square feet) available commercial/light industrial area multiplied by 2.22 AFY anticipated non-potable water demand is 12.3 AFY. 10.76 acres of open space/passive area multiplied by 2.22 AFY anticipated non-potable water demand is 23.9. Therefore, a total of 36.2 AFY (i.e., 12.3 AFY plus 23.9 AFY) non-potable water demand is expected.



### **3. Effect of Proposed Action and Alternative Actions (Government Code § 56668(c))**

Staff has not identified any effects of the proposal on adjacent areas, mutual social and economic interests, or the local government structure of the County.

### **4. Conformity with Adopted Commission Policies (Government Code § 56668(d))**

The proposal is consistent with all the Commission policies for changes of organization that are contained in the Ventura LAFCo Commissioner's Handbook (Handbook), including Section 3.2.1, which provides that "proposals involving annexations to cities shall include annexation to the city of entire adjacent roadway sections and complete intersections." In compliance with this policy, the proposal area includes the portions of Telegraph Road (along the northern boundary of the proposal area) and Highway 126 (along the southern boundary) that are contiguous with the area anticipated for development. Additionally, the proposal area includes the portion of the Santa Paula Branch Line that bisects the proposal area.

### **5. Impact on Prime Agricultural Land and Agriculture and Open Space (Government Code §§ 56668(d), 56668(e), and 56377)**

#### *Prime Agricultural Land and Agriculture*

In evaluating impacts to agricultural resources, LAFCo must apply the definition of prime agricultural land pursuant to LAFCo law (Government Code § 56064), which includes standards relating to the value of agricultural products and the soils classification determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Based on the underlying soils of the property, the proposal area meets the definition of prime agricultural land. Development of the site as proposed will result in the conversion of approximately 54 acres of prime agricultural land, which includes five acres of developed land and a total of approximately 49.1 acres of actively cultivated land to be converted to non-agricultural use (the remaining portions of the 64-acre proposal area consist of existing developed area, road right-of-way, and railroad right-of-way). The proposal area has been situated within the City of Santa Paula's sphere of influence since at least 1981. LAFCo has therefore, for the last 43 years, acknowledged the anticipated and eventual annexation of the proposal area to the City.

For proposals that would lead to the conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses, Handbook Section 3.1.2.1 requires the submittal of specific information, discussed as follows:

***a. The location of, and acreage totals for, prime and nonprime agricultural land involved in the area and adjacent areas. This analysis shall be based on the definition of “prime agricultural land” pursuant to Government Code Section 56064.***

The proposal area consists of approximately 64 acres; however, the area anticipated for development consists of approximately 54 acres (i.e., it excludes approximately 10 acres of existing road and railroad right-of-way). Of the approximately 54 acres to be developed, a cohesive five-acre area has historically been occupied by agricultural support facilities including an office, several large agricultural buildings, and an open yard in support of the landowner’s commercial agricultural operation. The remaining 49.1 acres of the proposal area consists of prime agricultural land to be converted to non-agricultural use. Surrounding land includes urban development within the City, generally north, east, and south of the proposal area. Land outside the City’s jurisdictional boundaries consists primarily of prime agricultural land that is generally west and south of the proposal area, outside of the City’s sphere of influence.

***b. The effects on agricultural lands within the proposal area.***

Approximately 49.1 acres of the 54-acre Santa Paula West Business Plan Specific Plan area are currently used for agricultural production, and the remaining approximately five acres contain exiting developed land. This area includes approximately 9.2 acres of avocado trees and 39.8 acres of a variety of row crops. This agricultural land would be permanently converted to non-agricultural uses consisting of commercial and light industrial uses allowed pursuant to the Specific Plan.

***c. The effects on adjacent agricultural lands.***

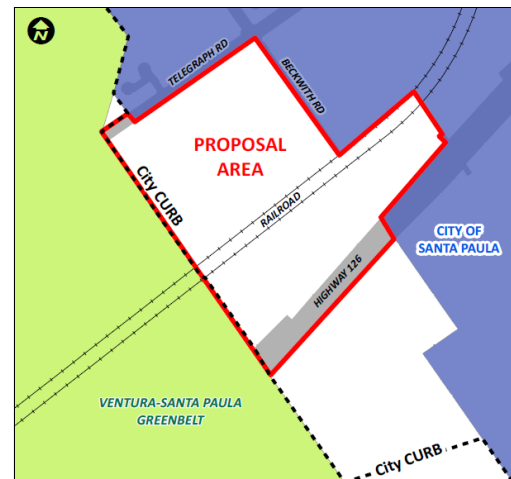
Neighboring agricultural lands are located to the west and south of the proposal area (surrounding land to the north and east is developed with urban uses and is located within the City). The neighboring agricultural land is separated from the proposal area by Adams Barranca (west of the proposal area) and Highway 126 (south of the proposal area). The existing natural separation provided by Adams Barranca to the west, along with designated parking areas within the proposal area and an open space/passive use area (i.e., linear buffer containing a vegetative screen and a masonry wall) would create a separation of at least 50 feet between the proposed urban development and neighboring agricultural uses. The City states that these project design features are intended to ensure compatibility of the proposed urban uses with existing neighboring agricultural uses by reducing the potential for incidents of vandalism, pilferage, trespassing, and complaints against standard legal agricultural practices to adjacent agricultural uses.

**d. The effects on the economic integrity of the agricultural industry in Ventura County.**

Based on the current and historical Ventura County Crop and Livestock Reports, the cultivated agriculture within the proposal area represents between 0.02 percent and 0.04 percent of the County's estimated gross agricultural value. Therefore, implementation of the project, considered independently, would have a minimal effect on the economic integrity of the agricultural industry in Ventura County.

***In addition, information should be provided about any measures adopted to reduce the effects identified.***

The City has established a CURB, which restricts its ability to enable urban development in certain areas outside its municipal boundaries. Subject to the City's SOAR ordinance, the CURB establishes a boundary within which voter approval is generally required prior to the extension of City services or a change in general plan designation. Additionally, the project site shares its western boundary with that of the Ventura-Santa Paula Greenbelt. The Greenbelt serves the purpose of preserving agriculture and open space, providing separation between the cities of San Buenaventura and Santa Paula, and limiting the extension of urban services within the area it covers. These measures, overall, protect agricultural land in specific geographic areas from conversion to non-agricultural uses. The proposal area's relationship to the City CURB and Greenbelt are shown in the map to the right.



Specific to the anticipated development, the EIR adopted by the City for the project includes a mitigation measure that requires, prior to the issuance of a grading permit, the developer to provide or fund permanent protection of other agricultural land. The developer is required to secure a conservation easement in perpetuity, on land officially designated as Prime Farmland and Important Farmland, at a 1:1 ratio for each class of designated farmland or make payments to a local, regional, or statewide organization whose purpose is to acquire agricultural conservation easements for Prime Farmland and Important Farmland, that has demonstrated a successful track record in doing so, over at least five years. The developer has the option to mitigate through a combination of these methods. The mitigation measure authorizes the City's Planning Director, based upon substantial evidence provided by the applicant, to determine whether the mitigation measure is financially feasible.

In addition, Handbook Section 3.3.5 establishes that LAFCo approval of a reorganization that is likely to result in the conversion of prime agricultural or existing open space land must lead to planned, orderly, and efficient development. The criteria for this determination, and a discussion of each criterion, are provided as follows:

- a. The territory involved is contiguous to either lands developed with an urban use or lands which have received all discretionary approvals for urban development. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.1(a))***

The proposal area is surrounded by residential uses to the north and light industrial and commercial uses to the east (both of which are located within the City's jurisdictional boundaries). Therefore, the territory involved is contiguous to developed urban uses; however, it is also contiguous to agricultural uses to the south (on the opposite side of Highway 126) and to the west (on the opposite side of Adams Barranca).

- b. The territory is likely to be developed within 5 years and has been pre-zoned for non-agricultural or open space use. In the case of very large developments, annexation should be phased wherever possible. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.1(b))***

The proposal area contains the City's Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, which comprehensively provides a plan for development of the proposal area as a master-planned business and industrial park, and has been pre-zoned consistent with the Specific Plan. Annexation of the proposal area to the City will enable development in accordance with the Specific Plan. Based on information provided by City staff, development is imminent upon annexation. Therefore, the territory is likely to be developed within five years and has been pre-zoned for non-agricultural or open space use.

- c. Insufficient non-prime agricultural or vacant land exists within the existing boundaries of the agency or within the existing boundaries of the agency that is planned and developable for the same general type of use. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.1(c))***

The Commission will not find that insufficient non-prime agricultural or vacant land exists within the boundaries of an agency (i.e., the City), unless the agency prepares a detailed alternative site analysis, which includes:

- (1) An evaluation of all vacant, non-prime agricultural lands within the boundaries of the jurisdiction that could be developed for the same or similar uses. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.2(a))***

According to City staff, its inventory of vacant land consists of approximately 60 acres within the current City jurisdictional area, excluding land within the City's East

Area 1 (approximately 501 acres) and East Gateway Specific Plan (approximately 36.5 acres), as these areas are not planned for commercial/industrial use at the scale anticipated within the proposal area. These sites were considered as part of the evaluation of potential alternative sites contained within the EIR for the anticipated development. The City documents that only about 10.2 acres of vacant land within the City are designated for light industrial uses.

Furthermore, the remaining vacant areas are largely dispersed, include sites currently designated for residential uses and located within residential areas which are not compatible with the envisioned commercial and industrial development, and/or are within or adjacent to the Santa Clara River floodplain and are not suitable for development due to flood risk. Furthermore, these sites do not provide sufficient contiguous land area to allow for master-planned development such as that contemplated to occur within the proposal area, and furthermore, could not accommodate a single large tenant. Therefore, insufficient non-prime agricultural or vacant land exists within the City that could accommodate the same general type of use.

**(2) *An evaluation of the re-use and redevelopment potential of developed areas within the boundaries of the jurisdiction for the same or similar uses. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.2(b))***

See discussion above regarding Handbook Section 3.3.5.2(a). Additionally, underutilized sites within the City were evaluated in the EIR that was prepared for the project. Available sites are not suitable for development with the type of light industrial and business park uses that would be accommodated by the project, due to limitations including those related to size, zoning, and location within the Santa Clara River floodplain. Therefore, insufficient opportunities for re-use or development of developed areas within the City are available to accommodate a large commercial and industrial park or a single large tenant of the type anticipated through the development of the subject site.

**(3) *Determinations as to why vacant, non-prime agricultural lands and potential re-use and redevelopment sites are unavailable or undesirable for the same or similar uses, and why conversion of prime agricultural or open space lands is necessary for the planned, orderly, and efficient development of the jurisdiction. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.2(c))***

Based on information provided by City staff, the City does not have sufficient land available within its current City limits to accommodate the type and extent of development envisioned for the land covered by the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan. As discussed above regarding Handbook Sections 3.3.5.2(a) and

3.3.5.2(b), vacant, non-prime agricultural lands and potential re-use and redevelopment sites within the City are limited in size, fragmented, and/or located within residential neighborhoods or floodplain areas. Therefore, insufficient non-prime agricultural or vacant land exists within the City that could accommodate the same general type of use.

- d. The territory involved is not subject to voter approval for the extension of services or for changing general plan land use designations. Where such voter approval is required by local ordinance, such voter approval must be obtained prior to LAFCo action on any proposal unless exceptional circumstances are shown to exist. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.1(d))***

The proposal includes the annexation of land located entirely within the City's CURB. Therefore, the proposal area is not subject to voter approval for the extension of services or for changes in the City's General Plan land use designations.

- e. The proposal will have no significant adverse effects on the physical and economic integrity of other prime agricultural or existing open space lands. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.1(e))***

In making the determination regarding whether conversion will adversely impact adjoining prime agricultural or existing open space lands, the Commission will consider the following factors:

- (1) The prime agricultural and open space significance of the territory and adjacent areas relative to other agricultural and existing open space lands in the region. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(a))***

The development site is currently used for agricultural production, contains prime agricultural land, and is adjacent to similar agricultural uses and prime agricultural land to the south and west. Adjacent agricultural land, located outside of the City's CURB and within the Ventura-Santa Paula Greenbelt, is separated from the proposal area by Adams Barranca to the west and Highway 126 to the south. Development would occur in accordance with the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, which includes a landscaped buffer and open space to ensure compatibility with agricultural land located west of the proposal area.

- (2) The economic viability of the prime agricultural lands to be converted. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(b))***

Implementation of the project will result in the conversion to non-agricultural use of approximately 54 acres of prime agricultural land, which includes about five acres of developed land and a total of approximately 49.1 acres of actively

cultivated land (i.e., a 9.2-acre avocado orchard and 39.8 acres of a variety of row crops). The County has determined that prime agricultural lands in the County are highly productive and are capable of supporting commercially-viable agricultural operations on parcels as small as nine acres. The prime agricultural land to be converted is currently economically viable, including the approximately 49.1 acres being used for commercial agriculture. Based on information provided by City staff in 2020, commercial agricultural operations within the proposal area generated approximately \$841,000 annually, an estimate that is generally similar today. Therefore, agricultural operations on the subject site are economically viable.

**(3) *The health and well-being of any urban residents adjacent to the prime agricultural lands to be converted. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(c))***

Urban residential uses adjacent to the project site are limited to areas directly north of the proposal area (the proposal area is bordered to the west by Adams Barranca and agricultural land, to the south by Highway 126, and to the east by industrial uses). The majority of the residences adjacent to the proposal are separated from the proposal area by Telegraph Road, and consist of a mobile home park and a single-family residential community. These residences will be separated from the proposed development by Telegraph Road and a 20-foot landscaped buffer, and will be located approximately 200 feet from the nearest buildings to be constructed within the proposal area. Several additional single-family residences are located immediately west of the proposal area (i.e., east of Adams Barranca), within neighboring parcels that are used for agricultural production.

The EIR prepared for the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan included an evaluation of impacts related to the anticipated development of the proposal area, and identified several mitigation measures to lessen significant and/or potentially significant impacts to less-than-significant levels, as well as unavoidable impacts that could not be mitigated to less-than-significant levels. Of the impacts rising to the level of significance or potential significance, those affecting urban residents adjacent to the proposal area would include aesthetics (i.e., construction activities and visual character), air quality (i.e., operational emissions to be reduced through traffic reduction efforts, imposition of low-emission water heaters, and inclusion of pedestrian facilities and shade trees), and transportation/traffic (i.e., traffic impacts at the intersection of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Harvard Boulevard). Additionally, existing residential development within the neighboring agricultural land is expected to experience potentially significant impacts related to noise during construction, which are proposed to be reduced with the imposition of mitigation measures.

The proposal area would be developed in accordance with the development and design standards established in the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, which has been designed to support compatibility with nearby residential uses in surrounding neighborhoods.

**(4) *The use of the territory and the adjacent areas. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(d))***

The uses of the proposal area and adjacent areas are discussed above in this staff report.

**(5) *Whether public facilities related to the proposal would be sized or situated so as to facilitate the conversion of prime agricultural or existing open space land outside of the agency's sphere of influence, or will be extended through prime agricultural or existing open space lands outside the agency's sphere of influence. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(e))***

The City has sewer and water master plans designed to serve uses allowed by the City's General Plan, including the uses in the West Area 2 Expansion Area, which includes the proposal area. According to City staff, sewer and water facilities would be provided to serve the site consistent with these master plans and would not be sized to accommodate additional growth. The project would not involve any road improvements that could induce growth of adjacent agricultural or open space land. No road extensions or extension of sewer, water, or other infrastructure is proposed that would facilitate the conversion of agricultural land outside the City's sphere of influence.

**(6) *Whether natural or man-made barriers serve to buffer prime agricultural or existing open space lands outside of the agency's sphere of influence from the effects of the proposal. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(f))***

The western portion of the proposal area will contain a buffer between Adams Barranca and the proposed proposal area (consisting of parking areas and several acres of open space containing a vegetative screen), which will enhance the separation between the existing prime agricultural land to the west and the proposal area, as well as create a buffer to Adams Barranca. Additionally, Faulkner Road and Highway 126 serve as a buffer between the proposal area and the agricultural land to the south of the proposal area.



**(7) *Applicable provisions of local general plans, applicable ordinances that require voter approval prior to the extension of urban services or changes to general plan designations, Greenbelt Agreements, applicable growth-management policies, and statutory provisions designed to protect agriculture or existing open space. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(g))***

The affected territory is not subject to voter approval for the extension of services or for the proposed amendments to the land use designations of the City's General Plan, as the proposal area is located entirely within the City's CURB. Furthermore, the proposal does not conflict with the Ventura-Santa Paula Greenbelt Agreement, and is designed to be adequately buffered from neighboring agricultural and open space areas.

**(8) *Comments and recommendations by the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner. (Handbook Section 3.3.5.3(h))***

The Agricultural Commissioner's Office acknowledges that the proposed development is expected to result in the loss of productive agriculture; however, it supports the establishment of low-intensity land uses and buffers (such as vegetative screens, parking areas, and open space, bolstered by Adams Barranca to the west and existing public roadways to the north and south) between newly-urbanized areas and neighboring agricultural uses in an effort to preserve those agricultural resources.

Additionally, the Commission will not approve a proposal which includes the annexation of territory subject to an active Land Conservation Act (LCA)<sup>8</sup> contract to a city or special district that provides or would provide facilities and/or services other than those that support the land uses that are allowed under the contract (Handbook Section 3.3.5.4). The proposal area does not include land that is subject to an LCA contract.

*Open Space*

In evaluating impacts to open space land, LAFCo must utilize the definition of open space pursuant to LAFCo law (Government Code § 56059). The proposal area is not designated by the City's General Plan as *Open Space*. Therefore, it does not meet the definition of open space provided in LAFCo law.

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<sup>8</sup> The LCA, also known as the Williamson Act, is a voluntary land conservation program adopted by the California Legislature which helps to preserve agricultural and open space land by means of contracts between the County and eligible landowners in which contracted land is restricted to agricultural or open space uses in exchange for preferential property tax treatment.

## **6. Boundaries and Lines of Assessment (Government Code § 56668(f))**

### *Map Review by County Surveyor*

County Surveyor review and certification of the map and legal description are required in order to record a certificate of completion (pursuant to Government Code § 57201) and to file a statement of boundary change with the State Board of Equalization (pursuant to Government Code § 57204). As such, the draft resolution for the annexation (Attachment 4) includes a condition that predicates recordation of a certificate of completion upon the approval of a map and legal description by the County Surveyor. As of the date of this staff report, review of the map and legal description have been completed.

### *Legal Lot and Lines of Assessment*

Handbook Sections 3.1.4.2 and 3.1.4.3 provide that the boundaries of a proposal shall follow lines of assessment or ownership, and that a proposal shall involve only legal lots. The proposal boundaries follow lines of assessment and ownership, and staff has no information to indicate that the lot was not legally created. These provisions do not apply to roads within the public road network.

## **7. Applicable Spheres of Influence (Government Code § 56668(i))**

The entire proposal area is located within the City of Santa Paula's jurisdictional boundaries. The proposal area is also within the spheres of influence of the Blanchard/Santa Paula Library District, Gold Coast Transit District, United Water Conservation District, Ventura County Fire Protection District, Ventura County Resource Conservation District, Ventura County Service Area Nos. 14 and 32, Ventura County Watershed Protection District, and Ventura Regional Sanitation District. The spheres of influence of these agencies would not be affected by the proposal.

## **8. Regional Housing Needs (Government Code § 56668(m))**

The proposal does not involve the creation of any parcels for residential use. Additionally, pursuant to the application materials, the City's General Plan Housing Element does not identify the proposal area as being necessary in order for the City to meet its regional housing needs obligation.

## **9. Environmental Justice (Government Code § 56668(p))**

Approval of the proposal would not result in the unfair treatment of any person based on race, culture or income with respect to the provision of municipal services to the proposal area. Staff did not identify any issues regarding environmental justice.

## **10. Comments and Additional Information (Government Code §§ 56668(j) and 56668(n))**

As of the date of this report, LAFCo staff received comments from the California Department of Transportation, VCTC, the Ventura County Transportation Department, the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner, the VCFPD, and the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. These comments have been considered in the evaluation contained within this staff report. No other information or comments have been submitted by any affected local agency or other public agency, landowners, voters, or residents of the affected territory.

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

When the City Council approved the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan, it certified an EIR pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The EIR was provided to the Commission under separate cover and is available on the LAFCo website by clicking [here](#). The EIR focused on the following topics: aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gases, hazards and hazardous waste, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, public services, transportation and traffic, and utilities and service systems. The EIR documents that significant and potentially significant environmental impacts can be mitigated to less-than-significant levels for the following issue areas: aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, noise, transportation and traffic, and utilities. Additionally, the EIR documents that significant environmental impacts cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels for impacts involving the following topics: aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, and transportation/traffic. Therefore, the City Council adopted a statement of overriding considerations for these impacts, determining that the benefits of the project outweigh the unavoidable, adverse environmental impacts created through implementation of the project. The City Council's resolution related to the certification of the EIR, adopting findings of fact, statements of overriding considerations, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting program is provided as Attachment 2.

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines § 15164(a), an addendum to a previously-certified EIR may be prepared to address necessary changes or additions that do not trigger the requirement for the preparation of a subsequent EIR. The City prepared an addendum to the EIR to reflect redesign of the drainage and flood control plan to replace existing natural floodplain storage within the project site and to improve conditions with regard to flood risk within the project site, on adjacent properties, and Highway 126. The City Council's resolution related to the approval of an amendment to the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan and associated addendum to the EIR is provided as Attachment 3.

The reorganization is also subject to CEQA. The Commission must therefore determine the appropriate environmental document for the proposed action. The EIR, addendum to the EIR,

and mitigation monitoring and reporting program were provided to the Commission under separate cover on August 28, 2024, and have been available on the homepage of the Ventura LAFCo website since that time. Staff recommends that the Commission, as part of its actions regarding the proposal, adopt the findings and mitigations provided in the City's EIR, as addended.

### **Commission Proceedings – Process Considerations:**

#### **Public Hearing Notice:**

Pursuant to Government Code § 56658(h), the Commission's actions associated with a request for a change of organization must be taken at a public hearing. Government Code § 56156 requires that mailed notice of a hearing shall be mailed at least 21 days prior to the date of the hearing. According to the Assessor's Office, the proposal area contains seven Assessor's parcels. According to the County Registrar of Voters, no registered voters reside within the proposal area. LAFCo provided notice by means of publishing a notice in the Ventura County Star (a newspaper of general circulation) on August 25, 2024, posting on the Ventura LAFCo website and outside the main entrance of the Ventura County Government Center Hall of Administration, and e-mail to the affected local agencies.

#### **Conducting Authority:**

The proposed reorganization may be subject to conducting authority proceedings, otherwise known as protest proceedings (Government Code § 57000 et seq.). However, pursuant to Government Code § 56663, the Commission may waive protest proceedings if the following criteria are met:

- (1) Notice has been provided to landowners and registered voters within the affected territory;
- (2) The notice discloses that unless written opposition to the proposal is received before the conclusion of commission proceedings, the Commission intends to waive protest proceedings; and
- (3) Written opposition from landowners and registered voters within the affected territory is not received before the conclusion of commission proceedings.

Notice was provided pursuant to the requirements of Government Code § 56157. As of the date of this staff report, staff has received no written opposition to the proposal from landowners or registered voters within the proposal area. As long as no written opposition to the proposal is submitted before the close of the public hearing, the Commission may waive protest proceedings. Staff recommends that the Commission waive protest proceedings entirely if it approves the proposal and no opposition is received prior to the close of the public hearing.

The resolution approving the reorganization contains the appropriate language to waive protest proceedings.

If the Commission does not waive protest proceedings, LAFCo must publish notice of the date and time of a protest hearing within 35 days of the Commission's hearing. Pursuant to Handbook Section 2.5.1, the Commission has "delegated the conducting authority functions and responsibilities to the Executive Officer."

**Alternative Actions Available:**

- A. If the Commission, following public testimony and review of the materials submitted, determines that further information is necessary, an action to continue the hearing should include the specific information desired and specify that further Commission consideration occur at a future date.
- B. If the Commission, following public testimony and review of the materials submitted, determines that the proposal should be approved subject to any changes or additions to the terms and conditions recommended, an action to approve should clearly specify any changes or additions to the terms and conditions of approval, up to and including the imposition of a condition to require the implementation of mitigation measures related to the conversion of agricultural land.
- C. If the Commission, following public testimony and review of materials submitted, wishes to deny or modify the proposal, the action should include direction that the matter be continued to the next meeting and that staff prepare a new report consistent with the evidence submitted and the anticipated decision.

BY: Andrea Ozdy  
Andrea Ozdy  
Deputy Executive Officer

**Attachments:**

- 1. LAFCo 20-06 Annexation – Location Map & Aerial Photograph
- 2. City Resolution 7190 Certifying the Final EIR, Adopting Findings of Fact, Statements of Overriding Consideration, and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- 3. City Resolution 7495 Approving Addendum to the EIR and an Amendment to the Santa Paula West Business Park Specific Plan
- 4. LAFCo 20-06 Resolution

LAFCo makes every effort to offer legible map files with the online and printed versions of our reports; however, occasionally the need to reduce oversize original maps and/or other technological/software factors can compromise readability. Original maps are available for viewing at the LAFCo office by request.