

# I. INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

The subject of this Sustainable Communities Environmental Assessment (SCEA) is the 340 S. Hill St. Equity Residential Mixed-Use Project, which involves the demolition of an 850-square-foot restaurant and a 109-space surface parking lot and the construction of a 31-story mixed-use building comprised of 428 multi-family residential units and a maximum of 5,610 square feet of commercial land uses (leasing office/neighborhood-serving retail), in the Central City Community Plan Area of the City of Los Angeles (City). The Project Applicant is EQR 4<sup>th</sup> and Hill LP. A more detailed description of the Project is contained in Section II, Project Description. The City is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

### **Background Information on State Bill 375 and the SCEA**

The State of California adopted SB 375, The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, which outlines growth strategies that better integrate regional land use and transportation planning and that help meet the State of California's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction mandates. SB 375 requires the State's 18 metropolitan planning organizations to incorporate a "sustainable communities strategy" (SCS) into the regional transportation plans to achieve their respective region's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets set by California Air Resources Board (CARB). Correspondingly, SB 375 provides various CEQA streamlining provisions for projects that are consistent with an adopted applicable SCS and meet certain objective criteria; one such CEQA streamlining provision is the SCEA.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the metropolitan planning organization for the County of Los Angeles (along with the Counties of Imperial, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, and Ventura). On April 7, 2016, SCAG's Regional Council adopted the 2016-2040 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (2016-2040 RTP/SCS). For the SCAG region, CARB has set GHG emissions reduction targets at eight percent below 2005 per capita emissions levels by 2020, and 13 percent below 2005 per capita emissions levels by 2035. The 2016-2040 RTP/SCS outlines strategies to meet or exceed the targets set by CARB.<sup>1</sup> By Executive Order, approved June 28, 2016, CARB officially determined that the 2016-2040 RTP/SCS would achieve CARB's 2020 and 2035 GHG emission reduction targets. (Refer to attached 6/28/2016 CARB Executive Order in Appendix A.)

SB 375 allows the City, acting as lead agency, to prepare a SCEA (in lieu of other CEQA documentation such as a Mitigated Negative Declaration) for "transit priority projects" (as described below) that are consistent with SCAG's 2016-2040 RTP/SCS.

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<sup>1</sup> *Southern California Association of Governments, 2016-2040 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy, Introduction, April 7, 20126.*

## Transit Priority Project Criteria

SB 375 provides CEQA streamlining benefits to qualifying transit priority projects (TPPs). For purposes of projects in the SCAG region, a qualifying TPP is a project that meets the following four criteria (see Public Resources Code, Section §21155 (a) and (b)):

1. Is consistent with the general use designation, density, building intensity, and applicable policies specified for the project area in the SCAG 2016-2040 RTP/SCS;
2. Contains at least 50 percent residential use, based on total building square footage and, if the project contains between 26 percent and 50 percent nonresidential uses, a floor area ratio of not less than 0.75;
3. Provides a minimum net density of at least 20 units per acre; and
4. Is within one-half mile of a major transit stop or high-quality transit corridor included in a regional transportation plan.

## SCEA Process and Streamlining Provisions

Qualifying TPPs that have incorporated all feasible mitigation measures and performance standards or criteria set forth in the prior applicable EIR (SCAG's 2014-2040 RTP/SCS Program EIR [PEIR]) and that are determined to not result in significant and unavoidable environmental impacts may be approved with a SCEA. The specific substantive and procedural requirements for the approval of a SCEA include the following:

1. An initial study shall be prepared for a SCEA to identify all significant impacts or potentially significant impacts, except for the following:
  - a. Growth-inducing impacts, and
  - b. Project-specific or cumulative impacts from cars and light trucks on global warming or the regional transportation network.<sup>2</sup>

Note: All relevant and applicable RTP/SCS PEIR mitigation measures shall be incorporated into the Project prior to conducting the initial study analysis.

2. The initial study shall identify any cumulative impacts that have been adequately addressed and mitigated in a prior applicable certified EIR. Where the lead agency

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<sup>2</sup> "Regional transportation network" means all existing and proposed transportation system improvements, including the state transportation system, that were included in the transportation and air quality conformity modeling, including congestion modeling, for the final regional transportation plan adopted by the metropolitan planning organization, but shall not include local streets and roads. Nothing in the foregoing relieves any project from a requirement to comply with any conditions, exactions, or fees for the mitigation of the project's impacts on the structure, safety, or operations of the regional transportation network or local streets and roads.

determines the impact has been adequately addressed and mitigated, the impact shall not be cumulatively considerable.

3. The SCEA shall contain mitigation measures that either avoid or mitigate to a level of insignificance all potentially significant or significant effects of the project required to be identified in the initial study.
4. A draft of the SCEA shall be circulated for a public comment period not less than 30 days, and the lead agency shall consider all comments received prior to acting on the SCEA.
5. The SCEA may be approved by the lead agency after the lead agency's legislative body conducts a public hearing, reviews comments received, and finds the following:
  - a. All potentially significant or significant effects required to be identified in the initial study have been identified and analyzed, and
  - b. With respect to each significant effect on the environment required to be identified in the initial study, either of the following apply:
    - i. Changes or alternations have been required in or incorporated into the project that avoid or mitigate the significant effects to a level of insignificance.
    - ii. Those changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and have been, or can and should be, adopted by that other agency.
6. The lead agency's decision to review and approve a TPP with an SCEA shall be reviewed under the substantial evidence standard.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE SCEA**

Based on the information presented above, the SCEA for the Project is organized as follows:

**Section I, Introduction:** This section provides introductory information about the Project and background information regarding SB 375, lists the TPP criteria, and describes the required content of the SCEA.

**Section II, Project Description:** This section provides a detailed description of the environmental setting and the Project, including Project characteristics and environmental setting.

**Section III, SCEA Criteria and Consistency:** This section includes a discussion of the Project's consistency with the TPP criteria listed above and demonstrates that the Project satisfies all necessary criteria for approval of a SCEA as set forth in California Public Resources Code Sections 21155 and 21155.2.

**Section IV, Initial Study Checklist:** This section contains the completed Initial Study Checklist.

**Section V, Environmental Impact Analysis:** Each environmental issue identified in the Initial Study Checklist contains an assessment and discussion of Project-specific and cumulative impacts associated with each subject area. Where the evaluation identifies potentially significant effects, as identified on the Checklist, mitigation measures are provided to reduce such impacts to less-than-significant levels.

**Section VI, 2016-2040 RTP/SCS Program EIR Mitigation Measures:** This section identifies all of the mitigation measures contained in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for SCAG's 2016-2040 RTP/SCS PEIR and a discussion of the applicability of the mitigation measures to the Project.