# NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT NEW SANTA CLARITA COURTHOUSE

**DATE:** Monday, October 27, 2025

To: Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Interested Parties, and Organizations

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the New Santa Clarita Courthouse

The Judicial Council of California ("Judicial Council") will be the lead agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") compliant with the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") for the proposed New Santa Clarita Courthouse Project (also referred to as "Project" or "Proposed Project"). An Initial Study will not be prepared because an EIR will be prepared for this Project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15063[a]); however, preliminary studies, including a *Biological Resources Survey Report* (2024), *Cultural Resources Technical Report* (2024), and *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment* (2024) will inform the EIR analysis. In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, this Notice of Preparation ("NOP") provides the Project location, a brief Project description, and a summary of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Project.

The purpose of this NOP is to provide an opportunity to comment on the scope and proposed content of the EIR. The Judicial Council invites responsible and trustee agencies to provide information relevant to the analysis of environmental resources falling within the jurisdiction of such agencies. Specifically, input is requested on:

- 1. **Scope of Environmental Analysis**—guidance on the scope of analysis for this EIR, including identification of specific issues that will require closer study due to the location, scale, and character of the Project;
- 2. **Mitigation Measures**—ideas for feasible mitigation, including mitigation that would avoid or reduce potentially significant or significant impacts to environmental resources; and
- 3. **Alternatives**—suggestions for alternatives to the Project that could potentially reduce or avoid potentially significant or significant impacts.

As outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b), each responsible and trustee agency must identify specific environmental issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be explored in the EIR. If there is no response within 30 days, the Judicial Council will assume that there are no specific environmental issues, alternatives, or mitigation measures that the responsible and trustee agencies believe should be incorporated into the EIR.

## WRITTEN COMMENTS ON THE NOP

Please provide your written comments by November 26, 2025. Comments, along with the name and contact information of the appropriate person in your organization, should be addressed to:

Kim Bobic, Senior Project Manager
Judicial Council of California; Facilities Services
2860 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95833-3409
805-249-0911
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Information related to this Project is available for review on the Judicial Council's website at: https://courts.ca.gov/facilities/los-angeles-county-new-santa-clarita-courthouse.

The Judicial Council will hold a public scoping meeting on **Wednesday, November 12, 2025, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.** at the following location:

The Centre (Oak Room) 20880 Centre Pointe Parkway Santa Clarita, CA 91350

Information related to the Project, including how to access Project documents and how to participate in the public review process will be provided at the scoping meeting.

## PROJECT LOCATION AND SURROUNDING LAND USES

The Judicial Council is proposing to construct a new courthouse at 26501 McBean Parkway in the City of Santa Clarita ("City") in northwestern Los Angeles County ("County"). The approximately 3.75-acre Project site consists of one privately owned parcel comprised of a vacant, unimproved lot near the intersection of McBean Parkway and Valencia Boulevard (refer to Exhibit 1).

While the Judicial Council is not subject to local land use regulations, <sup>1</sup> the use of the property for the Project is consistent with the City Planning Division's General Plan (Gov. Code § 65402(a)). The General Plan Land Use Element designates the Project site as Regional Commercial ("CR"). The City's Zoning Map and Uniform Development Code designates the Project site zoning as Regional Commercial (CR), which is a zoning designation applied to central and regional commercial districts of the City, generally located around the Valencia Town Center or other major community centers. The regional commercial designation is intended to promote the development of regional focal points for commercial, entertainment, cultural, and business uses serving the public. A public-serving Courthouse is consistent with the intent of this zone. As noted above, the Judicial Council is not subject to local land use regulations, and the above information regarding the City's General Plan and zoning is presented for context.

The Project site is an infill site within the City's commercial/downtown core. The Project site consists of a cleared, partially-graded vacant parcel located within and adjacent to a mixed use commercial and residential area. The site is composed of dirt with no native vegetation communities and limited trees present, occurring only at the perimeter edges of adjacent properties. The site is bordered to the east by McBean Parkway, beyond which Valencia Town Center (shopping center), to the southeast by a Shell gas station and Valencia Water Company Station 8 property, beyond which is the intersection of McBean Parkway and Valencia Boulevard, to the south by Valencia Boulevard, and to the west by Santa Clarita McBean Regional Transit Center ("MRTC"). Interstate 5 ("I-5") Freeway is approximately 1-mile west of the Project site. Approximately 0.75-mile north of the Project site is the Santa Clara River.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The existing Santa Clarita Courthouse is an approximately 32,000-square-foot County-owned courthouse located in the City. The building is a single-story structure with a partial basement. This building is located on a County campus with multiple buildings and a variety of justice partners and other County services, such as the Department of Health Services, the Santa Clarita Public Library, the Santa Clarita Department of Building and Safety, the District Attorney, the Public Defender, and the Alternate Public Defender. While colocation with some of these agencies is beneficial, space for the courts is limited at this location. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A state agency is immune from local regulations unless the Legislature expressly waives immunity in a statute or the California Constitution. (City of Malibu v. Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (2002) 98 Cal.App.4th 1379, 1383.)

Santa Clarita Courthouse was constructed in 1972 and needs the full range of lifecycle upgrades typical of a nearly 50-year-old building. The building has been evaluated and rated at a seismic risk level V, defining the courthouse as a Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") P-154 rating of Very-High-Risk seismically deficient building. The estimated cost to retrofit the facility at that time was \$12.9 million. The building has over \$4.7 million in deferred maintenance and security refresh expenditure needs.

The Project is proposed because existing court services in the City (three courtrooms hearing only criminal misdemeanor case types) are insufficient to meet the needs of the community causing all non-criminal misdemeanor case types to be filed and heard at courthouses outside of the City. Santa Clarita is the fastest growing region of Los Angeles County. The purpose of the Project is to consolidate court operations from the Santa Clarita Courthouse and the Sylmar Juvenile Court (three courtrooms), as well as relocating 19 dockets of caseload from other Los Angeles Superior Court courthouses to a new multi-service justice center in the Los Angeles Superior Court's North Valley District. The redeployment of case filings from other North Valley and Central District courthouses back to their jurisdiction in Santa Clarita will aid in the court's goals of decentralizing the small claims/civil functions and will provide all case types and services in Santa Clarita as a full-service justice hub for the North Valley District which is needed due to the rapid population growth in the District.

#### **PROPOSED FACILITIES**

The Judicial Council is proposing to construct a new, eight-story (plus basement), 24-courtroom (eight large courtrooms, 15 multipurpose courtrooms, and one arraignment courtroom) courthouse of approximately 278,000 building gross square feet using a design-build delivery method. The new courthouse would contain the following component areas: Public area – Lobby, Security Screening; 24 courtrooms; Judges' chambers and courtroom support; Court operations; Clerk's office; Family Court services; Alternative Dispute Resolution services; Self Help area; Administration and Information Technology offices; Jury services; Sheriff area; Central in-custody holding area, including vehicle and pedestrian sallyports; and Building Support areas. The new courthouse building would be constructed toward the northwest of the parcel, with parking to the east and south, including up to a 4-level parking garage towards the south of the parcel. The Project would include approximately 298 parking spaces for staff and the public, including jury parking, and a secured parking area of 32 additional parking spaces for judicial officers, executive staff, and law enforcement in the basement of the courthouse building (refer to Exhibit 2).

#### **ACCESS AND UTILITIES**

The Project site would be accessed from two locations: one along Valencia Boulevard in the westbound direction; and one from the signalized intersection of McBean Parkway and Mall Entrance, at the northeast corner of the Project site. Vehicles utilizing the secured (basement) parking, and the in-custody transports utilizing the secured sallyport beneath the courthouse building, will access the site from Valencia Boulevard and drive down a ramp into the basement level of the courthouse. Both the Valencia Boulevard and McBean Parkway/Mall Entrance site access points will be used for public/jury and staff parking and service deliveries.

Potable water would be provided by the Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency via new connections to an existing, 10-inch water main that is located along McBean Parkway. On-site pipelines for water uses, such as pipelines required for domestic water service, firewater service, and landscape irrigation, would be installed at the time of construction. The Project would not require the use of groundwater.

It is anticipated that wastewater collected from the Project site would be piped and connected to an existing Los Angeles County Sanitation District 12-inch sewer lateral line along McBean Parkway. Wastewater would be conveyed northwesterly to the Valencia Water Reclamation Plant. Stormwater from the site presently drains as surface runoff into a Los Angeles County Flood Control District storm drain/culvert that passes

through the south and eastern portion of the site. Low Impact Development techniques will be utilized in storm water design to retain stormwater runoff on site for the stormwater quality design volume and to minimize hydromodification impacts to natural drainage systems, consistent with City and County stormwater quality and hydromodification requirements. A combination of infiltration basins, drywells, or other means of retaining or reusing stormwater onsite, would protect water quality of nearby waterbodies by reducing the discharge of pollutants found in stormwater resulting from the Project development to the maximum extent practicable, and by reducing increased flows from impervious surfaces that could cause erosion and degrade habitat.

Electrical service would be provided by Southern California Edison and natural gas service would be provided by Southern California Gas Company. Both services would require new underground connections.

#### CONSTRUCTION

All construction equipment and vehicles would be staged either on the Project site or at a nearby location. Construction is anticipated to start mid-March 2029 with construction completion by December 2031. Site preparation would involve grading, ground improvement and/or pile foundations to support the courthouse building, and excavation for the subsurface basement. Excavation operations at the Project site would export material to an offsite location, replace as necessary with imported engineered fill, and compact the ground as required on site. Site preparation would generally be followed by trenching, building construction, architectural coatings, paving, and finishing.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The Judicial Council has identified the following Project Objectives to guide planning for the Project site, as well as the analysis included within the EIR:

- Improve public access to justice by providing a modern, safe, and accessible courthouse in a rapidly growing region of Los Angeles County.
- Relieve the current space shortfall, increase security, and replace three inadequate and obsolete buildings in Los Angeles County.
- Improve operational efficiencies by improving space adjacencies and providing spaces in alignment with Judicial Council space standards.
- Replace the Santa Clarita Courthouse, which is rated as a FEMA P-154-rated Very-High-Risk seismically deficient building.
- Consolidate court operations and increase services to meet the needs of the Santa Clarita community by redeploying cases originating in the Santa Clarita community to the local court.
- Avoid future deferred maintenance expenditures associated with the ongoing use of older facilities and needed security upgrades.
- Provide a full-service justice hub for the North Valley District.

## **REQUIRED APPROVALS**

Approvals required for the Proposed Project may include, but are not limited to:

- Judicial Council of California approval of the Project
- Office of the State Fire Marshal approvals to construct and occupy
- South Coast Air Quality Management District authority to construct/permit to operate emergency generators
- City of Santa Clarita encroachment permits

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

As required by CEQA, the EIR will describe existing conditions and evaluate the potential environmental effects of the proposed New Santa Clarita Courthouse and a reasonable range of alternatives, including the no-project alternative. It will address direct, reasonably foreseeable indirect, cumulative, and growth-inducing effects. The EIR will identify feasible mitigation measures, if available, to reduce significant and potentially significant impacts.

#### POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The following environmental topic areas are preliminarily anticipated to be evaluated in the EIR:

- Aesthetics—The EIR will describe the existing visual conditions and will evaluate the potential
  impacts on scenic resources and visual character that may result from development of the Project,
  as well as impacts related to light and glare.
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources—The Project site is not zoned or designed for agricultural or forestry uses. It is designated by the California Department of Conservation as Grazing Land, which does not fall under the Important Farmland umbrella. The Project site is not encumbered by a Williamson Act contract. The EIR will document that no forest land resources are present.
- Air Quality—The EIR will discuss the regional and local air quality setting and quantify air pollutant
  emissions for construction and subsequent operation of proposed uses. The emissions estimates
  will be derived in consideration of recommended methods and significance thresholds developed
  by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, and the EIR will explain how methods and
  thresholds are designed to assess potential human health effects.
- **Biological Resources**—The EIR will define the biological resources in the Project area, identify existing habitats, and evaluate the Project's potential effects on any wetlands, other sensitive natural communities, and special-status plant and animal species.
- **Cultural Resources**—The EIR will describe any existing Cultural Resources and evaluate potential impacts on those resources, including the potential to affect undiscovered resources during excavation and grading.
- Tribal Cultural Resources—The EIR will describe any existing Tribal Cultural Resources (TCR) and
  evaluate potential impacts on those resources, including the potential to affect undiscovered
  resources during excavation and grading. The EIR, including level of impact and opportunities for
  avoidance, preservation in place, and mitigation of TCR will be informed by consultation with
  traditionally and culturally affiliated California Native American tribes who request consultation
  pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 to assess potential impacts on TCR.
- **Energy**—The EIR will describe the Project's consistency with energy conservation standards and evaluate whether the Project would lead to wasteful or inefficient use of energy or affect local or regional energy supplies.
- Geology, Soils, Minerals, and Paleontology—The EIR will describe the geological setting and
  potential environmental effects related to geologic and soils hazards, and unique paleontological
  (fossil) resources. This section will outline design measures, best management practices, and
  regulatory requirements to minimize impacts on people or structures from geologic and soil hazards.
  The EIR will identify any potential impacts to undiscovered fossils. Deposits of regionally or locally
  important mineral resources are not present at the Project site.

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**—The EIR will include a description of the current science surrounding climate change. The EIR will evaluate potential greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions impacts resulting from construction and subsequent operation of the Project. The EIR will consider applicable goals and measures for reducing GHG emissions from the City Climate Action Plan (CAP), the Los Angeles County 2045 CAP, and California Air Resources Board State Scoping Plan.
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials—The EIR will summarize hazards and hazardous materials
  issues and evaluate potential Project impacts arising from former agricultural use of the Project site
  and other potential sources of contamination. The EIR will discuss potential for impacts from
  transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials; accidental releases of hazardous materials; any
  emissions of hazardous materials, substances, or waste, etc.
- **Hydrology and Water Quality**—The EIR will briefly discuss hydrologic and water quality conditions and potential short-term construction-related effects on water quality from stormwater runoff, as well as potential long-term operational effects on stormwater drainage volume, peak flows, and maintenance effects on water quality. The EIR will briefly consider potential impacts related to groundwater recharge and sustainability from the addition of impervious surfaces associated with the proposed development. The Project site is not located in a FEMA 100-year flood hazard zone. This section will outline design features and best management practices included to minimize hydrology and water quality effects.
- Land Use and Planning—The EIR will describe existing land uses and zoning and evaluate the potential for the Project to divide an existing community and a discussion of conflicts with policies and plans adopted for the purpose of reducing or avoiding environmental effects.
- **Noise and Vibration**—The EIR will describe existing noise and vibration conditions and the potential impacts of construction and operation of the Project. Noise and vibration levels from construction, and noise levels from operation of the courthouse, will be estimated and compared with existing ambient noise levels.
- Population and Housing—The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to induce substantial
  unplanned population growth. Because the Project site is currently undeveloped, no impacts are
  anticipated related to displacing substantial numbers of housing units or people that could lead to
  potentially significant environmental effects. The Project does not include the construction of new
  housing.
- Public Services—The EIR will describe existing public services related to fire and police and will
  evaluate whether the Project could result in potential increases in demand. The EIR will evaluate
  whether those demands would require new facilities, the construction of which could cause
  significant environmental impacts. Because the Project does not involve the construction of new
  housing, no impacts are anticipated to other public services, such as schools, libraries, etc.
- Recreation—The EIR will briefly describe existing recreational facilities in the Project area. Because
  the Project does not involve the construction of new housing, no impacts are anticipated related to
  recreation resources.
- Transportation—The EIR will evaluate vehicle miles traveled ("VMT")-related impacts using the
  City's Transportation Analysis Updates in Santa Clarita (May 2020), as well as consistency with the
  Southern California Association of Governments Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable
  Communities Strategy.
- Utilities and Service Systems—The EIR will evaluate physical environmental impacts related to the

provision of utility systems, including water supply, wastewater treatment, and solid waste disposal. Stormwater drainage facilities will be assessed in the Hydrology and Water Quality section of the EIR.

• Wildland Fire Hazards—The Project site is not located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones. Therefore, the EIR will explain why no significant impacts related to wildland fire hazards would be likely to occur.



