



**CITY OF SANTA CLARITA  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
AGENDA REPORT**

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

PLANNING MANAGER APPROVAL: 

DATE: June 20, 2023

SUBJECT: Shadowbox Studios Project (Master Case 21-109)

APPLICANT: LA Railroad 93, LLC

LOCATION: Northeast corner of Railroad Avenue and 13th Street

CASE PLANNER: Erika Iverson

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Planning Commission:

1. Receive the staff presentation in response to Planning Commission direction;
2. Continue the public hearing to receive testimony from the applicant and the public;
3. Provide direction to staff on the hearing schedule;
4. Continue the Public Hearing to July 18, 2023; and
5. Take other action as determined by the Planning Commission.

**REQUEST**

The applicant, LA Railroad 93, LLC, is requesting approval of an Architectural Design Review, Conditional Use Permit, Development Review, General Plan Amendment, Hillside Development Review, Minor Use Permit, Oak Tree Permit, Ridgeline Alteration Permit, Tentative Tract Map, and Zone Change to allow for the development of a nearly 1.3 million square foot, full-service film and television studio campus on an approximately 93-acre site.

**PURPOSE OF THE MEETING**

At the regular meeting of the Planning Commission on May 16, 2023, staff provided a staff

report and presentation in response to comments and requests for additional information as directed by the Planning Commission at the April 18, 2023 meeting. The Planning Commission received the staff report, applicant's presentation, and testimony from the public. The Planning Commission requested clarification on various topics, directed staff to address the remaining questions, and bring back a recommendation on the project for consideration at the June 20, 2023 meeting, following the close of the public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR).

Staff is working to prepare the Draft Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR), inclusive of responses to the all the comments received during the DEIR public review period. Once the Draft Final EIR is complete, the Planning Commission will be able to make a recommendation to the City Council on the project. The purpose of this meeting is addressing the remaining questions from the Planning Commission and to receive direction from the Planning Commission on the public hearing schedule and the preparation of a recommendation for the project.

Staff is proposing the following dates for the project hearing schedule:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023	Project introduction, summary of DEIR, public comments - Completed
Tuesday, May 16, 2023	Response to Planning Commission and public comments - Completed
<b>Tuesday, June 20, 2023</b>	<b>Response to Planning Commission and public comments</b>
Tuesday, July 18, 2023	Response to Planning Commission and public comments, Draft Final EIR, and recommendation to City Council
Date to be determined	City Council Public Hearings

#### MAY 16, 2023 PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING FOLLOW-UP

Following the May 16, 2023 Planning Commission meeting, a memo was prepared and sent to the Planning Commission on June 9, 2023 (PC Memo), to provide response to the request from the Planning Commission for further information on the topics of Alternative 3, street improvement plans, emergency operation plan, oak trees, the zoning and building height, operational characteristics for the project, and to provide visual simulations of the project.

Further discussion on the topics of Alternative 3, street improvement plans and emergency operation plans, oak trees, and operational characteristics is provided below. Based on questions and comments raised by the Planning Commission at the April 18, 2023, and May 16, 2023 meetings, part of the discussion topics outline language for conditions of approval that staff has begun drafting for incorporation into the project Conditions of Approval for consideration by the Planning Commission. In addition, further discussion on the topic of outreach is provided to address questions from the Planning Commission about business outreach in the vicinity.

### Alternative 3

As discussed in the PC Memo and as outlined in the Alternatives analysis of the DEIR, Alternative 3 evaluated a reduced studio project. Additional information is discussed below regarding the characteristics of the reduced project analyzed in the DEIR.

Alternative 3 considered a reduced studio project that would retain the same type of uses and general site plan layout as the proposed project. The total floor area in Alternative 3 assumed a reduction of approximately 24 percent for a total floor area of 980,000 square feet, comprising 400,000 square feet of sound stages; 396,000 square feet of warehouse/support uses; 140,000 square feet of office space; and 44,000 square feet of catering and maintenance facilities. The sound stage buildings would be reduced in number, but would still maintain a height of 55 feet. The warehouse/support building would shrink in size, but the overall height would remain at 50 feet. The office building would become two-stories over a ground floor parking level. The parking structure would remain in the same location, but potentially be reduced by one level of parking. The catering and facilities maintenance buildings would remain as single-story buildings. Perimeter fencing and landscaping would be the same as the proposed project. Alternative 3 would provide 2,102 parking spaces, and would still construct a bridge over Placerita Creek to the north parking lot. As such, the overall development footprint and grading for Alternative 3 would be the same as the proposed project, and have the same oak tree impacts. Alternative 3 would still use the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) property for excess parking. Lastly, Alternative 3 would require the same roadway improvements as the proposed project. With a reduction in the overall project size, the employment numbers for the studio facility would be reduced by approximately 10 to 15 percent, reducing the number of individual one-directional trips to 5,494 as compared to the 6,993 individual one-directional trips generated by the project.

All of the impacts of the proposed Project can be mitigated to a less than significant level. Alternative 3 would have lower impacts in areas of air quality, energy, GHG emissions, public services, transportation, and utilities; however Alternative 3 would still require the same mitigation measures as the project to ensure impacts remain less than significant.

When drafting an EIR, the Alternatives analysis is prepared for the purposes of evaluating the potential to reduce or lessen any of the significant effects of the project as well as to foster informed decision making. The project as proposed by the applicant is before the Planning Commission, and it is at the discretion of the Planning Commission to determine the appropriate recommendation on the project, which, if recommended for approval, could include the recommendation for one of the alternatives analyzed in the (DEIR).

### Street Improvement Plans

As discussed in the PC Memo, the Transportation Analysis (TA) prepared for the project analyzed the project both with and without the completion of the City of Santa Clarita's (City) planned extension of Dockweiler Drive. The proposed street improvements for the project would be required with or without the completion of the connection to Dockweiler Drive. The specific street improvements that would be required for the project prior to the Certificate of Occupancy

include:

- Widening of the rail crossing at 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Railroad Avenue from two traffic lanes to five traffic lanes. In addition to widening of the intersection, the railroad crossing would be upgraded to meet the current safety standards as directed by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC);
- Widening of 13<sup>th</sup> Street from two traffic lanes to six traffic lanes, Arch Street from two-traffic lanes to six traffic lanes, and 12<sup>th</sup> Street from two traffic lanes to three traffic lanes;
- Installation of a four-leg, signalized intersection at 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Arch Street;
- Installation of a four-leg, signalized intersection at Arch Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street; and
- Installation of a three-leg, half signalized intersection of Placerita Canyon Road and Dockweiler Drive.
- Requiring the 13<sup>th</sup> Street at-grade crossing to stage construction such that access to Placerita Canyon will remain open during construction.

If the Dockweiler Drive extension is not completed at the time of the project, the following intersection improvement would be required in place of the three-leg intersection at Placerita Canyon Road and Dockweiler Drive:

- Extend Arch Street to Placerita Canyon Road and complete the two-leg intersection of Placerita Canyon Road and Arch Street.

Lastly, part of the proposed project roadway improvements includes the incorporation of a Class I, multi-use trail along the project frontage of 13<sup>th</sup>, Arch, and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Class I trail cross-section would be required to consist of a 4-foot wide landscape buffer, a 5-foot wide concrete sidewalk for pedestrians, and a 10-foot wide asphalt path for two-way bike traffic and additional space, as needed for lodgepole fencing. Installation of the Class I trail would be required to be completed prior to first occupancy, along with the project roadway improvements described above. In addition to the Class I trail along the project frontage, the following Conditions of Approval would be recommended for consideration for trails:

- A fee payment toward the trail that would connect the Dockweiler Drive Extension to the Newhall Metrolink station, including the pedestrian bridge over Newhall Creek and other future improvements associated with enhancing mobility in the Newhall area, in accordance with the City's Non-Motorized plan.

### Emergency Evacuation

As outlined in the PC Memo, an Emergency Evacuation Analysis was also prepared for the project to study the evacuation time from the Placerita Canyon area. The analysis compared the existing condition, without the project and without the roadway improvements, to the proposed project including the roadway conditions described above. For purposes of determining the most conservative assessment, the analysis assumed that all evacuation routes would be directed through the intersection of Railroad Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street and assumed Dockweiler Drive would not be available. The assessment concludes that the evacuation time out of Placerita Canyon would be reduced by more than half under the project conditions. Therefore, with the installation of the roadway improvements identified in the TA for the project, even without the connection to Dockweiler Drive being available, the existing evacuation time that would be experienced today, would be improved under the project conditions.

In the PC Memo, the applicant provided a narrative to outline what an Emergency Operation Plan includes. The applicant would prepare a site-specific EOP for the studio facility prior to opening the facility, to establish a plan that can be enacted in any type of emergency in order to protect life and property. The EOP would identify types of events or situations where sheltering in place could be implemented, as well as determining if and when the MWD right-of-way to the north could be opened as an evacuation route.

Staff would recommend the following Conditions of Approval be considered for the project:

- Require the applicant to complete installation of the roadway improvements, as described above, prior to the first occupancy of the project to ensure the roadways provide the adequate capacity for the project and evacuation;
- Require the applicant to prepare construction phasing and traffic detour plans prior to street plan approval for any roadway improvements. Traffic detour plans must ensure that access to the Placerita Canyon is maintained at all times during roadway construction. The detour may require additional interim roadway and intersection improvements for the duration of the detour, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer; and
- Require the applicant to prepare a site-specific Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) prior to Certificate of Occupancy. The EOP would be required to include a site-specific evacuation plan for the studio campus and, include a training program for all security personnel and tenants of the studio campus to ensure preparedness in the event of an emergency.

The Planning Commission has asked in previous meetings about the rail line and what would occur in the event of a rail line incident that might block the rail crossing at 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Railroad Avenue. In the unfortunate event the rail crossing is blocked, it would be up to the local emergency/law authorities to establish any plans for temporary alternative routes or detours around the rail crossing as it now. It should be noted, that the proposed widening of the 13<sup>th</sup> Street rail crossing is designed to meet the most current safety standards of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and rail line authorities. Any improvement plans for the crossing require coordination and approval by the CPUC, Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA), Metro, and Metrolink.

The possibility of providing a secondary access to the Project site at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Railroad Avenue has been explored by the applicant, however, policies of the CPUC, SCRAA, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) discourage new grade crossings and require closure of at least one existing crossing, but in the City's experience it would likely require at least two existing crossings, with the application request for a new grade crossing. The CPUC does not distinguish between emergency crossing, private crossing, or public crossing so any new crossing is treated the same under their review.

### Oak Trees

The Oak Tree Report prepared for the project provides an assessment for each oak tree on the project site. The applicant provided a summary of each tree and its health status in the PC Memo. The City Arborist has reviewed the Oak Tree Report and based on-site inspection of the oak trees, agrees with the assessment provided in the Oak Tree Report. The applicant's original proposal includes the removal of 13 oak trees. Upon review of the Oak Tree Report and site

inspection, the City Arborist has worked with the applicant to reduce the number of oak tree removals to 12. The recommended Condition of Approval for the oak tree removals would:

- Permit the removal of 12 on-site oak trees, six of which are heritage in size and identified in the applicant's Oak Tree Report as oak tree numbers 1H, 2H, 3H, 4H, 5H, and 7H, and the remaining six removals are non-heritage and identified in the applicant's Oak Tree Report as oak tree numbers 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.
- Require a bond for the International Society of Arboriculture (hereafter ISA) Dollar Value of the oak trees, proposed for removal, would prior to the issuance of grading permits, and the removal of any oak trees. The current ISA Dollar Value as documented in the applicant's Oak Tree Report is listed at \$790,800.00 dollars. The applicant would be required to mitigate for the ISA Dollar Value of all oak trees approved for removal, subject the City of Santa Clarita Oak Tree Ordinance and Preservation and Protection Guidelines.
- Specific conditions regarding location for planting of mitigation oak trees would require larger specimen size oak trees to be planted in high visibility visible to residents and guests in the Placerita Canyon Community, at the landscaped corners of Shadowbox Studio Gates 1, 2, and 3 as shown on the preliminary landscape plan.

### Project Operations

The staff presentation and staff report for the May 16, 2023 meeting discussed the project access and outlined how all vehicle trips associated with the studio facility would enter the project site from the proposed signalized intersection at 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Arch Street. Gate 1, the main entrance, is located on the north leg of the proposed intersection of 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Arch Street. Gate 2, the secondary entrance, is located on the east leg of the intersection. Both gates are setback from the intersection, allowing vehicles to queue on the Project site instead of the public street. The combined stacking length on the project site for both gates is 2,100 linear feet. For context, assuming a 60-foot queue length per large 53-foot trailer vehicle, the capacity provided would accommodate 35 trailer vehicles in the queue. In addition, Gate 1 is designed as a three-lane entry that widens to four lanes, dedicating a lane for express entry by cardholders. Gate 2 is a three-lane entry. The provision for on-site queuing and multiple entry lanes ensures vehicle traffic can clear the entry gates and not cause impact on the public roadway.

Project-related vehicle trips would not be permitted to enter the project site from Gate 3, which is located on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Gate 3 is designed as an exit only, and is designed to permit a right turn out only (west toward Arch Street). This keeps vehicle traffic associated with the studio facility on Arch Street and away from the Placerita Canyon neighborhood. Gate 3 would allow for emergency service vehicles to enter the project site.

The studio facility operates 24 hour per day and would have nighttime trips associated with the studio facility. The applicant operation plan would limit vehicle entry and exit during the hours of 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. to Gate 1 only. This directs all vehicle traffic to the interior of the studio facility and keeps vehicle traffic away from the easterly internal drive aisle of the studio facility. The operation plan would also prohibit large trucks from entering or exiting both the north parking lot and the MWD parking lot during the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

Staff recommendations would include Conditions of Approval including:

- Require vehicle traffic use Gate 1 for entrance and exit during hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. and restricting large trucks (53-foot) from entering or exiting the north parking lot and the MWD parking lot during the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- Require that Gate 3 is restricted to egress only and must be designed as a right turn exit, west bound on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Emergency service only would be permitted to use Gate 3 as an entrance.
- Require the applicant to install gateway signage at the entrance to Placerita Canyon at Placeritos Boulevard and Placerita Canyon Road. The requirement would include signage to expressly state that no through traffic is allowed.
- Require 24-hour security personnel on-site, and require the studio facility establish a contact phone number for studio facility operations that would be made available to the public and posted at each entry gate.

### Business Outreach

The applicant has continued to conduct outreach in the community and since the May 16, 2023 meeting, met again with the Placerita Canyon Property Owners Association and several businesses along 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Arch Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Pine Street. An updated summary of the applicant outreach is attached.

Separately, City staff is organizing outreach efforts to work with and inform Railroad Avenue business owners of the plans for future Railroad Avenue street improvements that would impact street parking along their frontage on Railroad Avenue as part of the Dockweiler Drive extension project. The outreach plan includes both an informational flyer and direct meetings with the impacted businesses. Initial outreach is anticipated to begin this summer.

### CONCLUSION

Staff is preparing the Draft Final EIR, inclusive of response to all the comments received during the DEIR public review period. The Draft Final EIR is expected to be issued on July 6, 2023, and would be presented to the Planning Commission at a future public hearing along with a staff recommendation on the project for consideration by the Planning Commission, tentatively set for July 18, 2023.

### ATTACHMENTS

PC Memo - June 9, 2023  
 Applicant Outreach Summary  
 Public Comments