

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Master Environmental Impact Report (Master EIR) has been prepared by the Rio Hondo Community College (College) to assess the environmental consequences of the proposed Rio Hondo College Master Plan (Master Plan) and the subsequent projects described in the Master Plan. In order to meet the education needs of the Rio Hondo Community College District to the year 2012, a combination of new facilities, renovated facilities, parking and circulation improvements, and infrastructure is proposed in the Master Plan. The Rio Hondo Community College District Board of Trustees is the Lead Agency¹ for approval of the Master Plan and its subsequent projects. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)² and the Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA³ (State CEQA Guidelines) require that an EIR be prepared where the Lead Agency has determined that a project may have a significant effect on the environment (State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15064). The College completed an Initial Study for the Master Plan in January 2005 and determined that a Master EIR should be prepared (see Appendix A, *Notice of Preparation, Initial Study, and Scoping Comment Letters*).

An EIR is an informational document prepared to:

- Inform public agency decision makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project;
- Identify possible ways to minimize the significant environmental effects through “mitigation measures”; and
- Describe reasonable alternatives to the project that would substantially reduce environmental effects (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15121).

Preparation of a Master EIR is an alternative to preparing a Project EIR for a master plan that will form the basis for later decision-making (CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15175-15179.5). A Master EIR is intended to streamline the later environmental review of projects or approvals included within the Master Plan analyzed in the Master EIR. Accordingly, this Master EIR, to the greatest extent feasible, evaluates the cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and irreversible significant effects on the environment of the subsequent College projects. Upon certification of the Final Master EIR by the Rio Hondo College District Board, subsequent

¹ CEQA Guidelines, Title 14. California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3. Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act as amended September 7, 2004. Section 15050

² California Environmental Quality Act, California Public Resources Code, Division 13. Environmental Protection, Sections 21000-21177

³ CEQA Guidelines, Title 14. California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3. Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act as amended September 7, 2004



Draft Master Environmental Impact Report Rio Hondo College Master Plan

projects described in the Master Plan and Master EIR will be subject to only limited environmental review (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15177).

Public agencies are charged with the duty to avoid or minimize environmental damage where feasible (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15021). In discharging this duty, the College has an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, including technical, economic, environmental, timing, social, and legal issues.

While the information in this Master EIR does not control or pre-determine the College's ultimate discretion on the Master Plan, the College must respond to each significant effect identified in the Master EIR by making findings (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15091) and if necessary by making a Statement of Overriding Consideration (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15093) before adoption of the Master Plan.

The College is required to consider the information in the Final Master EIR with any other relevant information in making final decisions on the Master Plan and subsequent projects (State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15121). The information in the Master EIR may constitute substantial evidence in the record to support the College's action on the Master Plan and subsequent projects if its decision(s) is later challenged in court.

1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

An Initial Study was prepared to focus the Master EIR on those environmental issues that are expected to have a significant impact on the environment and to eliminate further analysis of those issue areas that are not expected to result in significant impacts to the environment (see Appendix A). The Initial Study was also used to facilitate early responsible agency and public participation in the scoping and preparation of this Master EIR. A Notice of Preparation⁴ (NOP) of the Master EIR for the Rio Hondo College Master Plan and subsequent projects was prepared and circulated, along with the Initial Study, for a 30-day review period that began on January 4, 2005, and closed on February 4, 2005 (see Appendix A). The documents were mailed directly to the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit in the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the County of Los Angeles Clerk-Recorder, federal, state, regional, and local responsible agencies, adjacent property owners, and known interested parties on December 30, 2004. The documents were also sent to the City of Whittier and Rio Hondo College public libraries, and made available electronically on the Rio Hondo College Web site. The State Clearinghouse also transmitted the NOP to responsible agencies on January 3, 2005, and posted the NOP on the State of California Web site via the State Clearinghouse CEQANet database. A

⁴ Rio Hondo College, *Notice of Preparation of a Draft Master Environmental Impact Report for the Rio Hondo College Master Plan*, January 2004



Draft Master Environmental Impact Report Rio Hondo College Master Plan

community meeting on the Rio Hondo Master Plan and Master EIR was conducted at Rio Hondo College on January 13, 2005. A Master EIR scoping meeting was conducted at Rio Hondo College on the evening of January 24, 2005. The availability of the NOP and Initial Study and an invitation to participate in the community meeting and Master EIR scoping workshop was published in local newspapers on January 2-4, 2004, and posted on the Rio Hondo College Web site (see Appendix A).

The January 13, 2005, public community meeting and the January 24, 2005, Master EIR scoping meeting facilitated early consultation with interested parties in compliance with Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Approximately 300 people attended the community meeting. Rio Hondo College representatives provided an overview of the Master Plan and the environmental consultant provided an overview of the CEQA process. The Master EIR consultant prepared a PowerPoint presentation and a Scope of Analysis Questionnaire for the January 24, 2005, public Master EIR scoping meeting. Rio Hondo College personnel described the background of the Master Plan. The Master Architect described the Master Plan and an early Alternative Master Plan. The environmental consultant provided an overview of the CEQA process and summarized the findings of the Initial Study. Input was requested on significant environmental effects, mitigation measures, project alternatives, and sources of information for the Master EIR. Following the presentation, a member of the public provided both oral and written scoping comments. The entire public scoping meeting was videotaped. Additionally, all public meeting comments were recorded on flip charts and later transcribed. Rio Hondo College received a total of nineteen (19) scoping comment letters in response to the NOP, Initial Study, public workshop and the scoping meeting (see Appendix A). All of the comment letters were provided to the Master EIR consultant as they were received for consideration during the preparation of the Master EIR.

As result of the analysis undertaken in the Initial Study, and following consideration of the scoping comment letters received during the Master EIR scoping period, it was determined that the proposed project would either not result in significant impacts or would result in less than significant impacts with mitigation to the following issue areas: agricultural resources, cultural resources, land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing and recreation resources (please refer to the Initial Study and scoping comment letters in Appendix A). No further analysis of those environmental resources is undertaken in this Master EIR. However, the Initial Study and Master EIR scoping process concluded that the Master Plan and subsequent projects do have the potential to result in significant impacts to seven environmental resource areas, which are the subject of the detailed analysis in this Master EIR:

- Aesthetics;



Draft Master Environmental Impact Report Rio Hondo College Master Plan

- Air Quality;
- Biological Resources;
- Geology and Soils;
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials;
- Noise;
- Traffic and Transportation;
- Utilities and Fire Protection; and
- Water Resources and Water Quality.

This Draft Master EIR was distributed to various federal, state, regional, and local government agencies and interested organizations and individuals for a 45-day public review and comment period. This Draft Master EIR was provided to the State Clearinghouse for additional distribution to responsible agencies. In addition, a public Notice of Availability of the Draft Master EIR was published in local newspapers and mailed directly to interested parties requesting the document. Electronic copies of the Draft Master EIR are available on the Rio Hondo College Web site at: <www.riohondo.edu/planning/>. Printed copies of the Draft Master EIR are available during the public review period at the following public libraries:

Whittier Central Library

7344 S. Washington Avenue
Whittier, CA 90602
562-464-3450

Monday - Wednesday: 10:00 AM - 9:00 PM
Thursday and Friday: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Saturday: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Sunday: Closed

Whittwood Branch Library

10537 Santa Gertrudes Avenue
Whittier, CA 90603
562-464-3470

Monday - Tuesday: 12:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Wednesday - Thursday: 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Friday - 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Saturday: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Sunday - Closed



Draft Master Environmental Impact Report Rio Hondo College Master Plan

Rio Hondo College Library – Reference Desk

3600 Workman Mill Road
Whittier, CA 90601-1699
563-908-3484

Monday – Thursday: 7:30 AM – 9:00 PM
Friday: 7:30 AM – 1:00 PM
Saturday: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Sunday: Closed

Written comments on this Draft Master EIR should be transmitted during the public review period to the College:

Dr. Andy Howard, Executive Director
Planning & Development
Rio Hondo College
3600 Workman Mill Road
Whittier, CA 90601-1699
E-mail: ahoward@riohondo.edu

Written comments provided by the public and public agencies will be evaluated, and written responses will be prepared for all comments received during the designated comment period. Upon completion of the evaluation, a Final Master EIR will be prepared and provided to the Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees for certification of compliance with CEQA and for review and consideration as part of the decision-making process for the proposed Rio Hondo Master Plan.

1.2 ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

Sections 15122 through 15132 of the State CEQA Guidelines describe the required content of an EIR to include: a description of the proposed project and the environmental setting (existing conditions); an environmental impact analysis; mitigation measures; alternatives; significant irreversible environmental changes; growth inducing impacts; and cumulative impacts.

Volume I of the Master EIR consists of a Draft Master EIR that describes the proposed project, environmental setting, impacts, mitigation, and alternatives considered.

Section ES, Executive Summary, provides a summary of the Master Plan and subsequent projects, identifies significant impacts of the Master Plan and subsequent projects, mitigation measures, and project alternatives that were considered to avoid the significant effects of the Master Plan. In addition, the Executive Summary identifies areas of controversy known to the College, considering issues raised by public agencies and the public. The Executive Summary includes a list of the issues to be resolved, including the choice among alternatives, and whether or how to mitigate significant effects of the Master Plan.

Section 1, Introduction, provides information related to the purpose and scope of the Master EIR, environmental review process, environmental effects not found to be significant, and the organization and content of the Master EIR (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15128).

Section 2, Project Description, provides the location and boundaries of the proposed Master Plan and subsequent projects, the purpose and statement of objectives of the Master Plan and subsequent projects, and a description of the technical, economic, and environmental characteristics of the Master Plan and subsequent projects. The project description also:

- Identifies the intended uses of the Master EIR, including the list of public agencies that are expected to use the Master EIR in their respective decision-making processes;
- Identifies the related discretionary actions (permits and approvals) required to implement the Master Plan;
- Identifies any related environmental review and consultation requirements required by federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or policies; and
- Identifies the related projects that were considered in the evaluation of cumulative impacts (CEQA Guidelines Sections 151248).

Section 3, Environmental Setting, Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Level of Significance after Mitigation, describes existing conditions found regionally and at the proposed project site. It identifies the “significance thresholds” used to assess the potential for the Master Plan and subsequent projects to result in significant impacts; evaluates the potential impacts to environmental resources that may be generated by the subsequent Master Plan projects, including the cumulative impacts of the proposed projects in conjunction with other related projects in the area; identifies feasible mitigation measures to reduce significant impacts; and assesses the effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures in reducing identified impacts to below the level of significance. This section also evaluates potential uses of nonrenewable resources, potential irreversible changes that may occur during the course of the proposed subsequent projects, and the potential for the proposed project to foster economic growth or population growth, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment (CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15125 and 15126).

Section 4, Alternatives to the Proposed Project, describes feasible alternatives to the proposed project that would attain most of the basic objectives of the Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees and simultaneously avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the proposed project. A no-project alternative is also evaluated. CEQA requires an evaluation of the

comparative impacts of the proposed project, alternatives to the proposed project, and the no-project alternative (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6).

Section 5, Organizations and Persons Consulted, provides a list of all governmental agencies, community groups, other organizations, and persons consulted during the preparation of this Master EIR.

Section 6, Report Preparation Personnel, provides a list of all personnel who provided technical input or review in the preparation of this Master EIR.

Section 7, References, lists all sources, communications, and correspondence used in the preparation of this Master EIR.

Section 8, List of Acronyms, provides definitions of uncommon terms.

Technical Appendices, support the environmental analysis contained in the Master EIR and include:

Appendix A, Notice of Preparation, Initial Study, and Scoping Comment Letters, received in response to the NOP provides input to the analysis provided in the Master EIR. All comments were considered during the preparation of the Draft Master EIR.

Appendix B, Transportation and Traffic Technical Report, provides the technical traffic modeling and analysis used in the preparation of the Draft Master EIR.

Volume 2: Letters of Comment, Responses and Clarifications and Revisions (future)
The Final Master EIR will consist of both Volumes 1 and 2.

Following public review and comment on the Draft Master EIR (Volume I), the College will prepare Volume II of the Master EIR, which will consist of letters of comments on the Draft Master EIR, responses to all substantive environmental comments, and any necessary clarifications and revisions that the College believes are appropriate, in light of the public comments.

Section 9, Clarifications and Revisions to the Draft Master EIR, will include the clarifications and revisions to the Master EIR provided in light of the substantive environmental comments received on the Draft Master EIR.

Section 10, Comment Letters and Written Responses, will provide a list of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the Draft Master EIR, a written record of all comments received on the Draft Master EIR either verbatim or in summary, and written



Draft Master Environmental Impact Report Rio Hondo College Master Plan

responses to all substantive environmental points raised during the review and consultation process (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15132).