DATE: **September 25, 2025**

TO: **WCA Governing Board**

FROM: **Mark Stanley, Executive Officer**

SUBJECT: **Item 16: Consideration of a resolution to disencumber funding for the Southeast Los Angeles Cultural Center**

RECOMMENDATION
That the WCA Governing Board authorize the Executive Officer to disencumber funds for the Southeast Los Angeles Cultural Center.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
On behalf of the WCA, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) staff was the primary leaders in managing the development process of the SELA Cultural Center. RMC contracted service with Geosyntec (Res. 2019-04) to conduct a feasibility study in 2019. The feasibility resulted in selection of the preferred site on Imperial Highway. In September 2020, the RMC board approved (Res. 2020-32) contracting Gehry Partners to design and provide planning services for the center. In September 2022, as the project concept design was being completed, contracted Skanska (Res. 2022-42) to provide owners representative engineering skills for the management of the project prior to beginning environmental impact studies. In September 2022 Ruth Villalobos & Associates (Res. 2022-41) was hired to conduct the CEQA study.

On December 19, 2023 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously motioned in favor of instructing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Departments of Public Works, Arts and Culture, and Parks and Recreation, and any other relevant departments to create a work plan outlining the necessary steps for the County to fulfill its intent to carry out the development and ongoing operations of the Southeast Los Angeles Cultural Center Project (SELA Cultural Center), and report back in writing in 90 days.

With the spirit of Los Angeles County resource investment in the project, which is an arts and cultural project, not an enhancement to natural resources, the leadership of the project is being consumed by Los Angeles Public Works and the Los Angeles County Arts and Cultural Departments. The County of Los Angeles is no longer working with Skanska or Ruth Villalobos & Associates.

The SELA Cultural Center Project was developed from the 2018 Lower Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan (LLARRP), which describes opportunities for improving both the environment and residents' quality of life along the Los Angeles (LA) River corridor (Exhibit A: Project Location). The Project was first envisioned as a community center in the LLARRP and is surrounded by 12 opportunity areas subsequently developed in the Rio Hondo Confluence Area Project (RHCAP). The RHCAP's revitalization efforts would create a larger network of parks and open space improvements, many of which are tied directly to the project site (Exhibit B: Project Site and Site Plan). It is envisioned that the project would serve as a village of culture and arts education, practice, performance, and display for the southeast LA communities and the broader region.

The regional setting of the Project is southeast LA, along the LA River and Long Beach Freeway I-710 corridors. The proposed site for the SELA Cultural Center is the southern portion of the

LACFCD's Imperial Yard maintenance facility, at 5525 E. Imperial Highway, South Gate. As such, this portion of LACFCD's Imperial Yard will need to be relocated to allow for the construction of the SELA Cultural Center. The proposed SELA Cultural Center Project site and the potential relocation sites for the southern portion of LACFCD's Imperial Yard are presented in more detail in Exhibit C (Exhibit C: LAFCD Maintenance Yard Relocation Sites). The preferred relocation site for LACFCD has not yet been selected and therefore two potential sites are being evaluated in the Environmental Impact Report.

The SELA Cultural Center site is impacted by being located between an industrial district and the LA River/ 710 freeway corridor, which handles most of the truck and rail traffic connecting the ports of LA-Long Beach with the rest of the nation. The pollution burden created by this built environment is shouldered by Black, Indigenous, Brown People of Color (BIPOC) communities within walking distance of the site, which score in the Cal EnviroScreen 94th percentile, with a Pollution Burden Percentile in 98 percentile with extremely high rates of chronic illness and obesity. Despite these park deficient communities being underserved, they contain an amazing abundance of artistic and cultural wealth, which the SELA Cultural Center aims to compliment and amplify.

BACKGROUND

Development of the Project stems from drawing attention to disproportionately affected specific populations, largely consisting of low-income and diverse communities, such as those found within southeast Los Angeles. Communities within this region of LA include nine of the most densely populated cities in the U.S. and are communities that lack open space, have lower rates of educational attainment, employment, and home ownership; and have higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, public assistance, and incarceration. Considering these socioeconomic disparities, the Project aspires to reveal the communities' talents and empower these talents as a cultural asset and economic resource within the region.

In response to recognizing the inequitable conditions of SELA cities and the need for infrastructural change, California State Assembly Speaker Emeritus Assembly Member Anthony Rendon created a seed fund for a cultural center in unincorporated LA County, next to the LA River, and surrounded by the City of South Gate, which is a city whose population has a 10-year shorter lifespan than those of more affluent cities. Regarding using a cultural center as a means of promoting economic growth, California's creative economy supports 2.6 million jobs, $227.8 billion in labor income, and $604.9 billion in annual economic output. While one in three jobs within LA County is part of the creative economy, these jobs are disproportionately represented by wealthier communities. Thus, it is believed that a significant reinvestment in arts education and programming within the SELA region would support access to the creative economy by its historically marginalized communities.

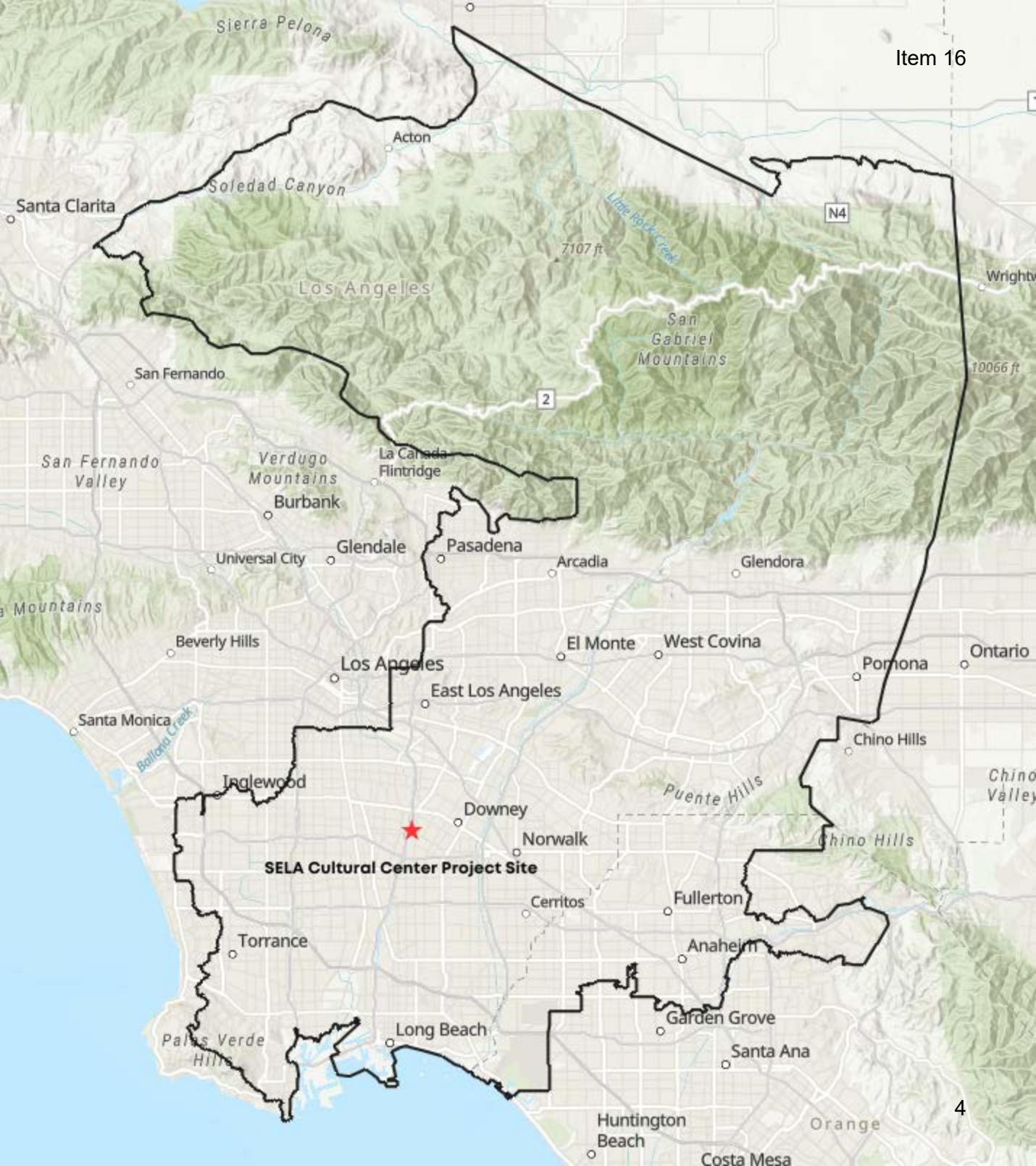
FISCAL INFORMATION

WCA was awarded through grant agreement RMC23017 a total of $93,953,399.89 in the State of California grant agreement funded through the Budget Acts of 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022 as part of the RMC's Non-bond Priorities Grant Program and for the purposes of advancing the policies and priorities set forth in PRC 22.8 §§ 32601-32602, 32604, 32611-32615.

Since the grant award there has been $194,770.98 dollars spent. The current balance for dis-encumbrance is $93,758,628.91.

Exhibit A

Project Location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Acton
Soledad Canyon
Santa Clarita
Little Rock Creek
N4
7107 ft
Los Angeles
San Gabriel Mountains
10066 ft
San Fernando
2
San Fernando Valley
Verdugo Mountains
La Cañada Flintridge
Burbank
Glendale
Pasadena
Universal City
Arcadia
Glendora
Beverly Hills
El Monte
West Covina
Ontario
Los Angeles
Pomona
East Los Angeles
Santa Monica
Bolsa Chica Creek
Chino Hills
Inglewood
Puente Hills
Downey
Norwalk
Chino Hills
SELA Cultural Center Project Site
Cerritos
Fullerton
Torrance
Anaheim
Garden Grove
Long Beach
Palos Verde Hills
Santa Ana
Huntington Beach
Orange
Costa Mesa

Exhibit B

Project Site and Site Plan

SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

RVA

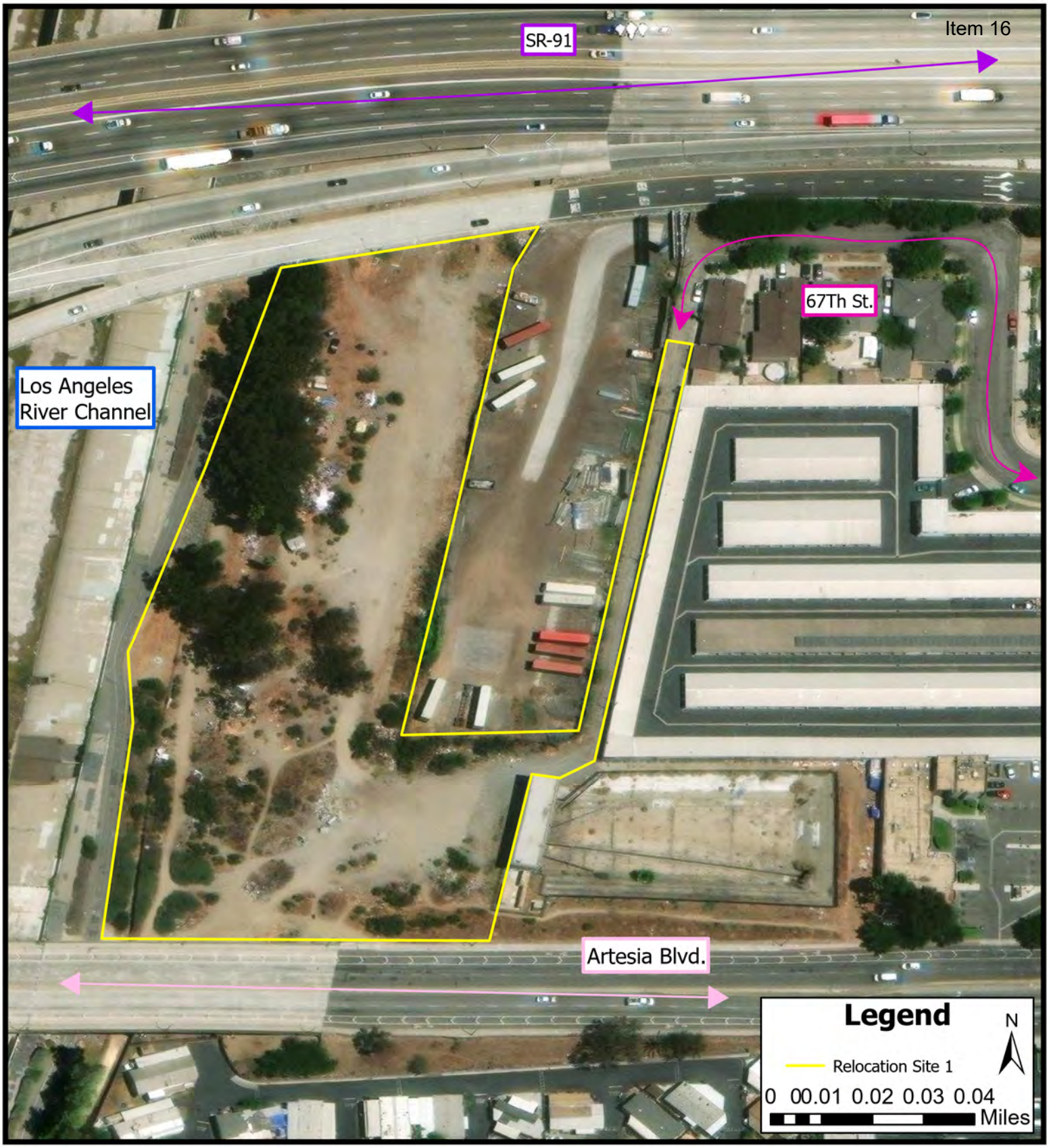
Project Site Location

Figure 3.0-4

LA RIVER
EXISTING TRAIL
FIRE ACCESS ROAD
CULTURAL CENTER
SOUTH GARDENS
HOLLYDALE REGIONAL PARK
EXISTING RESTROOM
PARKING
PRIMARY ACCESS ROAD
IMPERIAL HIGHWAY

Exhibit C

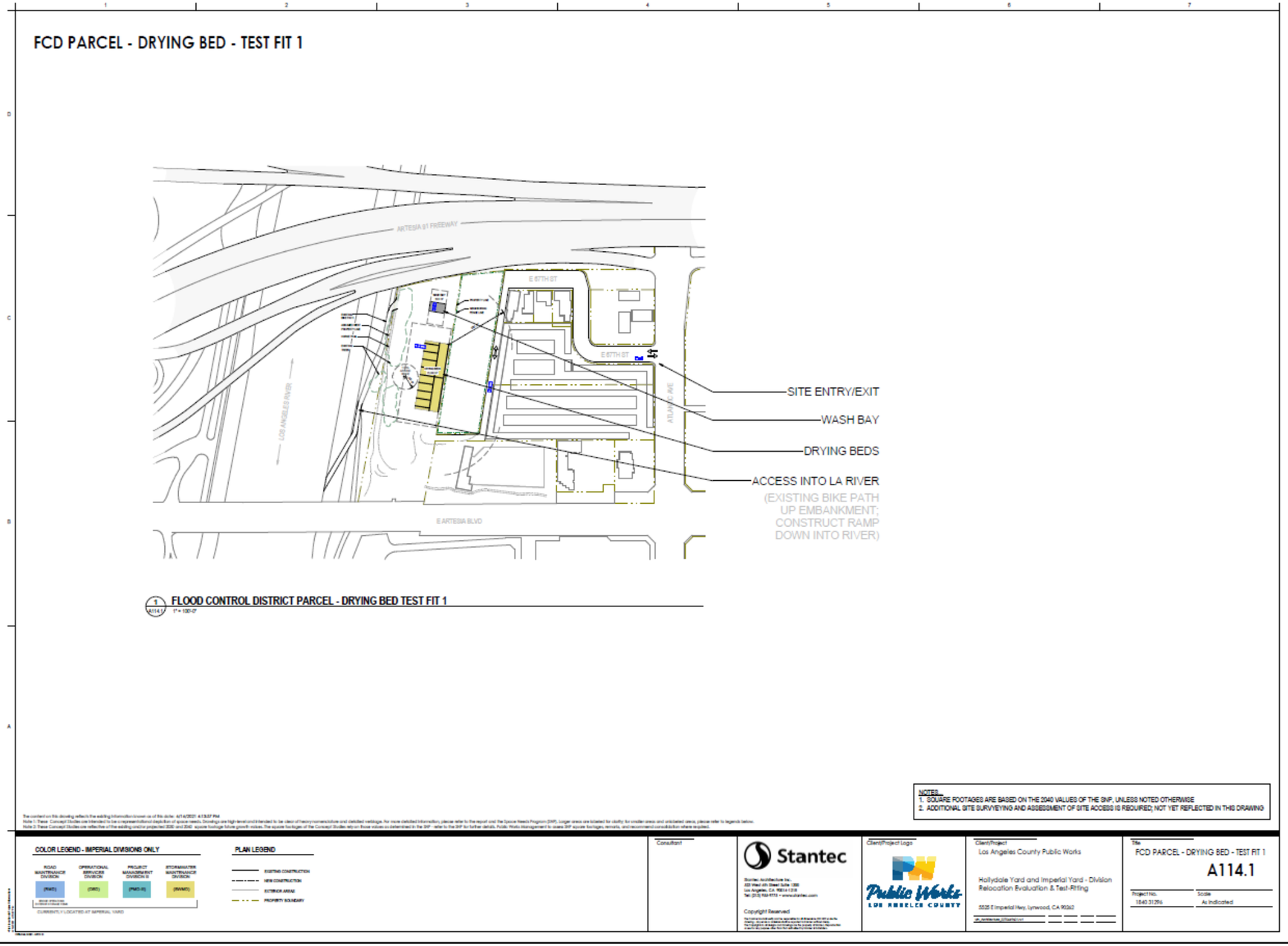
LAFCD Maintenance Yard Relocation Sites



SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

Relocation Site 1: 67th Street, Long Beach

Figure 3.0-5



SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

Relocation Site 1 Conceptual Layout

Figure 3.0-18

SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

Relocation Site 2: 11700 Wright Road, Lynwood

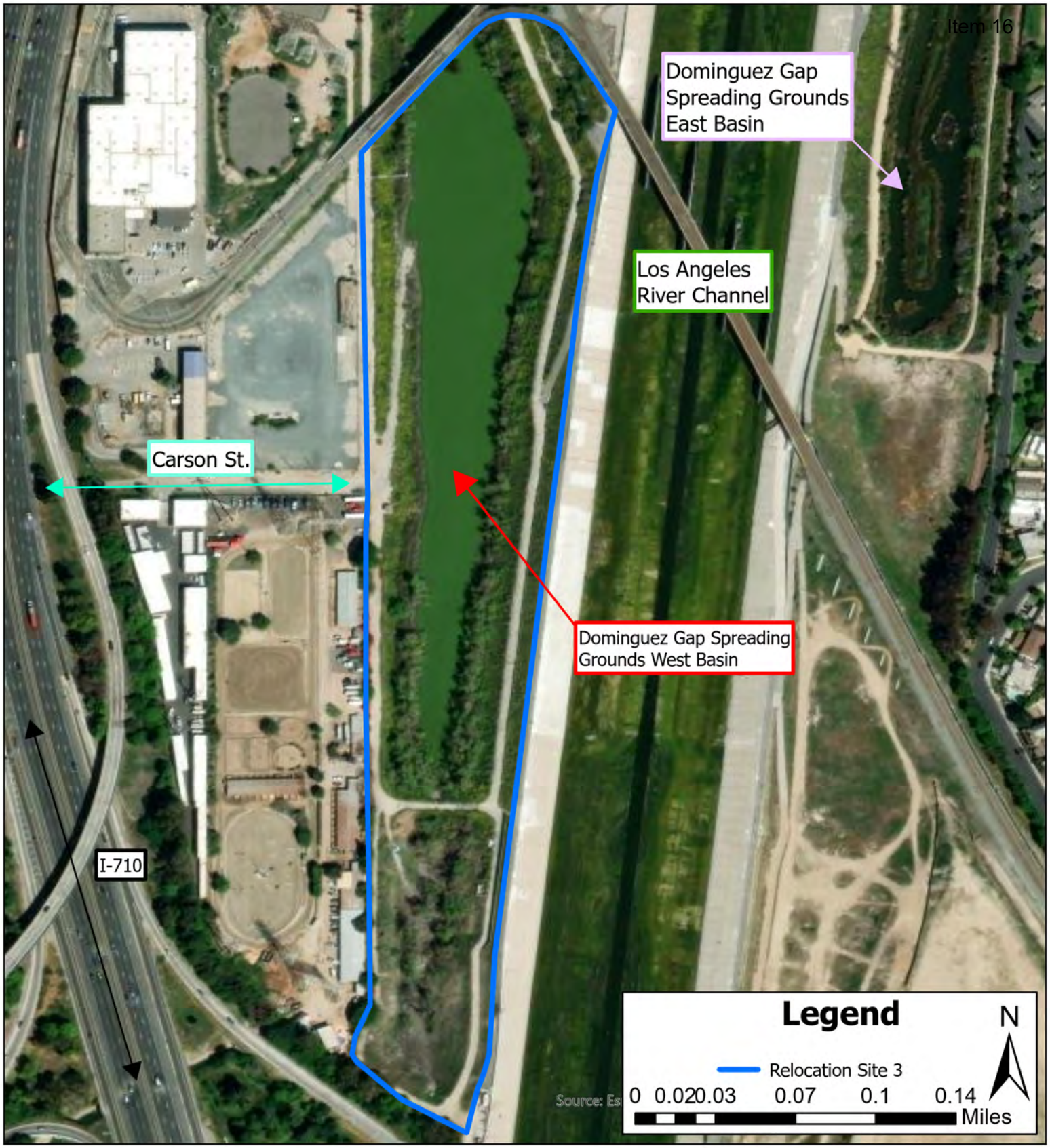
Figure 3.0-6

SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

RVA

LACPW Potential Relocation Site 2 (Caltrans) Conceptual Site Layout

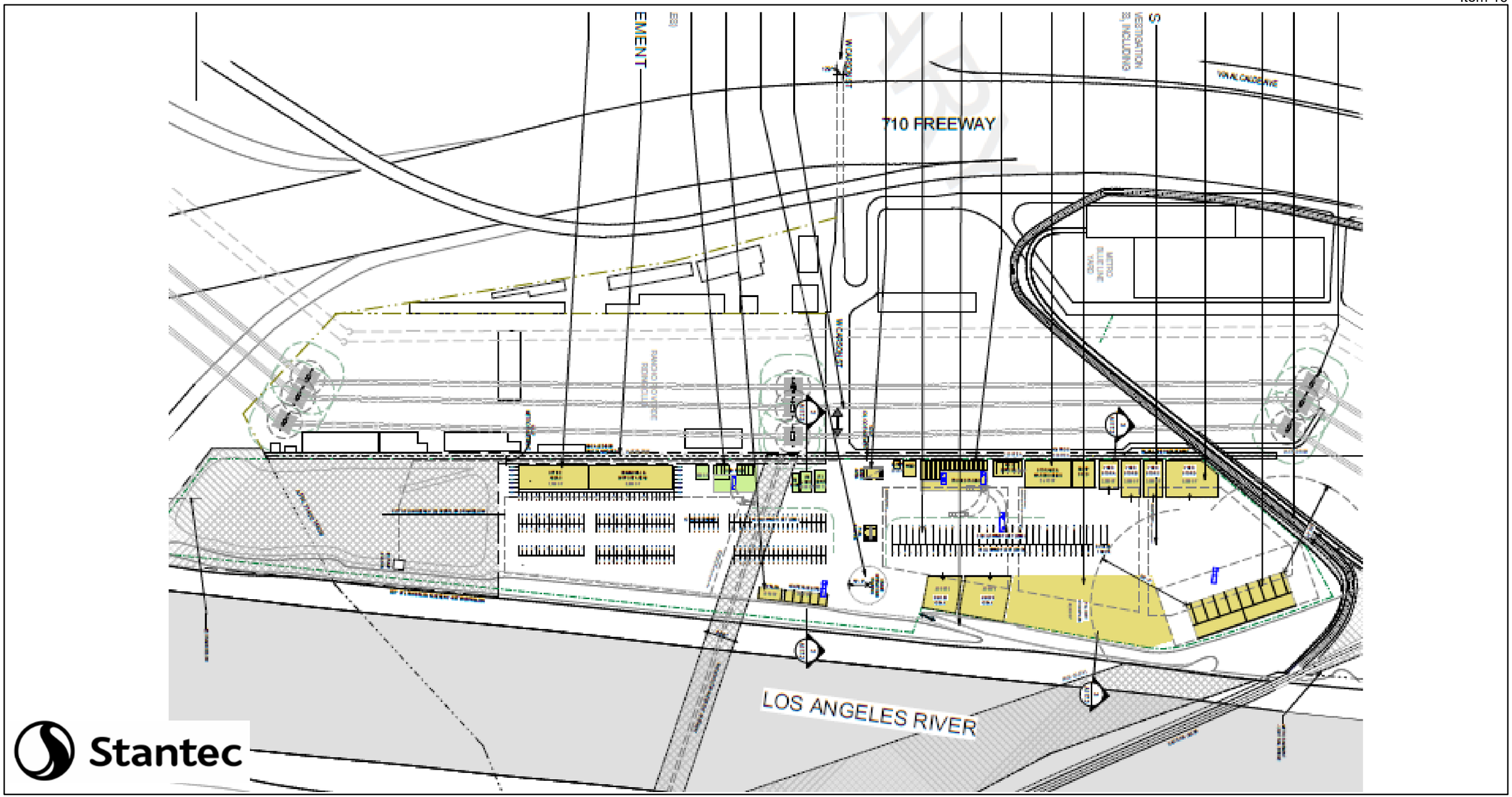
Figure 3.0-19



SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

Relocation Site 3: 1000 W. Carson Street, Long Beach

Figure 3.0-7



SELA CULTURAL CENTER PROJECT

RVA

LACPW Potential Relocation Site 3 Conceptual Site Layout

Figure 3.0-20

September 25, 2025 – Item 16

RESOLUTION 2025-36

CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION TO DISENCUMBER FUNDING FOR THE SOUTHEAST LOS ANGELES CULTURAL CENTER

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established as a joint powers agency between the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District; and

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established to facilitate joint projects between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and Los Angeles County Flood Control District; and

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority has been established to focus on projects which will provide open space, habitat restoration, and watershed improvement projects in both the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers watershed; and

WHEREAS, A significant reinvestment in arts education and programming within the SELA region would support access to the creative economy by its historically marginalized communities; and

WHEREAS, This action will authorize the WCA to disencumber planning and implementation grant funds provided by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the Southeast Los Angeles Cultural Center (SELA); and

WHEREAS, State of California has authorized through general funds within Budget Act of 2017, Budget Act of 2018, Budget Act of 2019, Budget Act of 2021, and Budget Act of 2022 as funding sources for development and implementation of the SELA Cultural Center; and

WHEREAS, This action is exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); NOW

Therefore be it resolved that the WCA hereby:

1. **FINDS** that this action is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the WCA.

2. **FINDS** that the actions contemplated by this resolution are exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated September 25, 2025.

4. **AUTHORIZES** the Executive Officer to disencumber funds associated with planning and implementation of the SELA Cultural Center.

~ End of Resolution ~

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Motion: _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
On September 25, 2025

_____
Vincent Chang
Governing Board Chair

ATTEST:_____
John Natalizio
Deputy Attorney General