

Section Two:  
SUMMARY OF  
EXISTING SITE  
CONDITIONS



## **A. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **History and Conditions at the Time of Original Plan**

Prior to the downturn of the aerospace industry in the early 1990s, the Site played an important role in California's aerospace industry. The Site was home first to Vultee Aircraft, then North American Aviation, later North American Rockwell, then Rockwell International which was bought by the Boeing Company. The Boeing facility was the birthplace of the Apollo space program and the space shuttle.

### **Existing Conditions at Time of Original Plan Approval**

Prior to the redevelopment of the Site under the Original Plan, the Site was comprised of approximately 124 industrial buildings and structures from the Site's aerospace days. After the adoption of the Original Plan, but before its actual redevelopment, land uses on the Site included:

- Vacant, former manufacturing buildings
- Vacant, undeveloped lots
- Vacant parking uses

The Original Plan contained as an appendix a Memorandum of Agreement ("MOA") among the State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO), NASA, the General Services Administration (GSA) and the City of Downey. The parties to the MOA (see Appendix B) determined which of the buildings on the Site were to be preserved in place and other measures to be taken to ensure that the history of the Site was preserved for future generations. The documentation required by the National Park Service was completed and accepted in 2007.

Building 1 is the most prominent of the structures, encompassing about 913,023 square feet. The MOA prescribed that a portion of Building 1 must be preserved in place, but the MOA determined that the other buildings designated as potentially historic in the MOA (including the remaining portion of Building 1 along with Buildings 6, 10, 11, 25, 36, 39, 41, 42, 108, 120, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, and 290) did not need to be preserved.

None of the buildings identified as historic in the MOA were listed on the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Places. The MOA required documentation of the historic value of the buildings to preserve the legacy of the noteworthy activities that have occurred on the Site. In addition, the City oversaw construction of, and contributed \$10 million to, the Columbia Memorial Space Center, which documents the Site's contributions to the nation's aeronautical and aerospace industries.

## **At Time of the Amended Specific Plan**

The Central Portion is comprised of older, generally metal-clad industrial structures and parking lots. Of the 1.5 million square feet of existing buildings in the middle area, approximately 750,000 square feet is currently in use as Downey Studios, a media facility that includes sound stages, studio, production, office uses, an outdoor suburban movie set, 20 acres of backlot industrial space and associated parking lots. Portions of Building 1, which were required by the MOA to be preserved in place, were restored according to the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines. Other portions of Building 1 and Buildings 6/290, 11 and 39 have been used as part of Downey Studios.

The middle area is mostly secured with a perimeter fence that generally follows the property line along street frontages. Street trees occur intermittently along some of the perimeter streets. Limited landscaping is found on the Site.

The site is currently served by existing utilities. Much of the onsite infrastructure was replaced in connection with the development of the Downey Landing Retail Center and Kaiser Downey Medical Center. Further off-site utility improvements may be required. A description of the existing service providers, systems configuration, and proposed changes and upgrades are found in Chapter Four – Development Plans.

## **B. CONTEXT**

### **Surrounding Land Uses at Time of Original Plan**

The site is surrounded by a variety of land uses that include:

- Low-, low/medium-, and medium-density residential uses to the north and northeast, across Stewart & Gray Road and Bellflower Boulevard.
- Neighborhood Commercial, low-density residential, multi-family housing, senior care, religious, and school uses to the west, across Lakewood Boulevard.
- General commercial and multi-family uses to the west, across Columbia Way (formerly Clark Avenue), between Lakewood Boulevard and Imperial Highway.
- Medium-density residential, commercial manufacturing, Independence Park, a Public Works yard, and commercial uses to the east, across Bellflower Boulevard.

### **Surrounding Land Uses at Time of Amended Plan**

The Central Portion of the Site is surrounded by a variety of land uses including:

- Downey Landing Retail Center to the north of the Central Portion.
- Kaiser Downey Medical Center to the southeast, across Congressman Steve Horn Way.
- Discovery Sports Complex and the Columbia Memorial Space Center to the southwest, across Congressman Steve Horn Way.

## **Existing Transportation Network**

Regional access to the project area is provided by the Century Freeway (I-105), which is located approximately one-quarter mile south of the Site, the San Gabriel River Freeway (I-605), which is located approximately one mile east of the Site, and the Santa Ana Freeway (I-5), which is located approximately two miles northeast of the Site. Within the vicinity of the Site, the Century Freeway has interchanges at Lakewood Boulevard and Bellflower Boulevard, the I-605 Freeway has interchanges at Imperial Highway and Firestone Boulevard, and the Santa Ana Freeway has an interchange at Lakewood Boulevard.

Streets that provide direct access to the Site are Lakewood Boulevard, Stewart & Gray Road, Bellflower Boulevard, Imperial Highway, Columbia Way (formerly Clark Avenue) and Congressman Steve Horn Way. Streets that provide direct access to the Central Portion of the Site are Lakewood Boulevard, Bellflower Boulevard, Columbia Way and Congressman Steve Horn Way.

## **Pedestrian and Bicycle Routes**

While the City of Downey does not have a bicycle plan, there are bike and pedestrian paths along the San Gabriel, Los Angeles, and Rio Hondo Rivers, all of which are within biking distance of the Site.

## **Public Transit**

The Site is currently served by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) regularly scheduled bus services. Existing service includes lines 121 (along Imperial Highway), 127 (along Bellflower Boulevard) and 266 (along Lakewood Avenue).

The City of Downey's Downey LINK, a local fixed-route bus service serving the City of Downey, also serves the Site. The Southeast Route serves the project site from the corner of Bellflower Boulevard and Imperial Highway.

The Metro Green Line light rail line serves Downey from a station at the intersection of the I-105 Freeway and Lakewood Boulevard. The station is approximately one-quarter mile to the south of the Site.

## **C. ISSUES AT TIME OF ORIGINAL PLAN ADOPTION**

Four major issues had to be addressed with respect to the redevelopment of the Site. Those were: (1) retention of existing structures while maintaining flexibility to respond to changing market conditions, (2) consistency between current zoning and the General Plan, (3) traffic and circulation impacts, and (4) compatibility with adjacent uses. The Original Plan addressed these issues, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

## **Retention of Existing Structures vs. Maintaining Flexibility in Changing Markets**

This issue pertains only to the Central Portion of the Site. Therefore, this issue remains today. Consistent with the MOA, a portion of Building 1 was restored according to the Secretary of Interior's Guidelines. Eighteen of the other remaining buildings were determined to be potentially historic by the MOA, and the historic value of those buildings has been documented to preserve the legacy of the noteworthy activities that have occurred on the Site. However, the MOA did not require that those 18 buildings be retained. The Tierra Luna Marketplace development proposal seeks to replace Downey Studios with a mixed-use scheme.

As explained above, of the 1.5 million square feet of existing buildings, approximately 750,000 square feet is currently in use as Downey Studios. Although the studio has operated for the last 7 years, the property owner contemplated that the studio use might not be economically viable in the long-term, and the Original Plan allowed for a transition from studio to commercial uses if the studio was not commercially viable. Since it began operating in 2004, the studio has operated at a loss, because nearly 75% of the Site's revenue comes from the television, movie and commercial industry. Due to a combination of industry tax credits provided by other states, the evolution of computer generated imagery (CGI) and the dramatic decrease in the need for large stage space in Southern California, Downey Studio's total aggregate loss over the last 7 years is approximately \$13 million.

## **General Plan and Zoning Consistency**

State planning law states that a city or county zoning ordinance must be consistent with their General Plan. Currently, Downey's General Plan designates the Site as Mixed Use (i.e., General Plan map and text) and the Site is zoned "Downey Landing Specific Plan" (SP-01-1). The Site's General Plan designation was changed from Manufacturing to Mixed Use in 1992 as part of that year's General Plan Update. Moreover, the Original Specific Plan was designed to be consistent with the Mixed Use designation; in that, the provisions of the Specific Plan serve to implement the Mixed Use designation's goals and objectives. For example, a primary intent of the Mixed Use category is to accommodate a broad mix of commercial and office uses, and the Specific Plan's list of permitted and conditional uses reflects those categories.

Additionally, the Amended Plan proposes to change only the provisions of the Central Portion of the Site and the Amended Plan recognizes the objectives of the Mixed Use designation. Specifically, the development plan contemplated for the Central Portion is a multiple-use project whose prospective uses fall under two of the General Plan's land use headings: commercial and office; contemplated uses will include a variety of retail formats, along with office uses, entertainment, a hotel and restaurants.

## **Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

Although the project site accommodated over 25,000 workers at one time and the surrounding road network has been sized over the years to accommodate the needs of the site, circulation in the vicinity will be impacted by this new development, as discussed in Chapter 4, Development Plans.

The Tierra Luna Marketplace proposes a mix of primarily commercial and office uses totaling approximately 1.5 million Gross Square Feet including a 150-key hotel.

## **Environmental Conditions and Compatibility with Adjacent Land Uses**

Although the Downey Landing Site was a manufacturing and assembly plant for over seventy years, a mix of manufacturing and non-manufacturing land uses surround it. The majority of previous industrial uses took place in the center of the Site while the perimeter was a parking buffer. That buffer shielded the surrounding uses from light and glare as well as noise and often around-the-clock activity.

Due to the manufacturing processes employed on the site, there exist hazardous materials in the Site's soil. These hazardous materials are currently being remediated. As stated previously, deed restrictions recorded against the Site preclude residential uses on the Site.

