"A" STREET AT FAIRWAY DRIVE
GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT & REZONE
1494 FAIRWAY DRIVE
CITY OF SANTA MARIA, CA
(APN: 111-231-016)

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT

OCTOBER 11, 2023

Prepared for:

SANTA MARIA PUBLIC AIRPORT DISTRICT
&
RRM DESIGN

PREPARED BY:

David Wolff Environmental, LLC

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “A” Street at Fairway Drive Rezoning project (Project) proposes to change the land use designation of the site located at 1494 Fairway Drive from Airport Service (AS-1) to Light Industrial (LI) and rezone the site from Open Space (OS) to Light Manufacturing (M-1). Adjacent land uses include commercial businesses to the north, industrial buildings and the FedEx Ground shipping facility to the east, undeveloped land and the Santa Maria Public Airport District (Airport) runways/operating area (AOA) to the south, and agricultural fields to the west. No wetlands or other waters of the U.S./State or riparian habitat occurs on the project site.

The search and review of the CNDDB revealed 19 special-status species composed of six special-status plants, 12 special-status wildlife species, and one natural community of special concern with recorded occurrences in the region of the proposed project site.

A field survey conducted on the Project site established existing conditions of the proposed project site as disturbed/developed ruderal habitat. This biological resources assessment concludes the site does not support suitable habitat for any special-status plant or wildlife species or the potential to occur, or any significant biological resources within the project site.

Based on the findings described in this biological resources assessment which establish the existing developed/ruderal conditions of the project site, implementation of the proposed Project land use change and rezone would not result in any substantial adverse effects on botanical, general wildlife, or waters of the U.S./State/wetland habitat resources. Therefore, direct and indirect project impacts on biological resources would be considered less than significant and no mitigation measures are recommended. The future site development following the rezone may have potentially significant impacts on nesting birds and the California red-legged frog, and mitigation measures are recommended to avoid impacts on these biological resources.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION, LOCATION, AND PURPOSE

The proposed Project is a City of Santa Maria (City) General Plan Amendment and Rezoning of the 6.95-acre Santa Maria Public Airport District parcel (APN: 111-231-016) from Open Space to Light Manufacturing (M-1). The specific request is to change the land use designation of the site located at 1494 Fairway Drive from Airport Service (AS-1) to Light Industrial (LI) and rezone the site from Open Space (OS) to Light Manufacturing (M-1). The proposed land use and zoning will be consistent with those of surrounding properties that have either the Light Industrial (LI) or General Industrial (GI) Land Use Classification with the Light Industrial (M-1) or Commercial Manufacturing (CM) Zone designation with the Planned Development (PD) Overlay.

There is not a specific development proposal that accompanies the rezoning request. For generalized buildout estimates included in other technical reports, a maximum floor area of 75,000 to 100,000 square feet of buildings was assumed. Generalized estimates for grading included 15,000 to 20,000 cubic yards of fill material that would be imported onsite to elevate the site above the adjacent flood elevation.

A portion of the site (approximately 0.42 Acres) is developed as a City water well pump facility and concrete pad yard. The site is otherwise vacant ruderal (disturbed) herbaceous vegetation with a few small non-native pine trees located along its southern boundary, and scattered coyote brush shrubs and fan palms. The site is bounded on the north, west and south perimeters by existing Santa Barbara County (County) flood control channels that flow into the east to west trending "Green Canyon" drainage. Open Space zoned Airport property is beyond to the west under annual crop agricultural use. The project site is abutted by 'A' Street, urban industrial development (FedEx Ground facility) to the east and north. Figure 1 in Appendix A provides a regional aerial photograph map that illustrates the current land use context of the project site.

David Wolff Environmental (DWE) conducted the review of available background data including City environmental review of nearby projects, and a biological and botanical field survey on the project site on August 28, 2023. The purpose of the field survey and this biological resources assessment is to document the existing conditions of the project site, determine the presence/absence of suitable habitat for rare plant or wildlife species, and to evaluate the potential for any direct or indirect significant impacts on biological or wetland resources, or adverse effects on any rare, threatened, or endangered plant or wildlife species (special-status species).

3.0 METHODS

Prior to field surveys, DWE Principal Ecologist David Wolff conducted a review of available background information including aerial photography of the project area over time (Google Earth), and the five-mile radius query results of the California Natural Diversity Data Base

(CNDDB). The five-mile search radius was used as a greater radius would have extended out of the area to the coastal and inland habitats and geographic areas not relevant to the project site. The CNDDB provided a list and mapped locations of special-status plant and wildlife species, and natural communities of special concern, that have been recorded in the region of the project site. The CNDDB records help to focus the field survey efforts and evaluation of potential project effects on specific species or habitats. It is noted that the CNDDB does not necessarily include all potential special-status species potentially occurring onsite or in the region, but rather only those that have been recorded by the CNDDB. This study also included the review of designated critical habitat and California tiger salamander breeding pond data from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

DWE Principal Ecologist David Wolff conducted the field reconnaissance survey of the project site to document existing conditions of the onsite biological resources on August 28, 2023. Surveys were conducted by walking the entirety of the proposed project area recording plant and wildlife species observed and general site characteristics and adjacent land uses. The purpose of the field survey was to document existing conditions in terms of habitat for plant and wildlife species, habitat suitability for presence/absence of special-status plant and wildlife species, the potential to support wetland and/or riparian habitats, and/or waters of the U.S./State. The study area habitat types were described by the aggregation of plants and wildlife based on the composition and structure of the dominant vegetation observed at the time the field reconnaissance was conducted.

DWE Principal Ecologist David Wolff reviewed the available background information and available aerial photography, conducted the field surveys, and is the author and principal in charge of report preparation. The survey data collected on plant and wildlife species, existing conditions, and conclusions presented in this biological resources assessment are based on the methods and field reconnaissance conducted over the project site as described above.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS HABITAT TYPES AND PLANT COMMUNITIES

Plant communities are generally described by the assemblages of plant species that occur together in the same area forming habitat types. Community alliance and alliance codes used in this report follow *A manual of California vegetation, 2nd edition* (Sawyer et al. 2009) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife *California Natural Community List*. Plant names used in this report follow *The Jepson Manual, Vascular Plants of California, Second Edition Thoroughly Revised and Expanded* (Baldwin et al. 2012) and as updated in the Jepson e-Flora website. The CDFW *A Guide to Wildlife Habitats of California Wildlife Habitat Relationship System Classification System* (WHR; Mayer and Laudenslayer, 1988) is the basis for classification of developed/ruderal habitat classification.

The proposed project site supports one plant community a ruderal non-native annual grassland cover over the entire property except for an approximately 0.42-acre developed concrete pad and building for a City well site. The site was previously a golf course of managed turfgrass with a water feature that has been abandoned, dried up, and returned to the ruderal uplands. Figure 2 in Appendix A provides a vicinity location and exiting conditions map showing the project location in the disturbed/developed proposed project site and surrounding land uses. Figure 3 includes a set of onsite representative photographs.

4.1.1 DISTURBED/RUDERAL NON-NATIVE GRASSLAND

The disturbed/ruderal annual grassland habitat from mowing/discing covers the project site outside the developed City well site can be considered the *Avena (barbata, fatua) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands* (CDFW: 44.150.02). It appears dominated by a thick thatch of mowed/disced non-native annual grasses with few native and non-native herbaceous broadleaf plant species. Common native plant species observed in the disturbed/ruderal annual grassland habitat includes American bird's foot trefoil (*Acmispon americanus*), grassland tarweed (*Deinandra increscens* ssp. *increscens*), telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), and saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*). Non-native plants observed dominating the site include short-podded mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), buckhorn plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*), annual bursage (*Ambrosia acanthicarpa*), and Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*). A line of several non-native pine trees (*Pinus* sp.) occur on the south edge of the site with scattered coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) and fan palms (*Washingtonia* sp.) are on the site.

4.2 WILDLIFE

The project site developed/ruderal non-native grassland habitat that is disced/mowed annually provides minimal quality wildlife habitat likely only for locally common wildlife species that have become adapted to the urban edge. The developed/ruderal habitat on the project site does not support a significant amount of wildlife habitat, and does not represent any movement corridor for wildlife as it is abutted to 'A' Street and the urban land uses to the north and east. The site was previously a golf course of managed turfgrass that has returned to the ruderal uplands disced/mowed that reduces habitat value for wildlife. Only evidence of gophers and ground squirrels were observed on the project site.

4.3 WATERS OF THE U.S., WETLANDS, AND WATERS OF THE STATE

No wetlands or other waters of the U.S./State or riparian habitat occurs on the ruderal non-native annual grassland project site. As noted above, the site is bounded on the north, west and south perimeters by existing County flood control channels that flow into the east to west trending "Green Canyon" drainage that supports a willow riparian habitat. The flood control channels to the west and north are trapezoidal channels with maintained ruderal non-native annual grassland habitat on the banks. The County flood control ditches and associated riparian habitat could be considered waters of the U.S./State under the jurisdiction of federal and state statutes. However, no delineation or jurisdictional determination has been made as part of this analysis for these offsite drainage features. Further, no offsite project elements are proposed in the County flood control ditches.

4.4 SPECIAL-STATUS SPECIES AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

Special-status species are those plants and animals listed, proposed for listing, or candidates for listing as threatened or endangered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) or the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the federal Endangered Species Act (FESA); those considered "species of concern" by the USFWS; those listed or proposed for listing as rare, threatened, or endangered by the CDFW under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA); animals designated as "Species of Special Concern" by the CDFW; and plants occurring as a rank 1B, 2, and 4 of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California.* Natural Communities of Special Concern are habitat types considered rare and worthy of tracking in the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) by the CNPS and CDFW because of their limited distribution or historic loss over time.

The search and review of the CNDDB revealed 19 special-status species composed of six special-status plants, 12 special-status wildlife species, and one natural community of special concern with recorded occurrences in the region of the proposed project site. The following briefly describes or summarizes the special-status species issues and presence/absence determination for occurrence on the project site.

4.4.1 Special-Status Botanical Resources

The search and review of the CNDDB identified six special-status plant species with recorded occurrences within an approximately five-mile radius of the project site. None have been recorded on the project site. The La Graciosa thistle (*Cirsium scariosum* var. *loncholepis*), a state threatened, federally endangered, and California Rare Plant Rank 1B.1 species, is a wetland species. No wetlands occur along the project site.

Five upland special-status plant species (none formally listed) known from the region were identified in the CNDDB search that includes the black-flowered figwort (*Scrophularia atrata*; CNPS Rank 1B.2), Blochman's leafy daisy (*Erigeron blochmaniae*; CNPS Rank 1B.2), dune larkspur (*Delphinium parryi* ssp. *blochmaniae;* CNPS Rank 1B.2), Kellogg's horkelia (*Horkelia cuneata* var. *sericea;* CNPS Rank 1B.2), and San Luis Obispo monardella (*Monardella undulata* ssp. *crispa*; CNPS Rank 1B.2). The prior golf course use and regular discing/mowing weed control make the project site unsuitable for these species and they are not expected to occur.

The CNDDB identified one natural community of special concern, Southern Vernal Pool, within a five-mile radius of the project site. No vernal pools occur on the project site.

Based on the findings from database review and the DWE field survey, no designated critical habitat occurs over the project site, and no impacts to special-status botanical resources or natural communities of special concern would result from the proposed project.

4.4.2 Special-Status Wildlife

The search and review of the CNDDB identified 12 special-status wildlife species with recorded observations within a five-mile radius of the project site. Only the California red-legged frog (CRLF; *Rana draytonii*), a federally threatened species and California Species of Special Concern (SSC), has recorded observations within the County flood control ditches near the project site. In the past, two of the former golf course ponds supported CRLF on the site that is now the FedEx facility. One of the former golf course ponds at the intersection of 'A' Street and Fairway Drive has been retained with site development as mitigation for CRLF habitat (See Figure 2). Current CRLF use in this pond is undetermined.

The CRLF is a highly aquatic species associated with perennial aquatic habitat for almost its entire lifecycle. The CRLF is known for overland movements between breeding sites during rain or heavy moisture (fog) events. The County flood control ditches have highly variable flows subject to duration and frequency of rainfall events, and at times could support suitable aquatic habitat for breeding and movement upstream and downstream through the ditches. This species may be present within the offsite drainages when water is present, and potentially in the retained mitigation golf course pond. The project site lacks suitable upland refuge habitat with vegetation cover limited to herbaceous grassland habitat. No moist refuge such as riparian habitat or downed woody debris occurs on the project site suggesting only the limited probability of overland movements during or immediately after rainstorms.

The project site existing conditions and proximity to USFWS identified known and potential breeding pond data were assessed for the potential of the site to support breeding or upland dispersal for the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*; CTS), a federally listed endangered and state threatened species. The CTS is a lowland species that breeds in temporary pools with sufficient duration for metamorphosis (greater than 90-days) and seeks upland refuge (before/after aquatic breeding and metamorphosis, etc.) in small mammal burrows during most of its lifecycle. They can be found primarily in grasslands and low foothill and oak woodland habitats within a USFWS predicted maximum upland habitat dispersal of 1.3 miles from a breeding pond. CTS breed in long-lasting rain pools (e.g., seasonal ponds, vernal pools, rarely in slow-moving streams), and occasionally in permanent ponds lacking fish or other large predators. During the nonbreeding season and most of their lifecycle, adults and juveniles (up to five years for breeding maturity) occur in upland habitats and occupy ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) or pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*) burrows. They migrate nocturnally to aquatic sites to breed during relatively warm winter or spring rains. Juveniles emigrate at night from the drying pools to upland refuge sites, such as rodent burrows and cracks in the soil.

No known CTS breeding pools have been documented within the USFWS maximum predicted 1.3-mile CTS upland dispersal distance from the project site. However, two potential breeding pools, SAMA-11 and SAMA-12 have been identified by the USFWS approximately 1.2 miles and 0.72 mile respectively to the southwest of the project site (See Figure 1). The intervening active agricultural fields are an impediment to CTS movement with the agricultural irrigation ditches, flood control ditches, and "Green Canyon" drainage representing positive barriers to CTS movement to the project site. As such, the project site does not represent suitable upland dispersal/refuge habitat, and no breeding habitat for the CTS occurs on the project site. Therefore, there would be no impact to this species from future development following the rezoning of the project site.

The offsite willow riparian habitat along "Green Canyon" and the County flood control ditches when flowing could provide suitable habitat to support the western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*) that is a highly aquatic species. Upland movement into the mowed/disced project area and developed urban land uses is unlikely. The western spadefoot (*Spea hammondii*) is a toad that requires temporary pools for breeding and uplands for dry season refuge. No suitable breeding pools are within the project area or surrounding areas so this species would not be expected to occur. Similarly, no suitable seasonally ponded habitat occurs for the vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*).

The previous golf course use, lack of shrub cover, and discing/mowing weed control renders the site as unsuitable for the northern legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra*), Blainville's (coast) horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii)*, American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), and burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), all designated as species of special concern. No evidence of badger dens were observed during the DWE field survey. The Lompoc grasshopper (*Trimerotropis occulens*) requires gravelly/rocky undisturbed habitat, and the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) requires stands of trees neither of which occur on the project site. The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is a coastal species not expected to use the small urbanized inland site for foraging as no nesting habitat occurs onsite or nearby in the agricultural and urban landscape.

5.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

5.1 SUFFICIENCY OF BIOLOGICAL DATA

The DWE field survey and review of available background information are sufficient to: 1.) adequately establish existing conditions of the project site and context in the landscape and land use mosaic; 2.) determine the occurrence or lack of suitable habitat for special-status plant or wildlife species; 3.) determine no waters of the U.S./State occur onsite; and 4.) adequately determine the potential significance of proposed development of the site and project impacts on biological resources.

5.2 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Botanical Resources – Taking into account the 0.42-acre City well facility and yard, the proposed project would allow for the development of 6.43 acres of disturbed/ruderal habitat supporting a low-diversity non-native annual grassland habitat for future undetermined light industrial uses. No native habitat or natural communities of special concern occur on the project site so none would be impacted. No special-status plant species are expected to occur in the disturbed/ruderal habitat. Therefore, the rezoning and future light industrial development of the 6.95-acre ruderal/disturbed/developed site of mostly non-native grasses and forbs would be ***considered a less than significant impact on botanical resources.***

General Wildlife Resources – There are no wildlife movement corridors across the site that is surrounded by agricultural lands and abutted to urban development. The network of nearby County flood control ditches may provide wildlife dispersal and migration corridors for a variety of local wildlife species adapted to the agricultural/urban setting (i.e., racoons, opossum, skunk). However, as noted above, no ditches are on the project site and no project activities are proposed within the highly maintained ditches. This site does not contain any features which would provide a native wildlife nursery site that would attract animals or other migratory species. ***Therefore, impacts on general wildlife resources would be less than significant.***

Nesting Birds – Potential but very low quality nesting habitat for ground nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the California Fish and Game Code (CFGC Sections 3503/3503.5) occurs in the ruderal grassland habitat on the project site. Project construction may result in direct impacts to nesting bird species, should active nests be present at the time of vegetation clearance. In addition, potentially suitable nesting habitat for a wide range of birds exists within 500 feet of the site. No direct impacts to nesting birds or their habitat outside of the site are expected. Potential impacts to nesting birds could occur only if individuals were to be present during construction and be exposed to potential disruption of nesting activities from construction activities. ***This would be considered a potentially significant impact on nesting birds.***

California Red-Legged Frog – While there is a potential for CRLF to occur in the County flood control ditches when water is present and retained golf course pond on the FedEx site, the project site does not support any aquatic habitat and only marginal upland dispersal habitat with little refuge opportunities. No loss of CRLF habitat would result from project development of the site. No designated critical habitat occurs over the project site, so none would be affected. Potential impacts to this species would occur if individuals were present during construction and were exposed to vehicle and heavy equipment traffic. ***This would be considered a potentially significant impact.***

5.3 RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

Given existing conditions within the existing disturbed/developed project site as documented by the field reconnaissance survey, implementation of the proposed Project land use change and rezone will result in less than significant impacts on botanical and general wildlife resources, as well as waters of the U.S./State/wetland habitat resources. Therefore, no mitigation measures are recommended. The future site development following the rezone may have potentially significant impacts on nesting birds and the California red-legged frog. The following mitigation measures are recommended to avoid impacts on these biological resources.

BIO-1: Nesting Birds Impact Avoidance and Minimization

The following actions are recommended to avoid potential impacts to nesting birds:

- A nesting bird survey should be conducted by a qualified biologist no more than two weeks prior to the onset of construction activities. The nesting bird survey should be conducted within any and all suitable habitat that occurs within the project site, within 300 feet of its immediate vicinity for raptors, and 100 feet for all other bird species (as is feasible). If no active nests are found, no further mitigation would be required.
- If active bird nests are found, then an appropriately sized avoidance buffer should be established by the biologist and all construction work within the buffer should be delayed until after the nesting season has ended or until the biologist has determined that the adults and young are no longer reliant on the nest site for survival.
- Limits of construction to avoid the nest shall be established in the field with flagging and stakes or construction fencing. Construction personnel shall be instructed on the sensitivity of the area.

BIO-2 California Red-legged Frog Impact Avoidance

The following actions are recommended to avoid potential impacts to CRLF:

- A pre-construction survey of the proposed project site for CLRF shall be conducted by a qualified biologist within 48 hours prior to the start of project construction to confirm this species is not present in the work area.
- A qualified biological monitor familiar with CRLF will monitor all initial site disturbance (clearing, grubbing, rough grading).
- In the event the pre-construction survey or the onsite monitor identifies the presence of individuals of CRLF prior to or during construction, then all work shall stop until the CRLF leave the site of their own accord. If CRLF do not move off site on their own, the project proponent shall comply with all relevant requirements of take authorization under the federal Endangered Species Act prior to resuming project activities.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings described above establishing the existing conditions of biological resources within the project site and implementation of the recommended mitigation measures to avoid impacts on nesting birds and the CRLF, the proposed project would not result in any substantial adverse effects on biological, botanical, or wetland habitat resources. ***Therefore, direct, and indirect project impacts on biological resources would be considered to be less than significant.***

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APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1 – Regional Location & CTS Pond Map
Google Earth May 2023
North

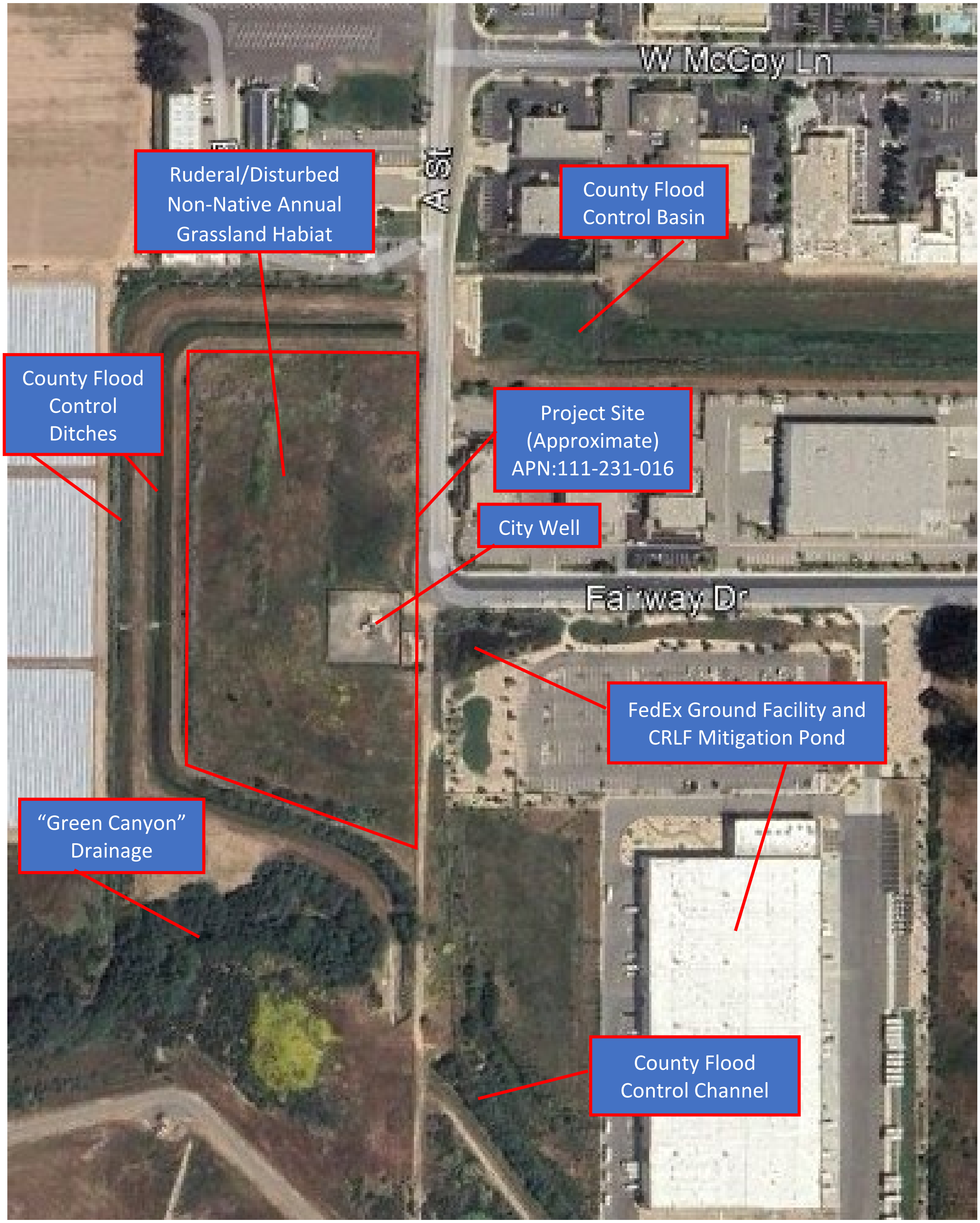

Figure 2 – Vicinity Location and Existing Conditions Map
Google Earth May 2023
North

Photo 1: View north at non-native ruderal/disturbed grassland of project site and fenced City well site (arrow). **8/28/2023**

Photo 2: View south along 'A' Street east border of the site at non-nnative ruderal annual grassland habitat and fenced City well (arrow). **8/28/2023**

Photo 3: View southeast at mowed non-native annual grassland habitat, fenced City well site, & offsite FedEx Ground facility (arrrow). **8/28/2023**

Photo 4: View S. at mustard dominated grassland, pines on south border, & offsite willow riparian of "Green Canyon" to the south. **8/28/2023**

FIGURE 3 – REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 5: View north along 'A' Street at disced ruderal/disturbed non-native annual grassland habitat and urbanized edge to the east. **8/28/2023**

Photo 6: View south along east project site border of non-native annual grassland, fenced City well site, and development to the east. **8/28/2023**

Photo 7: View southeast at City well site developed area. **8/28/2023**

Photo 8: View south at County flood control ditch (arrow) offsite to the west of the project site. **8/28/2023**

FIGURE 3 – REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOGRAPHS