

**Agenda Item 9(a)**  
**SMMC**  
**6/1/09**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**(Initial Study)**  
**CITY OF SANTA CLARITA**



**Project Title and Master Case Number:**

Sierra Crossing  
Master Case No. 08-033  
Conditional Use Permit No. 08-005  
Minor Use Permit No. 08-008  
Oak Tree Permit No. 08-006  
Initial Study No. 08-003

**Lead Agency name & address:**

City of Santa Clarita  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 302  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

**Contact Person and phone number:**

Ben Jarvis, Associate Planner  
City of Santa Clarita  
Community Development Department  
(661) 255-4330

**Project Location:**

The proposed project is located at 23300 Newhall Avenue (formerly known as San Fernando Road) in the City of Santa Clarita, in the County of Los Angeles. The project site is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Newhall Avenue and Sierra Highway, west of the Antelope Valley (SR-14) Freeway.

**Applicant's name and address:**

SFXS Partners, LLC  
24933 San Fernando Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91321

**Property Owner and address:**

SFXS Partners, LLC  
24933 San Fernando Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91321

**General Plan Designation:**

Community Commercial

**Zoning Designation(s):**

Community Commercial Planned Development Overlay (CC(PD)).

## Project Description and Setting:

### Regional Setting

The project site is located at a southern gateway entry to Santa Clarita, adjacent to State Route 14 (Antelope Valley Freeway). The area currently has limited, freeway-oriented commercial uses and is located in the City's Newhall Community. Newhall was founded in 1876 and was the first location of permanent settlement in the Santa Clarita Valley. The town grew in conjunction with the railroad and oil industries and was later the setting for motion picture and filming ranches in the early 1900s. As a community, Newhall has retained its identity as an old western town. This identity is reflected in local architecture as well as cultural resources such as the Western Walk of Stars and the William S. Hart Regional Park. As the oldest community in the Santa Clarita Valley, Newhall is home to numerous historic resources. Historic areas are primarily located in the downtown area along Main Street (a portion of the former San Fernando Road), at Heritage Junction located within William S. Hart Park, and in nearby canyons and neighborhoods.

Recently, there have been significant changes in Newhall as part of a major community redevelopment effort. As part of the Downtown Newhall Specific Plan and the City's Beautification Master Plan, San Fernando Road was renamed to better reflect the road's relationship to the local area. The roadway portion through downtown Newhall was renamed "Main Street" and now serves as the backbone for downtown redevelopment. The segment north of 11<sup>th</sup> Street northward to the intersection of Magic Mountain Parkway is now known as "Railroad Avenue." The name change reflects the proximity of the roadway to the Metrolink train tracks and also serves as a logical extension of the existing Railroad Avenue in downtown Newhall. The remaining portion of San Fernando Road, the segment that runs between the Antelope Valley Freeway and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, was renamed "Newhall Avenue." This provides greater cohesiveness within Newhall itself and also provides regional visibility for travelers on the Antelope Valley Freeway. Historically, San Fernando Road was the primary route between the San Joaquin Valley and the Los Angeles Basin. In the early and mid-twentieth century, the intersection of today's Newhall Avenue and Sierra Highway served as a northern gateway to Southern California. The intersection was the literal junction where travelers either headed north toward Sacramento and San Francisco, or northeast to Nevada, the Rocky Mountains, and the east coast. Modern freeways have routed traffic away from the area and the Newhall Avenue/Sierra Highway intersection. While the intersection remains one of the busiest within the Santa Clarita Valley, it no longer functions as the northern gateway to Southern California.

Newhall development consists of a mix of uses, including large lot single-family homes, high-density apartment communities, industrial uses in Railroad Canyon, and traditional Main Street commercial development in downtown. The area immediately surrounding the subject property consists of freeway commercial uses, a mobile home park, a movie production storage lot, a cemetery, vacant land, and the Antelope Valley Freeway.

### Project Setting

The 10.28-acre project site is located within the City of Santa Clarita and comprises the following five parcels: Assessor Parcel Nos. 2827-005-014, 015, 027, 028, and, 034. Originally, the property reflected the rolling topography of the area; however, the site is now generally flat and has been substantially graded and disturbed. The property is routinely mowed and grubbed for weed control and fire prevention. The property is not located on a hillside. The eastern property boundary is the former centerline of US 6, the original highway that connected Los Angeles to Provincetown on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The natural drainage through the property was channelized when the highway was constructed in the early Twentieth Century. More extensive grading occurred when Sierra Highway was constructed in the early 1900s and then widened in the 1930s. Sierra Highway comprises the western boundary of the property. The property is bounded to the north by Newhall Avenue (formerly San Fernando Road), and to the south by other commercial property that is currently used as a vehicle storage yard. A residential structure was built on the site in the 1940s but was demolished sometime before 1992. Only remnants of concrete foundations and steps remain. The foundations have no historic or cultural value.

Newhall Creek runs in a northwesterly direction along the property's eastern edge. The creek was directed into a partially-manufactured gully during highway construction in the early 1900s and has been altered significantly from its original course and situation on the property. Runoff from Eternal Valley Cemetery and Sierra Highway enters the gully at the south end of the site and joins the Elsmere Canyon drainage as it emerges from a concrete culvert under the former US 6 right-of-way. Water then flows northward and crosses under Newhall Avenue in a box culvert. When the creek

emerges on the other side of the intersection of Newhall Avenue and Sierra Highway, it converges with the Whitney Canyon drainage and continues flowing northwesterly toward the South Fork of the Santa Clara River. The creek channel has a soft-bottom and lush vegetation. As part of the proposed project, 300' of the creek's northern end would be covered to create parking and retail space. On August 28, 2008, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) sent the applicant a draft Streambed Alteration Agreement (#1600-2008-0080-R5 Revision 1) that reflects the proposed modification of this drainage. The United States Army Corps of Engineers also has jurisdiction over this drainage, as does the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Permits with those agencies are pending.

Project maps are found in Exhibits 1 and 2. Exhibits 3 through 18 show photos of the project site and the surrounding land uses.

### Project Description

The Applicant is proposing the development of a five-building retail, office, and hotel development in the Community Commercial Planned Development Overlay Zone in the City of Santa Clarita. The proposed project consists of a total of approximately 99,000 square feet (98,900) of building area. The commercial space will be distributed between five buildings. Two buildings will be single story, two buildings will have two stories and will be constructed over a subterranean parking deck, and the last building will be a four story hotel. The project will have a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of .22. This falls below the limit of .375 FAR potentially allowed in the Community Commercial zone (167,924 square feet). The project consists of the following improvements:

- One (1) Four-story hotel that would not exceed 55' in height and contain 55,200 square-feet;
- Two office/retail buildings comprising 31,120 square-feet (approximate), that would be 48' feet tall, would share a common roof and would be built over an underground parking structure (one building would be 16,420 square-feet the other would be 14,700 square feet);
- One (1) 7,000 square-foot stand-alone restaurant pad; and
- One (1) 5,584 square-foot multi-tenant building with a drive-through lane.

Both the hotel and restaurant pad would be built at a later time; only the multi-tenant building and the two office/commercial buildings would be constructed in the near term. The restaurant pad and hotel would require a Development Review Permit but would not require a public hearing before the Planning Commission provided that a development application is received within applicable timelines.

The project will require the following discretionary actions of the City of Santa Clarita:

- Conditional Use Permit for development in the Planned Development Overlay and also for buildings exceeding 35' in height;
- Minor Use Permit for a drive-through lane and dirt-hauling to import 46,000 cubic yards of fill; and
- Oak Tree Permit to allow for the removal of eight (8) oak trees, permit for four (4) oak tree encroachments, and also to provide mitigation measures for the remaining 32 oak trees on-site, including five (5) heritage specimens (there are currently 40 oak trees on the project site, not counting an oak tree in the public right-of-way that will be removed by the city).

The proposed project requires 385 parking spaces. A total of 434 parking spaces are shown on the site plan, including 145 subterranean spaces located beneath the commercial/office buildings.

### Project Site Access and Infrastructure

The project site will take access to public streets via two driveways on Sierra Highway and a single driveway on Newhall Avenue. The southern-most entrance on Sierra Highway would be signalized and would permit traffic to turn right or left into or out of the project. The other entrance on Sierra Highway, as well as the entrance on Newhall Avenue, would provide a "right in/right out" configuration. Each driveway is at least 28' wide and meets the City and Fire Department

standards. Surface parking will be located across the project site and a subterranean parking deck would be located off the main driveway that connects Sierra Highway and Newhall Avenue. There will be three stand-alone trash enclosures and a dedicated trash and loading area for the restaurant pad. There would be multiple outdoor break/eating areas, at least one per building. All of the buildings would be linked together by a cohesive, prominent, pedestrian path/walkway. The project is being developed in a manner that will allow for access to the vacant parcels east of the site, between the subject property and the Antelope Valley Freeway, should that land ever be developed.

#### Project Grading and Drainage

The project site slopes gently from the south to the north, is not located on a hillside, and has an average cross-slope of 6%. The project site ranges in elevation from 1,428' above sea level at the south end of the site near Sierra Highway to 1,374' where Newhall Creek flows into the culvert under Newhall Avenue. Approximately 80% of the project site will be graded (8.2 acres). The proposed project will require 7,000 cubic yards of cut and 53,000 cubic yards of fill. The difference in dirt totals will require the import of 46,000 cubic yards of fill. This amount of dirt hauling will require a Minor Use Permit.

The existing site drainage includes a soft-bottom channel that conveys water from the Elsmere Canyon and Sierra Highway drainages. These waters converge at the south end of the project site to form Newhall Creek. Newhall Creek flows northwesterly across the property and under Newhall Avenue where it joins with drainage from Whitey Canyon. Portions of the project site are within a floodplain (see Section VIII). In order to protect the project from flood waters, the proposed project includes the construction of a flood wall and extension of an existing culvert. The flood wall would be constructed along the west side of the existing natural channel, along the edge of the California Department of Fish and Game's jurisdiction. In addition, the existing double reinforced concrete box culvert would be extended upstream into the property approximately 300 feet. The 8' x 22' box culvert extension would be constructed in Newhall Creek and would connect to the existing culvert under Newhall Avenue. The culvert extension will affect 300 linear feet of the Newhall Creek and approximately 0.11-acre of "waters of the United States." Avoidance and minimization measures for project impacts associated with the extension of the culvert are included in the biological assessment, wetland delineation report, and diversion plan as discussed in Section IV-Biological Resources. Mitigation would consist of on-site creation of riparian habitat (0.34-acres), restoration/enhancement of riparian habitat (2.79-acres), and preservation of riparian habitat (3.13-acres). The applicant would provide any additional mitigation required in order to satisfy California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) requirements, as part of obtaining a required Streambed Alteration Permit for the project.

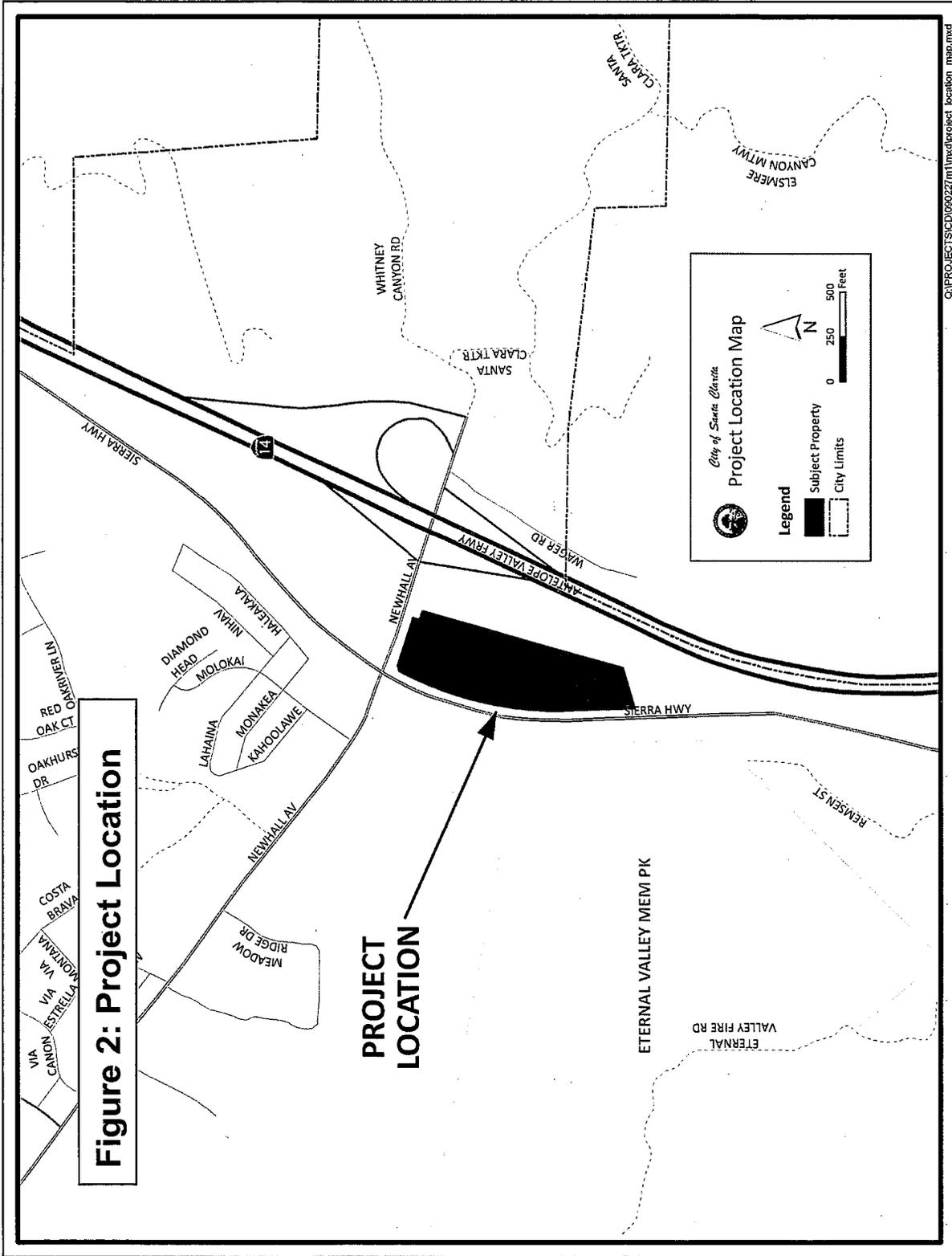
#### **Surrounding Land Uses:**

- North:** A fast-food restaurant (Carl's Jr.) is located directly north of the project site, across Newhall Avenue. This land is zoned CC(PD).
- South:** Industrial/Commercial use (an auto storage yard) and vacant land (CC(PD)).
- East:** Vacant land with the Antelope Valley Freeway and undeveloped wilderness area beyond (CC(PD)).
- West:** Various commercial uses including a cemetery, an auto repair business, gas station, and a vehicle storage lot. All of these uses are in the CC(PD) zone except for the cemetery which is located in the Open Space (OS) zone.

#### **Other public agencies whose approval is required:**

Los Angeles County Fire Department  
California Department of Fish & Game  
Army Corps of Engineers  
Regional Water Quality Control Board





**Figure 2: Project Location**

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