

Environmental Review

Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), many of the applications processed by the Planning Division require environmental review to evaluate the potential environmental impacts from a proposed project. A formal evaluation of potential environmental impacts is conducted through preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA). Certain projects that do not have the potential to cause significant environmental impacts may be exempt from an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The need for an EA for different types of planning application are listed in the table below:

EA Required	EA <u>may be</u> Required (May qualify for exemption)
General Plan Amendment	Building Site Approval
Subdivisions in rural areas	Grading Approval
Major subdivisions for five or more lots within an urban service area	Use Permit, Architecture and Site Approval, Design Review, Special Permit, Variance
Surface Mining Reclamation Plan	Zone Change
	Minor Subdivisions (four or less lots) within an urban service area

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

An Environmental Assessment provides for: (1) the preparation of an **Initial Study** and (2) determination by the Planning Division whether this project may or may not have a significant impact on the environment. The Initial Study is prepared by the Planning Division staff or by consultants under contract with the County. If the Initial Study shows that the project will not have any significant environmental impacts, the Planning Division will publish either a **Negative Declaration (ND)** or **Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)**. Per CEQA, these documents require a 20- to 30-day public review period, after which the project can be considered for approval. Typically, the process of preparing an Initial Study and publication of an ND or MND will take 60 to 90 days.

Certain large projects that would likely have significant environmental impacts require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). An EIR is prepared by consultants under contract with the County and requires a minimum 45-day public comment period. Typically, the process of preparing an EIR will take 6-9 months.

EXEMPTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For applications where an EA may be required, the applicant may file a *Petition for Exemption from Environmental Assessment* if the proposed project does not have impacts to environmental resources as described below:

- Biology
 - Work within a watercourse, wetland, or riparian area
 - Impacts or loss of habitat for endangered, threatened or rare wildlife or plants
 - Removal of five (5) or more native trees (12 inches in diameter, or 6 inches in diameter within the –h1 historic district)
 - Removal of ½ acre or more of oak woodland
- Historic
 - Demolition or modification of a historic resource
- Topography / Total Earthwork
 - Construction in area with steep topography – (average slope of > 30%)
 - Result in import or export of over 2,500 cubic yards of fill material or include total earthwork of more than 5,000 cubic yards (cut and fill, combined).
- Non-Residential
 - Generate significant new traffic
 - Create significant outdoor noise (outdoor amplified music, industrial activity)
 - Use of hazardous materials
 - Development on agricultural lands (A-40, A-20 Zoning Districts)

PRIOR USE OF CEQA DOCUMENT

In some instances, a previously completed Environmental Assessment may have evaluated all environmental impacts from a proposed project and additional Environmental Review is not necessary. In this instance, an applicant may apply for Petition for Use of Prior CEQA Document.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FORMS

The following forms are used during the Environmental Review process:

- (1) **Environmental Information Form:** To be completed by all applicants.

The Environmental Information Form contains a list of questions relating to existing site conditions and the proposed improvements. A completed Environmental Information Form is required as part of all applications listed above and can be used to determine if a project will be exempt from Environmental Review. Planning staff will conduct a site visit and check sources to ensure the accuracy of the answers provided on the Environmental Information Form. Incomplete or inaccurate answers will result in a delay in the processing of your application until the required information is submitted and declared complete.

- (2) **Petition for Exemption from Environmental Assessment:** As described above, certain types of projects may be eligible to be exempt from an environmental assessment if the project does not have any potential environmental impacts.

In order to determine if the project may be exempt from an Environmental Assessment, the applicant must complete the screening checklist on the Petition for Exemption, along with the Environmental Information Form, which will assist in answering the checklist questions. If the project involves a planning application type (see table above) that allows for an

exemption and will not result in any potential environmental impacts, as shown in the checklist and confirmed by County staff, an Environmental Assessment will not be required.

- (3) **Petition for Use of Prior CEQA Document:** The applicant should complete this form only if a previous Negative Declaration (ND) or Environmental Impact Report (EIR) adequately addresses the impacts of the proposed project and (a) no substantial changes have occurred or (b) no new information of substantial importance has become available since the preparation of the previous document. If you believe your project qualifies, complete and sign the "Petition for Use of Prior CEQA Document" form, and file and pay the associated fees. If your petition is not approved, you will be required to file for an environmental assessment.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Submittal of the Environmental Information Form must be accompanied by labeled photographs of the site (2 sets) that include all existing structures on site. Photos should be affixed to an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper labeled with a description of the subject matter (e.g., "building site," "neighborhood to the south," etc.), and should include the potential building site, unique features of the property, overall view of the property and view from the site of the surrounding area. Photographs of existing structures must be taken from at least two directions for each structure. The location where the photos are taken and the direction of view shall be shown on the site plan.