

CHAPTER 4

Environmental Analysis

4.0 Introduction to the Environmental Analysis

This draft program environmental impact report (EIR) evaluates and documents the physical environmental effects that would potentially occur with the implementation of the proposed Housing Element Update (HEU) and Stanford Community Plan (SCP) update (collectively, the “project”) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 21000, et seq., and the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines), California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15000, et seq.). Sections 4.1 through 4.17 consider the regulatory background, existing conditions, and environmental impacts associated with implementation of the project, as well as mitigation measures to reduce the impact of project-specific and cumulative environmental impacts, and the level of significance of impacts following mitigation. This EIR is a Program EIR, as provided for in CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. Section 15168(a) of the CEQA Guidelines states that a Program EIR is appropriate for projects which are “... a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either:

1. Geographically;
2. A logical part in the chain of contemplated actions;
3. In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or
4. As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulating authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.”

Future discretionary actions that would be facilitated by the HEU’s adoption, particularly those related to the development of housing, would require additional assessment to determine consistency with the analysis provided in this Program EIR. The potential future actions would also be subject to the mitigation measures established in this Program EIR, unless superseded by a subsequent environmental document prepared to analyze environmental impacts not foreseen in this Program EIR.

4.0.1 Definitions of Terms Used in this EIR

This EIR uses a number of terms that have specific meaning under CEQA. Among the most important of the terms used in the EIR are those that refer to the significance of environmental impacts. The following terms are used to describe environmental effects of the project:

- **Significance Thresholds:** A set of standards used by the lead agency to determine whether an impact would be considered significant. (See CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.7.) Standards of significance used in this EIR were derived from Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines unless otherwise noted. In determining the level of significance, the analysis assumes that the project would comply with relevant federal, State, and local regulations and ordinances.
- **Significant Impact:** A project impact is considered significant if the project would result in a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment. Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project-related physical change compared to specified significance criteria. A significant impact is defined as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance.”¹
- **Less-than-Significant Impact:** A project impact is considered less than significant when the physical change caused by the project would not exceed the applicable significance criterion.
- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact:** A project impact is considered significant and unavoidable if it would result in a substantial adverse physical change in the environment that cannot be feasibly avoided or mitigated to a less-than-significant level.
- **Cumulative Impact:** Under CEQA, a cumulative impact refers to “two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.”² A significant cumulative impact is one in which the cumulative adverse physical change would exceed the applicable significance criterion and the project’s contribution is “cumulatively considerable.”³
- **Mitigation Measure:** A mitigation measure is an action that could be taken that would avoid or reduce the magnitude of a significant impact. Section 15370 of the CEQA Guidelines defines mitigation as:
 - a. Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;
 - b. Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree of magnitude of the action and its implementation;
 - c. Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
 - d. Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and

¹ CEQA Guidelines, Section 15382.

² CEQA Guidelines, Section 15355.

³ CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130(a).

- e. Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments, including through permanent protection of such resources in the form of conservation easements.

4.0.2 Section Format

Chapter 4 is divided into technical sections (e.g., Section 4.1, *Aesthetics*) that present the physical environmental setting, regulatory setting, significance criteria, methodology and assumptions, and impacts on the environment for each environmental resource issue area. Where required, potentially feasible mitigation measures are identified to lessen or avoid potentially significant impacts. Each section includes an analysis of project-specific and cumulative impacts for each issue area.

The technical environmental sections each begin with a description of the project's **environmental setting** and the **regulatory setting** as it pertains to a particular issue. The environmental setting provides a point of reference for assessing the environmental impacts of the project and project alternatives. The environmental setting discussion addresses the conditions that existed at the time of issuance on the EIR's Notice of Preparation (NOP) and prior to implementation of the project. This setting establishes the baseline by which the project and project alternatives are measured for environmental impacts. The regulatory setting presents relevant information about federal, state, regional, and/or local laws, regulations, plans or policies that pertain to the environmental resources addressed in each section.

Next, each section presents **significance criteria**, which identify the standards used by the local jurisdiction to determine the significance of the environmental effects of the project.

A **methods and assumptions** description in each section presents the analytical methods and key assumptions used in the evaluation of effects of the project and is followed by an **impacts and mitigation** discussion. The impact and mitigation portion of each section includes impact statements, prefaced by a number in bold-faced type. An explanation of each impact is followed by an analysis of its significance. The subsection concludes with a statement that the impact, following implementation of the mitigation measure(s) and/or the continuation of existing policies and regulations, would be reduced to a less-than-significant level or would remain significant and unavoidable.

The analysis of environmental impacts considers both the construction and operational phases associated with implementation of the project. As required by Section 15126.2(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, direct, indirect, short-term, long-term, onsite, and/or off-site impacts are addressed, as appropriate, for the environmental issue area being analyzed. Under CEQA, economic or social changes by themselves are not considered to be significant impacts but may be considered in linking the implementation of a project to a physical environmental change, or in determining whether the physical change is significant.⁴

⁴ A "significant effect on the environment" is defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15382.

Where enforcement exists and compliance can be reasonably anticipated, this EIR assumes that the project would meet the requirements of applicable laws and other regulations.

Mitigation measures pertinent to each individual impact, if available, appear after the impact discussion section. The magnitude of reduction of an impact and the potential effect of that reduction in magnitude on the significance of the impact is also disclosed. An example of the format is shown below.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact 4.X-1: Impact statement.

A discussion of the potential impact of the project on the resource is introduced in paragraph form. To identify impacts that may be site- or project element-specific, where appropriate, the discussion differentiates between construction effects and operational effects. Impacts of the HEU and SCP are also discussed separately where appropriate. A statement of the level of significance before application of any mitigation measures is provided in bold.

Mitigation Measure

If the impact is determined to be less than significant, the text will say, “None required.” If the impact is determined to be significant or potentially significant, mitigation with be included in the following format:

Mitigation Measure 4.X-1:

Recommended mitigation measure, numbered in consecutive order.

Where appropriate, one or more potentially feasible mitigation measures are described. If necessary, a statement of the degree to which the available mitigation measure(s) would reduce the significance of the impact is included in **bold**.

Cumulative Impacts

An analysis of cumulative impacts follows the project-specific impacts and mitigation measures evaluation in each section. A cumulative impact consists of an impact that is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects causing related impacts.⁵

In this case, the HEU itself is a plan-level document which provides for increased residential development within the unincorporated County across a relatively broad geography, including potential housing development that exceeds the regional forecast included for the County in

⁵ CEQA Guidelines Section 15355.

regional plans (Plan Bay Area 2040)⁶ and the County's transportation model. Indeed, the identification of housing sites as part of the HEU is intended to plan for and encourage housing which would be developed as part of numerous separate projects in various unincorporated areas of the County.

The nature of the project does not alter the need to analyze cumulative impacts, and consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(b)(1), regional growth projections prepared for Plan Bay Area 2040 and contained in the County's transportation model are used for the analysis of VMT and related topics such as air quality, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and noise.

With respect to more localized cumulative effects, the cumulative analysis in this EIR considers the effects of the proposed HEU alongside ABAG's 2040 growth projections as described above, and also includes other pending and reasonably foreseeable residential projects within a one-mile radius of the HEU's opportunity sites. Since the HEU's opportunity sites are distributed across a relatively large geography, this approach was adopted because it would more accurately assess the HEU's cumulative effects, which will primarily be experienced in the general area of those sites. A substantial amount of residential development is currently in the review and approval pipeline within the South Bay region (many tens of thousands of units); if the cumulative analysis were to assess a broader geography (say, the entire County or the entire City of San José), the HEU's effects would appear to be substantially diluted, thus rendering the analysis hollow. The County has thus elected to consider a more localized approach, with the aim of identifying the cumulative effects of the HEU's implementation that area residents are reasonably likely to experience. The analysis also focuses on the effects of the HEU in combination with pending and reasonably foreseeable residential projects only, rather than commercial and other project types. This is because residential projects often create similar and therefore comparable effects. This approach will be followed throughout the EIR, and when it varies for specific topical issues, these variances will be discussed at the front of each topical cumulative impact analysis, along with a rationale explaining the variance.

Table 4.0-1 identifies pending and reasonably foreseeable residential projects in proximity to the County's HEU housing sites. The listed projects are located within a one-mile radius of HEU housing sites located within the City of San José and the Stanford University campus. Necessarily, the one-mile radius of the Stanford University sites includes areas within the Cities of Menlo Park and Palo Alto, and pending and reasonably foreseeable residential projects within those jurisdictions are therefore identified as well. For reasons of manageability the residential projects listed are those that include 20 or more residential units.

⁶ The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and ABAG recently adopted an updated plan, Plan Bay Area 2050. However, it will take up to three years for the plan's growth forecast to be integrated into MTC's transportation model, after which updates to each county's transportation model will take place. For these reasons, and for purposes of this EIR, Plan Bay Area 2040 is the regional plan which will form the basis for long range population, housing and employment projections in this EIR.

**TABLE 4.0-1
CUMULATIVE PAST, PRESENT, AND PROBABLE FUTURE RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS IN PROXIMITY TO
THE COUNTY'S HOUSING OPPORTUNITY SITES**

Project Name and/or Location	Project Characteristics	Status	Total Residential Units
City of San José^a			
14200 Union Avenue (Cambrian Plaza)	Mixed-use with hotel, office, retail, and 280 multi-family units and 84 townhomes	Approved	364
555 South Winchester (Winchester Ranch)	Planned Development Rezoning for up to 687 residential units on a 15.69 gross acre site	Under construction	687
329 Page Street	Construction of a six-story building with 82 residential units	Under construction	82
1530 West San Carlos	One 7-story mixed use apartment building and one 5 story affordable housing building, with a total of 202 residential units and 15,582 square feet of commercial space	Approved	202
Total Units (San José)			1,335
City of Menlo Park^b			
500 El Camino Real (Middle Plaza)	215 residential units and retail, office, and restaurant uses	Under construction	215
333 Ravenswood Avenue (Parkline)	400 residential units and office and retail uses	Pending	400
Total Units (Menlo Park)			615
City of Palo Alto^c			
955 Alma Street	Mixed-use project with 36 micro-studio residences	Pending	36
2951 El Camino Real	Mixed-use project with 119 residential units	Pending	119
3001 El Camino Real	Multi-family affordable with 129 units	Pending	129
70 Encina Avenue	Multi-family residential with 20 units	Pending	20
600 University Avenue	Mixed-use project with 65 units	Pending	65
1451-1601 California Avenue	Mixed single-family and multi-family project on 17 acres	Approved	180
231 Grant Avenue	Multi-family development with 110 units	Approved	110
Total Units (Palo Alto)			659
Stanford University^d			
None	NA	NA	0
Total Units (Stanford University)			0
Total Units (all jurisdictions)			2,609

SOURCES:

- a City of San José, Key Economic Development Projects. Available at: <https://csj.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=c4051ffa5efb4f4dbf8b6d8ec29cfabd>. Accessed March 31, 2023.
- b City of Menlo Park, Current and Pending Development. Available at: <https://menlopark.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=da1aa9a523ce4836988c2339a9364a84>. Accessed March 31, 2023.
- c City of Palo Alto, Pending and Approved Projects. Available at: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Current-Planning/Pending-and-Approved-Projects>. Accessed March 30, 2023.
- d Stanford University, 2023. Stanford currently has no large residential projects in its development pipeline.

As noted above, where a cumulative impact is significant when compared to existing or baseline conditions, the analysis must address whether the project's contribution to the significant cumulative impact is "considerable." If the contribution of the project is considerable, then the EIR must identify potentially feasible measures that could avoid or reduce the magnitude of the project's contribution to a less-than-considerable level. If the project's contribution is not considerable, it is considered less than significant and no mitigation of the project contribution is required.⁷ The cumulative impacts analysis is formatted in the same manner as the project-specific impacts, as shown above.

⁷ CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(a)(2).

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