
2.2 APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

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The proposed project is analyzed at both a Countywide level and an Area Plan level. At the Countywide, or cumulative, level, the whole of the project is compared to the existing General Plan and zoning code to evaluate the overall degree of change and environmental impact. The EIR then provides a separate section that focuses on the changes specific to each Area Plan.

There is nothing in the proposed project that would materially affect the historic and projected population or employment growth rates of Riverside County. The proposed changes in land use designation and zone classifications are intended to create an opportunity for different housing densities and encourage a mix of certain types of commercial uses with residential development. However, to provide a conservative environmental analysis, the EIR assumes full buildout of both the General Plan and the proposed project. Because the theoretical buildout assumptions are calculated without adjusting for specific project design, site characteristics, or market constraints, the resulting number of housing units and the associated population and traffic impacts are considered worst case and actual growth and related impacts would be substantially less.

This EIR includes the existing federal, state, and local regulatory framework that applies to all development regardless of location, and discusses the Countywide impacts attributed to the proposed project. A regulation specific to an Area Plan that would address a potential environmental impact is discussed in the respective Area Plan section. The EIR includes examples of how compliance with a regulation or permit will address the potential impact. Most of the impacts associated with the proposed project are addressed through compliance with existing regulations, permits, and fee programs. This EIR concludes that even with the existing regulations, some of the impacts may not be reduced to a less than significant level.

As there is no physical development proposed with the project and foreseeable environmental consequences related to this type of planning-level project are lacking, the environmental analysis is conducted at the policy level and only provides a general programmatic-level of review as is appropriate under CEQA. Sufficient details in order to formulate more site-specific environmental analysis in a first-tier planning-level EIR are often limited, and CEQA allows more detailed analysis and mitigation at a later date with projects that are more limited in their geographic scope, provided such a deferral does not prevent adequate identification of any potential future environmental effects that may occur (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15152(c)).

Some of the projects envisioned by the new zoning classifications will require discretionary action, such as a conditional use permit or parcel map, that will trigger project-specific CEQA. When this occurs, the CEQA process will focus on the site, design, and impacts of the specific project and rely upon this EIR to mitigate impacts that are cumulative (Countywide) in nature. The project-specific CEQA analysis can take into account design intended to avoid or minimize impact(s) to sensitive resources. It is normal for project-level CEQA analysis to result in mitigation measures and permit requirements linked specifically to the site-specific project design and operation.

For projects allowed by right in either the Mixed Use Area (MUA) or Highest Density Residential (R-7) zone classifications, California Government Code Section 65583.2i creates a statutory exemption from subsequent CEQA analysis for projects on property identified in the General Plan Housing Element as intending to meet the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA). With the program-level scope of the proposed project, this statutory exemption precludes the type of project-specific analysis that would result from CEQA. As there are no pending or foreseeable development projects associated with the proposed project, there is no site development or design information that could be analyzed at the project level. Creating development assumptions for each of the over 5,000 acres would be too speculative. Further, there is no certainty that any of the properties will be developed, or when the development might occur.

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Typically, a CEQA analysis and determination is valid for between two and five years. As the proposed project has an eight-year or greater buildout timeline, if project assumptions were made for each of the rezoning sites and included in this EIR, the analysis would need to be updated if development failed to occur within the two- to five-year window. Further, some of the sites may have constraints that could either be avoided by project design or eliminated through attainment of the appropriate permits.

The County development review process, as well as state and federal permitting agencies, encourages avoidance of sensitive resources, and requires demonstration of compliance through the CEQA process. While this avoidance can be demonstrated through the site plan review process, the analysis of the purpose and means of avoidance is typically found in the CEQA analysis. To address the inability to require project-level CEQA compliance for by right projects, the proposed zone classifications require that the applicant submit evidence of compliance with all County, state, and federal regulations as part of the application for site plan approval. This both ensures that the site is designed appropriately and provides the County with the ability to condition the project to address any off-site improvements needed to support the project (e.g., traffic, water, wastewater, utilities).

This EIR assumes that either subsequent CEQA analysis will be required for each discretionary project, or that the provisions of the new zone classifications will ensure documentation of compliance with County, state, and federal regulations.

2.2.2 EXISTING REGULATIONS

In addition to existing federal and state regulations, Riverside County implements a comprehensive set of development standards and permit requirements and has a process for the consideration of all development proposals. Nearly every aspect of a development project is regulated by an existing ordinance or policy. Only project-level issues unique to the individual development site and project design would need to be reviewed at the time of application. The County's design review process ensures that the site-specific issues are addressed. In addition, all are required to comply with CEQA and must complete the site-specific design environmental analysis as part of the development plan review. The project review process includes service districts and resource agencies that are part of the development review team. This EIR assumes that these other districts and agencies will continue to inform the County of their development requirements, update their plans to provide services, and enforce their regulations.

Section 3.3 of this EIR provides a brief summary of the requirements of the regulatory process that apply to all projects throughout the County. Where specific regulations or policies would apply in any of the Area Plans, they are discussed in the relevant Area Plan section. Because it is reasonable to assume that existing regulations will continue to be implemented and enforced, they are not duplicated as mitigation measures in this EIR.

2.2.3 PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

With few exceptions, the proposed project would increase the number of housing units (density) allowed on certain parcels that have been identified for development in the Riverside County General Plan. The Riverside County General Plan Update Project No. 960 was approved after environmental impacts of the plan were evaluated in Environmental Impact Report No. 521 (State Clearinghouse #200904105). This previous analysis was considered in evaluating the impacts associated with the proposed project and is incorporated by reference.

2.2.4 COUNTYWIDE AND CUMULATIVE ANALYSIS

Section 3.0 of this EIR evaluates the aspects of the proposed project that would apply Countywide. These aspects include both the Housing Element Update as well as amendments to Ordinance No. 348 adopting the MUA and R-7 zoning classifications. The section summarizes, but does not include, the text of the Area Plan amendments or rezoning. In addition, the cumulative impact of the rezoning of all of the parcels is discussed in this section.

2.2.5 AREA PLAN ANALYSIS

Sections 4.1 through 4.10 evaluate the potential impacts associated with the proposed rezonings identified in each Area Plan. The Area Plan sections also contain the proposed Area Plan text amendments that accompany the land use designation changes in support of the rezoning. The Area Plan sections do not repeat the Countywide analysis unless there is an issue that is specific to the Area Plan.

2.2.6 IMPACT DETERMINATIONS USED IN THE DRAFT EIR

This Draft EIR uses the following terminology to describe the environmental effects of the proposed project:

- **Less Than Significant or Less Than Cumulatively Considerable Impact:** A less than significant impact would cause no substantial change in the physical condition of the environment (no mitigation would be required for project effects found to be less than significant). At the programmatic level, compliance with existing regulations and permits are relied upon to reduce impacts. The discussion will identify the regulatory process and how compliance would address the impact.
- **Potentially Significant and Cumulatively Considerable Impact:** A significant impact would cause (or would potentially cause) a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment. Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project effects using specified standards of significance provided in each technical section of the DEIR and based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Identified significant impacts are those where the project would result in an impact that can be measured or quantified, while identified potentially significant impacts are those impacts where an exact measurement of the project's effects cannot be made but substantial evidence indicates that the impact would exceed standards of significance. A potentially significant impact may also be an impact that may or may not occur and where a definite determination cannot be foreseen. Mitigation measures, existing regulations, and/or project alternatives are identified to avoid or reduce physical environmental impacts to the environment to a less than significant level.
- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact:** A significant and unavoidable impact would result in a substantial negative change in the environment that cannot be avoided or mitigated to a less than significant level if the project is implemented. This impact may also occur if the mitigation measure cannot be implemented with certainty by the County. For example, a regional fee program, or an improvement to a state facility, requires participation by other projects or approval by other agencies. In these instances, the analysis will conclude that with mitigation the impact would be less than significant; however, since the County cannot be certain when the measure will be implemented, the impact remains significant and unavoidable.

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