

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

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This chapter contains an analysis of the environmental topics identified by Sonoma County’s scoping process for the EIR (Initial Study and Notice of Preparation) described in *Chapter 1.0 Introduction*. Environmental topics addressed in this chapter include:

- 4.1 Land Use, Population, and Housing
- 4.2 Transportation
- 4.3 Air Quality
- 4.4 Noise
- 4.5 Hydrology and Water Resources
- 4.6 Biological Resources
- 4.7 Geology / Soils
- 4.8 Agricultural and Timber Resources
- 4.9 Public Services
- 4.10 Cultural Resources
- 4.11 Visual Resources
- 4.12 Energy
- 4.13 Hazardous Materials

Sections 4.1 through 4.13 of this chapter describe existing environmental conditions as they relate to each specific topic, identify potential impacts from implementing the *Draft GP 2020*, and present mitigation measures required to reduce significant adverse impacts to a less-than-significant level.

This EIR evaluates cumulative impacts under two scenarios. The first are cumulative impacts that would occur in the unincorporated area of Sonoma County under the *Draft GP 2020*. Each of the topical impact assessments in this EIR (i.e., Sections 4.1 through 4.13) takes into consideration, where applicable, the cumulative impacts of the *Draft GP 2020*. For these cumulative analyses the geographic area of concern is the unincorporated area of Sonoma County.

In addition to impacts that are cumulatively significant under the *Draft GP 2020*, there is an additional level of cumulative impact resulting from growth in the unincorporated portion of Sonoma County together with projected growth in each of the nine cities. For this cumulative analysis the geographic area of concern is Sonoma County. These cumulative impacts are discussed in *Section 6.2 Cumulative Impacts*.

CEQA requires an EIR for a general plan to consider the impacts of the *proposed plan* against the existing physical environment. Limiting the analysis to a comparison of the potential development under the proposed general plan with the potential development under the existing general plan is not appropriate.¹ CEQA does not require the evaluation of the impacts of a proposed project on an existing general plan. Rather, it concerns itself with the impacts of the project on the environment, defined as the existing physical conditions in the affected area. It should be noted that *Chapter 5.0 Alternatives* provides a comparison of the impacts that would be expected to occur from land uses and development under continuation of the existing *General Plan* with what would be expected to occur under the *Draft GP 2020*.

¹ See *Environmental Planning & Information Council v. County of El Dorado* (“EPIC”) (1982) 131 Cal.App.3d 350.

FORMAT OF TOPICAL ANALYSES

Each of the topical impact assessments in this EIR (Sections 4.1 through 4.13) are organized as follows:

Environmental Setting

Existing conditions are described in the respective "setting" sections. These descriptions summarize information compiled during the study process to prepare the EIR. Background materials used in the EIR are referenced in footnotes and listed in *Appendix 7.3 Bibliography*.

Regulatory Setting

A discussion of relevant regulatory conditions is provided.

Significance Criteria

Standards used to evaluate the magnitude of impacts are listed in the "significance criteria" subsections for each topic analyzed. Under CEQA, a *significant effect* is defined as a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in the environment- namely, 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". The *State CEQA Guidelines* direct that the significance of impact be determined on the basis of scientific and factual data. The significance criteria were derived from the following main sources: the *State CEQA Guidelines*, the existing *General Plan*, environmental documents prepared recently on other projects in Sonoma County, and the professional standards and practices of the technical analysts who conducted the EIR evaluations.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The "impacts and mitigation" subsections identify the level and type of impacts that are likely to result from implementation of the *Draft GP 2020*. The generic impacts of potential growth from the land uses and level of development consistent with the *Draft GP 2020* are discussed in addition to any other impacts that might result from the goals and policies of the *Draft GP 2020*.

All impacts are numbered consecutively by topic. Based on the significance criteria, each impact is identified as being either a **Significant Impact** or a **Less-than-Significant Impact**. Significant impacts are followed by feasible mitigation measures that are available to reduce the magnitude of impact. No mitigation measures are required for less-than-significant impacts. Mitigation measures also are numbered to correspond to the respective impacts.

For each significant impact where a feasible mitigation is identified, a conclusion is provided as to whether with the incorporation of the recommended mitigation measure the impact would be reduced

to a less-than-significant level or whether it would be a **Significant Unavoidable Impact**. A significant unavoidable impact is a significant impact which cannot feasibly be avoided with mitigation. These include impacts which could be partly mitigated but could not be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

For each significant unavoidable impact identified in the Final EIR, Sonoma County would be required to adopt Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations explaining the reasons for approving the project (if approved) despite the impacts identified.