

3 Environmental Settings and Impacts

3.1 Overview

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the potential physical environmental effects resulting from implementation of the Fairfield 2050 General Plan Update (“Proposed Project”). Some environmental issue areas that are typically considered under CEQA would not be affected by the Project and, pursuant to CEQA, are not further analyzed in this EIR. A discussion of those issues that were not further analyzed in the EIR can be found in Chapter 5, Other CEQA Considerations, of this EIR.

These assessments are based on the description of the Proposed Project provided in Chapter 2. This evaluation does not satisfy the need for project-level CEQA analysis for individual projects. Individual projects under the Proposed Project will require project-level analysis at the time they are proposed, based on the details of those projects and the existing conditions at the time such projects are pursued.

3.2 Impacts Considered

According to the CEQA Guidelines, the following general types of environmental impacts must be considered in this program EIR:

- **Direct or primary impacts**, which are caused by the project and occur at the same time and place as the project.
- **Indirect or secondary impacts**, which are caused by the project and occur later in time or farther removed in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect or secondary impacts may include growth-inducing impacts and other impacts related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density, or growth rate, and related impacts on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems. Indirect or secondary impacts may also include cumulative impacts.
- **Short-term impacts**, which are those of a limited duration, such as the impacts that would occur during the construction phase of a project.
- **Long-term impacts**, which are those of greater duration, including those that would endure for the life of a project and beyond.
- **Significant and unavoidable impacts**, which cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant.

- **Irreversible environmental changes**, which may include current or future irretrievable commitments to using non-renewable resources, or growth-inducing impacts that commit future generations to similar irretrievable commitments of resources. Such changes are addressed in Chapter 5: CEQA Required Conclusions.
- **Cumulative impacts**, which refer to “two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.”¹ Like any other significant impact, 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.”² Cumulative impacts are addressed in Chapter 5: CEQA Required Conclusions.

3.3 Organization

Each section is formatted to include a summary of existing conditions, including regulatory context; the criteria for determination of significance for each impact; methodology and assumptions; evaluation of potential project impacts; a mitigation framework, if applicable; and a conclusion of significance after mitigation for impacts identified as significant.

The goals, policies, and implementing actions of the proposed General Plan reduce some impacts, and cases in which existing and proposed regulations, policies, and implementing actions reduce the impacts to a less-than-significant level are documented.

Physical Setting

The environmental setting discussion addresses the conditions that exist prior to implementation of the Project. This setting establishes the baseline by which the Project and Project alternatives are measured for environmental impacts. In accordance with Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, the discussion of the physical environment describes existing conditions within the Planning Area at the time the recirculated NOP was filed on March 22nd, 2024 unless otherwise noted. The physical setting provides the basis for assessing and comparing impacts of the Proposed Project.

Regulatory Setting

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.

Impact Analysis

This subsection focuses on an analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project described in Chapter 2, “Project Description,” of this EIR. A methodology description in each section presents the analytical methods used in the evaluation of effects of the Project. All potential direct and indirect impacts in Chapter 3 are evaluated in relation to applicable City, State,

¹ State CEQA Guidelines, section 15355.

² State CEQA Guidelines, section 15130(a).

and federal standards. Thresholds of significance based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines are used to identify the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project; the methods used to conduct the impact analysis are summarized; and the impacts analyzed in the respective subsection are summarized. The analysis of the potential environmental impacts is divided by impact significance criterion, presented in the following format:

Impact 3.X-X The impact statement briefly summarizes the findings of the impact discussion based on the identified threshold of significance. The level of significance is included at the end of the impact statement. Levels of significance listed in this EIR (as described below) are *no impact, less than significant, less than significant with mitigation, or significant and unavoidable.*

The analysis of environmental impacts considers both the construction and operation of future development associated with implementation of the Project. As required by section 15126.2(a) of the State 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 an impact is significant.

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, including goals and policies included in the proposed General Plan Update.

Mitigation Measures

For potentially significant impacts, feasible mitigation measures are identified. If the impact is determined to be less than significant, no mitigation measures are required. Where no mitigation measures have been identified that could reduce an impact to less than significant, the reason is stated, and no mitigation measures are listed.

As stated in CEQA Guidelines Section 15370, mitigation includes:

1. Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
2. Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
3. Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the impacted environment.
4. Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
5. Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

3.4 Determining Level of Significance

A set of criteria used by the lead agency to determine at what level or threshold an impact would be considered significant. Standards of Significance used in this EIR include those standards provided in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. In determining the level of significance, the analysis assumes that the project would comply with relevant federal, State, and local regulations, and ordinances.

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.”³

For each potential environmental impact identified in this EIR, a statement of the level of significance of the impact is provided. Impacts are assessed as one of the following categories:

The term “**no impact**” is used when the environmental resource being discussed would not be adversely affected by implementation of the Proposed Project. It means no change from existing conditions. This impact level does not need mitigation.

A “**less than significant**” impact would cause a minor change in the physical environment but would not meet or exceed the significance threshold. This impact level does not require mitigation, even if feasible, under CEQA.

An impact that is “**less than significant with mitigation**” would have a substantial adverse effect on the physical environment but could be reduced to a less than significant level with mitigation. Under CEQA, mitigation measures must be provided, where feasible, to reduce the magnitude of significant or potentially significant impacts.

A “**significant and unavoidable impact**” would cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment, and no known feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the impact to a less than significant level. Under CEQA, a project with significant and unavoidable impacts may be approved, but the lead agency (in this case, the City) must prepare a “statement of overriding considerations” in accordance with Section 15093 of the CEQA Guidelines, explaining how the benefits of the project outweigh the potential for significant impacts.

³ State CEQA Guidelines, section 15382.