



The Villages – Escondido Country Club

Draft EIR Summary Handout

Cities and counties plan and regulate the use of land to protect public health, safety, and general welfare. In doing so, cities and counties weigh a variety of factors when deciding whether to approve or deny a land use application or proposed development project. One such factor is what kind of effect a project would have on the environment. The term “environment” includes natural and man-made elements of our surroundings. This includes land, air, water, minerals, plants, animals and noise. It also includes things like historic buildings.

The California Environmental Quality Act guides the process of gathering information about a land use application of proposed development project to make for more informed decision-making. A nickname for this law is “CEQA” (pronounced “See-Kwa”). CEQA is California’s broadest environmental law. CEQA helps to guide cities and counties during issuance of permits and approval of development projects. Since the process is quite complex and technical, the City of Escondido prepared this brief *Summary Handout* to provide an overview of the environmental review process.

What determines the level of environmental review?

In some cases, the state legislature or other state-level decision-makers have decided some kinds of projects are exempt from the environmental review process. There are two sources of exemptions. One source is the CEQA statute (these are known as “statutory exemptions”). The other source of exemptions is the CEQA Guidelines. These are adopted by the state’s Resources Agency to provide guidance on implementing CEQA. These are known as “categorical exemptions.” Some examples of proposals not subject to CEQA review include emergency repairs, school closings, studies, water hook-ups in existing neighborhoods, and remodels in existing buildings.

If a project is not exempt from environmental review, the next step is to prepare something called an “Initial Study.” If the initial study shows that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, the next step is to prepare an actual environmental review document. If there are facts that indicate that a project could have a significant effect on the environment, then an “Environmental Impact Report” is typically prepared. As a reference point, it is common among city officials to use the acronym “EIR,” when referring to this type of document, which is an abbreviation formed from its initial letters.

What is an Environmental Impact Report?

An EIR is a detailed analysis of a proposed project's potentially significant effect on the environment. An EIR is an extensive environmental document, which contains a number of different items.

- *It describes the proposed project.* The EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published.
- *It evaluates all components of a project.* All phases of a project must be considered when evaluating its impact on the environment: planning, acquisition, development, and operation.
- *It analyzes all types of effects.* A thorough analysis identifies each significant environmental impact expected to result from the proposed project. Direct and indirect significant effects of the project on the environment shall be clearly identified and described, giving due consideration to both the short-term and long-term effects.
- *It comes up with feasible solutions.* The report also recommends steps to avoid or minimize those impacts. These actions are called "mitigation measures." Mitigation measures must be fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, or other legally binding instruments.
- *It discloses if some impacts cannot be mitigated.* The EIR must also identify all significant environmental effects which cannot be avoided with the proposed project.
- *It looks at a range of different options.* Alternative project scenarios or land use options are considered in an EIR, including the option of "no project." This section of analysis in an EIR is important. For sake of exposition, this *Summary Handout* does not discuss the alternatives that were analyzed as part of the draft EIR. The reader is encouraged to read the EIR for more information about this important section of analysis.

What is a "significant effect" on the environment?

A significant effect on the environment means 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. The determination of whether a project may have a significant effect on the environment calls for careful judgment on the part of the lead agency involved, based to the extent possible on scientific and factual data. Under CEQA guidance, cities and counties consider direct physical changes in the environment and reasonably foreseeable indirect physical changes in the environment, which may be caused by a land use application or development project. CEQA requires consideration of direct impacts, which are the same time and place as project; indirect impacts, which may be at a different time and place; and a project's contribution to combined impacts caused by effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

What is “mitigation?”

To be considered adequate, mitigation measures should be specific, feasible actions that will actually improve adverse environmental conditions. When drafting mitigation measures, cities and counties should include only those that are feasible. A mitigation measure is considered feasible if it is capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into consideration economic, environmental, legal, and technological factors. In accordance with Section 15370 of the CEQA Guidelines, mitigation includes the following type of strategies:

- *Avoid.* Avoid the impact altogether by not taking certain action or parts of an action.
- *Minimize.* Minimize impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- *Rectify.* Rectify the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- *Reduce or Eliminate.* Reduce or eliminate the impact over time by preservation and maintenance during the life of the action.
- *Compensate.* Compensate for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

How is the public involved in the environmental review process?

In implementing CEQA, cities and counties aims to open government projects and development decisions to the public. By incorporating scientific information and public review and comment periods into a systematic decision-making process, the public is involved during the entire CEQA process. In these jurisdictions, public involvement starts during the scoping process, which is used to determine what environmental impacts will be studied and what type of environmental document will be needed. Notice of Preparation is circulated for comment for 30 days. For the Villages – Escondido Country Club Project proposal, the Notice of Preparation comment period started on January 25, 2017 and ended on February 24, 2017. The City also held an informational Scoping Meeting on February 13, 2017. For this informational Scoping Meeting, the City encouraged participants to 1) learn about the Project, 2) identify potential environmental impacts, and 3) submit written comment either at the meeting or separately, during the comment period.

Next, there is a formal comment period after the draft environmental document is circulated. A draft EIR is typically circulated for at least 45 days. For the Villages – Escondido Country Club Project proposal, the draft EIR was circulated for 52 days. The public comment period began with the publication of the Notice of Availability, issued on June 28, 2017, and as extended as set forth by a Notice of Extended Public Comment Period, with a public review and comment period ending on August 18, 2017. The City also held an informational Open House to discuss the EIR review process and collect comments.

Finally, there are Public Hearings after the public comment period.

Regardless of the public's participation, the decision remains with the decision-makers on whether or not to approve a land use application or permit a development project.

What does the draft EIR say about the Villages – ECC Project?

The following table lists each topic area of EIR study, and whether mitigation is required to improve adverse environmental conditions, which may result from the project.

Less Than Significant- No Mitigation Required	Less Than Significant WITH Mitigation ¹	Significant and Unavoidable ²
Aesthetics	Air Quality	Transportation and Traffic
Agricultural Resources	Biological Resources	
Energy	Cultural Resources	
Geology and Soils	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	
Hydrology and Water Quality	Hazards and Hazardous Materials	
Land Use	Noise	
Mineral Resources		
Population and Housing		
Public Services		
Recreation		
Utilities		

¹ This significance determination means that mitigation measures were applied in order to reduce the project's effect to less than significant.

² This significance determination means that a potentially significant impact as result of the project could not be reduced even with the application of mitigation measures.

The reader is encouraged to read the EIR for more information about this important section of analysis.

What's next? What does the process look like after a draft EIR is circulated?

Once all the comments are received, the City of Escondido will prepare written responses to the comments. The response to comments must provide reasoned, good faith analysis regarding all significant environmental issues raised in EIR comments. The final EIR incorporates draft EIR comments and written responses to the comments.

What impact does an EIR have on the decision-making process?

Draft/Final EIRs DO NOT advocate either approval or denial of a project. The information from the environmental review process helps decision-makers decide whether to approve a project, or not.