

Chapter 2 Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) assesses the potentially significant environmental effects of the proposed City of Escondido General Plan Update, Downtown Specific Plan Update, and Escondido Climate Action Plan (E-CAP). Collectively these components are referred to as the proposed project. The General Plan is a statement of long-range public policy to guide the use of private and public lands within the City, the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and some areas adjacent to the SOI. The Downtown Specific Plan provides a comprehensive plan for land use, development regulations, development incentives, design guidelines and other related actions aimed at implementing the strategic goals for the downtown area as set forth in the General Plan Update. The E-CAP establishes goals and policies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by incorporating environmental responsibility into the City's daily management of residential, commercial and industrial growth, education, energy and water use, air quality, transportation, waste reduction, economic development, and open space and natural habitats.

As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this EIR:

1. Assesses the potentially significant direct and indirect environmental effects of the proposed project as well as the potentially significant cumulative impacts that could occur from implementation of the proposed project;
2. Identifies potential feasible means of avoiding or substantially lessening significant adverse impacts; and
3. Evaluates a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, including the required No Project Alternative.

The City of Escondido is the CEQA lead agency for the proposed project and has the primary responsibility for project approval. The responsibilities of the lead agency are discussed below in Section 2.4.

2.1 Purpose of the EIR and Legal Authority

The City of Escondido has prepared this EIR for the following purposes:

- To satisfy the requirements of CEQA, pursuant to Public Resource Code Section 21080;
- To inform the general public, local community, responsible trustee and federal public agencies, and others of the nature of the proposed project, its potential significant environmental effects,

potentially feasible measures to mitigate those impacts and reasonable potentially feasible alternatives to the proposed project;

- To enable the City Council to consider the environmental consequences of approving the proposed project;
- For consideration by responsible agencies in issuing permits and approvals for the proposed project that would occur as part of proposed project implementation;
- To provide a basis for tiering subsequent environmental documents pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15152 and 15168(c).

As described in CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, public agencies are charged with the duty to avoid or substantially lessen significant environmental effects, with consideration of other conditions, including economic, social, technological, legal, and other benefits. This EIR is an informational document, the purpose of which is to: 1) identify the potentially significant effects of the proposed project on the environment and to indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be avoided or significantly lessened; 2) identify any significant and unavoidable adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level; 3) identify reasonable and feasible alternatives to the proposed project that would avoid or substantially lessen any significant adverse environmental effects associated with the proposed project.

The lead agency is required to consider the information in the EIR, along with any other relevant information, in making its decision on the proposed project. Although the EIR does not determine the ultimate decision that would be made regarding implementation of the proposed project, CEQA requires the City Council to consider the information in the EIR prior to project approval and make findings regarding each significant effect identified in the EIR.

The EIR is circulated to responsible agencies and trustee agencies with resources affected by the project, state agencies with jurisdiction by law, federal agencies, and interested parties and individuals. The purpose of public and agency review of the EIR includes sharing expertise, disclosing agency analysis, checking for accuracy, detecting omissions, discovering public concerns, and soliciting comments. In reviewing the EIR, reviewers should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing potentially significant effects on the environment and avoiding or mitigating the significant effects of the proposed project.

2.2 Scope of the EIR

To initiate the public scoping process for this EIR, the City of Escondido prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in compliance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082. On July 22, 2010, the NOP was mailed to a distribution list consisting of the State Clearinghouse; responsible, trustee, and other relevant local, state, and federal agencies; and interested individuals. The NOP was also published in the North County Times newspaper. A 30-day comment period on the NOP closed on August 30, 2010. An EIR scoping meeting was held on May 23, 2011 to solicit input from interested agencies, individuals, and organizations. A copy of the NOP, comments received on the NOP, and a summary of the scoping meeting are included in Appendix A of this EIR. City staff determined the scope of analysis of this EIR in

part by the responses received to the NOP. The following issues were determined to be potentially significant and are addressed in Chapter 4 of this EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

The EIR also contains other mandatory discussions required by CEQA including the analysis of cumulative impacts provided in the various subsections of Chapter 4; effects found not to be significant, growth inducement, significant and unavoidable environmental effects, and significant irreversible environmental effects provide in the various subsections of Chapter 5; and alternatives to the proposed project provided in Chapter 6.

2.3 Intended Use of the EIR

This EIR has been prepared as a Program EIR, consistent with Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines, which examines the environmental impacts of a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either geographically; as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways. The series of actions analyzed in this EIR is the potential future development in the General Plan Update area during the planning horizon (year 2035), including the Downtown Specific Plan Update and E-CAP, as described in Chapter 3, Project Description.

While the EIR intends to identify potential impacts that would result from project implementation, the level of analysis is not detailed to the level of site specificity, nor is it intended to be accurate to this level of specificity. The EIR will identify a range of potential impacts resulting from future development allowed under the proposed project and will identify mitigation measures that future development would implement to reduce identified potentially significant effects. Any proposal for future development within the City's jurisdiction must be reviewed pursuant to the terms of the General Plan Update, E-CAP, implementing entitlements, and, if applicable, the Downtown Specific Plan. As addressed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c), 1) if a later activity would have effects not examined in the EIR, a new Initial Study would need to be prepared leading to either an EIR or a Negative Declaration, or 2) if the lead agency finds that pursuant to Section 15162, no new effects could occur or no new mitigation measures are required, the agency can approve the activity as being within the scope of the project covered by the EIR and no new environmental documentation would be required. Thus

the City, as the lead agency, would rely on the EIR in conjunction with its consideration of subsequent project development, as deemed appropriate and consistent with the requirements of CEQA.

This EIR is intended to serve as an informational document to be considered by the City Council during deliberations on the approval of the proposed project. This EIR would also be used by responsible and trustee agencies that may have review or discretionary authority over some future development within the City, such as San Diego Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD), Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), or California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The responsibilities of responsible and trustee agencies are discussed below in Section 2.4.

2.4 Lead, Responsible, and Trustee Agencies

Per the CEQA Guidelines, this EIR defines lead, responsible, and trustee agencies. The City of Escondido is the lead agency for the project because it holds principal responsibility for approving the project. A responsible agency refers to a public agency other than the lead agency that has discretionary approval over the project. The proposed project is a planning document for the City of Escondido to utilize moving forward. As such, the proposed project does not address a specific or proposed development plan, and no responsible agencies are identified at this time. Subsequent development projects will be subject to discretionary approval by the City and, depending on the development proposal, other public agencies including responsible agencies. In addition to the City of Escondido, future projects within the City may require approval from the SDAPCD, regarding issues of air quality and associated permitting; San Diego RWQCB, regarding water quality, quantity, and discharges into surface waters; CDFG, regarding biological resources; Caltrans, regarding Interstate 15, State Route 78, and other roadways within the City that are under the maintenance of the state; and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), regarding waters of the U.S. and wetlands.

A trustee agency is a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project, which are held in trust for the people of the state. The four trustee agencies in California are the CDFG, State Lands Commission, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and University of California (for the Natural Reserve System). As discussed above, the General Plan Update is a planning document for the City and does not address a specific or proposed development plan. As such, no trustee agencies are identified at this time for the adoption of the General Plan. However, the CDFG may be a trustee agency for future development in the City regarding biological resources.

2.5 Environmental Review Process

The Draft EIR ~~was~~ will be available for review and comment by the public and public agencies for a 45-day period from January 12 to February 27, 2012. Comments on the Draft EIR ~~should be~~ were sent to Jay Petrek at the following address:

Jay Petrek, AICP, Principal Planner
City of Escondido Planning Division
201 North Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

Other Pertinent Information:

Contact Phone: (760) 839-4556

Fax: (760) 839-4313

E-mail: Jpetrek@escondido.org

City Project Number: PHG 09-0020 and PHG 10-0016

SCH Number: 2010071064

All comments received pertaining to the accuracy or adequacy of information presented in the Draft EIR have been formally responded to in writing in the Response to Comments section of the Final EIR. Any comments pertaining to the goals, policies and guidance provided in the General Plan Update, Downtown Specific Plan Update, and E-CAP or other documents not part of the Draft EIR were requested to should be sent separately from comments pertaining to the Draft EIR. Section 15088(a) of the CEQA Guidelines states that the “lead agency shall evaluate comments on environmental issues received from persons who reviewed the Draft EIR and shall prepare a written response.” The City is not required to respond to comments on the proposed project itself, only to comments pertaining to information contained in the Draft EIR. Therefore, no responses have been prepared for comment letters that do not address the information provided in the Draft EIR.

A copy of the ~~Final Draft~~ EIR ~~is will be~~ available for review during normal operating hours ~~for the duration of the public review period~~ at the following location: City Hall, 201 North Broadway, Escondido, California 92025. The ~~Final Draft~~ EIR is also available on the City’s website: <http://www.escondido.org/>

The City, as lead agency, will consider the written comments received on the Draft EIR in making its decision whether to certify the Final EIR prior to approving or taking action on the General Plan Update, Downtown Specific Plan Update, or E-CAP.

2.6 Document Organization

The EIR is organized into two volumes. Volume I addresses the impacts of the physical development accommodated by implementation of the proposed project. Associated technical appendices are contained in Volume II.

Volume I of the project EIR includes the following:

- **Chapter 1, Executive Summary.** Summarizes the proposed project, environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project, recommended mitigation measures that would avoid or reduce impacts, and the level of significance of impacts both before and after mitigation. This section also summarizes the environmental impacts associated with each alternative to the proposed project.
- **Chapter 2, Introduction.** Describes the purpose and intended use of the EIR, the EIR’s compliance with CEQA, and the scope and organizational format of the EIR.
- **Chapter 3, Project Description.** Provides a detailed description of the proposed project, including the location, description of the planning area, and project objectives. This section also includes a list of discretionary actions that would be required to approve the proposed project.

- **Chapter 4, Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation.** Contains the project analysis for the various environmental issues listed above under Section 2.2, Scope of the EIR. The subsection for each environmental topic contains a description of the existing environmental setting of the planning area, regulatory framework, impact significance thresholds, direct and indirect impacts, cumulative impacts, mitigation, and impact significance after mitigation.
- **Chapter 5, Other CEQA Considerations.** Provides discussions required by Sections 15126 and 15128 of the CEQA Guidelines, including effects found not to be significant during the EIR process, growth inducing impacts of the proposed project, significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project is implemented, and significant irreversible environmental changes that would result from implementation of the proposed project.
- **Chapter 6, Alternatives.** Describes alternatives to the proposed project that could avoid or substantially lessen significant effects and evaluates their environmental effects in comparison to the proposed project. The alternatives analyzed in this chapter include the No Project Alternative, Reduced Employment Alternative, Reduced Residential Alternative, and Blended Reduced Downtown/Focused Smart Growth and Employment Alternative.
- **Chapter 7, References.** Provides a list of documents utilized in preparation of the EIR.
- **Chapter 8, Preparers and Reviewers.** Provides a list of persons that contributed to the preparation and review of the EIR and technical studies

Volume II of the EIR consists of supporting materials and technical appendices and includes the following:

- **Appendix A.** NOP and Comment Letters Received
- **Appendix B.** Air Quality Technical Report
- **Appendix C.** Biological Sensitive Species List
- **Appendix D.** Local Historic Resources Table
- **Appendix E.** Noise Technical Report
- **Appendix F.** Public Services Correspondence
- **Appendix G.** Utility Providers Correspondence
- **Appendix H.** Greenhouse Gas Inventory Modeling
- **Appendix I1.** Traffic Impact Analysis
- **Appendix I2.** Downtown Core Analysis
- **Appendix I3.** Complete Streets Analysis
- **Appendix I4.** Downtown Couplet Analysis