

## 2. Introduction

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This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to provide an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of adopting and implementing the proposed City of Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan Update (proposed Plan) and associated zoning amendments. The Draft EIR has been completed in accordance with, and in fulfillment of, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements. CEQA requires that State and local public agencies analyze projects to determine potential impacts on the environment and disclose any such impacts.<sup>1</sup> The proposed Plan and associated rezoning is considered a "project" subject to environmental review because it is "an action [undertaken by a public agency] which has the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment."<sup>2</sup> Typically, for larger projects, this analysis takes the form of an EIR. CEQA stipulates that an EIR must not only analyze a project's potential environmental effects, but also attempt to address those effects either through feasible mitigation measures or alternatives to the project.

The City of Palo Alto (City) is the Lead Agency for the proposed Plan and for this EIR.<sup>3</sup> This EIR will inform City of Palo Alto decision-makers, other agencies, and the general public of the nature of the proposed Plan and its potential effects on the environment. When appropriate, this Draft EIR identifies mitigation measures that, if effectively implemented, would reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts. It also examines alternatives to the proposed Plan that could reduce or avoid the identified significant impacts.

### 2.1 PROPOSED PLAN

The proposed project is an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan, which is the general plan that guides land use and investment decisions in the City of Palo Alto. The update is necessary to ensure that this crucial document accurately expresses the community's collective vision for the future of the City; reflects changes that have occurred both in background conditions and in projected trends since the bulk of the existing Comprehensive Plan was drafted in the 1990s; and responds to current community concerns about housing affordability, traffic and parking, and the pace and character of development in Palo Alto. Moreover, many sections of the plan are required by State law, and the State recommends that local jurisdictions update their

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<sup>1</sup> California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Section 15002(a). The CEQA Guidelines are found at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387.

<sup>2</sup> CEQA, Section 21080(d), and CEQA Guidelines, Section 15378[a].

<sup>3</sup> A lead agency has the principal responsibility for either carrying out or issuing permits to a project. As such, the lead agency is the party responsible for ensuring that environmental analyses are conducted when necessary and that such environmental review is done in accordance with CEQA. CEQA Guidelines, Section 15367.

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plans every ten years. Updating the City's Comprehensive Plan is critical to enable the City to remain in compliance with State law and to provide a coherent vision for the future.

Chapter 3, Project Description, describes four broad planning scenarios that are being used in this Draft EIR to capture the range of possible outcomes associated with a planning process that is still underway. The proposed Plan that is ultimately adopted is expected to fall within this range, and to constitute a blend or hybrid of these planning scenarios, plus the mitigation measures that are included to address potential impacts in Chapter 4.

Upon adoption, the proposed Plan will guide decision-making to preserve what is treasured about Palo Alto and to meet the challenges the City will face between now and the plan horizon year of 2030.

## 2.2 EIR SCOPE

This Draft EIR is a program EIR that analyzes the adoption and implementation of the proposed Plan and associated rezoning. CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines allow lead agencies to prepare a number of types of EIRs. Different types of EIRs are used for varying situations and intended uses. As described in Section 15161 of the CEQA Guidelines, the most common type of EIR is a *project* EIR, which examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. As described in Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines, *program* EIRs are appropriate when a project consists of a series of actions related to the issuance of rules, regulations, and other planning criteria.

In this case, the proposed Plan that is the subject of this EIR is a long-term plan that will be implemented over time as a policy document guiding future development activities and City actions. No specific development projects are proposed as part of the Project. Therefore, this EIR is a program EIR that analyzes the potential significant environmental effects of the cumulative development that is anticipated to occur during the life of the proposed Plan (i.e., to the year 2030). As a program EIR, it is not project-specific, and does not evaluate the impacts of individual projects that may be proposed under the proposed Plan. Such subsequent projects may require separate environmental review, when applicable as required by CEQA, which could be in the form of a Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration, or a Subsequent EIR, to secure the necessary development permits. Therefore, while subsequent environmental review may be tiered from this EIR, this EIR is not intended to address project-specific impacts of individual projects.

The scope of this EIR was established by the City of Palo Alto through the EIR scoping process and includes an analysis of potential proposed Plan impacts and cumulative impacts in the following issue areas:

- Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change

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- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems
- CEQA-Mandated Sections:
  - Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts
  - Impacts Found Not To Be Significant
  - Growth-Inducing Impacts
  - Significant Irreversible Changes

The implementation of the proposed Plan was found to have no impacts related to Agricultural and Forestry Resources or Mineral Resources. An explanation of the reasons the proposed Plan would not affect Agricultural and Forestry Resources or Mineral Resources is provided in Chapter 6, CEQA-Mandated Sections, of this Draft EIR.

## 2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

### 2.3.1 DRAFT EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21080(d) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15063, the City of Palo Alto determined that the proposed Plan could result in potentially significant environmental impacts and that an EIR would be required. In compliance with Section 21080.4 of the California Public Resources Code, the City circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the proposed Plan to the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) State Clearinghouse and interested agencies and persons on May 30, 2014. The NOP and scoping process solicited comments from responsible and trustee agencies, as well as interested parties regarding the scope of the Draft EIR. Appendix A, Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Comment Letters on the NOP, of this Draft EIR contains the NOP as well as the comments received by the City in response to the NOP.

This Draft EIR will be available for review by the public and interested parties, agencies, and organizations for a 90-day comment period starting February 5, 2016 and ending May 5, 2016. A public comment hearing will be held during this period for members of the public to offer comments on the Draft EIR. During the comment period, the public is invited to submit written comments via mail or e-mail on the Draft EIR to the City of Palo Alto Planning and Community Environment Department.

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Written comments should be submitted to:

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City of Palo Alto  
250 Hamilton Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94301  
Elena.Lee@CityofPaloAlto.org

### 2.3.2 FINAL EIR

Upon completion of the 90-day review period for the Draft EIR, the City of Palo Alto will review all written comments received and prepare written responses to each comment on the adequacy of the EIR. Depending on the outcome of the ongoing planning process, the City will then proceed to prepare a Final EIR, or will first prepare and circulate a supplement to this Draft EIR (if the preferred scenario differs in a meaningful way from the scenarios and hybrid described in Chapters 3 and 7). Ultimately, a Final EIR will be prepared containing all of the comments received, responses to comments raising environmental issues, and any changes and additions to the description and analysis in this Draft EIR. The Final EIR will then be presented to the City of Palo Alto for certification as the environmental document for the proposed Plan. All persons who commented on the Draft EIR will be notified of the availability of the Final EIR and the date of the public hearing before the City.

All responses to comments submitted on the Draft EIR by agencies will be provided to those agencies at least 10 days prior to certification of the EIR. The City Council will make findings regarding the extent and nature of the impacts as presented in the Final EIR. The Final EIR will need to be certified as having been prepared in compliance with CEQA by the City prior to making a decision to approve or deny the proposed Plan. Public input is encouraged at all public hearings before the City.

After the City Council certifies the Final EIR, it may then consider the proposed Plan and associated rezoning. The City Council will adopt and incorporate into the project all feasible mitigation measures identified in the EIR and it may also require other feasible mitigation measures.

In some cases, the City Council may find that certain mitigation measures are outside the jurisdiction of the City to implement, or that no feasible mitigation measures have been identified for a given significant impact. In that case, the City Council may nonetheless determine that economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the proposed Plan outweigh the unavoidable, significant effects on the environment.

### 2.3.3 MITIGATION MONITORING

Public Resources Code Section 21081.6 requires that the lead agency adopt a monitoring or reporting program for any project for which it has made findings pursuant to Public Resources Code 21081 or adopted a Negative Declaration pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(c). Such a program is intended to ensure the implementation of all mitigation measures adopted through the preparation of an

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EIR or Negative Declaration. The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the proposed Plan will be completed after preparation of the Final EIR, and will be considered as part of the City Council's decision to adopt the proposed Update.

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