

2. Introduction

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, Chapter 14, California Code of Regulations, Section 15378[a], the proposed Strive San Mateo General Plan 2040 (General Plan 2040 or proposed General Plan) and proposed Climate Action Plan (CAP) update are considered a “project” subject to environmental review. Their implementation 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.” This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) provides an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of adoption and implementation of the General Plan 2040 and CAP update, herein referred to as the “proposed project.”

This Draft EIR identifies mitigation measures and alternatives to the proposed project that would avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts. The Draft EIR also compares the development potential of the proposed project with the existing baseline condition that is described in detail in each section of Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR. The City of San Mateo (City) is the lead agency for the proposed project. This assessment is intended to inform the City’s decision-makers, other responsible agencies, and the public-at-large of the nature of the proposed project and its potential effect on the environment.

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

If approved by the San Mateo City Council, the proposed project would replace the City’s existing General Plan 2030, which has a buildout horizon to 2030, with an updated General Plan 2040. The proposed project would build off the existing General Plan 2030, which was last comprehensively updated in 2010, to provide a framework for land use, transportation, and conservation decisions through the horizon year of 2040. The proposed project would also update the buildout projections used in the City’s Climate Action Plan to be consistent with the updated General Plan 2040 and this Draft EIR.

The environmental analysis in this Draft EIR assumes that the adoption and implementation of the proposed project would result in up to 20,080 new households, 21,410 new housing units, 52,020 new residents, and 16,920 new employees by 2040. See Chapter 3, *Project Description*, of this Draft EIR for additional details on the proposed project. See Chapter 5, *Alternatives*, for a comparison of the current General Plan 2030 and the proposed General Plan 2040.

2.2 EIR SCOPE

This Draft EIR is a program EIR that analyzes the adoption and implementation of the proposed project. This is in contrast to a project-level EIR, which is used to identify and analyze the potential impacts of

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site-specific construction and operation. CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines allow lead agencies to prepare different types of EIRs for varying situations and intended uses. Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines states that 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 project that is the subject of this Draft EIR consists of long-term plans that would be implemented over time as policies guiding future development activities and City actions. No specific development projects are proposed as part of the proposed project, and decisions about whether to move forward with development projects on individual properties will continue to be made by the property owner. Therefore, as a program EIR, it is not project specific and does not evaluate the impacts of individual projects that may be proposed in the future under the General Plan 2040. However, where the program EIR addresses the effects of the proposed project as specifically and comprehensively as is reasonably possible, later activities that are within the scope of the effects examined in the program EIR may qualify for a streamlined environmental review process or may be exempt from environmental review.¹

When a program EIR is relied on for a subsequent activity, the lead agency must incorporate feasible mitigation measures and alternatives developed in the program EIR into the subsequent activities.² If a subsequent activity would have effects that are not within the scope of the program EIR, the lead agency must prepare a new Initial Study leading to a Negative Declaration, a Mitigated Negative Declaration, or an EIR, unless the activity qualifies for an exemption. For these subsequent environmental review documents, this program EIR will serve as the first-tier environmental analysis to streamline future environmental review.

2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

2.3.1 DRAFT EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21080(d) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15063, the City determined that the proposed project could result in potentially significant environmental impacts and that a program EIR would be required. In compliance with CEQA Section 21080.4, the City circulated the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the proposed project to the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) State Clearinghouse (SCH) and interested agencies and persons on January 12, 2022, for a 30-day review period. A public scoping meeting was held on January 25, 2022 at the San Mateo City Council Chambers. The NOP and scoping process solicited comments regarding the scope of the Draft EIR from responsible and trustee agencies and interested parties. Appendix A, *Notice of Preparation and Scoping Comments*, of this Draft EIR contains the NOP and 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 45-day comment period starting August 11, 2023 and ending September 25, 2023.

¹ CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c) and CEQA streamlining provisions.

² CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c)(3) and CEQA streamlining provisions.

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During the comment period, the public is invited to provide written comments on the Draft EIR via mail or email to the City of San Mateo Planning Division by 5:00 p.m. on September 25, 2023. Comments should be submitted as follows:

- Written: Manira Sandhir, Planning Manager
City of San Mateo, Community Development Department
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403
- Phone: (650) 522-7203
- Email: msandhir@cityofsanmateo.org with “San Mateo General Plan Draft EIR” as the subject line.

2.3.2 FINAL EIR

Upon completion of the public review period for the Draft EIR, the City will review all written comments received and prepare written responses to each comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIR. A Final EIR will then be prepared, which contains all of the comments received, responses to comments raising environmental issues, and any changes to the Draft EIR. The Final EIR will then be presented to the San Mateo Planning Commission where a public hearing will be held for public comments on the Final EIR. During this public hearing, recommendations will also be considered for certification of the Final EIR. Following the public hearing, the Final EIR will be presented to City Council for consideration of the certification as the environmental document for the proposed project. 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, which is tentatively scheduled for early 2024.

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 EIR. The 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 project. Public input is encouraged at all public hearings before the City.

If the City Council certifies the EIR, it may then consider action on the proposed project. If approved, the City Council would adopt and incorporate all feasible mitigation measures identified in the EIR and 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 would have to adopt a statement of overriding considerations that determines that economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the proposed project outweigh the unavoidable, significant effects on the environment.

2.3.3 MITIGATION MONITORING

CEQA Section 21081.6 requires that the lead agency adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for any project for which it has made findings pursuant to CEQA Section 21081. Such a

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program is intended to ensure the implementation of all mitigation measures adopted through the preparation of an EIR. If mitigation measures are required, the MMRP for the proposed project will be completed congruently as part of the Final EIR process.

2.4 USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN EIR

CEQA includes several provisions to streamline the environmental review of qualified projects based on several factors. These include where environmental review has already occurred (e.g., a program-level EIR), which could apply to future development in the EIR Study Area.

The CEQA concept of "tiering" refers to the evaluation of general environmental matters in a broad program-level EIR, with subsequent focused environmental documents for individual projects. CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines encourage the use of tiered environmental documents to reduce delays and excessive paperwork in the environmental review process. This is accomplished in tiered documents by eliminating repetitive analyses of issues that were adequately addressed in the program EIR and by incorporating those analyses by reference.

Section 15168(d) of the CEQA Guidelines provides for simplifying the preparation of environmental documents by incorporating by reference analyses and discussions. Where an EIR has been prepared or certified for a program or plan, the environmental review for a later activity consistent with the program or plan should be limited to effects that were not analyzed as significant in the prior EIR or that are susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152[d]).

By tiering from the program EIR, the environmental analysis for a future project would rely on the program EIR for the following:

1. A discussion of general background and setting information for environmental topic areas;
2. Overall growth-related issues;
3. Issues that were evaluated in sufficient detail in the program EIR for which there is no significant new information or change in circumstances that would require further analysis;
4. Assessment of cumulative impacts; and
5. Mitigation measures adopted and incorporated into the proposed project.

As a program EIR, this document and the mitigation measures presented herein will be used as a guide for implementing the General Plan 2040 policies and actions, as well as adopting changes in City codes, regulations, and practices. This program EIR will also be used as a base resource for reviewing future development projects. This document will assist in guiding the assessment of projects and provide environmental review tiering, where appropriate. Currently, the City's development review process includes the following steps, which will be carried forward under the adopted General Plan 2040:

- **Determine Project Consistency with the General Plan and City Codes.** When a new development project is filed with the City, it is reviewed for completeness and consistency with the General Plan goals, policies, and actions, and City codes and practices. Because the impact avoidance measures

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have been incorporated into the General Plan 2040, development projects will inherently implement these measures to: a) mitigate environmental impacts; and b) achieve consistency with the General Plan and compliance with City codes.

- **Determine Requirements for Project-Level Environmental Review.** City staff are responsible for determining the level of environmental review required by CEQA for each development project.
 - **Projects Subject to Environmental Review.** For future development projects subject to environmental review, the information and analysis contained within this EIR and carried forward in the General Plan 2040 will guide the scope of this review. For project-level environmental review, many of the topic areas studied in this program EIR will adequately cover and provide environmental clearance for the project. However, the preparation of site-specific studies and reports may be necessary based on the location and nature of the development project. The information and analysis presented in this program EIR will assist in determining when and where a special, site-specific study is warranted. Examples are shown on Figure 4.3-1, *Special-Status Plant Species and Sensitive Natural Communities*, and Figure 4.3-2, *Special-Status Animal Species and Critical Habitats*, in Chapter 4.3, *Biological Resources*, of this Draft EIR. These figures map geographic areas where special-status species are known to exist, which will provide guidance on where and when to require a technical study of biological resources.
 - **Projects Exempt from Environmental Review.** CEQA includes a long list of environmental review exemptions. Most future development projects that are consistent with General Plan 2040 will likely be exempt from environmental review as the project impacts will be adequately covered by this program EIR. However, many of the CEQA exemptions require compliance with specific criteria for the development project to qualify for the exemption. The information and analysis contained within this EIR and carried forward in the General Plan 2040 will be used to assist in determining if the CEQA-prescribed criteria have been met to qualify for the exemption. One example of a CEQA exemption is for development projects located in a “Transit Priority Area” (TPA). Further information on CEQA exemptions for development in a TPA is provided in Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*.

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