

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the environmental impact report (EIR) presents potential environmental impacts of the proposed Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan. The scope of the analysis and key attributes of the analytical approach are presented below to assist readers in understanding how the impact analysis has been conducted in this EIR.

3.2 SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

This section provides a detailed description of existing conditions on the project site and in the vicinity, an evaluation of impacts of the proposed project, descriptions of the identified mitigation measures, and an analysis of cumulative impacts.

Based on the NOP scoping process, as described in **Section 1.0, Introduction**, this EIR addresses the following topics in detail:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Population and Housing
- Traffic and Circulation
- Utilities and Service Systems

As potential impacts related to agricultural resources and mineral resources are not likely to be significant under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), these are addressed at a lesser level of detail in this EIR (see **Section 5.0, Other CEQA Considerations**).

3.3 DEFINITION OF BASELINE OR EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to Section 5125 (Environmental Setting) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, an EIR must include a description of physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project to provide the “baseline

physical conditions” against which project-related changes can be compared. The discussion of existing conditions defines the environmental conditions that currently exist on or near the project site.

For most resources areas, impacts are evaluated in terms of changes that would result from development of projects that could occur under the proposed Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan as compared to existing conditions, defined as the conditions present at the time of the November 10, 2008, Notice of Preparation. For certain topics, including transportation and circulation, air quality, and noise, the baseline conditions include projects that would occur in the near term and that are expected to be operational by the time construction begins on the proposed Sycamore Crossing and Hill Town projects. For these resource areas, the conditions that would result at the end of the planning horizon are compared to baseline conditions, in order to characterize the anticipated change in conditions as a result of the proposed project.

3.4 DEFINITION OF STUDY AREA

The extent of the study area varies with each environmental resource area analyzed in this EIR, and depends on the extent of the area in which impacts could be expected to occur. The study area for each resource area is defined in the pertinent resource sections.

3.5 BASIS OF IMPACT ANALYSIS

Project impacts are characterized as the effects of the proposed development on the existing environment. Features of the project that would help to avoid or reduce project impacts are described and analyzed for their effectiveness.

The analyses of impacts in this EIR are based primarily on one of two factors, depending on the primary cause of the impact. Impacts related to biological, cultural, geologic, and hydrological resources are analyzed primarily on the basis of the location and acreage of ground disturbances (the footprint of development) that is projected to occur as a result of development of the Added Area. Impacts related to population and housing, traffic, air quality, noise, public services, and utilities, on the other hand, are analyzed primarily on the basis of the total population increase associated with development of the Added Area. Land use impacts are analyzed based on both of these factors. The remaining impact topics, including aesthetics and hazardous materials, are analyzed based on the topic-specific criteria described in those sections.

3.6 LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The EIR uses a variety of terms to describe the levels of significance of adverse impacts identified by the environmental analysis. The following are definitions of terms used in this EIR:

- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact.** Impacts that exceed the defined standards of significance and cannot be eliminated or reduced to a less than significant level through the implementation of feasible mitigation measures.
- **Significant Impact.** Impacts that exceed the defined standards of significance and that can be eliminated or reduced to a less than significant level through the implementation of feasible mitigation measures.
- **Potentially Significant Impact.** Significant impacts that may ultimately be determined to be less than significant; the level of significance may be reduced in the future through implementation of policies or guidelines (that are not required by statute or ordinance), or through further definition of the project detail in the future. Potentially significant impacts may also be impacts about which there is not enough information to draw a firm conclusion; however, for the purpose of this EIR, they are considered significant. Such impacts are equivalent to significant impacts and require the identification of feasible mitigation measures.
- **Less Than Significant Impact.** Impacts that are adverse but that do not exceed the specified standards of significance.
- **No Impact.** The project would not create an impact.

3.7 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

An EIR is required to analyze cumulative impacts and propose feasible options for mitigating or avoiding the project's contribution to any significant cumulative impacts, if the project's contribution is "cumulatively considerable" (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15120).

According to Section 15355 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*,

[c]umulative impacts refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.

- (a) The individual effects may be changes resulting from a single project or a number of separate projects.*
- (b) The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonable foreseeable probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.*

Section 15130(a) of the *State CEQA Guidelines* clarifies a number of issues with respect to cumulative impacts as follows.

- An EIR should not discuss impacts which do not result in part from the project evaluated in the EIR.
- When the combined cumulative impact associated with the project's incremental effect and the effects of other projects is not significant, the EIR shall briefly indicate why the cumulative impact is not significant and is not discussed in further detail in the EIR.
- If the combined cumulative impact is significant, the EIR discussion must reflect the severity of the impact and the likelihood of its occurrence.
- If the combined cumulative impact is significant, the EIR should indicate whether that a project's contribution to a significant cumulative impact will or will not be cumulatively considerable.
- An EIR may determine that a project's contribution to a significant cumulative impact will be rendered less than cumulatively considerable and thus is not significant. A project's contribution would be less than cumulatively considerable if the project is required to implement or fund its fair share of a mitigation measure or measures designed to alleviate the cumulative impact.

Section 15230(b) of the *State CEQA Guidelines* notes that a cumulative impact analysis may be completed by

[a] list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts, including, if necessary, those projects outside the control of the agency, or

A summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or areawide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact. Any such planning document shall be referenced and made available to the public at a location specified by the lead agency.

When utilizing a list, factors to consider when determining whether to include a related project should include the nature of each environmental resource being examined, the location of the project and its type.

The cumulative context for the proposed project includes both the currently proposed and probable future projects and a summary of projections, depending on the impact topic being analyzed. Reasonably foreseeable development in the vicinity of the Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan Area is shown in **Table 3.0-1, Cumulative Projects.**

**Table 3.0-1
Cumulative Projects**

Project	Land Use	Size (gross square feet/units)
Sycamore Downtown	Residential and Commercial	96 attached residential units 40,000 square feet of commercial/retail
BART Replacement Parking Facility	Transit-related	420 parking spaces
Hercules New Town Center Phases 1 (Market Town), 2 (Cinema Town), and 3 Transit Town)	Residential and Commercial	1,370 attached residential units 190,000 square feet of office space 376,000 square feet of retail space
Waterfront Intermodal Transit Center	Transit-related (ferry, commuter rail, and bus)	291 parking stalls, 10 drop-off stalls, 10 bus berths 3,000 square feet of retail/office
Waterfront Project ¹	Residential and Commercial	1,342 residential units 134,000 square feet of commercial 81,000 square feet of office 74,500 square feet of retail

Source: City of Hercules, 2008

Note:

¹ Waterfront Project development details are as described in the Hercules Waterfront Master Plan Initiative adopted in July 2008.

The *City of Hercules General Plan* identified that in 1992 the City encompassed 23,560.2 acres generally designated for residential, commercial, industrial, public facility, and open spaces uses. The buildout scenario analyzed in the *General Plan EIR* consisted of 49,370 dwelling units, nearly 70 million square feet of commercial building space, nearly 150 million square feet of industrial building space, 551 acres of public facilities, and 1,411 acres of open space. The summary of projections and anticipated future growth considered in this draft EIR is contained in the *City of Hercules General Plan* and associated *General Plan EIR* (State Clearinghouse No. 94033034). These documents in their entirety are incorporated by reference into this EIR, pursuant to Section 15150 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. These documents are available for review at the City of Hercules, 111 Civic Drive, Hercules, California 94547.