

4 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

4.1 SCOPE OF THE EIR ANALYSIS

The focus of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as provided for in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, is limited to those specific issues and concerns identified by the County of Placer (County) as being possibly significant. The County has elected not to prepare an Initial Study for this EIR. The County prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR that provided a general description of the proposed Placer County Government Center (PCGC) Master Plan Update Project (project) and project site, and a preliminary evaluation of possible environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed project. The NOP was circulated on September 7, 2017, to state agencies (via the State Clearinghouse), local agencies, organizations, and the public. Consistent with the project issue areas noted in the Notice of Completion form, which accompanied the NOP to the State Clearinghouse, this EIR contains the following environmental resource chapters:

- Chapter 5 Land Use
- Chapter 6 Population and Housing
- Chapter 7 Biological Resources
- Chapter 8 Cultural Resources
- Chapter 9 Visual Resources
- Chapter 10 Transportation
- Chapter 11 Noise
- Chapter 12 Air Quality
- Chapter 13 Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Chapter 14 Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontology
- Chapter 15 Hydrology and Water Quality
- Chapter 16 Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Chapter 17 Public Services and Recreation
- Chapter 18 Utilities and Service Systems
- Chapter 19 Energy Conservation

The responses received during the NOP review period served to further refine the focus of the EIR. NOP comments were received from the California Department of Transportation, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Placer County Local Agency Formation Commission, the Placer County Airport Land Use Commission, the Placer County Air Pollution Control District, the Nevada Irrigation District, and several individuals and representatives of local organizations.

Issues Excluded from the EIR

As evaluated in the NOP, the project does not have the potential to result in significant impacts to certain environmental resource areas. In accordance with Section 15128 of the CEQA Guidelines and Section 18.20.030A of the Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance, the issues discussed below are not discussed in this EIR.

Agriculture

The project is expected to have no impact to agricultural and forestry resources. The project site has been largely developed since the 1940s (County of Placer 2018), does not contain substantial timber resources, and is not used as nor is zoned for agricultural uses (County of Placer 2010). The project site is not eligible for a Williamson Act contract due to the lack of agricultural activity (CDC 2017), and it is not listed in the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program database as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Farmland of Local Importance (CDC 2016). Therefore, the project would not result in any impacts to agricultural or forestry resources and these issues are not analyzed in this EIR.

Mineral Resources

The project site does not support any significant mineral resources based on the classification studies prepared by the California Department of Conservation, Division of Mines and Geology (County of Placer 2003). The project site does not support mineral recovery activities and is not known to contain substantial mineral resources; therefore, development of the project site would not destroy any existing mineral resources. Therefore, the project would not result in any impacts to mineral resources, and this issue is not analyzed in this EIR.

4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

According to Section 15125(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project as they exist at the time when the NOP is published. This “environmental setting” typically constitutes the “baseline condition” against which project-related impacts are compared. Therefore, the baseline condition for this EIR, unless noted otherwise, is based on conditions that existed in September 2017, when the NOP was published.

For analytical purposes, impacts associated with implementation of the proposed PCGC Master Plan Update are compared against existing conditions at the time the NOP was published. The proposed project’s cumulative impacts are assessed against future, or “cumulative,” conditions, generally defined as the conditions anticipated to exist in approximately 2036, which is the future year condition forecasting provided by the County’s traffic modeling. Existing conditions and

cumulative conditions can differ by issue area. Each chapter defines the existing conditions and cumulative conditions for the impact being analyzed.

In determining the level of significance of environmental impacts associated with the proposed project, the analysis in this EIR assumes that the proposed project would comply with relevant federal and state laws and regulations, County General Plan policies, County ordinances, and other adopted County documents (e.g., Auburn/Bowman Community Plan), unless otherwise noted. Therefore, such mandatory policies, ordinances, and standards are not identified as mitigation measures, but, rather, are discussed as part of the regulatory setting governing the proposed project.

4.3 CHAPTER FORMAT

Each chapter begins with a description of the project’s environmental setting to establish the existing conditions (i.e., baseline) that characterize the project site and surrounding area. The second section in each chapter presents the regulatory framework, which summarizes the adopted federal, state, and local plans, policies, and ordinances as they pertain to the project’s potential environmental effects. The regulatory setting is followed by a statement of the thresholds of significance used to determine whether the project’s physical environmental effects would constitute a significant impact. This is followed by the analysis of project impacts at both the programmatic and project levels of analysis.

For each impact evaluated, an impact summary table presents the impact number and title, a determination of the level of significance of the impact for each of the three project components (the PCGC Master Plan Update, the Health and Human Services building, and the Multifamily Residential project at 1st Street and B Avenue), the mitigation measures necessary to reduce or avoid significant impacts, and a determination of the level of significance after implementation of mitigation measures. An explanation of each impact and an analysis of its significance follow each impact summary table.

An example of an impact summary table is shown here:

Impact 9-1	Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?		
	<i>PCGC Master Plan Update</i>	<i>Health and Human Services Building</i>	<i>Multifamily Residential Project</i>
Level of Significance:	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant
Mitigation Measures:	None Required	None Required	None Required
Significance after Mitigation:	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant

Following the impact summary table, each chapter presents the programmatic analysis of the PCGC Master Plan Update, followed by the project-level analyses of the Health and Human Services building project and the Multifamily Residential project.

Each discussion of potential impacts of the proposed project is presented in paragraph form. The project-specific impacts associated with construction and operation of the proposed project are evaluated and compared to the thresholds of significance for the particular impact. The analysis discusses the applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations that would reduce impacts. As noted above, it is assumed that the proposed project would comply with applicable laws, ordinances, and regulations, and that the County and/or private project applicants would obtain all necessary permits and comply with all required conditions of those permits. In many instances, the actions that are necessary to reduce a project impact to less than significant are already required by existing laws or requirements, in which case it is not necessary for additional mitigation measures to be imposed. The impact analysis concludes with a determination of the impact's significance, shown in **bold type** (e.g., **less-than-significant impact** or **significant and unavoidable impact**).

Cumulative Impacts Analysis

An analysis of cumulative impacts follows the evaluation of project impacts in each chapter. As defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15355, cumulative impacts refer to two or more individual impacts that, when considered together, are considerable or compound or increase other environmental impacts. The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment that results from the incremental impact of that project together with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, causing related impacts.

In this EIR, issue area chapters provide an introductory statement that defines the cumulative analysis methodology and the cumulative context being analyzed. In some instances, a project-specific impact may be considered less than significant, but would be considered potentially significant in combination with other development within the surrounding area. Or, in some instances, a potentially significant impact could result on a project level, but would not result in a cumulatively considerable impact. The cumulative impacts analysis is presented in the same format as the impacts section is, described above. When a cumulatively significant impact is identified, that section addresses what the project's incremental contribution to that cumulatively significant impact would be.

Mitigation Measures

Within each impact analysis discussion, any feasible mitigation measures necessary to reduce the significance of that impact are identified, and the degree to which the identified mitigation measure would reduce the impact is described. As noted above, compliance with applicable laws, policies,

and regulations is assumed and will be identified in the impact analysis. In many cases, compliance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations is sufficient to ensure that an impact would remain less than significant. The text of all mitigation measures for each environmental resource chapter is provided in a single section following the impact analysis.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15370 defines mitigation as follows:

- avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;
- minimizing impacts by limiting the degree of magnitude of the action and its implementation;
- rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
- reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and/or
- compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

In addition, provided there is a “reasonable plan for mitigation” and the project’s contributions are “sufficiently tied to the actual mitigation” of the project’s impacts, a commitment to contribute a fair share to such a mitigation program may be sufficient to meet an agency’s mitigation duty under CEQA (*Save Our Peninsula Com. v. Monterey County Bd. of Supervisors*, [2001] 87 Cal.App.4th 99, 141; see also CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130(a)(3) [recognizing that a project’s contribution to a cumulative impact may be less than cumulatively considerable where “the project is required to implement or fund its fair share of a mitigation measure or measures designed to alleviate the cumulative impact”]; see also *Anderson First Coalition v. City of Anderson* [2005] 130 Cal.App.4th 1173).

4.4 TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE EIR

This Draft EIR uses the following terminology to describe environmental effects of the proposed project:

- **Thresholds of Significance:** A set of criteria used by the lead agency to determine at what level, or “threshold,” an impact would be considered significant. Thresholds of significance used in this EIR include those set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15065 (Mandatory Findings of Significance) and those derived from questions set forth in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines; criteria based on regulatory standards of local, state, and federal agencies; and criteria based on goals and policies identified in the Placer County General Plan, the County’s Auburn/Bowman Community Plan, and the Placer County Code. In

determining the level of significance, the analysis assumes that the proposed project would comply with relevant federal, state, and local regulations and ordinances.

- **Less-than-Significant Impact:** A project impact is considered less than significant when it does not reach the significance threshold according to the relevant standard, indicating that there would be no substantial adverse change in the environment. No mitigation is required for less-than-significant impacts.
- **Potentially Significant Impact:** A potentially significant impact is an environmental effect that could cause a substantial adverse change in the environment; however, additional information is needed regarding the extent of the impact to make the determination of significance. To provide a conservative impact assessment under CEQA, a potentially significant impact is treated as if it were a significant impact.
- **Significant Impact:** A project impact is considered significant if it results in a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment. Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project effects in the context of specified significance criteria. When available, potentially feasible mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified to reduce these effects on the environment.
- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact:** A project impact is considered significant and unavoidable if it results in a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment and cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant. Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project effects in the context of specified significance criteria. Even after application of potentially feasible mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified, these effects to the environment remain adverse.
- **Cumulative Impact:** According to CEQA, “cumulative impacts refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15355). CEQA requires that cumulative impacts be discussed when the “project’s incremental effect is cumulatively considerable” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130 (a)).

4.5 REFERENCES CITED

CDC (California Department of Conservation). 2016. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. “Placer County.” Accessed June 2018.

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County of Placer. 2003. DeWitt Government Center Facility Plan EIR. Prepared for Placer County Department of Facility Services. Prepared by North Fork Associates. December 2003.

County of Placer. 2018. Placer County Government Center Master Plan, Draft Strategic Vision. Prepared by Williams + Paddon. November 16, 2018. <http://www.placer.ca.gov/pcgc>.

NFA/URS (North Fork Associates and URS). 2002. Existing Conditions Reports. Chapter 1 Geologic Resources. August 2002.

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