

**111 Independence Drive Project**

Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report

**Table of Contents**

**General Public**

Annabelle Nye ..... 3

**Public Agencies**

Sequoia Union High School District ..... 5

## **General Public Comments**

**Perata, Kyle T**

---

**From:** Perata, Kyle T  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 7, 2021 12:05 PM  
**To:** Perata, Kyle T  
**Subject:** 111 Independence Drive.



**Kyle T. Perata**  
Principal Planner  
City Hall - 1st Floor  
701 Laurel St.  
tel 650-330-6721  
[menlopark.org](http://menlopark.org)

**From:** Annabelle Nye <[annbell1@aol.com](mailto:annbell1@aol.com)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 27, 2020 7:42 AM  
**To:** Bhagat, Payal  
**Subject:** 111 Independence Drive.

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Unless you recognize the sender's email address and know the content is safe, DO NOT click links, open attachments or reply.**

To Payal Bhagat:

We are against this project. Too many stories, too much development in Menlo Park. When is this going to stop? It is impossible to drive down El Camino at certain times of the day even during the Covid pandemic. Menlo Park is overrun with too many new apartments, offices, cars, etc.

Please stop this development! We are ruining our city.

Blaine and Annabelle Nye

## **Public Agencies Comments**



Bradley R. Sena  
Attorney at Law

E-mail: bsena@lozanosmith.com

February 2, 2021

**By U.S. Mail & E-Mail: [PBhagat@menlopark.org](mailto:PBhagat@menlopark.org)**

Ms. Payal Bhagat  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
701 Laurel Street  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Response of Sequoia Union High School District to Draft Environmental Impact Report for the 111 Independence Drive Project

Dear Ms. Bhagat:

This office represents Sequoia Union High School District (“District”). On behalf of the District, we are hereby submitting comments regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Report (“Draft EIR”) prepared by the City of Menlo Park (“City”) for the project to be located on an approximately 0.92-acre site having the address of 111 Independence Drive, Menlo Park, CA (the “Property”). According to the Draft EIR, the proposed project, sponsored by SP Menlo, LLC (“Developer”), will consist of redevelopment of the Property with an approximately 145,679 square foot (“sf”), eight-story multi-family apartment building with approximately 105 dwelling units, and an approximately 746 sf commercial space (the “Project”). This Project is anticipated to generate approximately 270 new residents, and a corresponding increase in high school students that attend District schools. The Project will be located approximately 2,400 feet west of the District’s TIDE Academy.

Please note that, concurrently with this letter, the District is transmitting its response to the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Menlo Uptown Project. Both the Menlo Uptown Project and the instant Project are mixed-use residential projects proposed in the Bayfront Area of Menlo Park a short distance away from the District’s TIDE Academy. Further, the Initial Studies and Draft EIRs for both projects were prepared by the same firm and are substantially similar. For these reasons, the District’s comments in response to both Draft EIRs may substantially overlap.

The Draft EIR, like the Draft EIR prepared for the Menlo Uptown Project, does not comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA,” Pub. Res. Code §§ 21000, *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §§ 15000, *et seq.*, “CEQA Guidelines”), for both technical and substantive reasons. Moreover, the Draft EIR, based on an improper

*Limited Liability Partnership*

Ms. Payal Bhagat  
City of Menlo Park  
February 2, 2021  
Page 2

interpretation of statutes added and amended by Senate Bill (SB) 50, does not include sufficient information to evaluate potential environmental impacts both to schools, and related to schools. **Through this letter, the District wishes to emphasize that this Project, in combination with the numerous other projects currently pending before the City (including the Menlo Uptown Project), has the potential to have a profound negative effect on the District's students, their families, and residents who will reside in and near the Project.**

With the foregoing in mind, the District requests that the City revise the Draft EIR to address the serious deficiencies identified in this letter, develop appropriate mitigation measures for impacts that are identified as significant, and then recirculate the revised Draft EIR as required by CEQA. (CEQA Guidelines § 15088.5.)

## **I. Background: Initial Study, Notices of Preparation, and District's Scoping Letter**

The District previously submitted comments to the City in response to the City's Notice of Preparation ("NOP") and Initial Study ("Initial Study"), on July 15, 2019. A copy of the District's July, 2019 comment letter (referred to as the "Prior Comment Letter") is attached hereto, and incorporated herein by this reference.

Through the Prior Comment Letter, the District specifically requested that the Draft EIR include a description and evaluation of certain information needed to determine whether impacts related to schools are potentially significant. Through the Prior Comment Letter, the District raised numerous concerns regarding the Project's potential impacts related to transportation, circulation, traffic, noise, population, housing, and the District's provision of its public services. Most of the concerns raised by the District were not addressed in the Draft EIR, and the ones that were addressed received no more than a cursory review. Because such information and environmental analysis was not included in the Draft EIR, the document is inadequate as set forth in more detail below.

## **II. The Draft EIR does not meet its purpose as an informational document because it fails to provide an adequate description of the environmental setting related to schools.**

One of CEQA's basic purposes is to inform government decision-makers and the public about the potential significant environmental effects of proposed projects and to disclose to the public the reasons for approval of a project that may have significant environmental effects. (CEQA Guidelines § 15002(a)(1) and (a)(4).) In line with this goal, the preparer of an EIR must make a genuine effort to obtain and disseminate information necessary to the understanding of impacts of project implementation. (See, CEQA Guidelines § 15151; *Sierra Club v. State Board of Forestry* (1994) 7 Cal.4th 1215, 1236.)

An EIR must describe existing environmental conditions in the vicinity of the proposed project from both a local and regional perspective, which is referred to as the "environmental setting." (CEQA Guidelines § 15125.) This description of existing environmental conditions serves as the "baseline" for measuring the qualitative and quantitative changes to the environment that will result from the project and for determining whether those environmental effects are significant.

Ms. Payal Bhagat  
City of Menlo Park  
February 2, 2021  
Page 3

(*Id.*; see also, CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a); *Neighbors for Smart Rail v. Exposition Metro Line Constr. Auth.* (2013) 57 C4th 439, 447.)

District facilities are a critical part of the Project location's environment, and should be considered throughout the Draft EIR impact categories. As noted, the Project is located approximately 1,400 feet east of the District's TIDE Academy. (Draft EIR at 4.3-31.) TIDE Academy's first year of operations was the 2019/2020 school year. While enrollment was 103 students for the first year of operations, the District anticipates that it will exceed its 400-student capacity at TIDE by the fourth year of operations (2023-2024). The Project is otherwise located within the District's Menlo Atherton High School attendance boundary. Menlo Atherton High School, which is the county's largest high school, currently exceeds its capacity by 200 students. The District is inadequately equipped to house these excess students. The proposed Project will be accessed via entrance points on Independence Drive, which road is used by District families, students, and staff to walk, bike, and drive to TIDE Academy from neighborhoods located to the east, west, and south.

Independence Drive and the Bayfront Area generally have been, and are anticipated to continue being heavily impacted by traffic, traffic exhaust, and fumes due to increased development in the neighborhood.

The Draft EIR purports to describe the Project's environmental setting in each of the five environmental impact categories that are analyzed in the Draft EIR. In doing so, the Draft EIR notes the location of TIDE Academy in a few instances. However, the Draft EIR otherwise fails to present any information needed to assess the Project's environmental impacts on the District, TIDE Academy, or Menlo Atherton High School. For instance, the Draft EIR fails to address the current and projected future enrollment at TIDE or any other District schools that will be affected by the Project; the District's educational program objectives at TIDE and or Menlo Atherton High School; a description of how the District currently uses its facilities at TIDE or Menlo Atherton High School; and the current vehicular and pedestrian paths of travel used by District staff, students and their families to get to and from these schools, in the context of a neighborhood that has already been severely impacted by traffic. Without consideration of these factors, it is impossible for the lead agency and public to assess whether there are any impacts posed by the Project on the District's students, families, and staff, and whether those impacts are significant.

**III. The Draft EIR does not meet its purposes as an informational document because it fails to provide an adequate analysis of environmental impacts on and related to schools.**

**A. The Draft EIR inappropriately relies on information, analysis, and mitigation measures contained in the “program” EIR prepared for the City’s ConnectMenlo project in 2016.**

The Draft EIR improperly “scopes out” numerous environmental impact categories, including “Public Services” impacts related to schools. In doing so, the Draft EIR relies on the analysis of Public Services impacts contained in the Initial Study, which in turn tiers off of the analysis of Public Services impacts contained in the City’s EIR prepared for its General Plan update (referred to as “ConnectMenlo”) in 2016. (Draft EIR at 1-2; Initial Study at 3-41.) Specifically, the Initial Study states as follows:

The ConnectMenlo Final EIR determined that any development associated with ConnectMenlo would occur incrementally over the 24- year building horizon and would be subject to payment of development impact fees, which under Senate Bill 50 (SB 50) are deemed to be full and complete mitigation...Therefore, because the proposed project would comply with existing regulations prepared to minimize impacts related to schools and would be subject to the mandatory payment of developer impact fees pursuant to SB 50, the proposed project would have a less- than- significant impact related to the need for remodeled or expanded school facilities.

(Initial Study at 3-41; emphasis added.)

As noted by the Initial Study, the ConnectMenlo Draft EIR concluded as follows with regard to development impacts on the District and its facilities:

Because future development under the proposed project would occur incrementally over the 24-year buildout horizon and, in compliance with SB 50, would be subject to pay development impact fees that are current at the time of development, impacts related to the SUHSD would be less than significant.

(Connect Menlo Draft EIR at 4.12-40; emphasis added.)

A “program” EIR is an EIR prepared for a series of small projects that can be characterized as one large project. (14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15168(a).) A project proponent may rely on a program EIR’s analysis of the program’s environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and alternatives in order to engage in a simplified environmental review for a future project contemplated by the program. (*Id.* at subd. (d).) However, when a program EIR is relied on by a future project proponent, the new project proponent must carefully examine the impacts addressed in the program EIR and determine whether additional environmental review is required. An agency’s evaluation of the sufficiency of a program EIR for later approval of a project contemplated by the program involves a two-step process:

1. First, the agency considers whether the project is covered by the program EIR by determining whether it will result in environmental effects that were not examined in the program EIR. (14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15168(c)(1).)
2. Second, the agency must consider whether any new environmental effects could occur, or new mitigation measures would be required, due to events occurring after the program EIR was certified. (14 Cal. Code Regs. §§ 15168(c)(2), 15162.)

If the project will result in significant environmental impacts that were not examined in the program EIR, then the project proponent must prepare an EIR analyzing those impacts and corresponding mitigation measures. (14 Cal. Code Regs. §§ 15162 and 15168(c)(1); Pub. Res. Code §§ 21100(a), 21151.)

The Initial Study and Draft EIR's reliance on the ConnectMenlo EIR's analysis of potential impacts on the District and its facilities is improper and misguided. Circumstances have changed since the time that the ConnectMenlo EIR was prepared, and the development assumptions underlying the ConnectMenlo project approvals have proven inaccurate. Critically, ConnectMenlo was based on the incorrect assumption that development under the program would take place in an incremental fashion, over the course of 24 years. As noted in the instant Project's Draft EIR, ConnectMenlo envisioned that 4,500 new residential units would be added to the Bayfront Area by 2040. According to the City's current "ConnectMenlo Project Summary Table," development currently proposed and/or completed in the neighborhood would result in the construction of 3,257 net new residential units.<sup>1</sup> This does not include the 540 units that have already been completed at 3639 Haven Avenue and 3645 Haven Avenue, which would bring the total number of residential units to 3,797. This equates to 84% of the total authorized buildout under ConnectMenlo. It is clear from this trend that full buildout under ConnectMenlo will be achieved well in advance of 2040. The Draft EIR acknowledges the fact that this assumption was incorrect in providing that "[a]lthough the ConnectMenlo Final EIR assumed a buildout horizon of 2040, the maximum development potential may be reached sooner than anticipated." (Draft EIR at 3-11, fn. 10.)

The Draft EIR provides that "no new or additional impacts are anticipated as a result of the expedited buildout." (*Id.*) The District vehemently disagrees with this conclusion. Contrary to the Draft EIR's assertions, the ConnectMenlo EIR's analysis regarding the General Plan update's impacts on the District (and on other public services) was founded on the assumption that development of the Bayfront Area would take place in an "incremental fashion."

**If the City continues to approve new residential development projects at its current pace, the District will be subject to a rapid influx of students to the District's facilities, which are already at or exceeding capacity.** This rapid influx, combined with the existing inadequacies of the District's school facilities funding sources (as discussed below), will prevent the District from engaging in meaningful long-term facilities planning, and will instead require the District to spend valuable resources on temporary solutions to the District's facilities problems, such as the purchase and lease of portables. **This influx of students will not only impact the District's ability to accommodate increased enrollment, but will pose numerous traffic, transportation, safety, air quality, noise, and other impacts affecting the District's ability to safely and effectively provide its services.** As discussed below, none of these impacts were properly analyzed in the ConnectMenlo EIR, the Initial Study, or the Draft EIR.

Further, ConnectMenlo did not consider either the program or Project's specific impacts on the District's TIDE Academy, as this school did not yet exist when the ConnectMenlo EIR was prepared. Because TIDE Academy is located in the Bayfront neighborhood, it is particularly vulnerable to the thousands of residential units authorized by ConnectMenlo, all of which will be constructed in the Bayfront Area. ConnectMenlo did not consider whether/how the placement of thousands of residential units within a few hundred meters from a District high school would impact the District's program at TIDE Academy. Accordingly, the Draft EIR's reliance on the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/23346/ConnectMenlo-Project-Summary-Table>

analysis and mitigation measures described in the ConnectMenlo EIR is inappropriate with respect to impacts on the District.

Finally, as discussed below, ConnectMenlo did not otherwise properly analyze the General Plan update's impacts on or related to the District and its facilities. Accordingly, the Draft EIR's reliance on the ConnectMenlo EIR as the basis for disregarding certain Project impacts on the District is improper.

**B. The Draft EIR and ConnectMenlo EIR fail to identify and analyze all impacts on school facilities under CEQA's threshold of significance for Public Services impacts.**

The Initial Study, similar to the ConnectMenlo EIR, states that the proposed Project would have a significant "Public Services" impact on schools if it would:

Result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives [for the provision of school services].

(Initial Study at 3-39.)

In purporting to analyze public services impacts on the District under this threshold, the Initial Study and Draft EIR tier from the analysis of the ConnectMenlo Draft EIR. The ConnectMenlo Draft EIR's analysis consisted mostly of noting the current enrollment capacity of Menlo Atherton High School and the District's unspecified plans for construction of a future high school. (ConnectMenlo Draft EIR at 4.12-39-4.12-40.) The ConnectMenlo EIR then went on to conclude that because the developer would pay developer fees as required by SB 50, any impacts on schools would be less than significant. (ConnectMenlo Draft EIR at 4.12-40.) The instant Project's Draft EIR and Initial Study adopt the same conclusion as the ConnectMenlo EIR, albeit without analyzing the District's facilities capacity in any way. (Initial Study at 3-41; Draft EIR at 5-6.)

Through this short and conclusory analysis, the Initial Study and Draft EIR fail to appropriately analyze the Project's potential impacts under the above-cited Public Services CEQA threshold.

In order to support a determination that environmental impacts are insignificant (and can therefore be scoped out of an EIR), the lead agency must include in either the Initial Study or the EIR the reasons that the applicable environmental effects were determined to be insignificant. (Pub. Res. Code § 21100(c); CEQA Guidelines § 15128.) An unsubstantiated conclusion that an impact is not significant, without supporting information or explanatory analysis, is insufficient; the reasoning supporting the determination of insignificance must be disclosed. (See, *City of Maywood v. Los Angeles Unified Sch. Dist.* (2012) 208 CA4th 362, 393; *San Joaquin Raptor/Wildlife Rescue Ctr. V. County of Stanislaus* (1994) 27 CA4th 713 [findings that project will not pose biological impacts to wetlands must be supported by facts and evidence showing

that the lead agency investigated the presence and extent of wetlands on the property, which analysis must be disclosed to the public].)

The approach utilized in the ConnectMenlo EIR, the Initial Study, and the Draft EIR oversimplifies the myriad of ways in which large residential and commercial development projects can impact a school district's need for new or physically altered facilities in order to maintain performance objectives. These documents fail to analyze all potential impacts under this standard, including but not limited to: (1) whether the influx of students would require "physically altered" school facilities unrelated to the accommodation of additional enrollment; (2) whether other impacts of the proposed Project, such as increased traffic, noise, or air pollutants in the neighborhood surrounding TIDE Academy, could impact the District's need for new or physically altered school facilities; and (3) whether other impacts of the proposed Project could otherwise interfere with the District's ability to accomplish its own performance objectives.

The District anticipates that its ability to provide adequate service at TIDE Academy will be severely impacted by the Project. For this reason, the Draft EIR should have provided information along the following lines:

1. Existing and future conditions within the District, on a school-by-school basis, including size, location and capacity of facilities.
2. Adequacy of both existing infrastructure serving schools and anticipated infrastructure needed to serve future schools.
3. District's past and present enrollment trends.
4. District's current uses of its facilities.
5. Projected teacher/staffing requirements based on anticipated population growth and existing State and District policies.
6. Description of any impacts on curriculum as a result of anticipated population growth.
7. Cost of providing capital facilities to accommodate students on a per-student basis, by the District.
8. Expected shortfall or excess between the estimated development fees to be generated by the Project and the cost for provision of capital facilities.
9. An assessment of the District's present and projected capital facility, operations, maintenance, and personnel costs.

10. An assessment of financing and funding sources available to the District, including but not limited to those mitigation measures set forth in Section 65996 of the Government Code.
11. Any expected fiscal impacts on the District, including an assessment of projected cost of land acquisition, school construction, and other facilities needs.
12. An assessment of cumulative impacts on schools resulting from additional development already approved or pending.
13. Identification of how the District will accommodate students from the Project who are not accommodated at current District schools, including the effects on the overall operation and administration of the District, the students and employees.

Without consideration of the above, the Draft EIR fails as an informational document.

Finally, the Initial Study and the Draft EIR fail to analyze adequately cumulative public services impacts on the District due to extensive new development within District boundaries. EIRs must discuss cumulative impacts of a project when the project's effects on the environment, viewed in conjunction with impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects, is cumulatively considerable. (CEQA Guidelines § 15130(a); see, *San Joaquin Raptor/Wildlife Rescue Center v. County of Stanislaus* (1994) 27 CA4th 713, 720, finding that piecemeal approval of several projects with related impacts could lead to severe environmental harm.) The purpose of the cumulative impacts analysis is to avoid considering projects in a vacuum, because failure to consider cumulative harm may risk environmental disaster. (*Whitman v. Board of Supervisors* (1979) 88 CA3d 397, 408.)

As noted in the District's most recent School Fee Justification Study (April 2020), the District anticipates that an estimated 17,516 residential units may be constructed within District boundaries over the next 20 years, including approximately 5,500 units in Menlo Park. (SFJS, Appx. C.) Using the District's current student generation rate of 0.2 new high school students per residential unit, this new development, which will include numerous other development projects in the Bayfront Area, is anticipated to generate well over a thousand new students to the District. (SFJS at 9.) It is therefore likely that the District will exceed its facilities capacity at various locations throughout its boundaries in the coming years, including at TIDE Academy. The District anticipates both that the combined impact of the Project and all other residential development and commercial development projects in District boundaries and the Project neighborhood will significantly impact the District's ability to provide its public service in accordance with established performance objectives, and that the Project's incremental effect is cumulatively considerable.<sup>2</sup> (CEQA Guidelines § 15130(a).) Because the District currently exceeds capacity in various locations, it is further anticipated that the Project, when viewed in

---

<sup>2</sup> The Draft EIR contains an inventory of "Cumulative Projects in the Vicinity of the Project Site" on pages 4-3-4-5, but fails to include the proposed, very large mixed-use residential and commercial development project at 123 Independence Drive. It is expected that this project, in combination with the instant Project, will significantly impact District students attending TIDE Academy, and it must be considered when analyzing cumulative impacts on and related to schools.

conjunction with numerous other projects, will cause the District to need new or physically altered school facilities, including at TIDE Academy. Although this particular Project represents a small share of student generation compared to the Menlo Uptown project, for example, it still contributes to the overall massive student generation that the District is likely to be faced with, and its proponents must therefore ensure adequate mitigation of the impacts.

The Initial Study and Draft EIR were required to provide sufficient information for the public and lead agency to assess these impacts and potential mitigation measures. These documents do not provide such information. Rather, the Initial Study and Draft EIR inappropriately rely on the analysis conducted in the ConnectMenlo EIR, which also failed properly to analyze the above impacts.

**C. The Draft EIR contains an inadequate discussion of all other “school-related” impacts.**

In addition to impacts on the District’s facilities under the Public Services CEQA threshold of significance noted above, the Draft EIR fails adequately to analyze probable Project impacts “related to” schools, as required by CEQA and case law interpreting CEQA. In disregarding these impacts, the Draft EIR and Initial Study attempt to rely on Government Code section 65996, enacted by SB 50. However, reliance on SB 50 and Government Code section 65996 as a panacea to all impacts caused by the Project on the District demonstrates a misunderstanding regarding the law and developer fees.

By way of background, developer fees are fees that may be levied or imposed in connection with or made conditions of any legislative or adjudicative act by a local agency involving planning, use, or development of real property. (Ed. Code § 17620.) “Level 1” developer fees are levied against residential and commercial or industrial developments on a price per square foot basis. If a district is able to establish a sufficient “nexus” between the expected impacts of residential and commercial development and the district’s needs for facilities funding, then the district may charge up to \$4.08 per sf of residential development, and up to \$0.66 per sf of commercial development, which maximum amounts may be increased every two years based on the statewide cost index for class B construction.<sup>3</sup>

From a practical standpoint, the amount of developer fees received by school districts typically fall woefully short of alleviating the impacts caused by development. This is due largely to the facts that: (1) statutory developer fee amounts fail to acknowledge the differences in costs of school construction from one district to another, which particularly burdens school districts in the Bay Area, where both land and construction costs exceed other parts of the state; (2) **the developer fee amounts fail to contemplate the special facilities needs of those districts experiencing rapid growth, such as the need for portables;** and (3) the adjustment formula for developer fees is based on a “construction cost index” and does not include indexing related to

---

<sup>3</sup> Due to a Fee Sharing Agreement between the District and its elementary feeder school districts, the District is currently authorized to impose fees of \$1.63 per square foot for residential construction (40% of \$4.08), and \$0.26 per square foot for commercial/industrial construction (40% of \$0.66).

the increases in land costs, resulting in the actual costs of facilities (i.e., land and improvements) increasing at a greater rate than the adjustment.

The inadequacy of developer fees as a source of funding for school facilities has forced school districts to rely increasingly on other sources of funding, primarily including local bond funds and State bond funds administered under the State's School Facilities Program (SFP). However, these sources of funds can be equally unreliable. Local bond funds are difficult to generate, as local bonds are subject to school district bonding capacity limitations and voter approval. State funds are also unreliable and take considerable time to obtain, especially during this time of funding uncertainty caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. Either way, the funding formula was never intended to require the State and local taxpayers to shoulder a disproportionate portion of the cost of school facilities.

SB 50 declares that the payment of the developer fees authorized by Education Code section 17620 constitutes "full and complete mitigation of the impacts of any legislative or adjudicative act on the provision of adequate school facilities." (Gov. Code § 65995(h); see also, Gov. Code § 65996(a).) **However, California courts have since acknowledged that developer fees do not constitute full and complete mitigation for school-related impacts other than impacts "on school facilities" caused by overcrowding.** (*Chawanakee Unified Sch. Dist. v. Cty. of Madera* (2011) 196 Cal.App.4th 1016 ("Chawanakee").) *Chawanakee* addressed the extent to which the lead agency (Madera County) was required to consider school related impacts in an EIR for new development. The court determined that SB 50 does not excuse a lead agency from conducting environmental review of school impacts other than an impact "on school facilities." The court required that the County set aside the certification of the EIR and approvals of the project and take action necessary to bring the EIR into compliance with CEQA. (*Id.* at 1029.) In so holding, the court explained as follows:

[A]n impact on traffic, even if that traffic is near a school facility and related to getting students to and from the facility, is not an impact 'on school facilities' for purposes of Government Code section 65996, subdivision (a). From both a chronological and a molecular view of adverse physical change, the additional students traveling to existing schools will impact the roadways and traffic before they set foot on the school grounds. From a funding perspective, the capped school facilities fee will not be used by a school district to improve intersections affected by the traffic. Thus, it makes little sense to say that the impact on traffic is fully mitigated by the payment of the fee. In summary ... the impact on traffic is not an impact on school facilities and, as a result, the impact on traffic must be considered in the EIR.

(*Id.* at 1028-29.)

Thus, contrary to the assertions of the Initial Study and Draft EIR, the payment of fees does not constitute full mitigation for all impacts caused by development, including those related to traffic, noise, biological resources, air quality, pedestrian safety, and all other types of impacts "related to" the District and its educational program. The Draft EIR's approach is significantly flawed and inconsistent with the requirements of *Chawanakee*, as it failed to provide information

necessary to determine whether the Project results in significant environmental impacts both to and *related to* schools.

Specific areas where the Draft EIR and Initial Study failed adequately to evaluate school-related impacts are discussed below:

**i. Traffic/Transportation/Circulation**

Though the Draft EIR generally analyzes the traffic impacts anticipated by the Project, its analysis is inadequate, particularly as related to schools. The following issues require the City to revise and recirculate the Draft EIR.

As explained in the Prior Comment Letter, the Draft EIR was required to address potential effects related to traffic, including noise, air quality, and any other issues affecting schools. (Pub. Resources Code, §§ 21000, *et seq.*; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §§ 15000, *et seq.*; *Chawanakee, supra*, 196 Cal.App.4th 1016.) Additionally, specifically related to traffic, the Draft EIR was required to analyze safety issues related to traffic impacts, such as reduced pedestrian safety, particularly as to students walking or bicycling to and from TIDE Academy; potentially reduced response times for emergency services and first responders traveling to these schools; and increased potential for accidents due to gridlock during school drop-off and pick up hours.

The requirement to analyze student safety issues is rooted in both the California Constitution and CEQA. Article I, section 28(c), of the California Constitution states that all students and staff of primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are “safe, secure, and peaceful.” CEQA is rooted in the premise that “the maintenance of a quality environment for the people of this state now and in the future is a matter of statewide concern.” (Pub. Res. Code § 21000(a).) Naturally, safety is crucial in the maintenance of a quality environment. “The capacity of the environment is limited, and it is the intent of the Legislature that the government of the state take immediate steps to identify any critical thresholds for health and safety of the people of the state and take all coordinated actions necessary to prevent such thresholds being reached.” (Pub. Res. Code § 21000(d).) The Legislature has made clear in declarations accompanying CEQA’s enactment that public health and safety are of great importance in the statutory scheme. (Pub. Res. Code §§ 21000 (b), (c), (d), (g); 21001(b), (d) (emphasizing the need to provide for the public's welfare, health, safety, enjoyment, and living environment.) (*California Building Industry Assn. v. Bay Area Air Quality Management Dist.* (2015) 62 Cal.4th 369, 386.)

In order to fully understand these issues, the District requested that the Draft EIR include the following:

14. The existing and the anticipated vehicular traffic and student pedestrian movement patterns to and from school sites, including movement patterns to and from TIDE Academy, and including consideration of bus routes.

15. The impact(s) of increased vehicular movement and volumes caused by the Project, including but not limited to potential conflicts with school pedestrian movement, school transportation, and busing activities to and from TIDE Academy.
16. The estimated travel demand and trip generation, trip distribution and trip assignment by including consideration of school sites and home-to-school travel.
17. The cumulative impacts on schools and the community in general resulting from increased vehicular movement and volumes expected from additional development already approved or pending.
18. The direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the circulation and traffic patterns in the community as a result of traffic generated by the transportation needs of students to and from the Project and schools throughout the District during the Project build-out.
19. The impacts on the routes and safety of students traveling to school by vehicle, bus, walking, and bicycles.

The Draft EIR fails to analyze any of the above categories of information. There is, therefore, no way for the lead agency or the public to assess whether the Project will pose a traffic impact related to the District's provision of public services.

As noted in the Prior Comment Letter, the District anticipates that the construction and operation of the proposed Project will have significant impacts on traffic, transportation, circulation, and student safety.

Regional vehicular access to the Property is provided by US Highway 101 (US 101), via the Marsh Road on- and off- ramps located to the west and State Route 84 (SR 84 or the Bayfront Expressway) located to the north. Access to the Project will be provided solely via Independence Drive. The Bayfront Area of Menlo Park has experienced a drastic impact in traffic over the last ten to fifteen years as the City has continued to approve of newer corporate campuses and mixed biotechnology, commercial, office, and residential land uses. ConnectMenlo calls for an increase of 4.7 million square feet of non-residential office space, 850 hotel rooms, 5,430 residential units, 13,960 residents, and 20,150 employees, all within the Bayfront Area.<sup>4</sup> ConnectMenlo concluded that the additional development would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to roadway segments and increase peak hour delays at intersections from increased traffic, even after the mitigation measures called for in the General Plan Update are implemented (if ever).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Final EIR (October 6, 2016), p. 2-12; ConnectMenlo: General Plan Land Use & Circulation Elements and M-2 Area Zoning Update Draft EIR (June 1, 2016), Table 3-2.

<sup>5</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Final EIR (October 6, 2016), pp. 2-15 – 2-16; ConnectMenlo: General Plan Land Use & Circulation Elements and M-2 Area Zoning Update (June 1, 2016), p. 4.13-73.

The Level of Service (LOS) analysis included in the Project’s Draft EIR further reveals that the intersections surrounding the Project site and TIDE Academy, including the intersections of Marsh Road/Bayfront Expressway, Chrysler Drive/Independence Drive, Chilco Street/Constitution Drive, Willow Road/Bayfront Expressway, and University Avenue/Bayfront Expressway, are currently operating at an LOS of ‘D’ or worse at one or more peak hours, and do not meet the City’s desired LOS standards. (Draft EIR, Appx. E, at 10-11.) Per the Draft EIR, traffic generated by the Project, in conjunction with other near term projects expected to be approved, would also cause the levels of service at the intersection of Chrysler Drive/Constitution Drive to drop to an ‘F,’ and would further degrade the levels of service at certain other intersections. (Draft EIR at 4.2-42-4.2-43.) In analyzing intersection Levels of Service under “Cumulative (2040) Plus Project Conditions,” the Draft EIR shows that most intersections in the Project neighborhood will be operating out of compliance with the City’s Circulation Policy goals. (Draft EIR at 4.2-46-4.2-47.) While the Draft EIR discusses certain improvement measures that the City may take to resolve these traffic issues, including the payment of transportation impact fees to fund some (but not all) of the improvement measures, it is unclear from the Draft EIR exactly when or if these measures will be accomplished. (See, e.g., Draft EIR at 4.2-48 [“While the improvements to the westbound approach are included in the City’s TIF program, the improvements on the other approaches are beyond those in the TIF program and payment of the TIF would not entirely address the change to LOS as a result of project traffic”]; see also, Draft EIR, Appx. E, at 16 and 17 [“The implementation timeline of these proposed improvements [to walking, biking, and transit facilities] is unknown”].) In addition to deficient vehicular intersections, the Draft EIR states that the “network of sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb ramps are discontinuous in the vicinity of the proposed project.” (Draft EIR at 4.2-7.) Finally, the Draft EIR goes on to note several sidewalk gaps that exist in the Bayfront Area. (*Id.*)

**The construction of, and traffic generated by, the Project will severely exacerbate the existing inadequacies in the City’s roadways/sidewalks noted above, the already stifling traffic in the general area and Bayfront Area, and the safety issues posed thereby. These impacts will severely inhibit the District’s ability to operate its educational programs, including at TIDE Academy. However, none of these issues were properly analyzed in the ConnectMenlo EIR or the Draft EIR.**

The Draft EIR shows that the proposed Project is anticipated to impede circulation in the Bayfront Area, and clog the access roads to, from, and around the District’s TIDE Academy. (See, 5 Cal. Code Regs. § 14010(k), which requires that school facilities be easily accessible from arterial roads.) The TIDE Academy driveway is located a short distance east of the proposed Project. Both TIDE Academy and the proposed Project would be accessed by the same roads, including Marsh Road, Independence Drive, Constitution Drive, Jefferson Drive, and the immediately surrounding streets. In addition to drawing hundreds of new residents to the area, including many new high school students, the proposed Project will draw hundreds of daily office commuters, visitors, and emergency access vehicles from around the Bay Area.

As indicated in the City’s General Plan, and as shown in the Draft EIR, the City’s roads and intersections are not currently equipped to accommodate such high density development and

high levels of traffic. (See, e.g., Draft EIR at 4.2-24-4.2-26 [ConnectMenlo EIR found significant and unavoidable impacts to several different elements of the City's transportation system due to project buildout].) Independence Drive is a narrow two-lane road with sidewalks on only one side of the street. Accordingly, such increases to traffic in the area will not only make it much more difficult for students and staff to travel to and from TIDE Academy, but will also **drastically increase the risk of vehicular accidents to District families, students, and staff traveling to and from school.** For instance, many students at TIDE Academy access school by turning onto Independence Drive from Marsh Road. This turn is already extremely dangerous, as it requires drivers essentially to complete a 180 degree turn, with no visibility of the cars and/or people traveling on Independence Drive. By packing hundreds of new residents and visitors into the western Bayfront Area, the Project will be magnifying this dangerous road condition, further placing District students, families, and staff in harm's way. This roadway condition was not discussed in the Draft EIR.

In addition to increased risks of vehicular accidents, the Draft EIR fails to analyze how traffic and parking impacts posed by the Project will impact the safety and convenience of TIDE Academy students who walk or bike to school. Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations requires that school sites be located within a proposed attendance area that encourages student walking and avoids extensive bussing. (5 Cal. Code Regs. § 14010(l).) To mitigate the impacts of increased traffic in the Bayfront Area, the District has committed to develop and implement a Travel Demand Management Plan. Through this Plan, the District encourages the use of student walking, biking, and other alternative means of student transport to school.<sup>6</sup> Further, to mitigate the impacts of conflicts and/or dangerous interactions between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles, the District agreed to prepare a "Safe Routes to School Map" that identifies facilities such as traffic lights, crosswalks, and demarcated bikeways that promote safe routes to school.<sup>7</sup>

The Draft EIR notes the following goals and policies from the City's General Plan related to the safe promotion of alternative modes of transportation:

- Goal CIRC-1: Provide and maintain a safe, efficient, attractive, user-friendly circulation system that promotes a healthy, safe, and active community and quality of life throughout Menlo Park.
- Goal CIRC-2: Increase accessibility for and use of streets by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Policy CIRC-2.14. Impacts of New Development. Require new development to mitigate its impacts on the safety...and efficiency...of the circulation system. New development should minimize cut-through and high-speed vehicle traffic on residential streets; minimize the number of vehicle trips; provide appropriate bicycle, pedestrian, and transit

---

<sup>6</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Draft EIR (July 8, 2016), p. S-4; The City of Menlo Park's Comprehensive Bicycle Development Plan (2005) identifies school-aged bicycle commuters as one of the two key bicycle commute groups utilizing the City's bicycle infrastructure.

<sup>7</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Draft EIR (July 8, 2016), p. S-6.

connections, amenities and improvements in proportion with the scale of proposed projects; and facilitate appropriate or adequate response times and access for emergency vehicles.

- Policy CIRC-3.4: Level of Service. Strive to maintain level of service D at all City-controlled signalized intersections during peak hours...
- **Policy CIRC-6.4: Employers and Schools. Encourage employers and schools to promote walking, bicycling, carpooling, shuttles, and transit use.**

(Draft EIR at 4.2-17-4.2-19; emphasis added.)

Further, and as noted by the ConnectMenlo EIR (but excluded from the instant Project's Draft EIR), the City has committed itself to supporting "Safe Routes to School programs to enhance the safety of school children who walk and bike to school" in General Plan Policy CIRC-1.9. (City of Menlo Park General Plan (Nov. 29, 2016), Circulation Element at CIRC-16.)

While the Draft EIR purports to analyze whether the Project complies with the above policies, the Draft EIR does not include adequate information or analysis regarding the transportation needs and patterns of District students, including those attending TIDE Academy. The Draft EIR likewise fails to consider how extreme increases in traffic on roads that are already narrow and crowded will impact the safety of students traveling to and from TIDE Academy. Rather, in assessing whether the Project would be consistent with Policy CIRC-6.4 related to Employers and Schools, the Draft EIR doesn't even mention schools in simply stating that the "proposed project would develop and implement a TDM plan that includes measures encouraging employers to promote walking, bicycling, carpooling, shuttles, and transit use." (Draft EIR at 4.2-32.) This analysis is not adequate under CEQA, as it does not provide the public with sufficient information as to whether the Project will comply with the City's General Plan policies.

The Draft EIR likewise provides only a surface-level analysis regarding the Project's compliance with other City policies related to the promotion of safe alternative modes of transportation. The Draft EIR notes that there are several existing deficiencies with pedestrian facilities within and in the vicinity of the Project site, including discontinuous sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb ramps, as well as sidewalk gaps. (Draft EIR at 4.2-7.) The Draft EIR also notes that the Project would involve the addition of a small portion of sidewalk intended to encourage the use of pedestrian facilities, and some street lighting along Independence Drive. (Draft EIR at 4.2-30.) However, the analysis completely fails to consider how the probable increase in traffic congestion to the area could exacerbate existing deficiencies with pedestrian facilities, thereby posing severe safety issues to pedestrian use of the Project neighborhood. Contrary to assertions in the Draft EIR, the new criteria established in CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3 for analyzing transportation impacts does not excuse a lead agency from analyzing and mitigating traffic congestion impacts where such impacts may cause significant impacts on air quality, noise, and pedestrian safety. (Pub. Res. Code § 21099(b)(3).)

The inadequate parking proposed for the Project will also magnify issues related to pedestrian safety. While inadequate parking in and of itself may not be considered a significant impact under CEQA, the Draft EIR is still required to provide sufficient information regarding any secondary impacts that may result from inadequate parking, such as safety impacts to students traveling to and from school. (See, *Covina Residents for Responsible Development v. City of Covina* (2018) 21 CA5th 712, 728.) While the number of parking spaces proposed for the Project would satisfy the City's Municipal Code requirements, the Draft EIR notes that demand for parking generated by the Project would exceed the proposed supply by at least 37 spaces. (Draft EIR at 4.2-52.) This will result in an increased demand for public parking spaces in the streets surrounding TIDE Academy and the Property, which will in turn lead to more crowded streets and a higher potential for conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. These secondary impacts on pedestrian and student safety caused by inadequate parking must be analyzed.

Finally, the Draft EIR's cumulative traffic impacts analysis is deficient. As noted above, EIRs must discuss cumulative impacts of a project when the project's effects on the environment, viewed in conjunction with impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects, is cumulatively considerable. (CEQA Guidelines § 15130(a).) (See, *San Joaquin Raptor/Wildlife Rescue Center v. County of Stanislaus* (1994) 27 CA4th 713, 720.) While a lead agency may incorporate information from previously prepared program EIRs into the agency's analysis of a project's cumulative impacts, the lead agency must address all cumulative impacts that were not previously addressed in the program EIR. (Pub. Res. Code § 21083.3(c); 14 CCR 14183(b)(3).)

The Project's above-discussed anticipated traffic and safety impacts on the District, combined with the anticipated traffic and safety impacts of the vast number of development projects that have recently been approved and are being considered for approval in the Bayfront Area, and specifically the western Bayfront Area, are cumulatively considerable. Each of the large mixed-use projects proposed in the Bayfront Area alone promises to drastically increase traffic in the neighborhood, resulting in air quality, noise, and safety issues for District families and staff attending TIDE Academy. When considered together, their collective impacts on traffic, safety, and air quality in the neighborhood will be devastating. All of these impacts are exacerbated by the rapidity at which the City is approving of development projects in the Bayfront Area, as the City's roadways have not been updated to handle the increase in traffic associated with full buildout under ConnectMenlo. These cumulative impacts on the District's TIDE Academy were not adequately discussed in the ConnectMenlo EIR or the Project's Draft EIR.

## ii. Air Quality

The Draft EIR analyzes air quality impacts posed by construction and operation of the Project. The Draft EIR further recognizes that the proposed Project would pose a significant environmental impact if it would expose "sensitive receptors," including schools, to substantial pollutant concentrations. (Draft EIR at 4.3-31.) The Draft EIR does not, however, specifically discuss potential construction and operational air quality impacts as they pertain to the District's TIDE Academy, and students traveling to and from TIDE Academy. Air quality impacts on the District, its students, and staff have the potential to disrupt classes, prevent students from being

outside during construction, and prevent students from traveling to and from TIDE Academy during construction. The Draft EIR was, therefore, required to analyze the following:

20. The direct and indirect air quality impacts of the Project on the District's TIDE Academy, including District students, families, and staff walking to and from TIDE Academy.
21. The cumulative air quality impacts on schools and the community in general resulting from increased vehicular movement and volumes expected from additional development already approved or pending in the City and Project neighborhood.

As the Air Quality impacts discussion does not provide sufficient information needed to analyze air quality impacts on the District's students and TIDE Academy, the discussion of air quality impacts is lacking, and the Draft EIR is not in compliance with CEQA.

### **iii. Noise**

The Draft EIR's analysis of noise impacts generally contains insufficient quantifiable data and analysis that would allow the public and lead agency to understand whether noise and/or vibration generated from either construction or operation of the proposed Project, including in combination with all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would cause significant impacts on the District's educational program at TIDE Academy. Noise impacts could disrupt classes, prevent students from being able to be outside due to overwhelming outside noise that would affect teachers' abilities to monitor and direct students because they cannot be heard, and lastly, could affect the interior of buildings students are housed in. For these reasons, the District requested that the following information be discussed and analyzed in the Draft EIR:

22. Any noise sources and volumes which may affect school facilities, classrooms, and outdoor school areas.

Because the Draft EIR did not include sufficient quantifiable information related to the generation of noise and vibration impacts on TIDE Academy, the Draft EIR fails to serve its informational purpose.

### **iv. Population and Housing**

The District anticipates that this Project will generate many new students, and specifically requested that the Draft EIR analyze:

23. Historical, current, and future population projections for the District.

Related, the District requested that the following categories of information pertaining to housing be addressed:

24. The type and number of anticipated dwelling units indirectly resulting from the Project.
25. The average square footage for anticipated dwelling units, broken down by type of unit, indirectly resulting from the Project.
26. The estimated amount of development fees to be generated by development in accordance with implementation of the Project.

The Draft EIR failed adequately to address the above categories of information.

As explained in the Prior Comment Letter, population growth or shrinkage is a primary consideration in determining the impact that development may have on a school district, as a booming population can directly impact the District and its provision of educational services, largely because of resulting school overcrowding, while a district with declining enrollment may depend on new development to avoid school closure or program cuts. Overcrowding can constitute a significant impact within the meaning of the CEQA. (See, Cal. Code Regs., tit.14, §§ 15064(e).) This is particularly true where the overcrowding results in unsafe conditions, decreased quality of education, the need for new bus routes, and a need for new school construction. (See, *Chawanakee, supra*, 196 Cal.App.4th 1016.)

The foregoing categories of information are critical for determining the extent of both physical and fiscal impacts on the District caused by increased population growth. As discussed above, California school districts are dependent on developer fees authorized by the provisions of Government Code sections 65995, *et seq.*, and Education Code sections 17620, *et seq.*, for financing new school facilities and maintenance of existing facilities. The developer fees mandated by section 65995 provide the District the bulk of its local share of financing for facilities needs related to development. The adequacy of the statutory development fees to offset the impact of new development on local school districts can be determined only if the types of housing and average square footage can be taken into consideration. For instance, larger homes often generate approximately the same number of students as smaller homes. At the same time, however, a larger home will generate a greater statutory development fee, better providing for facilities to house the student being generated. It is for these reasons that the Government Code now requires a school district to seek – and presumably to receive – such square footage information from local planning departments. (Gov. Code § 65995.5(c)(3).)

While the foregoing funding considerations present fiscal issues, they translate directly into physical, environmental impacts, in that inadequate funding for new school construction can result in overcrowding of existing facilities. Furthermore, fiscal and social considerations are relevant to an EIR, particularly when they either contribute to or result from physical impacts. (Pub. Res. Code § 21001(g); Cal. Code Regs., tit.14, §§ 15021(b), 15131(a)-(c), 15142 & 15382.)

Phasing of development is also a crucial consideration in determining the extent of impact on schools. The timing of the development will determine when new students are expected to be

generated, and therefore is an important consideration particularly when considering the cumulative impact of a project in conjunction with other approved or pending development.

The District requests that the Draft EIR be modified to include the above categories of information so that the lead agency, District, and the public may adequately understand the direct and indirect impacts of the Project on the District. (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a) [requires consideration of indirect impacts].)

**IV. SB 50 does not absolve lead agencies of their responsibility to ensure General Plan consistency.**

In *Endangered Habitats League v. County of Orange* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 777, the Court held that project approvals and findings must be consistent with the lead agency's general plan, and that the EIR for such a project must provide sufficient information for the lead agency to make an informed decision regarding such consistency. A project is consistent with the general plan if it will further the objectives and policies of the general plan and not obstruct their attainment. (See *Endangered Habitats League, supra*, 131 Cal.App.4th 777, 782, quoting *Corona-Norco Unified School District v. City of Corona* (1993) 17 Cal.App.4th 985, 994.)

Fostering quality education should be a priority to the City. As discussed above, the City's General Plan includes goals to support "Safe Routes to School programs to enhance the safety of school children who walk and bike to school," and to encourage schools to promote walking, bicycling, carpooling, shuttles, and transit use. (General Plan at CIRC-16, CIRC-25.) The General Plan also includes Land Use Policy LU-1.7, which states that the City shall "encourage excellence in public education citywide, as well as use of school facilities for recreation by youth to promote healthy living." (General Plan at LU-19.)

As discussed at length above, substantial evidence in the record establishes a significant possibility that the Project, in conjunction with all other projects being considered in the Bayfront Area of Menlo Park, by generating thousands of new residents and vehicles to the area within a few years, will have a negative impact on students, education, and educational facilities. These impacts, which were not adequately analyzed in the Draft EIR, will directly impede the fulfillment of the above General Plan policies and goals. The simple payment of developer fees will not adequately mitigate the impacts of development on the District's schools. Thus, approval of the Project without adopting any feasible measures to address the negative impacts on schools would be contrary to the City's General Plan.

**V. The proposed mitigation measures are inadequate to reduce the impacts related to schools to a less than significant level.**

Based on the deficiencies of the Draft EIR described above, it is District's position that the Draft EIR's conclusion that payment of school impact fees will mitigate school impacts to a less than significant level is inaccurate. Since the Draft EIR is lacking in detailed discussion and analysis of existing and projected Project conditions, taking into account both the impact *on* school facilities and the impacts *related to* schools, the City cannot accurately reach the conclusion that

developer fees are adequate to mitigate the Project's school impacts because all impacts have not been evaluated.

Furthermore, the Draft EIR's conclusion that SB 50 limits the City's ability to prescribe other types of school mitigation for the Project is unsupported by law. Rather, under the Government Code, the City has a duty to coordinate with the District to provide effective school site planning. The City should consider alternative mitigation measures, such as those proposed below, to fulfill that duty.

#### **A. The Legislature Intended Coordinated Planning for School Sites**

Government Code sections 65352 and 65352.2 (all subsequent code sections refer to the Government Code unless otherwise specified) require local cities and counties to coordinate planning of school facilities with school districts. The Legislature confirmed that the parties are meant to coordinate “[o]ptions for the siting of new schools and whether or not the local city or counties existing land use element appropriately reflects the demand for public school facilities, and ensures that new planned development reserves location for public schools in the most appropriate locations.”

The Legislature recognized that new planned development should take into consideration and even “reserve” where schools would be located to serve the development because schools are as integral a part of planning for new development as is any other public service, such as fire, police, water and sewer. As it relates to this case, the intent behind sections 65350, *et seq.*, supports the District's position that the City must analyze whether the District's current facilities are adequate to accommodate and serve both its existing population and the new development, particularly in light of the Project impacts and cumulative factors addressed in this letter. The City can help the District provide adequate facilities resulting from any impacts of the Project, which are not addressed by developer fees, by requiring alternative mitigation measures to assure that there are adequate school facilities available to accommodate the District's needs.

#### **B. Alternative Mitigation Measures**

District proposes the following possible alternative mitigation measures to address impacts related to schools, each of which begin to address the actual school related impacts discussed above.

##### **1. Land Dedication**

One possible mitigation method would be for the City to consider adopting findings requiring any developer building as part of the development allowed by the Project to dedicate land and/or funding pursuant to Government Code sections 65970, *et seq.*, which permit the City to require a developer to dedicate land to a school district.

Section 65974 specifically states that “for the purpose of establishing an interim method of providing classroom facilities where overcrowded conditions exist, . . . a city, county, or city and county may, by ordinance, require the dedication of land, the payment of fees in lieu thereof, or a

combination of both, for classroom and related facilities for elementary or high schools as a condition to the approval of a residential development.” Nothing in SB 50/Government Code section 65996 precludes this approach. Land dedication is a permissible mitigation measure under Government Code sections 65995, et seq. Section 65995(a) specifically states that “[e]xcept for a fee, charge, dedication, or other requirement authorized under Section 17620 of the Education Code, or pursuant to Chapter 4.7 (commencing with Section 65970), a fee, charge, dedication or other requirement for the construction or reconstruction of school facilities may not be levied. . . .” (Emphasis added.) Section 65995 expressly excludes Chapter 4.7, inclusive of section 65974, from this limitation, thus permitting a city to address conditions of overcrowding in school facilities or inadequately sized school sites by requiring, for example, the dedication of land.

A land dedication requirement would be good public planning benefiting all residents of the community, including future residents of the Project. Land suitable for new school facilities in Menlo Park is already extremely scarce; it will only become more so if the Project is implemented and further development occurs. Under Government Code sections 65352 and 65352.2, the City has a duty to help plan for adequate services to its residents by ensuring that future sites are set aside for schools. Failure to do so leads to inadequate services, future controversies, and the potential need for a school district to exercise its rights under eminent domain, displacing existing residents. Therefore, mitigation for the impacts stemming from the Project that are not considered in the Draft EIR are and can be made available even after SB 50.

## 2. *Phasing*

Another method by which the City can work cooperatively with the District within all legal constraints to ensure adequate school facilities with regard to new development allowed by the Project, and which therefore can serve as an appropriate mitigation measure, is the requirement that all future development be phased, including all future development contemplated by ConnectMenlo. Timing development so as to balance the availability of school facilities with new development can significantly aid the District in its attempt to provide for the additional students who will be generated as a result of the Project and development following approval of the Project. Such phasing is not a denial of new development on the basis of insufficient school facilities in contravention to SB 50; it is instead appropriate planning to offset the impacts of new development.

## VI. Conclusion

Recirculation is required when the new information added to an EIR discloses: (1) a new substantial environmental impact resulting from the project or from a new mitigation measure proposed to be implemented (CEQA Guidelines § 15162 (a)(1), (3)(B)(1)); (2) a substantial increase in the severity of an environmental impact unless mitigation measures are adopted that reduce the impact to a level of insignificance (CEQA Guidelines, § 15162 (a)(3)(B)(2)); (3) a feasible project alternative or mitigation measure that clearly would lessen the environmental impacts of the project, but which the project's proponents decline to adopt (CEQA Guidelines § 15162 (a)(3)(B)(3), (4)); or (4) that the draft EIR was so fundamentally and basically inadequate and conclusory in nature that public comment on the draft was in effect meaningless

Ms. Payal Bhagat  
City of Menlo Park  
February 2, 2021  
Page 22

(*Mountain Lion Coalition v. Fish & Game Com.* (1989) 214 Cal.App.3d 1043); *Laurel Heights Improvement Assn. v. Regents of University of California* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 1112, 1130, as modified on denial of reh'g (Feb. 24, 1994).)

In this case, as with the Draft EIR prepared for the Menlo Uptown Project, it is the District's position that the Draft EIR is incomplete, and does not adequately analyze the Project's potential impacts related to schools, and mitigation measures that would lessen these impacts. The safety of its students is paramount to the District, and its safety concerns are not adequately addressed in the Draft EIR as currently constituted. Changes must be made to preserve the safety of the children and allow them to enjoy productive time at school, free from excessive traffic, noise, and pollution. Therefore, the District demands that the Draft EIR be updated and recirculated.

District encourages the City and Developer to work cooperatively with the District and consider alternative mitigation measures, such as phasing and land dedication, which can assist in adequately mitigating the impacts on the District's schools and the affected surrounding environment.

Sincerely,

LOZANO SMITH



Bradley R. Sena

BRS/mag

Enclosure

cc: Crystal Leach, Interim Superintendent (cleach@seq.org)



Kelly M. Rem  
Attorney at Law

E-mail: [krem@lozanosmith.com](mailto:krem@lozanosmith.com)

July 15, 2019

**By U.S. Mail & E-Mail: [KMMeador@menlopark.org](mailto:KMMeador@menlopark.org)**

Ms. Kaitie M. Meador, Senior Planner  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
701 Laurel Street  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Response of Sequoia Union High School District to Notice of Preparation of an Initial Study and Environmental Impact Report for the 111 Independence Drive Project

Dear Ms. Meador:

This office represents Sequoia Union High School District (“District”). On behalf of the District, we are hereby submitting comments regarding the Notice of Preparation of the Initial Study and Environmental Impact Report (“NOP”) regarding the focused environmental impact report (“EIR”) that the City of Menlo Park (“City”) plans to prepare for the project located at 111 Independence Drive, Menlo Park, California (“Project”). Specifically, this letter responds to the City’s invitation to submit comments on the proposed scope and content of the focused EIR. The District previously submitted written comments highlighting some of the District’s concerns regarding both this Project and the Commonwealth: Building 3 project, both of which are located within the vicinity of the District’s TIDE Academy. The District requests that these and other projects in that vicinity be considered cumulatively, since their already significant individual impacts have the potential to create substantial problems for the District when combined with one another.

According to the NOP, the proposed Project, sponsored by SP Menlo, LLC (“Developer”), consists of the demolition of an existing single-story, 15,000-square foot (“sf”) office building, and the construction of a new eight-story, 145,350 sf, and 105-unit multi-family residential building with an integrated multi-story and above-grade parking structure on an approximately one-acre site. The Project includes the maximum density permitted at the site through bonus level development, and 115 parking stalls, which is just shy of the maximum parking stalls allowed per unit based on the Project site’s R-MU-B zoning designation. The Project is located approximately 0.25 miles north of the District’s TIDE Academy, located at 150 Jefferson Drive, Menlo Park.

*Limited Liability Partnership*

*2001 North Main Street, Suite 500 Walnut Creek, California 94596 Tel 925-953-1620 Fax 925-953-1625*

Ms. Kaitie M. Meador, Senior Planner  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
July 15, 2019  
Page 2

The District submits these comments in order to preserve its concerns regarding the proposed scope and content of the focused EIR. Below are specific scoping requests for the EIR, which the City must address in the focused EIR to evaluate adequately the potential environmental impacts of the Project on the District.

### Transportation/Circulation/Traffic Analysis

- 1. Describe the existing and the anticipated vehicular traffic and student pedestrian movement patterns to and from school sites, including consideration of bus routes.**
- 2. Assess the impact(s) of increased vehicular movement and volumes, including potential conflicts with school pedestrian movement, school transportation, and busing activities.**
- 3. Estimate travel demand and trip generation, trip distribution and trip assignment by including consideration of school sites and home-to-school travel.**
- 4. Assess cumulative impacts on schools and the community in general resulting from increased vehicular movement and volumes expected from additional development already approved or pending.**
- 5. Discuss the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the circulation and traffic patterns in the community as a result of traffic generated by the transportation needs of students to and from the Project and schools throughout the District during the Project build-out.**
- 6. Assess the impacts on the routes and safety of students traveling to school by vehicle, bus, walking, and bicycles.**

The District has significant concerns about the traffic, transportation, and circulation impacts that the Project may have on the District, including the District's staff, parents, and students that attend the TIDE Academy. The foregoing categories of information are critical for determining the extent of those impacts on the District.

Any environmental analysis related to the proposed Project must address potential effects related to traffic, noise, air quality, and any other issues affecting schools. (Pub. Resources Code, §§ 21000, *et seq.*; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §§ 15000, *et seq.*; *Chawanakee Unified School District v. County of Madera, et al.*, (2011) 196 Cal.App.4th 1016.) Additionally, specifically related to traffic, there must also be an analysis of safety issues related to traffic impacts, such as reduced pedestrian safety, particularly as to students walking or bicycling to and from TIDE Academy; potentially reduced response times for emergency services and first responders traveling to TIDE Academy; and increased potential for accidents due to gridlock during school drop-off and pick up hours. (See, Journal of Planning Education and Research, "Planning for Safe Schools:

Ms. Kaitie M. Meador, Senior Planner  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
July 15, 2019  
Page 3

Impacts of School Siting and Surrounding Environments on Traffic Safety,” November 2015, Chia-Yuan Yu and Xuemei Zhu, pg. 8 [Study of traffic accidents near Austin, Texas schools found that “[a] higher percentage of commercial uses was associated with more motorist and pedestrian crashes” around schools].)

As discussed, the District’s TIDE Academy is located just north of the Project’s site. The Project site’s neighborhood is one of the most heavily traversed areas in the City of Menlo Park. The Project site is bordered by Bayfront Expressway (State Route 84) on the north, the Dumbarton rail corridor on the east, U.S. Highway 101 on the south, and Marsh Road on the west. Marsh Road is an arterial or collector roadway that connects major activity centers in Menlo Park, Atherton, and Redwood City. Further, the Project site is located in the Bayfront Area of Menlo Park that has experienced a drastic impact in traffic over the last ten to fifteen years as the City has continued to approve of newer, corporate campuses and mixed biotechnology, commercial, office, and residential land uses. The City’s 2016 General Plan Update calls for an increase of 4.7 million square feet of non-residential office space, 850 hotel rooms, 5,430 residential units, 13,960 residents, and 20,150 employees, all within the Bayfront Area.<sup>1</sup> The General Plan Update Draft EIR concluded that the General Plan Update would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to roadway segments and increase peak hour delays at intersections from increased traffic, even after the mitigation measures called for in the General Plan Update are implemented (if ever).<sup>2</sup>

Adding to the District’s concerns regarding traffic surrounding the Project site and the TIDE Academy are the number of development projects that have recently been approved by the City and/or completed in the area, including Buildings 1 and 2 on the Commonwealth Corporate Center, the Facebook Campus Project at former 1601 Willow Road and 312 and 313 Constitution Drive (78.9 acres of mixed use development), and the Menlo Gateway Project at 100-190 Independence Drive (cafe/restaurant, health club, 230-room hotel, three office and research and development buildings, and three parking structures covering 15.9 acres). There are several other projects that are being considered by the City, including the Facebook Campus Expansion Projects at 301-309 Constitution Drive, the Menlo Uptown Project at 141 Jefferson Drive and 180-186 Constitution Drive (483 multi-family dwelling units), and Commonwealth Building 3 Project (249,500 sf office space and 324,000 sf parking structure), all of which promise to drastically increase traffic in the neighborhood. Given the magnitude of development being considered and approved in this area, the District maintains that a focused EIR is inappropriate and in conflict with the letter and spirit of CEQA. Please see our separate letter related to the Commonwealth: Building 3 project, which was submitted to the City on June 28, 2019. All of these various projects located within the vicinity of TIDE threaten to have significant impacts, both individually and cumulatively, on the students attending TIDE, as well as District staff.

<sup>1</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Final EIR (October 6, 2016), p. 2-12; ConnectMenlo: General Plan Land Use & Circulation Elements and M-2 Area Zoning Update (June 1, 2016), Table 3-2.

<sup>2</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Final EIR (October 6, 2016), pp. 2-15 – 2-16; ConnectMenlo: General Plan Land Use & Circulation Elements and M-2 Area Zoning Update (June 1, 2016), p. 4.13-73.

Ms. Kaitie M. Meador, Senior Planner  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
July 15, 2019  
Page 4

Construction of the Project will severely exacerbate the already stifling traffic in the neighborhood and the safety issues posed thereby. In addition to drawing hundreds of additional residents, visitors, and emergency vehicles into the area, as currently planned, the Project site only has one point of vehicular ingress and egress: the driveway connected to Independence Drive. This will inevitably lead to congestion along Independence Drive as all residents and visitors to the new apartment complex will drive along the same narrow, two-lane road to enter and exit the apartment complex on a daily basis. Further, to access the Project site, residents and visitors will often turn right onto Independence Drive from Marsh Road. This turn is extraordinarily dangerous as it requires the driver essentially to complete a 180 degree turn with no visibility of the cars and/or people walking and/or driving on Independence Drive.

The traffic and safety impacts posed by the Project, combined with all the other City-approved development in the area, will severely impact the safety and convenience of TIDE Academy students who walk or bike to school. To mitigate the impacts of increased traffic in the Project site neighborhood in implementing the District's TIDE Academy project, the District committed to develop and implement a Travel Demand Management Plan. Through this Plan, the District encourages the use of student walking, biking, and other alternative means of student transport to school.<sup>3</sup> To mitigate the impacts of conflicts and/or dangerous interactions between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles, the District agreed to prepare a "Safe Routes to School Map" that identifies facilities such as traffic lights, crosswalks, and demarcated bikeways that promote safe routes to school.<sup>4</sup> The Project would undermine the District's abilities to implement its transportation and safety mitigation measures for the TIDE Academy, endangering students, parents, and visitors to the school.

We urge the City thoroughly to address and analyze each of the above listed items through its EIR, and implement extensive and thoughtful mitigation measures.

### **Noise**

**7. Identify any noise sources and volumes which may affect school facilities, classrooms and outdoor school areas.**

It is expected that noise from construction and operation of the Project will cause impacts on the District's educational program at the TIDE Academy. Request No. 7 is intended to clarify that the EIR's consideration of noise issues take into account all of the various ways in which noise may impact schools, including increases in noise levels in the immediate vicinity of TIDE Academy.

### **Population**

---

<sup>3</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Draft EIR (July 8, 2016), p. S-4

<sup>4</sup> Menlo Park Small High School Project Draft EIR (July 8, 2016), p. S-6

**8. Describe historical, current, and future population projections for the District.**

The District anticipates that this project will generate students and specifically requests that historical, current, and future population projections for the District be addressed in the EIR. Population growth or shrinkage is a primary consideration in determining the impact that development may have on a school district, as a booming population can directly impact the District and its provision of educational services, largely because of resulting school overcrowding, while a district with declining enrollment may depend on new development to avoid school closure or program cuts. Overcrowding can constitute a significant impact within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). (See, Cal.Code Regs., tit.14, §§ 15064(e).) This is particularly true where the overcrowding results in unsafe conditions, decreased quality of education, the need for new bus routes, and a need for new school construction. The same can hold true for potential school closures or program cuts resulting from a declining population.

**Housing**

- 9. Describe the type and number of anticipated dwelling units indirectly resulting from the Project.**
- 10. Describe the average square footage for anticipated dwelling units, broken down by type of unit, indirectly resulting from the Project.**
- 11. Estimate the amount of development fees to be generated by development in accordance with implementation of the Project.**

The foregoing categories of information are critical for determining the extent of both physical and fiscal impacts on the District caused by increased population growth. California school districts are dependent on developer fees authorized by the provisions of Government Code Sections 65995, *et seq.*, and Education Code sections 17620, *et seq.*, for financing new school facilities and maintenance of existing facilities. The developer fees mandated by Section 65995 provide the District the bulk of its local share of financing for facilities needs related to development.

The adequacy of the statutory development fees to offset the impact of new development on local school districts can be determined only if the types of housing and average square footage can be taken into consideration. For instance, larger homes often generate approximately the same number of students as smaller homes. At the same time, however, a larger home will generate a greater statutory development fee, better providing for facilities to house the student being generated. It is for these reasons that the Government Code now requires a school district to seek – and presumably to receive – such square footage information from local planning departments. (Gov. Code § 65995.5(c)(3).)

While the foregoing funding considerations are fiscal issues, they translate directly into physical, environmental impacts, in that inadequate funding for new school construction can result in

Ms. Kaitie M. Meador, Senior Planner  
City of Menlo Park  
Community Development Department, Planning Division  
July 15, 2019  
Page 6

overcrowding of existing facilities. Furthermore, fiscal and social considerations are relevant to an EIR, particularly when they either contribute to or result from physical impacts. (Pub. Resources Code § 21001(g); Cal.Code Regs., tit.14, §§ 15021(b), 15131(a)-(c), 15142 & 15382.)

Phasing of development is also a crucial consideration in determining the extent of impact on schools. The timing of the development will determine when new students are expected to be generated, and therefore is an important consideration particularly when considering the cumulative impact of a project in conjunction with other approved or pending development.

### **Conclusion**

The District is not anti-development. However, the needs of the District must be appropriately considered in the environmental review process for all proposed new development that will impact the District, such as the Project. The District is hopeful that it will be able to collaborate with the Developer and the City in order to identify and propose solutions that alleviate the impacts caused by Developer's Project, and is prepared to provide any information necessary to assist the City in preparation of the EIR and in addressing each of the comment and scope/content issues set forth above.

We request that all notices and copies of documentation with regard to this Project be mailed both to the District directly, and also to our legal counsel's attention as follows:

Mary E. Streshly, Superintendent  
Sequoia Union High School District  
480 James Avenue  
Redwood City, CA 94062

Kelly M. Rem  
Lozano Smith  
2000 N. Main St., Suite 500  
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Please feel free to contact me directly if we can be of any assistance. Thank you.

Sincerely,

LOZANO SMITH

*Kelly M. Rem*

Kelly M. Rem

KMR/mag

cc: Mary E. Streshly, Superintendent ([mstreshly@seq.org](mailto:mstreshly@seq.org))