

1 INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates the potential environmental consequences of future development that could occur as a result of adopting and implementing the proposed Housing Element Update, General Plan Consistency Update, and associated Zoning Ordinances amendments, together referred to as the “Plan Components.” This EA has been completed to inform City of Menlo Park decision-makers, other agencies, and the general public of the nature of the Plan Components and their potential effects on the environment. When appropriate, this EA identifies mitigation measures that, if adopted, would reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts. It also examines alternatives to the Plan Components. The City of Menlo Park (City) is the lead agency on the EA.

In 2012, three housing advocacy groups sued the City citing the City’s failure to comply in a timely fashion with the State mandated Housing Element update. A court order required the City to expeditiously complete an update to the Housing Element. California Government Code Section 65759(a)(2) provides that when a city is ordered by a court to bring its General Plan, which includes the Housing Element, into compliance, the City shall prepare an environmental assessment, the content of which shall substantially conform to the required content of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR). With an environmental assessment, there is no formal comment period and no “response to comments” document that would generally be prepared as a Final EIR. The EA will be reviewed in public session by the City Planning Commission and reviewed and adopted in public session by the City Council.

Consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this EA describes the potential programmatic environmental impacts associated with implementation of future development that would be possible under the Plan Components. As described in Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines, *program-level* environmental review documents are appropriate when a project consists of a series of actions related to the issuance of rules, regulations, and other planning criteria. The Plan Components that are the subject of this EA consist of long-term plans that will be implemented as policy documents guiding future development activities and City actions. Because this is a program-level EA, it does not evaluate the impacts of specific, individual developments that may be allowed under the Housing Element, General Plan, and Zoning Ordinance. Future specific projects may be the subject of separate environmental review as required by CEQA.

If no exemption applies and the project would have effects not examined in the EA or would require new mitigation measures, then a project-specific Initial Study would need to be prepared leading to either an EIR or a Negative Declaration. This EA is anticipated to provide a basis for future project-level CEQA analysis.

A. Environmental Review Process and Scope

1. Public Meetings

The City is scheduled to conduct a series of public meetings on the Housing Element update process between June 2012 and May 2013. The Housing Element process was guided by a Steering Committee, comprised of members of the City Council, Housing Commission, and Planning Commission. The Steering Committee meetings, subject to the 2003 Brown Act,¹ met six times between June and January 2013. In addition, those wishing to receive notifications of upcoming meetings and/or follow the Housing Element process were invited to subscribe to the City's electronic noticing system available on the City's Housing Element Update webpage.

On October 31, 2012, the City submitted its Draft Housing Element to the State Department of Housing and Community Development, which started the official 60-day review period by the State. At this same time, the City made the Draft Housing Element available in digital format on the City's website at www.menlopark.org and as printed copies at the following City facilities:

- Community Development Office, 701 Laurel Street
- Main Library, 800 Alma Street
- Belle Haven Library, 413 Ivy Drive
- Onetta Harris Community Center, 100 Terminal Avenue
- Senior Center, 110 Terminal Avenue

The City presented an overview and addressed questions about the Plan Components at the following public meetings:

- Housing Commission: Wednesday, December 5 at 5:30 p.m.
- Environmental Quality Commission: Wednesday, December 5 at 6:30 p.m.
- Bicycle Commission: Monday, December 10 at 7:00 p.m.
- Transportation Commission, Wednesday, December 12 at 7:00 p.m.
- Planning Commission: Monday, December 17 at 7:00 p.m.
- Parks & Recreation Commission: Wednesday, December 19 at 6:30 p.m.

Members of the public were invited to submit comments in writing by Friday, December 21, 2012 at 5:00 p.m.

¹ The 2003 Ralph M. Brown Act (Government Code Section 54950 *et seq.*) includes provisions for open meetings (e.g. requirements, notices and comment opportunities) for local government bodies.

2. Agency Meetings

The City held a series of meetings/interviews with public agencies and districts on November 13, 19 and 20, 2012. These meetings were attended by the following:

- “ City of Menlo Park Finance Department, December 13 at 8:30 a.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Community Development Department, December 13 at 9:00 a.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Community Services Department (Housing), December 13 at 9:30 a.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Public Works (Water & Stormwater), December 13 at 10:00 a.m.
- “ Menlo Park Library, December 13 at 11:00 a.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Public Works (Solid Waste), December 13 at 1:00 p.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Community Services Department (Recreation), December 13 at 1:30 p.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Public Works (Transportation), December 13 at 2:30 p.m.
- “ City of Menlo Park Police Department, December 13 at 3:00 p.m.
- “ Sequoia Union High School District, December 19 at 1:00 p.m.
- “ West Bay Sanitary District, December 19 at 2:00 p.m.
- “ Las Lomas School District, December 19 at 3:00 p.m.
- “ Redwood City School District, December 19 at 4:30 p.m.
- “ Menlo Park Elementary School District, December 20 at 1:00 p.m.
- “ Menlo Park Fire Protection District, December 20 at 2:00 p.m.
- “ Ravenswood School District, January 31, 2013 at 2:25 p.m.

3. Initial Study

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 65759(a)(1), an Initial Study was prepared prior to the preparation of this EA to determine the environmental topics for which the potential future development associated with the Plan Components could result in potentially significant impacts. The Initial Study is contained in this EA as Appendix A.

Accordingly, as provided above, the scope of this EA was established through consultation with City Staff, consideration of agency and public comments received on environmental issues and through preparation of the Initial Study.

Environmental topics addressed in this EA include:

- “ Aesthetics
- “ Air Quality
- “ Biological Resources
- “ Cultural Resources
- “ Geology and Soils
- “ Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- “ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- “ Hydrology and Water Quality
- “ Land Use and Planning
- “ Noise
- “ Population and Housing
- “ Public Services and Recreation
- “ Traffic and Transportation
- “ Utilities and Service Systems

B. Proposed Action

The proposed action analyzed in this EA is the implementation of the Plan Components. The proposed Housing Element Update would replace the existing Housing Element, which was adopted in 1992. The proposed General Plan Consistency Update would amend the existing General Plan, which was adopted in December 1, 1994 with amendments through June 2012. The proposed Zoning Ordinance amendments would modify and/or add to the existing Zoning Ordinance. The potential future development associated with the Plan Components is described in detail in Chapter 3, Project Description, of this EA.

C. Report Organization

This report is organized into the following chapters:

- “ **Chapter 1: Introduction** provides an introduction and overview of the document.
- “ **Chapter 2: Report Summary** provides a synopsis of the environmental impacts from the Plan Components, describes recommended mitigation measures, and indicates the level of significance of impacts before and after mitigation.

- “ **Chapter 3: Project Description** describes the Plan Components in detail, including the location, planning process, future development characteristics under the Plan Components, buildout, and required permits and approvals.
- “ **Chapter 4: Environmental Evaluation** provides an analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the potential future development associated with the Plan Components and presents recommended mitigation measures to reduce their significance, as necessary.
- “ **Chapter 5: Alternatives to the Proposed Project** considers two alternatives to the Plan Components, including the CEQA-required “No Project Alternative.”
- “ **Chapter 6: Report Preparation** identifies the preparers of the EA.

CITY OF MENLO PARK
HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE, GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY UPDATE,
AND ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
INTRODUCTION