

4.0 Environmental Impact Analysis

4.0.1 Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

Sections 4.1 through 4.14 of this EIR present the environmental impact analysis for the anticipated effects of implementation of the proposed Belmont General Plan, the Phase I/Interim Zoning (Phase I Zoning), the Belmont Village Specific Plan (BVSP), and Climate Action Plan (CAP), collectively referred to as the Proposed Project. The environmental topics addressed in these sections are as follows:

- 4.1 Aesthetics
- 4.2 Air Quality
- 4.3 Biological Resources
- 4.4 Cultural Resources
- 4.5 Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- 4.6 Energy, Greenhouse Gases, and Climate Change
- 4.7 Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- 4.8 Hydrology, Flooding, and Water Quality
- 4.9 Land Use, Housing, and Population
- 4.10 Noise
- 4.11 Public Services and Recreation
- 4.12 Transportation
- 4.13 Utilities

Alternatives analysis is presented in Chapter 5, “Analysis of Alternatives.” This EIR presents a discussion of other analyses required under CEQA (including cumulative and growth inducing impacts) in Chapter 6 of this EIR, “CEQA Required Conclusions.”

ORGANIZATION OF THIS EIR

Each sub-section in Section 4 of this EIR presents a detailed evaluation of a particular environmental topic, including potential environmental impacts, mitigation measures proposed to

reduce significant environmental impacts (where necessary), and a determination of the level of significance after mitigation measures are implemented.

The goals, policies, and implementation programs of the proposed Belmont General Plan, Phase I Zoning, BVSP, and CAP have been incorporated into the Proposed Project's analysis, and, as discussed throughout this Section 4, these plan policies serve to limit many potential impacts of the Proposed Project. In some subsections, no mitigation measures are required to reduce the Proposed Project's impacts to a less-than-significant level. In the subsections for Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Transportation, and Utilities, policies and implementation programs are added or revised as mitigation measures in order to reduce the Proposed Project's potential impacts. These policies are considered uniformly applied development policies that will streamline and substantially limit the scope of analysis for future projects that are consistent with the Proposed Project.

Physical Setting

This subsection provides relevant information about the existing physical environment related to the particular environmental topic. In accordance with Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, the discussion of the physical environment describes existing conditions within the Planning Area at the time the NOP was filed—unless otherwise noted.

Regulatory Setting

This subsection describes federal, State, regional, and local plans, policies, regulations, and laws that may apply to the environmental topic under evaluation.

Impact Analysis

This subsection focuses on an analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project described in Section 3, “Project Description,” of this EIR. Thresholds of significance used to identify the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project are identified; the methods used to conduct the impact analysis is summarized; and the impacts analyzed in the respective subsection are summarized. Following this is a more in-depth analysis of the potential environmental impacts, presented in the following format:

4.X-X The impact statement briefly summarizes the findings of the impact discussion based on the identified threshold of significance. The level of significance without mitigation is included at the end of the impact statement. Levels of significance listed in this EIR (as described below) are *no impact, less than significant, or significant.*)

The impact discussion is contained in the paragraphs following the impact statement. The analysis compares implementation of the Proposed Project to existing conditions. In addition, the effects of policies in the Proposed Project that will reduce the impacts are discussed.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Each subsection analyzes applicable and relevant proposed Belmont General Plan policies that are incorporated into the Proposed Project and have the effect of reducing the Proposed Project's potential to cause impacts.

Proposed Belmont Village Specific Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Applicable and relevant BVSP policies that are incorporated into the Proposed Project and have the effect of reducing the Proposed Project's potential to cause impacts are analyzed.

Proposed Climate Action Plan Measures that Would Reduce the Impact

Applicable and relevant CAP policies that are incorporated into the Proposed Project and have the effect of reducing the Proposed Project's potential to cause impacts are analyzed.

Mitigation Measures

If the Proposed Project's impact is found to be less than significant, no mitigation measures are required. If mitigation measures are required to reduce the Proposed Project's impact, the mitigation measures are numbered to match the impact number, using “a,” “b,” “c,” and so on if there are more than one, as described above.

Summary of Impact after Mitigation

If mitigation measures are required, this text provides a summary of the resulting impact assuming that the mitigation measures are implemented. There are two different outcomes:

1. Less than significant with mitigation incorporated: this would be the finding if the incorporation of all mitigation measures indicated above reduced the impact to less than significant.
2. Significant and unavoidable: this would be the finding if the City has presented all feasible mitigation (in the form of General Plan policies and programs) and the impact is still significant.

As stated above, it should be noted that the impact analysis compares implementation of the Proposed Project to existing conditions. Implementation of the Proposed Project is also referred to as the “Future Plus Project” condition or scenario—in other words, projections of the condition in 2035 assuming Project implementation (land use changes, transportation improvements, etc.). In the Alternatives chapter, the analysis also considers the “Future No Project” scenario, which represents projected conditions in 2035 if the Proposed Project were not to be implemented.

While project-level (versus program-level) EIRs often also compare implementation of the Proposed Project to an “Existing Plus Project” scenario—particularly for transportation impacts—this scenario offers no meaningful information for a programmatic EIR for a long range plan. Because the “project” in this case is a set of policies and actions that will be implemented gradually over the long term, conditions as they exist today will no longer be relevant when the preponderance of Proposed Project implementation has occurred. This is in contrast to, for example, a single development project, which when constructed can still meaningfully be said to relate directly to conditions that exist at the time of its environmental review.

DETERMINING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

For each potential environmental impact identified in this EIR, a statement of the level of significance of the impact is provided. Impacts are assessed as one of the following categories:

The term “no impact” is used when the environmental resource being discussed would not be adversely affected by implementation of the Proposed Project. It means no change from existing conditions. This impact level does not need mitigation.

A “less-than-significant impact” would cause a minor, but acceptable change in the physical environment. This impact level does not require mitigation, even if feasible, under CEQA.

A “significant impact” would have a substantial adverse effect on the physical environment, but can be reduced to a less-than-significant level with mitigation. Impacts may also be considered “potentially significant” if the analysis cannot definitively conclude that an impact would occur as a result of the implementation of the Proposed Project. Under CEQA, mitigation measures must be provided, where feasible, to reduce the magnitude of significant or potentially significant impacts.

A “significant and unavoidable impact” would cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment, and no known feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. Under CEQA, a project with significant and unavoidable impacts may be approved, but the lead agency (in this case, the City) must prepare a “statement of overriding considerations” in accordance with Section 15093 of the CEQA Guidelines, explaining how the benefits of the project outweigh the potential for significant impacts.