

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF THE EIR

In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) describes the environmental impacts associated with implementation of the City of Albany Draft 2035 General Plan (Draft General Plan). This Draft EIR is designed to fully inform decision-makers in the City of Albany, other responsible agencies, and the general public of the potential environmental consequences of approval and implementation of the updated Draft General Plan. In some instances, it recommends mitigation measure in the form of modifications to the proposed Draft General Plan policies and actions that would reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts. This Draft EIR also examines alternatives to the Draft General Plan.

The City of Albany (City) is the Lead Agency for environmental review of the project. This Draft EIR will be used by City staff and the public in their review of the Draft General Plan. The effects of the Draft General Plan land uses and implementation actions are analyzed in this document as specifically and comprehensively as possible, consistent with State law.

This document is a Program EIR. The preparation, content, and processing of this EIR are covered primarily by CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. A Program EIR is one that may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project, and that are related: (1) geographically; (2) as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with the issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar effects that can be mitigated in similar ways.

The Draft General Plan satisfies each of these criteria. The Draft General Plan will shape land use and development within the City of Albany, thus resulting in a geographic relationship. The Draft General Plan includes maps, goals, policies, and actions that are logical parts of a chain of contemplated actions governing future land uses and allowed development. The goals, policies, and actions either directly establish, or will govern future plans that will establish, rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria governing implementation of the Draft General Plan. The Draft General Plan will be carried out under the authority and approval of the City of Albany. Many of the specific projects and actions carried out pursuant to implementation of the Draft General Plan would have similar environmental impacts which could be mitigated in similar ways

There are several advantages to a Program EIR. It provides a more thorough consideration of regional influences, secondary effects, cumulative impacts, land use and policy alternatives, global climate change, and other factors that apply to the program as a whole. Program EIRs avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations. They allow the lead agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures at a time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with fundamental issues and/or cumulative effects.

Subsequent projects approved or undertaken pursuant to a Program EIR may still require additional environmental review. The level and type of review will be determined by the City on a project-by-project basis based on the details and specifics of the project and/or site, and appropriate subsequent analysis. Program EIRs allow subsequent environmental review to focus on issues unique to the site or individual project that were not specifically addressed in the Program EIR. Decision-makers and interested parties can therefore focus the CEQA analysis of a subsequent project on new effects (if any) not considered previously. The City will consider future discretionary projects and make determinations as to their consistency with the Draft General Plan and other regulations and whether they may properly rely on this Program EIR, and/or whether any subsequent site-level technical studies and resource inventories should be required.

Subject to the foregoing, other planned growth in the Draft General Plan is expected to move forward under categorical exemptions, negative declarations, mitigated negative declarations, and focused environmental impact reports with reliance on the information and analysis contained in this EIR. The City intends to rely, to the extent legally feasible, upon the statutory exemptions provided under State law including: Public Resources Code Section 21083.3 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 for land use actions and development consistent with the Draft General Plan.

B. PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project evaluated in this Draft EIR is the Draft General Plan which will guide future development within the City. The Draft General Plan is intended to be the foundation for future land use and capital improvement decisions and will replace the existing 1992 General Plan. The purpose of the Draft General Plan is to guide community development, preservation, and environmental conservation in the City through 2035. A detailed overview of the project is provided in Chapter III, Project Description.

C. DRAFT EIR SCOPE

The City of Albany is the Lead Agency for environmental review of this Draft EIR. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was submitted to the State Clearinghouse and appropriate agencies to identify any issues of concern prior to preparation of this Draft EIR. The NOP included a comment period from March 14 to April 14, 2014. The City then extended the comment period until May 23, 2014. The NOP, and the notice of extended public review, are included in Appendix A of this Draft EIR.

The Draft EIR focuses on the areas of concern resulting from an assessment of potential environmental impacts, discussion with City staff, and review of comments received from public agencies and the general public. The following environmental topics are addressed in this Draft EIR:

- A. Land Use, Planning Policy, and Agricultural Resources
- B. Population and Housing
- C. Transportation and Circulation
- D. Air Quality
- E. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- F. Noise and Vibration
- G. Geology, Seismicity, and Mineral Resources
- H. Hydrology and Water Quality
- I. Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- J. Biological Resources
- K. Cultural Resources
- L. Public Services and Recreation
- M. Utilities and Infrastructure
- N. Visual Resources

D. REPORT ORGANIZATION

This Draft EIR is organized into the following chapters:

- *Chapter I – Introduction:* Discusses the overall Draft EIR purpose, provides a summary of the proposed project, describes the Draft EIR scope, and summarizes the organization of the Draft EIR.
- *Chapter II – Summary:* Provides a summary of the impacts that would result from implementation of the project, describes mitigation measures recommended to reduce or avoid significant impacts, and describes the alternatives to the proposed project.
- *Chapter III – Project Description:* Describes the regional location and general setting of the City of Albany; identifies the intended uses of the Draft EIR; describes the relationship of the Draft General Plan to California State law and regional and local initiatives; provides the objectives of the Draft General Plan; describes the components of the Draft General Plan; and describes the anticipated adoption and implementation of the Draft General Plan.
- *Chapter IV – Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures:* Describes the following for each environmental technical topic: existing conditions (setting), potential environmental impacts (project level and cumulative) and their level of significance, and mitigation measures recommended to mitigate identified impacts. Potential adverse impacts are identified by levels of significance, as follows: less-than-significant impact (LTS), significant impact (S), and significant and unavoidable impact (SU). The significance of each impact is categorized before and after implementation of any recommended mitigation measure(s).
- *Chapter V – Alternatives:* Provides an evaluation of three alternatives to the Draft General Plan.
- *Chapter VI – CEQA Required Conclusions:* Provides an analysis of effects found not to be significant, growth-inducing impacts, unavoidable significant environmental impacts, significant irreversible changes, and cumulative impacts.
- *Chapter VII – Report Preparation:* Identifies preparers of the Draft EIR, references used, and the persons and organizations contacted.

- *Appendices:* The appendices contain: the NOP and scoping comments; technical calculations; and other documentation prepared in conjunction with this Draft EIR. The appendices included at the end of this Draft EIR. Copies are available for review at the City Community Development Department and at the Albany Library.