

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Revised Environmental Impact Report – Selected Chapters has been prepared for the Veronica Meadows Specific Plan project in the City of Santa Barbara. A Court order issued in early 2008 required the City Council to set aside the certification of the 2005 Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the related project approvals. In the Court decision, it was clarified that there were no major deficiencies in the EIR itself, but that the environmental findings adopted by the City Council were not adequate. Section 1.0 Introduction provides more information about the process and contents for this Revised EIR – Selected Chapters.

The City of Santa Barbara Community Development Department (City) has received an application for a residential development project and annexation in the Las Positas Valley, called the Veronica Meadows Specific Plan (Figure 1-1, Appendix A). The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the environmental effects of the proposed project. The EIR identifies significant impacts of the project, as well as feasible mitigation measures and alternatives to avoid or reduce such impacts. Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the City decision makers will use the information in the EIR during their consideration of the application, which will involve a public hearing. The EIR is also used to inform the public about the project and to facilitate public input.

I. PROJECT SUMMARY

This summary text is retained from the 2005 Final EIR. Details of the project have changed in the Current (2008) Project Design, and are described fully in new Section 4.13.

The project site is located within the unincorporated area of the Las Positas Valley, between Arroyo Burro Creek (on the eastern boundary of site) and Campanil Hill (to the west). The current City/County jurisdictional boundary runs along the southern property line of the project area. The southern portion of the property is located in the Coastal Zone. The site is currently undeveloped, and access is taken from the end of Alan Road. Existing single-family development along Alan Road is located immediately south of the project site, and the Stone Creek Condominiums are to the north.

The project would involve annexation of approximately 50.5 acres from an unincorporated portion of Santa Barbara County. Approximately 35.7 acres would be dedicated open space and 14.8 acres would be developed for residential uses and public open space. Twenty four (24) residential lots would be created with two-story, single-family houses. The sizes of the houses would range from 1,800 to 4,500 square feet.

Site access to all but two lots would be provided via a concrete bridge over Arroyo Burro Creek that would intersect with Las Positas Road. This bridge would be constructed over a City-owned open space parcel along the creek. A two-way stop-controlled intersection would be constructed on Las Positas Road across from the entrance to Elings Park; a stop sign would not be placed on Las Positas Road. Access to the southern two lots on the property would occur from Alan Road.

The project includes a 100-foot buffer between the proposed residences and the top-of-bank of Arroyo Burro Creek, and a 50-foot buffer zone adjacent to the west side of the creek. A public pedestrian path is proposed within the 50-foot creek buffer area. It would provide access from Las Positas Road (and Elings Park) to Alan Road. Bicycle access would also be provided through the site using interior roads and a small length of a paved bike path.

The project also includes habitat restoration along both banks of Arroyo Burro Creek at, and adjacent to, the property. Much of the restoration would occur on a City-owned open space parcel, and would require City approval. Development of several lots would require stabilization of landslides on the hillsides above the lots.

The project also involves annexation of a 5.89-acre City-owned parcel, a portion of which would be used for the bridge to the project site, subject to City Council approval.

2. REQUIRED APPROVALS

The project requires a large number of discretionary approvals by both the Planning Commission and the City Council. Key approvals include a Coastal Development Permit, Lot Line Adjustment, Tentative Subdivision Map, annexation approval, specific plan approval, and amendments to the City General Plan and Local Coastal Plan. The Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) must also approve annexation of the property to the City.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The proposed project represents a discretionary action subject to the environmental review requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Community Development Department completed a CEQA Initial Study Environmental Checklist and determined that there was a potential for the project to cause significant environmental impacts. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to evaluate the potentially significant impacts of the project. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was issued in September 2003 for a 30-day public review period. Public comments on the scope of the EIR were provided at the October 29, 2003 Planning Commission scoping hearing.

On September 22, 2004, a Notice of Availability was issued, announcing that the Draft EIR was available to the public and agencies for review and comment. A 45-day public review period was provided to receive comments, ending on November 5, 2004. A total of 33 letters of comments from public agencies, community organizations, and the general public were received. On October 21, 2004, the City Planning Commission conducted an environmental hearing on the Draft EIR to receive comments on the document.

The City has reviewed the comments on the Draft EIR and prepared responses to the comments. For some responses, the text of the EIR has been revised, as indicated by text underlining.

The Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing to consider certifying that the Final EIR meets the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City will also conduct one or more subsequent public hearings to consider approval of the project.

On March 14, 2008, a Notice of Availability was issued announcing that a Revised EIR – Selected Chapters was available to the public and agencies for review and comment. A 45-day public review period was provided to receive comments, ending on April 28, 2008. During public review, 18 letters of comment were received, and the Planning Commission held an environmental hearing on April 17, 2008. From that hearing, notes were prepared summarizing presentations to the Commission and comments by the Planning Commissioners. The letters of comment and these notes are provided in Appendix L. Responses to all of these comments are provided in Appendix M. Minor revisions have been made in this Revised EIR in response to the comments. These are shown as underline or strikeout markings. The earlier revisions markings showing changes in the original Final EIR (January 2005), and the Draft Revised EIR (March 2008) revisions, have been removed (except where noted in this document). In this Revised EIR, portions of the original document requiring modifications are re-printed and necessary changes are shown in underline or strikeout. The earlier underlining showing changes incorporated in the 2005 Final EIR has been removed.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The proposed project would result in three significant unavoidable impacts (Class I) for which there are no feasible mitigation measures or alternatives to avoid these impacts while still meeting the project objectives:

- Habitat Impacts of New Bridge. The construction of the bridge over Arroyo Burro would permanently remove native and non-native riparian habitat at the location of the abutments, and would require removal of a large oak tree and sycamore tree. Tall dense riparian woodland would not develop at this location with the bridge in place. The change in habitat could adversely affect wildlife movement due to the gap in vegetation cover at the bridge. In addition, wildlife movement would be hindered by the presence of the bridge abutments. In light of the narrow riparian corridor at this location and the close proximity of other human disturbances that affect wildlife, the overall impact of the bridge on riparian habitat and associated wildlife is considered significant and unmitigable. The EIR includes mitigation measures that would reduce the magnitude of this impact, but not avoid it. Refinements in the project design as the creek restoration plans have been formulated indicate that the sycamore tree can be retained in place and that the creek banks adjacent to the bridge can be recontoured to provide a greater open area and improved corridor function. While these changes are improvements, they are not considered sufficient to change the conclusion regarding habitat impacts of the new bridge in the context of this project.
- Contribution to Cumulative Traffic Impact on Local Intersections. The proposed project would add 5 to 21 trips to AM and/or PM peak hour trips at four local intersections. The additional trips, while small in magnitude, would contribute to a potentially significant cumulative impact from future projects on the operation of these intersections. A feasible mitigation measure requiring a fair share contribution of funds for capacity improvements at

these intersections has been identified in the EIR, but may not fully mitigate the contribution of this project to the cumulative impact

- Construction Truck Noise on Alan Road. Construction traffic and haul trucks would use Alan Road to access the site during the initial phase of the project, while the bridge over Arroyo Burro is being constructed. Noise from haul trucks using Alan Road would increase the ambient sound levels in outdoor and indoor living areas of residences along the road, which would cause an inconvenience to residents during this temporary construction phase. The number of truck trips per day is estimated to be 30 to 40 round trips.

The proposed project would also result in various significant, but mitigable impacts (Class II), which are summarized below. Mitigation measures to avoid these impacts, or to reduce them to less than significant levels, are presented in the EIR. These impacts and the associated mitigation measures are described in more detail in Table ES-1.

Biological Resources

- Permanent loss of about 6.8 acres of mostly non-native habitats and seven oak trees due to the construction of residential lots and roads. [Note: The project also involves the restoration/enhancement of 6.8 acres of riparian habitat on and off the project site, and restoration of 3.8 acres of upland habitat]
- Loss of up to 7 coast live oak trees from the project site
- Disturbance and possible displacement of wildlife from the creek corridor due to construction activities
- Adverse effect of noise, lighting, human activity, pets, and pesticides associated with the residential development on aquatic and riparian habitats and species of Arroyo Burro Creek

Drainage, Flooding, and Water Quality

- Collecting on- and off-site runoff in a storm drain system and directing it only two storm drain outlets would reduce infiltration and bank seepage along Arroyo Burro Creek; construction and maintenance of large storm drain outlets could cause hydraulic impacts. (The current (2008) project design incorporates mitigation measures and revisions that reduce this impact, as described in Section 4.13.)
- Proposed riparian corridor restoration plans and bank repair could cause unintended adverse impacts by increasing bank erosion and instability along Arroyo Burro Creek
- Temporary adverse effects on water quality in Arroyo Burro Creek due to construction activities
- Adverse effect of stormwater pollution from land development on Arroyo Burro Creek water quality

Geologic Hazards

- Potential liquefiable soils, expansive soils, and high groundwater conditions could adversely affect proposed development
- Landslide hazards are present at the project site

Cultural Resources

- Adverse effect of development on historic properties of the site

Traffic and Circulation

- Traffic associated with the residential development would add additional trips to local intersections, and when combined with other future projects, would be significant
- The proposed traffic light controlled intersection at the site entrance and Las Positas Road is not warranted by Caltrans standards. The use of a one-way stop controlled intersection is feasible, but would cause traffic safety hazards unless certain improvements were implemented
- Construction truck traffic along Las Positas Road, Cliff Drive, and Alan Road could degrade pavement conditions.

Public Health and Safety

- Potential public exposure to pesticides used for maintenance of open space landscaping
- Potential public exposure to radon gas that may be emitted from underlying geologic formations

Air Quality

- Generation of fugitive dust during major site grading and earthwork

Various adverse, but less than significant, impacts would also occur due to the proposed project. These impacts are summarized in Table ES-1. They include impacts to drainage, geological hazards, biological resources, visual resources, public health and safety, and cultural resources.

5. ALTERNATIVES

The following alternatives to the proposed project were evaluated in the EIR:

- No Project Alternative
- No Annexation Alternative
- Use of Draft Pre-Annexation Zoning
- Alan Road Access Alternative
- Secondary Emergency Access Alternative
- Concrete Sidewalks
- Current 2008 Project Design
- Avoid Landslide Alternative

- Alternative Landslide Stabilization
- Alternative Creek Setback Distance (three scenarios)
- Alternative Drainage and Stormwater Treatment
- Alternative Bridge Sites

The No Project Alternative would avoid the environmental impacts of the proposed project. The current environmental conditions at the project site would continue. This alternative is [considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint](#). However, ~~not expected to be feasible~~, as the project applicant purchased the property for the purposes of developing a project. Without development, it may not be economically feasible for the landowner to maintain ownership and manage the property. This alternative would not meet the overall project objective of developing the site for residential use, consistent with the City General Plan.

The No Annexation Alternative could potentially increase the environmental impacts of the proposed project because a higher maximum density of residential units would be potentially allowable under County zoning. Use of the City’s Draft Pre-Annexation Zoning Designations for the project site could also increase the potential magnitude of the impacts identified for the proposed project due to higher density and number of allowable units at the project site. These alternatives are ~~considered feasible~~ [considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint](#), and would generally meet the overall project objective.

The Alan Road Access Alternative would avoid a significant biological impact to Arroyo Burro Creek due to the proposed bridge, but would cause a significant project-related impact at the Cliff Drive/Las Positas Road intersection. This Alternative would also cause an adverse impact on the quality of life in the Alan Road neighborhood because there would be an increase in traffic and traffic-related noise along Alan Road from residents traveling to and from the project site. Alan Road currently does not have through-traffic and ends in a cul-de-sac. This alternative is ~~considered feasible~~ [considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint](#) and would generally meet the project objectives. With respect to the objective of improving pedestrian and bicycle access, however, this alternative would only include an easement for a pedestrian/bicycle bridge across Arroyo Burro; and not the actual construction of such a facility. It is questionable whether this alternative is feasible from a social and neighborhood compatibility perspective given the degree of opposition by the public against this alternative. This issue will be further addressed by the City’s decision making bodies in their review of the project.

The Secondary Emergency Access Alternative is ~~considered feasible~~ [considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint](#) and would meet the overall project objective. Under this alternative, emergency vehicular access would be provided at Alan Road. This alternative would not cause any new significant impacts, nor intensify any impacts of the proposed project. However, it would enhance public safety conditions at the project site and Alan Road neighborhood.

The Concrete Sidewalk Alternative is ~~considered feasible~~ [considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint](#) and would meet the overall project objective. It would not cause any new significant impacts, but it would reduce the effectiveness of the proposed stormwater management plan by increasing impermeable surfaces.

The Avoid Landslides Alternative would reduce various drainage, habitat, and construction-related impacts of the proposed project because of a reduction in amount of earthwork and the number of lots developed under this alternative. However, this alternative may not meet some of the project objectives, including creek restoration and public access if the reduction in residential units would be substantial (up to 11 lots), and therefore reduce the applicant's financial ability to implement these improvements. However, under this alternative, the extensive landslide stabilization would not be required, which would substantially reduce site development costs. A final determination of feasibility of this alternative would be made by City decision-makers.

~~However, this alternative may be infeasible because the reduction in residential units would be substantial (up to 11 lots), and is expected to make the proposed site improvements economically infeasible for the applicant. Hence, this alternative would not meet the overall project objective.~~

The Alternative Landslide Stabilization would increase the magnitude of construction related impacts (i.e., habitat disturbance, erosion, equipment emissions, truck trips, noise) compared to the proposed project because more grading would be required, and retaining walls may be needed. The alternative stabilization methods would be designed to provide the same level of safety as under the proposed project. As such, this alternative would meet overall project objective. However, the alternative stabilization methods are not considered feasible due to the need to encroachment onto adjacent parcels.

The Alternative Creek Setbacks (which includes three setback scenarios) would reduce water quality and biological impacts to riparian resources along Arroyo Burro Creek, and provide additional protection to the creek resources compared to the proposed project (which includes a creek setback and riparian restoration program). The creek setback alternatives are considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint and -would meet the overall project objective of developing the site for residential use consistent with the City General Plan unless the economic impact of the loss of units renders the project infeasible, or if the reduction in revenue substantially reduces the applicant's financial ability to implement the creek corridor open space improvements (i.e., trail and restoration).

The Alternative Drainage and Stormwater Treatment would reduce potential adverse hydraulic and stormwater pollution impacts to Arroyo Burro Creek associated with the proposed project. It would provide additional protection of water quality compared to the proposed project (which includes a stormwater detention basin/bioswale). This alternative is ~~considered feasible~~ considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint and would meet the overall project objective. It would not cause any new significant impacts, nor intensify any environmental impacts of the proposed project.

The Alternative Bridge Sites included three locations. The first alternate bridge location (about 100 feet north of the proposed location) would avoid loss of a mature oak tree, but would otherwise have similar effects to the bridge alignment in the original design and in the current 2008 design. The second location (along the previous bridge alignment that ran obliquely across the creek) would have more extensive impacts within the riparian corridor than the proposed alignment. The third alternate bridge location (about 500 feet south of the proposed alignment) would have similar riparian impacts, but more extensive upland habitat impacts, when compared to the proposed

alignment. The first two alternate bridge sites are not physically or technically feasible, due to their proximity to, but failure to align with, the Elings Park entrance road. The third site may be considered potentially feasible from a physical and technical standpoint, but would require a larger easement across the City-owned parcel east of the creek. Since these alternatives provided little or no environmental benefit, and were less feasible than the bridge location proposed, they were not pursued.

The Current 2008 Project Design incorporates several changes that have developed since the 2005 Final EIR. These include incorporation of mitigation measures and features described in the Alternative Drainage and Stormwater Treatment alternative related to improving stormwater management. This alternative also includes minor reconfigurations to provide a greater distance between Arroyo Burro Creek and the Private Driveway, a slight increase in open space adjacent to the creek, recognition of refinements in the creek restoration plan, and two affordable dwelling units. This alternative is considered potentially ~~feasible~~ feasible from a physical and technical standpoint and would meet the ~~overall~~ project objectives. It would not cause any new significant impacts, nor intensify any environmental impacts of the originally proposed project.