



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Atkinson Lane Specific Plan and Planned Unit Development (PUD) (hereinafter “proposed project”) has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines. The purpose of this EIR is to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with the proposed project. A full description of the proposed project is presented in the **Chapter 2: Project Description**.

1.1.1 Background and Overview

The County of Santa Cruz (County) and the City of Watsonville (City) have prepared a Specific Plan and PUD for the Atkinson Lane future growth area, which consists of an approximately 65.8 acre site located adjacent to the City of Watsonville city limits (hereinafter “planning area”). The Specific Plan and PUD serves two purposes: 1) to direct the development of a 16-acre portion of the planning area (hereinafter “County site”) as a PUD according to the County’s Regional Housing Needs Combining Zoning District and 2) to serve as a Specific Plan to direct the development of the balance of the planning area upon annexation by the City. Because the County will consider adoption of the PUD and project approval of the 16-acre County Site prior to annexation of the planning area, this EIR has been prepared for the County of Santa Cruz Planning Department, which is serving as Lead Agency under CEQA for the project. Subsequent adoption of the Specific Plan by the City may occur after approval by the County. However, no tentative map shall be approved by the City until after January 1, 2010 in accordance with Measure U.

This EIR focuses on evaluation of the following environmental issue areas: aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, population and housing, public services, utilities, and recreation, and transportation and circulation.

1.1.2 Project Overview

This EIR has been prepared in accordance with CEQA as amended in July 27, 2007, and the State CEQA Guidelines. As stated in the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR is an “informational document” with the intended purpose to: “inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project.” Although the EIR does not control the ultimate decision on the proposed project, the County and the City must consider the information in the EIR and respond to each significant effect identified in the EIR. As defined in Section 15382 of the CEQA Guidelines, a “significant effect on the environment” is:

“...a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. A social or economic change related to a



physical change may be considered in determining whether a physical change is significant.”

1.2 Environmental Review Process

The review and certification process for the EIR will involve the following procedural steps:

1.2.1 Notice of Preparation

In accordance with Section 15063 of the CEQA Guidelines, the County of Santa Cruz determined that an EIR would be necessary for the proposed project; therefore an Initial Study was not prepared. In accordance with Section 15082(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, the County of Santa Cruz Planning Department circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to local, state, and federal agencies for a period of 30-days in order to solicit comments on the scope and content of the EIR regarding the proposed project (See Appendix A). The comment period on the NOP was from August 11, 2008 to September 9, 2008. A total of five comment letters were received on the NOP from the following agencies: Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District; the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG); Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC); California Department of Transportation (Caltrans); and the County of Santa Cruz, Office of the Agricultural Commissioner, Mosquito and Vector Control. Concerns raised in the response to the NOP were considered during preparation of the Draft EIR and are included in **Appendix A** of this Draft EIR.

1.2.2 Draft EIR

The Draft EIR contains a description of the proposed project, description of the environmental setting, identification of project impacts and effects found not to be significant, mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant, and an analysis of project alternatives.

Upon completion of the Draft EIR, the County filed a Notice of Completion (NOC) with the State Office of Planning and Research, in accordance with Section 15085 of the CEQA Guidelines. This begins the public review period (Public Resources Code, Section 21161) for the Draft EIR.

Public Notice/Public Review

The Draft EIR will be published and circulated for review and comment by the public and other interested parties, agencies and organizations for a 45-day review period from **Monday, March 9, 2009** through **Wednesday, April 22, 2009**.

Concurrent with the Notice of Completion (NOC), the County provided a public notice of the availability of the Draft EIR for public review in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15087(a), and invited comments from the general public, Responsible Agencies, organizations, and other interested parties. The review period for the Draft EIR is 45 days. Notice of the time and location of the County hearing to consider the EIR will be published prior to the hearing.



All comments or questions regarding the Draft EIR should be addressed to:

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Response to Comments/Final EIR

Following the public review and comment period for the Draft EIR, a Final EIR will be prepared. The Final EIR will respond to written comments received during the public review and comment period. The County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors will review and consider the Final EIR prior to their decision to approve, revise, or reject the proposed project or an alternative to the proposed project.

Certification of the Final EIR

If the County of Santa Cruz finds that the Final EIR is “adequate and complete,” the County of Santa Cruz may certify the Final EIR. The rule of adequacy generally holds that the EIR can be certified if: 1) it shows a good faith effort at full disclosure of environmental information, and 2) provides sufficient analysis to allow decisions to be made regarding the project in contemplation of environmental considerations. As a responsible agency, the City of Watsonville may also certify the Final EIR prior to adoption of the Specific Plan.

Project Consideration

Upon review and consideration of the Final EIR, the County of Santa Cruz may act upon the proposed project. A decision to approve the proposed project would be accompanied by written Findings in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 and, if applicable, Section 15093 (Statement of Overriding Considerations).

Since the City’s consideration of the proposed project includes annexation and a Sphere of Influence (SOI) amendment request, the proposed project will require approval by the Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) prior to implementation of the Specific Plan by the City. Once the Final EIR is certified by the County of Santa Cruz, the City of Watsonville, as a responsible agency under CEQA, would consider approval of the Specific Plan and/or certification of the EIR. Following approval of the Specific Plan and/or certification of the EIR, a petition may be filed to LAFCO for the annexation and Sphere of Influence boundary adjustment. In accordance with Measure U, no tentative map shall be approved by the City until after January 1, 2010.

1.3 Report Organization

Sections 15122 through 15132 of the CEQA Guidelines identify the content requirements for Environmental Impact Reports. An EIR must include: description of the environmental setting; an environmental impact analysis; mitigation measures; alternatives to the proposed project;



identification of significant irreversible environmental changes; growth-inducing impacts; and cumulative impacts.

The environmental issues addressed in the Draft EIR were established through the preparation of environmental documentation and supporting technical reports developed for the proposed project, public agency responses to the NOP and comments received. Based upon documentation, technical reports, NOP responses, agency consultation, consultation with the City of Watsonville, and review of the proposed Specific Plan and PUD, the County of Santa Cruz has determined the scope for this EIR. This Draft EIR is organized in the following manner:

Section S – Executive Summary

This section summarizes the characteristics of the proposed project and provides a concise summary matrix of the project’s environmental impacts, associated mitigation measures and project alternatives.

Section 1.0 – Introduction

This section provides an introduction and overview describing the intended use of the EIR and the review and certification process.

Section 2.0 – Project Description

The project description provides a detailed description of the proposed project, including project location, site conditions, intended objectives, background information and physical and technical characteristics of the proposed project.

Section 3.0 – Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section contains an analysis of environmental topic areas to be addressed, as identified below. Each subsection contains a description of the existing setting of the planning area and surrounding area and identifies project-related impacts and recommends mitigation measures where necessary. The following major environmental topics shall be addressed within various subsections of the EIR:

- **Subsection 3.1, Aesthetics and Visual Resources:** The potential change in character of the planning area as measured against the existing setting and visual conditions and surrounding land uses is discussed within subsection 4.2: Aesthetics and Visual Resources. Project visibility, scale, additional light and glare, and visual character are considered relative to the predominately agricultural and rural residential nature of the planning area. The analysis is based on a site reconnaissance, photo documentation of the planning area, and existing policy documents (e.g. *City of Watsonville General Plan* and the *County of Santa Cruz General Plan*).
- **Subsection 3.2, Agricultural Resources:** This subsection describes the agricultural resources within the planning area; evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed project on these agricultural resources; and evaluates other changes that could result in conversion of adjacent farmland. In addition, this subsection identifies land use compatibility conflicts associated with the construction of residential development adjacent to existing farmland. The analysis within this section is based on the information contained in the proposed Specific Plan and PUD, the *California Department*



- of *Conservation Important Farmlands Map for Santa Cruz County*, the *Soil Survey for Santa Cruz County*, and existing policy documents.
- **Subsection 3.3, Air Quality:** This subsection addresses the requirements of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) and analyzes local and regional air quality impacts associated with project implementation including both short-term construction impacts and long-term operational impacts from mobile and stationary sources, as well as the potential exposure to objectionable odors from surrounding uses. This analysis is based on air quality modeling performed for the proposed project by RBF Consulting based on the traffic impact analysis, which is included as Appendix B in Volume II of the Draft EIR.
 - **Subsection 3.4, Biological Resources:** This subsection evaluates project impacts to biological resources with implementation of the proposed project based on a *Biotic Assessment for the Proposed City of Watsonville and Santa Cruz County Atkinson Lane Specific Plan, Santa Cruz County, California* prepared in January 2009 by EcoSystems West Consulting Group (EcoSystems West); *Delineation of Wetlands and Waters of the U.S. Subject to Section 404 Jurisdiction for the Atkinson Lane Specific Plan* prepared by EcoSystems West in January 2009; and a *Special-status Amphibian and Reptile Preliminary Site Assessment for the City of Watsonville Atkinson Lane Specific/Master Plan, Santa Cruz County, California* prepared by Bryan M. Mori, Biological Consulting Services in July 2008., which is included in Appendix D in Volume II of the Draft EIR. This subsection discusses the potential degradation or elimination of important species, and potential impacts on listed, proposed and candidate threatened and endangered species.
 - **Subsection 3.5, Cultural Resources:** This subsection analyzes the presence or absence of potentially significant archaeological and historic resources within the planning area. This section is based on the on the *Cultural Resources Evaluation of Six Areas Proposed for Annexation to the City of Watsonville* prepared by Archeological Resource Management in February 2005, a review of the files at the County Assessor's office and a site reconnaissance of the planning area. Since the proposed project includes a General Plan Amendment and a Specific Plan, the County of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville completed the Senate Bill 18 (SB 18) consultation process on January 13, 2009. The cultural resources evaluation prepared by Archeological Resource Management is included in Appendix C in Volume II of the Draft EIR.
 - **Subsection 3.6, Geology and Soils:** This subsection examines potential geologic and seismic hazards, as well as any engineering constraints and general soil suitability for the land uses proposed as part of the proposed Specific Plan and PUD. Information contained in this section is based on various planning documents including the *Soil Survey of Santa Cruz County* and the *Feasibility Level Geotechnical Investigation and Engineering Geology Report for Atkinson Lane Development, Watsonville, California* prepared by Pacific Crest Engineering Inc., which is included in Appendix E in Volume III of the Draft EIR.
 - **Subsection 3.7, Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** This subsection evaluates the potential presence of hazardous materials and contaminated soil within the planning area. The potential for onsite sources of contamination such as leaking hazardous waste containers, residual agricultural chemicals, lead-based paints, and asbestos-containing building materials, among other items is also addressed within this subsection of the EIR.



The potential risk of these conditions in proximity to existing and proposed residential development and human activities is evaluated. This subsection is based upon a *Preliminary Hazardous Materials Assessment* that was prepared by RBF Consulting, which is included in Appendix F in Volume II of the Draft EIR.

- **Subsection 3.8, Hydrology and Water Quality:** The impacts of the proposed project on hydrology, storm drainage, water resources and water quality are discussed within this section. The analysis also identifies existing drainage patterns, potential flood hazards and stormwater retention requirements of the County of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville. This section is based on a drainage analysis prepared by RBF Consulting, which is included in Appendix G in Volume III of the Draft EIR.
- **Subsection 3.9, Land Use and Planning:** The relationship of the proposed project to relevant regional and local plans, including the *County of Santa Cruz General Plan*, the *City of Watsonville General Plan* and other local planning documents, is discussed in this subsection. The analysis focuses on project consistency with adopted plans and policies, project relationship to the City and County General Plan and the potential to affect existing neighborhoods. This subsection also provides a discussion of LAFCO policies and State law governing the annexation and the SOI boundary adjustment.
- **Subsection 3.10, Noise:** Compatibility between the existing noise environment and anticipated noise levels generated by the project-generated traffic, by on-site activities and cumulative noise from area roadways upon completion of the project are examined within this subsection of the EIR. This subsection is based on noise modeling conducted for the proposed project by RBF Consulting, which is included as Appendix I in Volume IV of the Draft EIR.
- **Subsection 3.11, Population and Housing:** This subsection focuses on population and housing impacts that would occur with implementation of the proposed project.
- **Subsection 3.12, Public Services, Utilities, and Recreation:** This subsection addresses the availability of existing public facilities and services, and calculates demand generated by the proposed project for additional facilities such as schools, parks/recreation facilities, police and fire services. It also provides a general assessment of additional system requirements and physical improvements needed to serve the buildout demands of the proposed project. The provision of potable water service, wastewater treatment and disposal, natural gas and electric service, and solid waste impacts are also addressed in this subsection of the EIR.
- **Subsection 3.13, Transportation and Traffic:** This subsection examines potential impacts on the area roadway network, including roadway segments and intersections. Scenarios evaluated include: existing conditions, background conditions, background plus project conditions, and cumulative conditions based on General Plan buildout. This subsection also addresses alternatives transportation (e.g. public transit, pedestrian access, and bicycle routes). This subsection is based on a traffic impact analysis prepared by RBF Consulting, which is included as Appendix I in Volume IV of the Draft EIR.



Section 4.0 – CEQA Considerations

This section of the EIR addresses the required discussions and analyses of various topical issues mandated by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2, including: significant and unavoidable environmental effects; growth inducing impacts; irreversible environmental changes and effects found not to be significant.

This section also addresses alternatives to the proposed project and cumulative impacts. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6 requires that an EIR describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, which could feasibly attain the basic objectives of the project and avoid and/or lessen the environmental effects of the project. The alternatives analysis compares the proposed project with four selected alternatives, which include the following:

- Alternative #1 – No Project/No Development Alternative;
- Alternative #2 – Proposed Project without the Wagner Road Extension;
- Alternative #3 – Reduced Project Density (Six to Nine Units Per Acre);
- Alternative #4 – Alternative Project Design

Impacts associated with cumulative development were analyzed based on the project’s effects in combination with a summary of projections in the adopted *City of Watsonville General Plan* (2005), as modified with adoption of Measure U.

Section 5.0 – Report Preparers and References

The purpose of this section is to provide a list of all authors and agencies that assisted in the preparation of the report by name, title, and company or agency affiliation. It also itemizes supporting and reference data used in the preparation of the Draft EIR and lists all governmental agencies, organizations, and other individuals consulted in preparing the EIR.

Appendices

This section includes all notices and other procedural documents pertinent to the EIR as well as all technical reports prepared in support of the analysis.

1.4 Impact Terminology

This Draft EIR uses the following terminology to describe environmental effects of the proposed project:

- **Standards of Significance:** A set of criteria used by the lead agency to determine at what level, or “threshold”, an impact would be considered significant. Significance criteria used in this EIR include the CEQA Guidelines and Statutes; factual or scientific information; regulatory performance standards of local, state, and federal agencies; and the Goals, Objectives, and policies of the *County of Santa Cruz General Plan* and the *City of Watsonville General Plan*.
- **Less Than Significant Impact:** A less than significant impact would cause no substantial change in the environment and no mitigation is required.



- **Potentially Significant Impact:** A potentially significant impact may cause a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment. Mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified to reduce project effects to the environment.
- **Significant Impact:** Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project effects using specified standards of significance. Mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified to reduce project effects to the environment.
- **Significant Unavoidable Impact:** A significant and unavoidable impact would result in a substantial change in the environment for which no feasible mitigation is available to reduce the impact to a less than significant level, although mitigation may be available to lessen the degree of the impact.
- **Cumulative Impact:** Cumulative impacts refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.