

Introduction

PURPOSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared for the City of Rohnert Park Southeast Specific Plan. The Southeast Specific Plan includes the construction of up to 499 residential units and up to 20,000 square feet of commercial/retail space inclusive of 36 live/work residential units on an 80 acre parcel of land. The 36 live/work residential units are included in the total 499 residential unit count. This EIR has been prepared in conformance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines as amended.¹

The purpose of the EIR is to provide the City of Rohnert Park, public agencies and the public in general with detailed information about the environmental effects of implementing the Southeast Specific Plan (herein referred to as the “project”), to examine and institute methods of mitigating any adverse environmental impacts should the Southeast Specific Plan be approved, and to consider alternatives to the Southeast Specific Plan as proposed.

CEQA provides that public agencies should not approve projects for construction until all feasible means available have been employed to substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects. “Feasible” means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time taking into account economic, environmental, social and technological factors.²

This EIR specifically addresses the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components as proposed, and is therefore “project specific”. The Final EIR will be considered by officials of the City of Rohnert Park, acting as Lead Agency for the project under CEQA, prior to any decisions being made on the proposed Southeast Specific Plan. Certification of the Final EIR by the City of Rohnert Park City Council as complete and adequate in conformance with CEQA does not grant any approvals for the project or its development components. The merits of the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components will be considered after the EIR is certified by the City of Rohnert Park City Council.

EIR SCOPING

Public Scoping Meeting

The City of Rohnert Park Planning Commission conducted an EIR public scoping meeting for the Southeast Specific Plan at the 7 PM Planning Commission meeting of November 13, 2003 at the City Council Chambers located at 6750 Commerce Boulevard, Rohnert Park. The purpose of the public scoping meeting was to allow agency representatives, individuals and the public at large to express the environmental issues felt necessary to be addressed in the EIR for the Southeast Specific Plan, and for the Planning Department to record those expressed concerns.

To advertise for the public scoping meeting, the Planning Department announced the scoping meeting time and place in the EIR Notice of Preparation (see below), and mailed notices to property owners and residents within a 300 foot radius of the Southeast Specific Plan site as well as to others who had expressed an interest in the Plan's development.

Notice of Preparation – Southeast Specific Plan

On October 29, 2003, the City of Rohnert Park Planning Department issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) that an EIR would be prepared for the Southeast Specific Plan. The NOP response period extended for 30 days from the time of receipt of the NOP. The NOP was submitted to 75 City, County and State agencies, businesses, civic groups, committees and associations having jurisdiction or interest over environmental resources and/or conditions within the project area (e.g., Penngrove Advisory Committee, City of Cotati, California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, Caltrans), and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (State Clearinghouse for EIRs). The purpose of the Notice was to allow the various private and public entities to transmit their concerns and comments on the scope and content of the EIR, focusing on specific information related to each group's interest or agency's statutory responsibility early in the environmental review process.

In response to the NOP, letters of comment were received from the following (see Appendix A of this EIR, Notice of EIR Preparation and Letters of Response):

State Agencies

Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

Regional Agencies

Bay Area Air Quality Management District

Local Agencies

Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission
Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department
City of Cotati

As a result of the November 13, 2003 public scoping meeting and correspondence received as a result of issuing the NOP for this EIR, major issues to be studied in the EIR were determined as follows (presented in alphabetical order):³

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Geology, Soils and Seismicity
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use⁴
- Noise
- Public Services
- Relationship to Plans and Planning Policy
- Traffic and Circulation
- Utilities

Accordingly, the environmental effects of implementing the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components are analyzed in this EIR under each major topic as listed above. It should be noted that the CEQA Guidelines define the effects of a project as changes from the environmental setting (existing conditions) that are attributable to the project. Short-term construction impacts as well as the long-term operational impacts are analyzed as appropriate for the various topics.

STANDARD FOR ADEQUACY

Section 15151 of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that an EIR should be prepared on a project with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information that enables them to make a decision that intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. Where a particular project effect is too speculative for evaluation, discussion of the effect is to be concluded.

The standards for adequacy are described in CEQA.⁵

- An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible.
- Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts.
- The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental impacts resulting from implementing the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components are considered in this EIR. Current environmental conditions under which the project would be implemented are considered in determining impact significance. If it is determined that a potential impact is too speculative for evaluation, this condition is so noted and the discussion of impact is terminated.

In accordance with Sections 15143 and 15145 of the CEQA Guidelines, this EIR focuses on the significant effects on the environment resulting from implementing the project. Each major topic (e.g., Hydrology, Biological Resources), provides criteria for evaluating whether an environmental impact is significant or less than significant. These criteria, known as *thresholds of significance*, and as presented in each technical section of this EIR, are as approved by the City of Rohnert Park for use in EIRs where Rohnert Park serves as Lead Agency. As explained in Section 15002(g) of the CEQA Guidelines, a significant effect on the environment is defined as a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions which exist in the area affected by the proposed project. For purposes of this EIR a less than significant environmental impact is one in which there is no long or short-term substantial adverse change in the physical conditions which exist in the area affected by the proposed project.

Determining that a mitigation measure reduces a significant impact to a less than significant level rests with understanding the criteria for determining a significant impact. If the criteria for determining a significant impact is not met, the impact is considered less than significant. For one or more significant unavoidable impacts that cannot be substantially mitigated, the Lead Agency (in this case the City of Rohnert Park), under CEQA must prepare a Statement of Overriding Considerations in which the Lead Agency sets forth its views in writing on the ultimate balancing of the merits of approving a project despite the environmental impacts which would result from project implementation. This process requires consideration of the decision maker (the Lead Agency), to balance the benefits of a proposed project against its unavoidable environmental risks in determining whether to approve a project. The Statement is preserved in the record of project approval (if a project is approved), and is prepared after the Final EIR has been completed.

It should be noted that the Southeast Specific Plan as defined further in this EIR is first treated as a single undertaking in order to establish the potential environmental impacts under buildout as a worst case scenario. The various development components under the project as currently proposed, or that reasonably could occur in the future, are then identified as necessary and environmental impacts assessed consistent with the magnitude of each component as compared to the project as a whole. In this way, the potential range of development up to and including the maximum that could occur on the project site, and the relative contribution of each development component as currently proposed to the whole may be assessed and compared for purposes of comprehension.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EFFECTS

Section 15131 of the CEQA Guidelines specify that economic or social effects of a project shall not be treated as significant effects on the environment. However, “an EIR may trace a chain of cause and effect from a proposed decision on a project through anticipated economic or social changes resulting from the project to physical changes caused in turn by the economic or social changes. The intermediate economic or social changes need not be analyzed in any detail greater than necessary to trace the chain of cause and effect. The focus of the analysis shall be on the physical changes.”⁶ Accordingly, this EIR focuses on physical changes that would be caused through implementing the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Cumulative impacts are discussed at the end of each technical section of this EIR. Cumulative impact refers to two or more individual effects, which, when considered together compound or increase the environmental impact under consideration or other related environmental impacts. For example, a project may have possible environmental effects which are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. “Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, other current projects and probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.

Further, as noted in CEQA Guidelines Section 15130 (a), “Where a lead agency is examining a project with an incremental effect that is not ‘cumulatively considerable’, a lead agency need not consider that effect as significant, but shall briefly describe its basis for concluding that the incremental effect is not cumulatively considerable.” Section 15130 (a) (3) goes on to note, “A project’s contribution is less than cumulatively considerable if the project is required to implement or fund its fair share of a mitigation measure or measures designed to alleviate the cumulative impact.”

Depending on subject area, i.e., *Visual Quality*, the discussion of cumulative impacts is more general in character due to the more general relationship of the subject matter to the City as a whole. On the other hand, the discussion of cumulative impacts is broken down into specific subject areas where possible in other technical sections of the EIR such as in the section entitled *Public Services*. Throughout the EIR, the cumulative impact analysis is based on the projected future level of growth in Rohnert Park as described in the Rohnert Park 2020 General Plan, inclusive of various Specific Plan Areas as documented in the General Plan.

The City is currently processing development applications that include the requirement for EIR preparation for five Specific Plan Areas (including the Southeast Specific Plan Area) within its Sphere of Influence. There is also a redevelopment proposal within the City Center area (known as the City Center project), and there is an additional designated Specific Plan Area identified as a growth area located in unincorporated Sonoma County that will require preparation of a Specific Plan. Each is described as follows:

- **University District:** The University District Specific Plan Area consists of 20 assessor’s parcels on about 297 acres. The application requests 1,610 residential units and about 250,000 square feet of commercial land uses. The entire Specific Plan Area has the potential for 1,610 residential units and 350,000 square feet of commercial space under the City’s General Plan.⁷
- **Northeast Specific Plan Area:** The Northeast Specific Plan Area consists of 36 assessor’s parcels on about 272 acres. A Specific Plan Application has been submitted covering 122 acres and 11 of the parcels. The application requests 1,063 residential units. The entire Specific Plan Area has the potential for 1,085 residential units under the City’s General Plan.⁸
- **Southeast Specific Plan Area:** The Southeast Specific Plan Area which is the subject of this EIR, consists of two assessor’s parcels on 80 acres. The Specific Plan Application submitted requests 499 residential units and 20,000 square feet of commercial/retail space.
- **Northwest Specific Plan Area:** The Northwest Specific Plan Area consists of about 170 acres, for which a Specific Plan Application has been submitted for the southern portion of the Specific Plan Area covering approximately 102 acres on 16 assessor’s parcels. The application requests 495 residential units and 495,000 square feet of commercial/industrial use. The entire Specific Plan Area has the potential for 900 residential units, 480,000 square feet of commercial space, 260,000 square feet of office space and 560,000 square feet of industrial space under the City’s General Plan.⁹
- **Wilfred Dowdell Specific Plan Area:** The Wilfred Dowdell Specific Plan Area consists of about 25 acres. Future land uses include about 300,000 square feet of commercial space for which a Specific Plan Application has been submitted.

- **Canon Manor Specific Plan Area:** Canon Manner is a 237 acre subdivision consisting of about 118 developed residential parcels and 109 vacant parcels, and a 20 acre commercial golf range. The Canon Manor Specific Plan Area encompassing the entire subdivision will require preparation of a Specific Plan prior to approval of any development in Canon Manor with the amount of development controlled by the underlying land use designations.
- **City Center:** The City Center area around City Hall Drive is planned to include a new City Hall, the public library and commercial and residential uses as a primary use. About 180 high-density residential units are envisioned above ground floor commercial uses with the sites designated as “Mixed Use” by the General Plan diagram. The project is within the City’s redevelopment area.

In addition, the Graton Rancheria Resort Hotel/Casino Project is proposed to be located on 360 acres of unincorporated land about one-half mile west of U.S. 101. This project is proposed to include a 300 room hotel, five restaurants, a 2,000 seat theater and a casino with up to about 1,900 slot machines.

Data regarding each of the five Specific Plan areas is presented in Table 1 on the next page. Figure 2-2 in Section 2, *Project Description*, shows the location of the cumulative development projects described above.

Traffic volumes for the 2020 horizon year were determined by increasing the land use assumptions factored into the City’s traffic model to reflect the year 2020 land use projections of the City of Rohnert Park, Sonoma County and Metropolitan Transportation Commission. The growth projections have also been updated to reflect current information regarding the proposed Graton Rancheria Resort Hotel/Casino Project.

MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING

Amendments to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require public agencies to adopt mitigation monitoring and reporting programs, for changes to a project to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment. The monitoring and reporting program provides the Lead Agency with the means for tracking and implementing mitigation measures as documented in a project EIR. The monitoring and reporting program need not be a component of the EIR. The program is part of the project approval process, not necessarily part of the impact analysis process. A mitigation monitoring and reporting program will be included with the City of Rohnert Park findings for the Southeast Specific Plan and its development components.

Table 1
Table of Specific Plan Areas¹

	Northeast Plan	Northwest Plan (per General Plan)²	Southeast Plan	University District	Wilfred- Dowdell
Total Acreage	272 acres	170 acres	80 acres	297 acres	24.77 acres
Residential Units					
Rural/Estate Residential	97		27	25	
Large Lot (NE Plan only)	114				
Low Density	552		168	318	
Medium Density	100		268	537	
High Density	200	800-900		630	
Mixed Use			36	100	
Total Units	1,063 Units	800-900 Units	499 Units	1,610 Units	N/A
Second Units				122	
Total w/Second Units ³				1,732 Units	
Commercial Sq. Ft.		40-50 acres	20,000 sf	Max.250,000 sf	302,114 sf
Office Acreage		15-25 acres			
Industrial Acreage		55-65 acres			
Parks	17.6 acres	2-4 acres	5.8 acres	14.4 acres	
Open Space	56.9 acres			63.4 acres	

Notes:

- ¹ Data as of November 5, 2004. Source: City of Rohnert Park Planning Department.
- ² The portions of the Northwest Specific Plan that are north and south of Wilfred Avenue are being processed separately. A Preliminary Plan for the south portion has been reviewed and proposes 495 residential units, 39-51 acres of commercial, 12-24 acres of industrial, and a 2 acre park. A plan for the north portion has not been submitted.
- ³ The Northeast Specific Plan area could have second units on the single-family residential lots, however, only the University District applicants have factored this potential into their unit estimates. Second units are considered affordable units and are not subject to the 225 units/year growth cap.

Endnotes—Introduction

- ¹ *CEQA, California Environmental Quality Act, Statutes and Guidelines*, Guidelines as amended December 1, 2003, published by the Governor's Office of Planning Research.
- ² Public Resources code 21061.1.
- ³ The subjects of hazardous materials and cultural resources were not determined to be studied in detail in the EIR. In a 2001 Phase I Site Assessment by Harris & Lee Environmental Sciences, it was indicated that a record review and site investigations revealed no Environmental Conditions (contaminants) respecting the site, nor did any other site present a likely impact to the subject (project) site. However project generating hazardous materials handling and disposal is addressed in Section 3.11 of this EIR, *Utilities*. In addition, in a 2002 cultural resources evaluation of the project site by Archaeological Resource Service, it was noted that the results of a literature search and surface examination showed that archaeological monitoring of future proposed excavations was not warranted (cultural resources is further discussed in Section 3.2 of this Draft EIR, *Land Use*).
- ⁴ Agricultural land uses are discussed in Section 3.2, *Land Use*.
- ⁵ CEQA Guidelines Section 15151.
- ⁶ CEQA Guidelines Section 15131.
- ⁷ City of Rohnert Park General Plan, Table 2.4-1, Land Use Program, University District Specific Plan Area.

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- ⁸ City of Rohnert Park General Plan, Table 2.4-4, Land Use Program, Northeast Specific Plan Area.
- ⁹ City of Rohnert Park General Plan, Table 2.4-2, Land Use Program, Northwest Specific Plan Area.