

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

This section provides information on the environmental review process being conducted by San Mateo County for the proposed project in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This information is provided to assist the reader in understanding the planning and regulatory context in which the proposed project is being reviewed.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The project site is located within the San Mateo Highlands neighborhood in an unincorporated area of San Mateo County, to the west of the San Mateo City limit. The 97-acre site is currently vacant land. The Project Applicant, Ticonderoga Partners, LLC, proposes to construct 11 single-family homes ranging in size from approximately 2,800 square feet to approximately 3,600 square feet. The residential lots would total approximately 4.53 acres, located in three areas within the project site along Ticonderoga Drive, Bunker Hill Drive, Cobblehill Place, and Cowpens Way. As part of the proposed project, 92 acres of the site would remain undeveloped and would be kept as open space. The project would require several approvals from San Mateo County, including: rezoning, a major subdivision permit, a lot line adjustment, a Resource Management (RM) permit, and a grading permit. Additional details are presented in **Section 3.0, Project Description**.

As part of the proposed project, the County would also adopt a zoning text amendment to RM District regulations in order to allow for reduced setbacks for residential projects in urban areas that preserve open space. This zoning text amendment, if approved by the County Board of Supervisors, would apply not only to the proposed project but to all residential projects proposed in the RM District.

1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The current Highland Estates project has an extensive development history, consisting of an evolution of various residential projects proposed on the current project site over the past 20 years. The Bunker Hill Estates proposal was submitted by one of the current Project Applicants to San Mateo County in 1988. This was a proposal to develop a 199-unit (133 single-family homes and 66 apartment units) residential development on the 97-acre project site. Through the process of conducting community meetings with the Highlands Community Association, the Project Applicant modified the project proposal to contain 84 single-family residential units and 66 apartments for a total of 150 residential units. The apartment units were concentrated on a 12-acre portion of the parcel near the intersection of Polhemus Road and

Ticonderoga Drive. In 1991, a conceptual site plan was prepared by the Project Applicant that contained 74 townhouses and 30 single-family units, totaling 104 units. The townhouses were proposed along Bunker Hill Drive along with four single-family units, 16 single-family residences at an extension of Cowpens Way, and four single-family units fronting Ticonderoga Drive. Four single-family units were also proposed at an extension of Cobblehill Place and two single-family houses were proposed adjacent to the existing California Water Service parcels that are surrounded by the project site. Following the submittal of the 1991 application to the County, extensive geotechnical and soil investigations were conducted and as a result, the project was further revised. In 1999, 18 single-family units and 74 townhouse residences were proposed for development on the current project site. An environmental impact report (EIR) was prepared for this project, but the process was never completed and a formal hearing never occurred. As a result of controversy with local neighbors, a negotiation process was initiated that lasted for four to five years. As a result, in 2004, a revised application was submitted for a smaller residential development of 26 single-family units and 40 condominiums. However, the environmental review process for this project was never completed.

In 2005 a pre-application meeting was held and in 2006 another application was submitted to the County for the development of nine residential units on the project site, including eight of the 11 houses currently proposed. A slightly revised version of this project with eight residential units was proposed in 2006 and submitted as an application to the County in 2007. The County circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR and attached Initial Study for the proposed project to the State Clearinghouse and interested agencies and persons on May 10, 2007. The 2007 Initial Study examined the potential environment effects of this development, which consisted of single-family homes along Bunker Hill Drive and Ticonderoga Drive. The Initial Study, prepared pursuant to Section 15063 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, analyzes the potential environmental effects of the uses and physical development proposed for the Highland Estates project and identifies measures to mitigate the significant adverse project-level and cumulative impacts associated with the project. When an Initial Study has been prepared for a project, the environmental review for a later activity consistent with the project should be limited to effects that were determined to be significant in the prior environmental analysis or topics for which significant new information becomes available.¹ This environmental document incorporates the analysis of the Initial Study and the Initial Study can also be found on file with San Mateo County. A scoping meeting for the project was also held on June 5, 2007, at Highlands Elementary School.

Subsequent to the circulation of the NOP, the project description was modified to include three additional single-family homes located at the end of Cowpens Way and Cobblehill Place within the current project site and a RM District zoning text amendment. A revised NOP was issued on November 19, 2008.

¹ *State CEQA Guidelines*, Sections 15064 and 15143.

This change to the project description including three additional houses and the proposed zoning text amendment would result in negligible changes to the physical environment and, thus, would not change the conclusions in the Initial Study.

A draft EIR for this project was circulated in December 2008 (SCH #2007052068). Since the publication of that draft EIR (hereinafter “previously circulated draft EIR” or “December 2008 draft EIR”), the analyses with respect to various resource topics have been modified to address concerns raised by interested parties and public agencies. Specifically, the County decided to revise and recirculate the December 2008 draft EIR to include the full geotechnical scope which is addressed in this document. In addition, text has been added in this recirculated draft EIR as appropriate in order to respond to the comments received on the December 2008 draft EIR. Pursuant to Section 15088.5 (a) of the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*, a lead agency is required to recirculate an EIR when significant new information is added to the EIR after public notice for the Draft EIR and prior to certification. The term “information” can include changes in the project or environmental setting as well as additional data or other information.

The Highland Estates Draft EIR is being recirculated in its entirety. Given this, pursuant to Section 15088.5(f)(1), the lead agency (County of San Mateo) is requesting that reviewers of this document submit new comments based on the revised project description and impact analyses. The previous comments have become part of the administrative record and are presented as an attachment to this recirculated draft EIR in **Appendix 1.0**. To assist the reviewers in their review of the recirculated draft EIR, all changes to the December 2008 draft EIR are shown in redline/~~strikeout~~ format.

This recirculated draft EIR presents analysis of the full 11-unit project including analysis from the Initial Study presented in the subsection Effects found Not to Be Significant located in **Section 4.4, Other Resource Topics**. Furthermore, public service providers were consulted to ensure that additional residential units could be adequately served by County services. Analysis of the proposed RM District zoning text amendment is included as a separate section, **Section 4.5, Resource Management District Zoning Text Amendment** in this recirculated draft EIR.

The Lead Agency for the proposed project is San Mateo County. Written comments on the 2007 and 2008 NOP and verbal comments during the scoping meeting were received from the following agencies and individuals:

1.3.1 Agencies

California Department of Transportation
City of San Mateo

Town of Hillsborough
Department of Fish and Game

1.3.2 Individuals and Organizations

Cotton, Shires, & Associates, Inc.
Robert Wineland
Wanda Pope
Steve Diamond
Art Goldenstein
Chris Misner
Jane Knapel
Richard Axen
Will Penney
Russ Levikow
David Newhouse
Bob Gutierrez
Sam Naifeh
Melissa Wilson

Written comments on the December 2008 draft EIR and verbal comments during the Planning Commission meeting held on February 11, 2009, were received from the following agencies and individuals:

1.3.3 Agencies

California Department of Transportation
City of San Mateo
County of San Mateo, Department of Public Works
Department of Fish and Game
State Clearinghouse

1.3.4 Individuals and Organizations

Adams Broadwell Joseph & Cardozo
Jean-Pierre Bernard
Mark Brennen
Deke and Corrin Brown
Cotton, Shires & Associates, Inc.
Donald Coyne
James Goodman
Trudie Huygen
Pamela Merkadeau
Chris Misner
Sam Naifeh
Pacific Gas & Electric

Regional Open Space
San Mateo Highlands Community Association
Les Schlaegel
Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger
Melissa Wilson
Mark and Gail Wuotila

Comments from these agencies/organizations and individuals have been addressed by topic and are presented in each resource area in **Section 4.0, Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures**, of this recirculated draft EIR. Based on information contained in the Initial Study and on a review of project plans and the NOP and draft EIR comments, San Mateo County determined that the EIR should analyze the following resource topics in depth:

- Aesthetics
- Biological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Other Resource Topics

These topics are discussed in **Sections 4.1** through **4.4** of the recirculated draft EIR. **Section 4.5** addresses the potential environmental impacts associated with the RM District zoning text amendment. Other topics included in the *State CEQA Guidelines* and are discussed in **Section 7.0, Other CEQA Considerations**.

The recirculated draft EIR will be circulated for a 45-day public review period. During this review period, written comments concerning the adequacy of the document may be submitted by all interested public agencies and private parties to San Mateo County at the following address:

Attn: Camille Leung
County of San Mateo Planning Department
455 County Center Drive, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063

At the end of 45-day public review period, the County will prepare written responses to all comments received on the recirculated draft EIR. These responses will be incorporated into the final EIR. The final EIR will be available for public review for at least 10 days prior to certification, in accordance with CEQA procedures. The final EIR will be reviewed and considered and must be certified prior to any actions on the project application.

1.4 FORMAT AND CONTENTS OF THIS EIR

This section describes the organization of the EIR and the contents of each section. The sections following this introduction are organized as follows:

Section 2.0, Executive Summary, includes a description of the proposed project, a description of project alternatives, a summary of the impacts and mitigation measures identified in the EIR, and a discussion of issues to be resolved.

Section 3.0, Project Description, presents a detailed description of the proposed project. The topics addressed in this section include project location and setting; existing land use designations and zoning; project characteristics including: proposed building height and design, landscape design, access and parking, infrastructure; descriptions of construction activity and proposed schedule; and the discretionary approvals sought for the project.

Section 4.0, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures, contains the analysis of each of the environmental topics addressed in this EIR. Each topic is addressed in a separate sub-section organized as follows: introduction; environmental setting; project impacts and mitigation measures; and cumulative impacts.

Section 5.0, Growth-Inducing Impacts, discusses the ways in which the proposed project could remove an impediment to growth, foster economic expansion or growth in the area, establish a precedent-setting action, or represent isolated development or encroachment in an isolated or adjacent area of open space.

Section 6.0, Alternatives, provides an analysis of the alternatives to the proposed project. As required by the *State CEQA Guidelines*, a discussion of the reasons for selecting the alternatives analyzed in this section is provided, along with a comparative analysis of each alternative with the project and identification of the “environmentally superior” alternative.

Section 7.0, Other CEQA Considerations, provides discussions of significant unavoidable effects as mandated by CEQA. Effects found not to be significant, which is also a subject mandated by CEQA, can be found in **Section 4.4, Other Resource Topics**.

Section 8.0, References, identifies the references cited in this EIR.

Section 9.0, List of EIR Preparers, identifies the Lead Agency and consultants involved in the preparation of this EIR, as well as persons and organizations contacted during preparation of the EIR.

Appendices to this recirculated draft EIR include the ~~NOP~~comments on the NOP and comments on the December 2008 draft EIR and information from the technical analyses used in this recirculated draft EIR.