

- NOTICE OF PREPARATION -
Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report for
City of Willits Land Use Element & Sphere of Influence Updates

ANNOUNCEMENT:	Notice is hereby given that the City of Willits, as Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) to evaluate the environmental effects associated with the proposed General Plan Land Use Element and Sphere of Influence (SOI) Updates (Project). The Program EIR will address the environmental impacts associated with the adoption and implementation of the proposed project and the zoning amendments necessary to implement the General Plan as well as planning for an expansion of the City of Willits SOI. The City is soliciting comments regarding the scope and content of the environmental information.
ANNOUNCEMENT DATE:	March 10, 2023
PROJECT TITLE:	City of Willits Land Use Element & Sphere of Influence Updates
PROJECT LOCATION:	City of Willits Planning Area
NOP PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:	The Notice of Preparation (NOP) review period begins on Friday, March 10, 2023, and closes on Monday, April 10, 2023. Please submit written responses by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, April 10, 2023, to the address or email below.
LEAD AGENCY:	City of Willits
LEAD AGENCY CONTACT PERSON:	Dusty Duley, Community Development Director dduley@cityofwillits.org Phone: (707) 459-4601 City of Willits 111 E. Commercial Street Willits, CA 95490

PURPOSE OF THIS NOTICE OF PREPARATION

The City of Willits (City) will serve as lead agency under CEQA and a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) will be prepared to analyze the proposed Project. The EIR will identify the potential for significant environmental effects to satisfy the requirements of CEQA [Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.].

In accordance with the California Code of Regulations §15082, the City has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to inform agencies and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared for the proposed Project. The purpose of this notice is:

- (1) To serve as the notice to provide interested parties, including members of the public, potential responsible agencies, agencies involved in funding or approving the Project, agencies providing public services (schools, utilities, medical and emergency services), and trustee agencies responsible for natural resources affected by the Project, with sufficient information to provide meaningful responses as to the scope and content of the EIR; and
- (2) To advise and solicit comments and suggestions from interested parties regarding the preparation of the Program EIR, environmental issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIR, and any related issues.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Willits General Plan is a planning document with text and diagrams that express the goals, objectives, and policies necessary to guide the community toward achieving its vision over a long-term planning period (typically 20 years). City decision makers rely on the General Plan as the basis for making decisions on matters such as land use, transportation, open space and conservation, provision of public services, and environmental quality and

safety. It is also a policy document that guides decisions related to protecting and enhancing what the community values most, such as protecting and enhancing the character of the community, and open space.

The City is preparing an update to the General Plan Land Use Element. The City of Willits' General Plan was last comprehensively updated and adopted in 1992. Since then, the City's land use needs have changed due to demographic and economic conditions and updates to state guidelines and policies. The Land Use Element should also contain planning for any land outside of its boundaries which has a relationship to the City. Defining a Planning Area that includes land outside of its boundaries is a means by which the City can communicate its objectives and concerns for the future of surrounding lands under the jurisdiction of the County and other agencies, such as the Local Agency Formation Commission.

The City of Willits prepared a Draft Safety Element Update in October 2019 to address changes in California Planning Law relating to Safety Element and to incorporate the currently Local Hazard Mitigation Plan into the City's General Plan. The City anticipates adopting the Safety Element prior to the adoption of the Land Use Element Update. The Safety Element directly relates to the Land Use Element and the City will take care to ensure that proposed land uses are planned in a manner that minimizes the impacts of known hazards and that reflect the climate adaptation and resiliency strategies contained in the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project will update and amend the City's existing General Plan Land Use Element. The Project will address the goals, policies, and implementation programs that articulate the vision for the City's long-term physical and economic development, while preserving open space areas and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The Land Use Element is being prepared to comply with the requirements of California Government Code §65300 which mandates that each city and county adopt a comprehensive, long-range, internally consistent plan for future development. The proposed updates:

- Satisfy modern State mandates for General Plans that have been issued since the General Plan was last updated;
- Provide additional housing opportunities inside and outside the existing city boundary;
- Streamline the housing approval process, and accelerate new housing development;
- Promote social justice and racial equity;
- Amend inconsistencies; and
- Ensure consistency and compliance with other City plans that have been adopted or revised in recent years, such as the 2019 Housing Element.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element will continue to include the general distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, agriculture, natural resources, public buildings and grounds, and other categories of public and private uses of land within the City. As the Land Use Element was last updated in 1992, the demographics, data, analyses, and policies in the plan will be updated to reflect the current conditions and vision of the City. The intent of the proposed Land Use Element is to provide new economic development and housing opportunities inside and outside the existing city boundary, streamline the housing approval process, and accelerate housing development. Although past growth in the City and surrounding area has been limited and future projections for the County indicate a population decline, various emerging local and regional factors indicate a need to provide for a range of housing types in Willits that can be readily developed. In addition, the Land Use Element may include changes to land use designations to support residential and commercial development, plan certain lands adjacent to the City for various types of development, including residential, commercial, recreation, or open space, and update land use designations of areas where planned land uses may be in conflict with the character of existing communities. While planning for residential land uses, the City seeks

to ensure that projects that would result in the creation of employment opportunities are appropriately prioritized.

Zoning Amendments

The proposed project will require zoning amendments to implement the Land Use Element and Sphere of Influence Update. The anticipated that Zoning amendments are intended to enable new development in a manner consistent with the Land Use Element. In addition, the Zoning Amendments will also pre-zone the Sphere of Influence Update area to allow for a complete application to amend the City's Sphere of Influence to be submitted to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission.

PROGRAM EIR ANALYSIS

The City of Willits, as the lead agency under CEQA, will prepare a Program EIR for the Willits Land Use Element and Sphere of Influence Updates in accordance with current CEQA Guidelines. The Willits Land Use Element and Sphere of Influence Update is considered a "project" under CEQA and is therefore subject to CEQA review. As a policy document, the General Plan provides guidance and sets standards for several areas of mandatory environmental review for later "projects" that would be undertaken by local government and the private sector. The Program EIR will evaluate potential environmental impacts associated with adoption and implementation of the proposed project. The Program EIR will disclose potential impacts of the proposed project, propose mitigation measures to avoid and/or reduce impacts deemed potentially significant, identify reasonable alternatives, and compare the environmental impacts of the alternatives to the proposed project's impacts. Pursuant to Section 15063(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, no Initial Study will be prepared. The Program EIR will evaluate the full range of environmental issues contemplated under CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines.

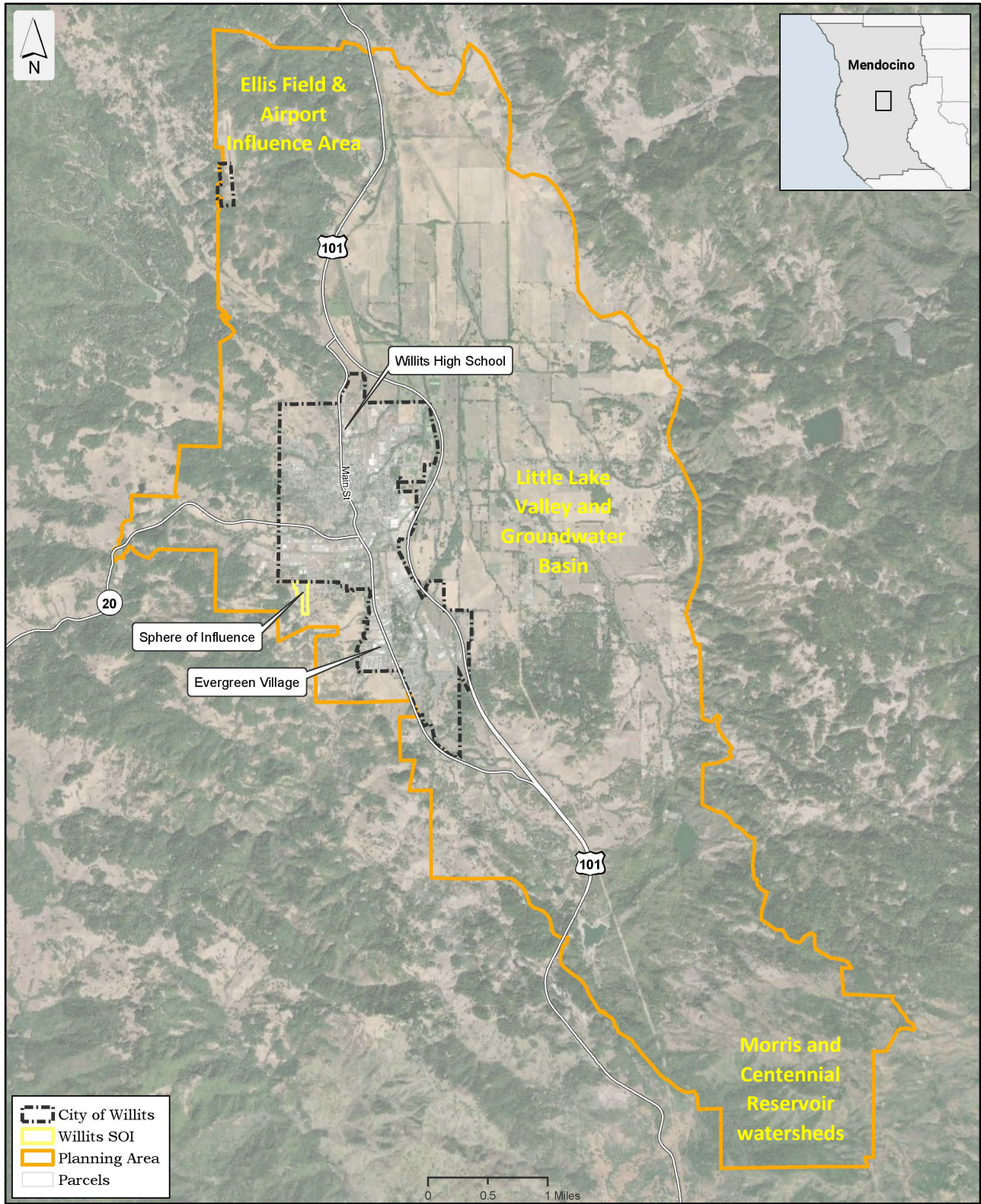
Pursuant to Section 15063(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, an Initial Study will not be prepared. The Program EIR will evaluate the full range of environmental issues contemplated under CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, including the following resource categories: Aesthetics, Agricultural and Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Energy, Geology and Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Land Use, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation and Circulation, Tribal Cultural Resources, Utilities and Service Systems, and Wildfire.

The following resource categories may have potentially significant impacts, and mitigation measures may be required to reduce potential significant impacts: Air Quality, Biological Resources, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Noise, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation, and Utilities and Service Systems. The Program EIR will also discuss the cumulative impacts of the project in combination with other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects in the vicinity, as well as growth inducement, and other CEQA-required topics.

The Program EIR will describe and evaluate the comparative merits of a reasonable range of alternatives to the project that could reasonably accomplish most of the basic project objectives and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant impacts. The Program EIR will also analyze the "No Project Alternative" and will identify the environmentally superior alternative. The Program EIR will briefly describe and explain any alternatives that were eliminated from detailed consideration. The alternatives to be analyzed will be developed during the environmental review process and will consider input received during the public scoping process.

Comments regarding the scope of the proposed Program EIR can be submitted to dduley@cityofwillits.org or mailed to City of Willits Community Development Department, 111 E. Commercial Street, Willits, CA 95490. Please submit written responses by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, April 10, 2023. This NOP is available for review via the City's General Plan webpage at: <https://willitslanduseupdate.com/>.

City of Willits Regional Setting and Initial Draft Planning Area



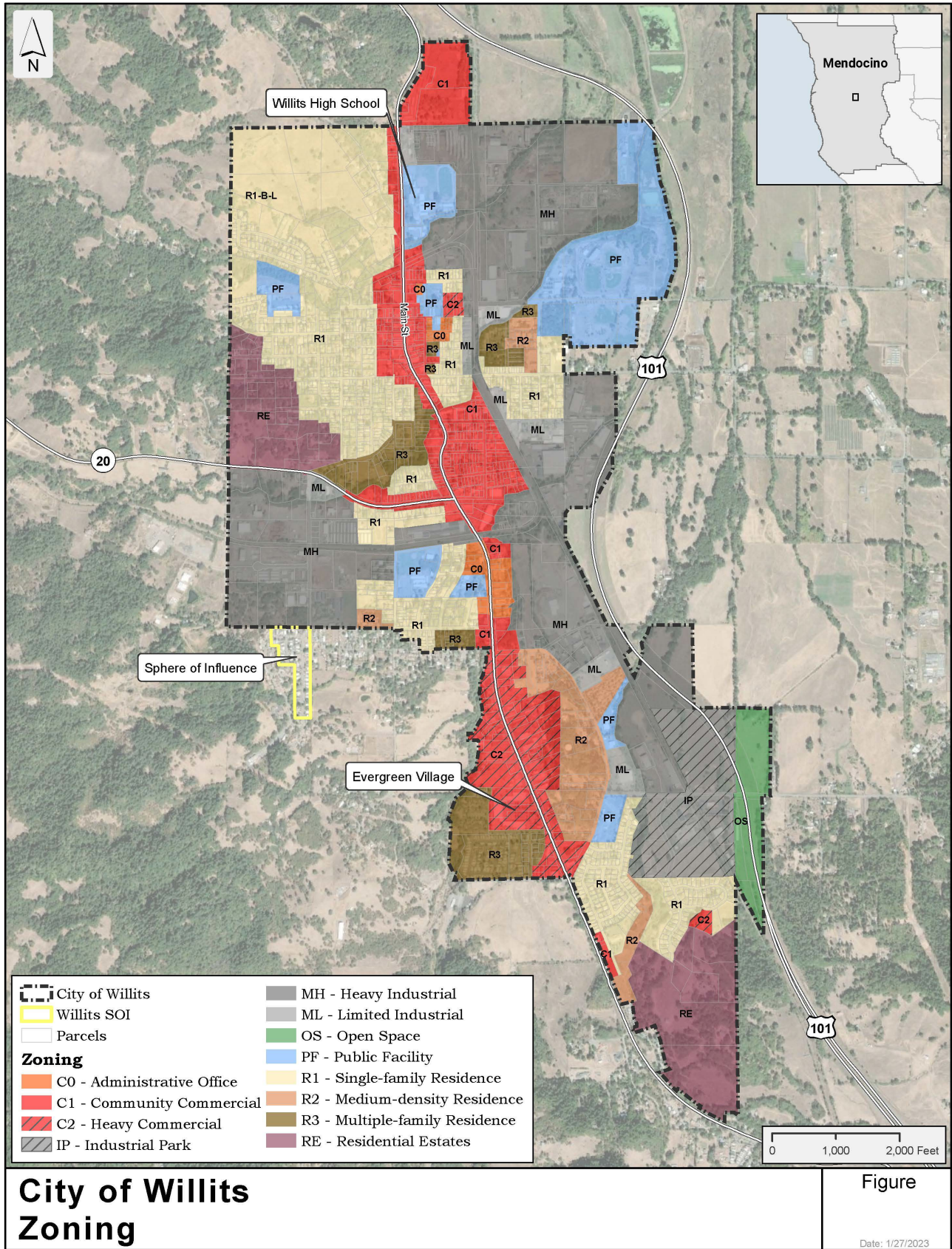
**City of Willits
Planning Area**

Figure

Date: 2/13/2023

Sources: Boundaries, Roads, Parcels: Mendocino County GIS.

City of Willits Current Zoning



Sources: Boundaries, Roads, Parcels: Mendocino County GIS.