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McKinleyville Town Center Rezone Notice of Preparation

Project Overview

The McKinleyville Town Center Rezone Project (proposed project) is intended to establish a unique identity for McKinleyville by promoting the Town Center area of McKinleyville as a community focal point for social/community interaction. Guidance for developing the Town Center site would be established by rezoning the Town Center area to a Mixed Use base zoning and adopting a “Q-Zone” overlay zoning district. The Q-Zone will apply specific regulations to the Town Center site. The Q-Zone will support a mix of commercial, civic, and residential uses while emphasizing bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, public gathering spaces, open space, and wetland preservation. One of the primary goals for the Town Center to promote mixed land uses that are supported by pedestrian, bicycle, transit improvements, as well as vehicular circulation improvements that enhance connectivity in the area. The Q-Zone includes form-based building design standards.

Setting/Project Location

The approximately 134-acre Town Center site is located in the unincorporated community of McKinleyville in Humboldt County, California. It is generally situated between Heartwood Drive on the south and Railroad Drive on the north, and extends from McKinleyville Avenue on the west to the eastern end of Pierson Park. The project site is primarily accessed via Central Avenue, which provides access north and southbound through McKinleyville. The Central Avenue corridor is developed with and zoned for commercial uses. The project site and its relationship to the surrounding McKinleyville community is illustrated in [Figure 1, Location Map](#).

Existing development within the site includes 116 residential units and about 481,800 square feet of commercial use. Several acres of the site have been defined as wetland.

Project Description

The *McKinleyville Community Plan* calls for creating a unique identity for McKinleyville by developing a viable town center that serves as a community focal point and which contains a mixture of land uses with a center for social/community interaction that encourages bicycle and pedestrian travel and allows for convenient and safe automobile access. The County of Humboldt (“County”) will evaluate the potential, reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts that could occur based on developing the site consistent with the proposed Q-Zone development standards.

In addition to building and other standards, the Q-Zone standards include language that would change how wetlands are defined. Wetlands are typically delineated as features based on the following parameters:

- **Vegetation:** The dominant vegetation must consist of species that are typically adapted to grow, effectively compete, reproduce, and/or persist in anaerobic (low/no oxygen) soil conditions.
- **Soil:** Soils present are classified as hydric, or they possess characteristics that are associated with reducing soil conditions (saturated soils).
- **Hydrology:** The area is inundated either permanently or periodically, or the soil is saturated to the surface at some time during the growing season of the prevalent vegetation.

Historically in McKinleyville, only one of these parameters would need to be exhibited to define an area as wetland. The Q-Zone standards would modify this approach by requiring that all three parameters be met to define an area as wetland.

The Town Center site is currently zoned a combination of Community Commercial (C-2) and Residential Multiple Family (R-3), with portions zoned with a wetland overlay. The Town Center would apply Mixed-Use (MU) as the new underlying zoning district for the entire site. The Q zone allows modifications to the underlying uses to address unique circumstances associated with the site. Among other uses, public facilities, higher density residential uses and resource sites to be preserved/maintained are permitted. A Q zone will allow uses in the Town Center that would be found under the designation for Public Facility (PF1) to reflect existing public facility uses. The Q zone would also allow uses found in the designation for Residential Multiple Family (R-3) to reflect an existing residential uses. A portion of the area to the west would be designated with a combining zone for Streamside Management Areas and Wetlands based on its planned function as a wetland mitigation area. [Figure 2, Proposed Town Center Zoning Map](#), shows these respective areas of the site.

The Town Center is drafted and will be evaluated in the EIR to allow subsequent development to occur without further environmental review except in circumstances which are not foreseen in the ordinance or in the environmental review. This includes a known senior living campus project titled Life Plan Humboldt that will include 144 one and two bedroom units, a 22,000 square foot common area, 12 Assisted living suites, 12 memory care studios and 60 affordable units on the south side of Hiller Avenue.

The Q-Zone regulations would also expand the range of uses allowed in the MU zone to include winery/distillery, restaurants, multi-family residential (minimum density 16 units per acre), churches, and private and public schools.

Project Objectives

Project objectives for developing the Town Center ordinance are as follows:

1. Establish a unique identity for McKinleyville through developing a viable town center, serving as a community focal point and providing a center for social/community interaction.
2. Develop an area of mixed land uses which encourages bicycle and pedestrian travel, yet allows for convenient and safe automobile access.
3. Permit mixed-use categories of zoning, including higher density housing in concert with retail commercial uses and shopfronts, and an abundance and variety of open spaces.
4. Offer opportunities for developing a full range of commercial uses including a grocery store, shops, department store, hardware home supply, movie complex, laundromat, and restaurants; office space and medical and dental clinic; town green for athletic and civic events, civic buildings and a library; high density residential and mixed use residential above commercial uses; farmers market; child care facilities; and art galleries.
5. Focus on community scale needs without drive-thru restaurants and no large “big-box” department stores, with store design that avoids the look of giant retail department stores.
6. Identify design alternatives for Central Avenue which ease pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including traffic calming measures.
7. Promote safe, accessible and human scale residential and commercial areas where people of all ages can work and play.
8. Promote development of pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods and commercial areas.
9. Develop appropriate design review standards consistent and compatible with the overall principles, objectives and policies of the entire Humboldt County General Plan.
10. Include mixed-use categories of zoning, including higher density housing above retail commercial uses and shopfronts designed to include an abundance and variety of open spaces, such as urban parks, courtyards and gardens, with a connected system of pedestrian walkways, alleys and streets.
11. Design intersections and streets within the Town Center to facilitate pedestrian movement, provide bicycle connections to commercial areas and transit stops, and provide transit stops with shelter for pedestrians and provisions for secure bicycle storage.
12. Protect natural land forms by minimizing alteration caused by cutting, filling, grading or clearing.
13. Screen or soften the visual impact of new development through the use of landscaping and promote use of species common to the area and known fire resistant plants.

New Development Capacity

The proposed Q-Zone regulations would modify the type and amount of new development that could occur within the project site relative to existing zoning. New development capacity for the 113-acre area shown as Mixed Use in Figure 2 is summarized in [Table 1, Expected New Town Center Development Capacity](#). No new development capacity is assumed for areas of the site shown in Figure 2 as Public Facility, Residential (R-3) or Wetlands, which total a combined approximately

31 acres of the 134-acre site. Under existing residential and commercial zoning regulations that apply to the site, new development capacity is assumed to be 2,195 new residential units and 1,372,000 square feet of new commercial development. Consequently, the proposed project would result in approximately 640 more residential units and 109,771 square feet of commercial development relative to existing zoning.

It is possible that some of the existing residential and/or commercial uses within the area planned for mixed use development could be demolished as part of one or more future individual development projects that implement the Q-Zone. That determination will be made at the time individual development project applications are submitted to the County.

Table 0 Expected New Mixed Use Town Center Development Capacity

Land Use	Acreage	Multi-Family Residential Units	Commercial Building Square Footage
Mixed Use	106	2,655 (25 units/acre)	1,387,822

SOURCE: County of Humboldt 2024

EIR Approach and Probable Environmental Effects

The EIR will focus on evaluating the reasonably foreseeable potential impacts of developing the project site with the uses shown in Table 1. The environmental resource implications of changing the wetland definition approach from one to three parameters will also be addressed. Potential environmental effects of the project and the scope of analysis that will be undertaken to assess each are briefly discussed below.

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

The proposed Q-Zone regulations require that lighting only be used for a clear public safety purpose and shall be directed at the area which requires illumination; otherwise, lighting is not allowed. The project also proposes a decrease in the maximum building height allowed within the MU zone; the proposed zoning would allow for a building height of four stories whereas the original zoning allowed 75 feet (which is taller than a four-story building).

U.S. Highway 101 is located approximately 0.3 miles west of the project site (specifically, the wetland designated area and not the area planned for future development) and is considered an eligible state-designated scenic highway according to Caltrans. The Town Center site is not visible from Highway 101 due to existing development and the elevation of Highway 101 is lower than the property between the site and Highway 101.

This section of the EIR will address the potential for new development to substantially impair the visible character of project area scenic resources and include a discussion of proximity to scenic roadways and scenic vistas, existing lighting standards, and recommendations for mitigating any potentially significant impacts.

Agriculture and Forestry Resources

None of project site is designed for agricultural use and none of the site is under Williamson Act contract. None of the project site is zoned Timberland. The County has partially mapped the project area as containing soils designated as “Prime AG Soil – Ar5,” “Prime AG Soil – Ar6,” and “Prime AG Soil – Hk4” (Humboldt County Web GIS 2024).

According to the 2017 County general plan EIR:

“Humboldt County does not participate in the statewide Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, and is therefore unable to analyze the impacts to these lands. Humboldt County is currently in the process of updating the soils maps so that ultimately the County could qualify to participate, but as of the preparation of this DEIR, the soils survey is not complete. However, the County addresses the loss of farmlands, both prime and non-prime, as described in the following sections and provides mitigation measures to address this loss as a result of the General Plan Update.” (Humboldt County 2017, page 3.2-19)

As of February 2024, the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Department of Conservation had not yet mapped farmland in Humboldt County. The EIR will utilize the County general plan and general plan EIR policies and mitigations as the basis of determining the significance of converting prime agricultural soils to non-agricultural use.

Air Quality

The project site is located in the North Coast Air Basin (air basin). The North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District (air district) has jurisdictional authority within the air basin. The proposed project would generate criteria air pollutant emissions during its construction and operation. This section of the EIR will address whether the project would conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality standards, result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant, and/or create air pollutant concentrations that could create risk for public health. The potential for the proposed project to generate criteria air pollutants and toxic air contaminants with potential to cause significant impacts will be the focus of this analysis. Air emissions will be modeled and compared to thresholds of significance.

Biological Resources

Based on a preliminary review of aerial photographs, the project site may contain areas of annual grassland, wetlands, and scattered spruce and fir trees.

The preliminary results of the *McKinleyville Town Center Wetlands Mapping Project* (GHD 2023) show approximately 5.4 acres of wetlands delineated within the project boundary. These wetlands likely fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and/or the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

As noted previously, wetlands are typically delineated as features exhibiting one or more of with the following key parameters:

- **Vegetation:** The dominant vegetation must consist of species that are typically adapted to grow, effectively compete, reproduce, and/or persist in anaerobic (low/no oxygen) soil conditions.
- **Soil:** Soils present are classified as hydric, or they possess characteristics that are associated with reducing soil conditions (saturated soils).
- **Hydrology:** The area is inundated either permanently or periodically, or the soil is saturated to the surface at some time during the growing season of the prevalent vegetation.

Some jurisdictions, such as the California Coastal Commission, use a “one-parameter” approach to defining wetlands, meaning only one of the above three criteria would define the presence of wetlands. Other jurisdictions, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, require all three criteria (“three-parameter”) to be present to define the extent of wetlands. In McKinleyville, wetlands have been previously defined using the one-parameter definition. The Q-Zone regulations would modify this prior practice by requiring use of the three-parameter approach. The results of the *McKinleyville Town Center Wetlands Mapping Project* (GHD 2023) include both the extents of one-parameter and three-parameter wetlands within the project boundary and the difference in extents will be analyzed in the biological resources section of the EIR, as will requirements for wetland mitigation as described in the Q-Zone regulations.

The potential for habitat for special-status species in the area to be present on the site and recommend mitigation measures for the protection of biological resources will be addressed. If suitable habitat is identified, recommendations may also include the need for additional specific or protocol-level surveys to be conducted when development is proposed.

Cultural Resources

The project site includes four structures that are considered by the County to be historic site and cultural resources. The project site is also located less than one mile east of the ocean and less than one-half mile south of Widow White Creek, which could influence the potential that cultural resources are present. The potential for the project to impact historic and unique archaeological resources will be assessed and mitigation measures proposed as necessary.

Energy

The project will increase demand for energy resources, primarily in the form of electricity and transportation fuels. Projected energy demand will be quantified based on the CalEEMod results. Future development within the site will be required to comply with uniformly applied regulations for energy efficiency and conservation. If air quality and/or GHG impacts are found to be significant, associated mitigations could include actions that also reduce energy demand. Applicable regulations will be discussed to identify how energy demand will be moderated, as will any air quality and/or GHG mitigation measures that reduce energy demand.

The impact evaluation will assess whether the energy needs of the project would be wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary, or if it would conflict with a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency. This evaluation will be qualitative in that there are no quantified thresholds of significance against which project demand can be compared.

Geology and Soils

Geologic and soils resources and potential hazards/development constraints at the site will be reviewed using existing information. Future individual development projects will be required to prepare site specific geotechnical reports to identify these issues for their specific sites. Existing state and local uniformly applied development standards that serve to reduce related hazards and impacts will be reviewed based on their function to reduce the significance of potential impacts.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The proposed project will be a source of GHG emissions whose impact must be evaluated. The predominant sources of emissions are likely to be vehicle travel, with electricity and potentially natural gas use also being notable sources. The draft *Humboldt County Climate Action* plan will be used to streamline the review of GHG emissions impacts if the plan is adopted prior to the draft EIR being released for public review. If not, the plan will be used as reference, but with guidance for evaluating GHG impact significance provided by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District in its *CEQA Thresholds for Evaluating the Significance of Climate Impacts from Land Use Projects and Plans* used as the basis for determining impact significance. Projected GHG emissions will be quantified using CalEEMod. Emissions reductions accruing to legislative actions and specific actions identified in the Q-Zone regulations will be evaluated. Mitigation measures will be identified as needed.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The types of new development anticipated in Town Center are not anticipated to be notable sources of hazardous materials risks. The existence of known hazardous materials conditions within the site will be evaluated based on review of hazardous materials conditions databases. Uniformly applied state and County regulations designed to reduce the risk of hazardous materials release will be identified as serving the function of mitigating potential environmental impacts.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Conversion of vacant areas of the site to urban development would create new impervious surfaces that change existing drainage patterns. The site is not located within a flood hazard zone.

The proposed project is not likely to be the source of unique impacts on water quality. Nevertheless, potential sources of water quality degradation will be identified. Its potential water quality effects will be evaluated in light of uniform regulations promulgated by the County to implement State Water Quality Control Board mandates for protecting ground and surface water quality that function to reduce the significance of potential water quality impacts.

The McKinleyville Community Services District provide municipal water supply in McKinleyville primarily from surface water sources. The McKinleyville Community Services District will be consulted about water supply available and projected demand from the project. The *McKinleyville Community Services District FINAL 2020 Urban Water Management Plan* will be reviewed as a basis for determining the adequacy of existing and projected water supply availability to meet project demand. Potential impacts on groundwater supply conditions are expected to be nominal given that surface water supply would be utilized to serve the project.

Noise

This section will address the noise sources from the proposed project and whether noise level increases could adversely affect noise sensitive receptors. The proposed uses are not expected to be sources of significant point source noise generation. Traffic noise effects will be evaluated based on changes in traffic volumes that would be generated by new development. Analysis of noise impacts will be conducted in the context of related County general plan policies and analysis conducted in the general plan EIR.

Public Services and Recreation

This section of the EIR will assess the need for new public facilities (police, fire schools, parks) and address, to the extent possible, whether constructing and operating such facilities could result in significant impacts. Various agencies will be consulted including, but not limited to, Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services, Arcata Fire Protection District, Humboldt County Parks and Trails, Pacific Union School District, and Northern Humboldt Union High School District.

Solid Waste

This section will address the potential impacts of physical changes associated with expanded solid waste facilities/local landfills should the proposed project trigger the need for such expansions. The Humboldt Waste Management Authority, Recology Humboldt County, and the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) will be primary sources of information to assess potential solid waste impacts.

Transportation

The proposed project has the potential to result in an increase in vehicle miles travelled (VMT). W-Trans will prepare a traffic study to assess VMT impacts for reporting in the EIR. For County informational purposes, W-Trans will also address the non-CEQA issues of project effects on traffic operations and parking. Proposed modifications to adjacent roadways as identified in the Q-Zone regulations will be reviewed for their feasibility and effect on traffic operations and bicycle and pedestrian safety and connectivity, as will the proposed road network identified in the Q-Zone regulations.

Tribal Cultural Resources

The County's SB 18 and AB 52 tribal consultation process will be reviewed. If consultation is requested and conducted, the results will be identified along with conclusions about whether the proposed project cause an adverse change on the significance of a tribal cultural resource.

Water and Sewer Systems

The McKinleyville Community Services District purchases wholesale treated drinking water from Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District, the regional supplier. Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District operates the Ruth Reservoir and approximately 11 million gallons of water per day from this reservoir is delivered to municipal/district customers. Of this total, a peak flow rate of 2.6 million gallons per day is committed to serve the McKinleyville Community Services District customers. No groundwater is pumped. The McKinleyville Community Services District also provides sewer services to the area and operates its own wastewater management facility.

The EIR will address the capability of the water and sewer facilities of the McKinleyville Community Services District to serve the projected new development whether future development within the project site requires the construction of new or expansion of existing facilities to adequately support the development.

Effects Found Not to Be Significant

This section of the EIR will include brief analysis of environmental effects whose impacts are determined to be less than significant based on review of readily-available information. At this time, it is anticipated that mineral resources impacts and wildfire impacts will be less than significant. One or more environmental topics discussed above may be included in this section based on the outcome of their respective impact analyses. Data sufficient to support a determination of less than significant impact will be provided.

Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative effects of buildout of the Town Center, combined with other relevant plans and programs, will be analyzed in this section of the EIR.

Growth Inducement

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15126.2(d) the EIR will include a discussion of the growth-inducing impacts of the project.

Alternatives

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6 the EIR will include analysis of a reasonable range of project alternatives, and/or to the project location, which could feasibly attain most of the basic project objectives, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant project effects. An evaluation of the comparative merits of the alternatives will be presented.

Figure 1 Location Map

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Figure 2 Proposed Town Center Zoning Map

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