



State of California – Natural Resources Agency

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Bay Delta Region

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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor

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August 20, 2024

Jennifer Gates, Community Development Department Director

City of Sonoma

1 The Plaza

Sonoma, CA 95476

JGates@sonomacity.org

Subject: Montaldo Apartments, Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report, SCH No. 2024070476, City and County of Sonoma

Dear Ms. Gates:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) reviewed the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Montaldo Apartments Project (Project).

CDFW is providing the City of Sonoma (City) as the Lead Agency, with specific detail about the scope and content of the environmental information related to CDFW's area of statutory responsibility that must be included in the EIR (See Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15082, subd. (b)).

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is a **Trustee Agency** with responsibility under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for commenting on projects that could impact fish, plant, and wildlife resources (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15386). CDFW is also considered a **Responsible Agency** if a project would require discretionary approval, such as a permit pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) or Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA), Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Program, and other provisions of the Fish and Game Code that afford protection to the State's fish and wildlife trust resources. Pursuant to our authority, CDFW has the following concerns, comments, and recommendations regarding the Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

The objective of the project is to demolish an existing single-family home and construct 50 apartment units in seven 2- and 3-story residential buildings, 94 on-site parking surface spaces (consisting of 68 garage stalls and 2 carports for residents; 20 standard and 4 compact spaces for visitors), common open space area, and multiple landscaped passive open space areas with connecting walkways. The Project site is in the City of Sonoma, 19320 Sonoma Highway north of the cross streets of Highway 12 and Lyon

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Street, County of Sonoma, at approximately Latitude 38.297688°, Longitude - 122.474887°, and Assessor Parcel Numbers 127-202-006 and 127-202-007.

The CEQA Guidelines (See Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15000 et seq.) require that the EIR incorporate a full project description, including reasonably foreseeable future phases of the Project, that contains sufficient information to evaluate and review the Project's environmental impact (CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15124 & 15378). Please include a complete description of the following Project components in the Project description:

- Land use changes resulting from, for example, rezoning certain areas;
- Footprints of permanent Project features and temporarily impacted areas, such as staging areas and access routes;
- Area and plans for any proposed buildings/structures, ground-disturbing activities, fencing, paving, stationary machinery, landscaping, and stormwater systems;
- Operational features of the Project, including level of anticipated human presence (describe seasonal or daily peaks in activity, if relevant), artificial lighting/light reflection, noise, traffic generation, and other features; and
- Construction schedule, activities, equipment, and crew sizes.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

California Endangered Species Act

Please be advised that a CESA permit must be obtained if the Project has the potential to result in "take" of plants or animals listed under CESA, either during construction or over the life of the project. **The Project has the potential to impact CESA listed species included in Attachment 1: Special-Status Species.** Issuance of a CESA permit is subject to CEQA documentation; the CEQA document must specify impacts, mitigation measures, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting program. If the Project will impact CESA or NPPA listed species, early consultation is encouraged, as significant modification to the Project and mitigation measures may be required in order to obtain a CESA permit.

CEQA requires a Mandatory Finding of Significance if a project is likely to substantially restrict the range or reduce the population of a threatened or endangered species. (Pub. Resources Code, §§ 21001, subd. (c) & 21083; CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15380, 15064, & 15065.) Impacts must be avoided or mitigated to less-than-significant levels unless the CEQA Lead Agency makes and supports Findings of Overriding Consideration (FOC).

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Nesting Birds

CDFW also has authority over actions that may disturb or destroy active nest sites or take birds. Fish and Game Code sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 protect birds, their eggs, and nests. Migratory birds are also protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The EIR should provide sufficient information regarding the environmental setting (“baseline”) to understand the Project’s, and its alternative’s (if applicable), potentially significant impacts on the environment (CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15125 & 15360).

CDFW recommends that the CEQA document prepared for the Project provide baseline habitat assessments for special-status plant, fish and wildlife species located and potentially located within the Project area and surrounding lands, including, but not limited to all rare, threatened, or endangered species (CEQA Guidelines, § 15380). The EIR should describe aquatic habitats, such as wetlands or waters of the U.S. or State, and any sensitive natural communities or riparian habitat occurring on or adjacent to the Project site (for sensitive natural communities

see: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/VegCAMP/NaturalCommunities#sensitive%20natural%20communities>), and any stream or wetland set back distances the City may require.

Fully protected, threatened or endangered, candidate, and other special-status species and sensitive natural communities that are known to occur, or have the potential to occur in or near the Project site, include but are not limited to those listed in

Attachment 1.

Habitat descriptions and the potential for species occurrence should include information from multiple sources: aerial imagery, historical and recent survey data, field reconnaissance, scientific literature and reports, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Information, Planning, and Consultation System, and findings from “positive occurrence” databases such as California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) and California Aquatic Resources Inventory (CARI). Based on the data and information from the habitat assessment, the EIR should adequately assess which special-status species are likely to occur on or near the Project site, and whether they could be impacted by the Project.

CDFW recommends that prior to Project implementation, surveys be conducted for special-status species with potential to occur, following recommended survey protocols if available. Survey and monitoring protocols and guidelines are available at:

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocol>.

Botanical surveys for special-status plant species, including those with a California Rare Plant Rank (<http://www.cnps.org/cnps/rareplants/inventory/>), must be conducted during the blooming period within the Project area and adjacent habitats that may be indirectly

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impacted by, for example, changes to hydrological conditions, and require the identification of reference populations¹. More than one year of surveys may be necessary based on environmental conditions. Please refer to CDFW protocols for surveying and evaluating impacts to special-status plants available at: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Plants>.

IMPACT ANALYSIS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The EIR should discuss all direct and indirect impacts (temporary and permanent) that may occur with implementation of the Project (CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.2). This includes evaluating and describing impacts such as:

- Land use changes that would reduce open space or agricultural land uses and increase residential or other land use involving increased development;
- Encroachments into riparian habitats, wetlands or other sensitive areas;
- Potential for impacts to special-status species;
- Loss or modification of breeding, nesting, dispersal and foraging habitat, including vegetation removal, alternation of soils and hydrology, and removal of habitat structural features (e.g., snags, roosts, vegetation overhanging banks);
- Permanent and temporary habitat disturbances associated with ground disturbance, noise, lighting, reflection, air pollution, traffic or human presence; and
- Obstruction of movement corridors, fish passage, or access to water sources and other core habitat features.

The CEQA document should also identify reasonably foreseeable future projects in the Project vicinity, disclose any cumulative impacts associated with these projects, determine the significance of each cumulative impact, and assess the significance of the Project's contribution to the impact (CEQA Guidelines, §15355). Although a project's impacts may be insignificant individually, its contributions to a cumulative impact may be considerable; a contribution to a significant cumulative impact – e.g., reduction of available habitat for a special-status species – should be considered cumulatively considerable without mitigation to minimize or avoid the impact.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the Project, the CEQA Guidelines direct the lead agency to consider and describe all

¹ CRPR 1B plants are considered rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere. Further information on CRPR ranks is available in CDFW's Special Vascular Plants, Bryophytes, and Lichens List (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=109383&inline>) and on the California Native Plant Society website (<https://www.cnps.org/rare-plants/cnps-rare-plant-ranks>).

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feasible mitigation measures to avoid potentially significant impacts in the EIR, and/or mitigate significant impacts of the Project on the environment (CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15021, 15063, 15071, 15126.2, 15126.4 & 15370). This includes a discussion of impact avoidance and minimization measures for special-status species, which are recommended to be developed in early consultation with CDFW, USFWS, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. These measures can then be incorporated as enforceable Project conditions to reduce potential impacts to biological resources to less-than-significant levels.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in EIRs and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)). Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to CNDDDB. The CNDDDB online field survey form and other methods for submitting data can be found at the following link:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link:


<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plantsand-Animals>.

FILING FEES

CDFW anticipates that the Project will have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of filing fees is necessary (Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089). Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW.

If you have any questions, please contact James Hansen, Environmental Scientist, at (707) 576-2869 or James.Hansen@wildlife.ca.gov; or Melanie Day, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory), at (707) 210-4415 or Melanie.Day@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Erin Chappell
Regional Manager
Bay Delta Region

Attachment 1: Special-Status Species

ec: Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2024070476)

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ATTACHMENT 1: Special-Status Species

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status
Plants		
<i>Lasthenia conjugens</i>	Contra Costa goldfields	FE, CRPR 1B.1
<i>Blennosperma bakeri</i>	Sonoma sunshine	ST, FT, CRPR 1B.1
<i>Downingia pusilla</i>	dwarf downingia	CRPR 2B.2
<i>Hemizonia congesta</i> ssp. <i>Congesta</i>	congested-headed hayfield tarplant	CRPR 1B.2
<i>Fritillaria liliacea</i>	fragrant fritillary	CRPR 1B.2
<i>Brodiaea leptandra</i>	narrow-anthered brodiaea	CRPR 1B.2
<i>Amorpha California</i> var. <i>napensis</i>	Napa false indigo	CRPR 1B.2
<i>Centromadia parryi</i> ssp. <i>parryi</i>	pappose tarplant	CRPR 1B.2
Mammals		
<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	pallid bat	SSC
Birds		
<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Swainson's hawk	ST

SE = state listed as endangered under CESA; ST = state listed as threatened under CESA; WL = state listed on watch list; FE = federally listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA); FT = federally listed as threatened under ESA; SSC = state Species of Special Concern; CRPR = California Rare Plant Rank; DPS = distinct population segment