



NOTICE OF PREPARATION NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

DATE: November 20, 2020

TO: Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and Interested Parties

FROM: City of El Cerrito, Lead Agency
Contact: Sean Moss, AICP, Planning Manager
10890 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530

PROJECT APPLICANT: City of El Cerrito

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting for a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report, San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update¹

The City of El Cerrito (City) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (Draft Supplemental EIR) for the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update (project) described below. The Supplemental EIR will tier off the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan EIR, which was certified by the City of El Cerrito in August 2014. We are interested in the views of your agency as to the appropriate scope and content of the Draft Supplemental EIR's environmental information pertaining to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the Supplemental EIR prepared by the City when considering your permit or other approvals for the project. The proposed project, its location, and its potential environmental effects are described below.

The Specific Plan area is located within both the cities of El Cerrito and Richmond; some parcels are in El Cerrito, some are in Richmond, and some are split between both cities. The Specific Plan Update would apply to properties within the City of El Cerrito.

Because the City of El Cerrito has already determined that a Supplemental EIR is required for the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update, and as permitted by CEQA Guidelines section 15060(d) (Preliminary Review), the City will not prepare an Initial Study for the project. All required CEQA content will be contained in the SEIR.

The City of El Cerrito welcomes public input during the Notice of Preparation (NOP) review period. Due to the time limits mandated by the CEQA Guidelines, your response must be sent **not later than 30 days after your receipt of this notice**. In the event no response or request for additional time is received by the end of the review period, the City may presume that you have no response. Please provide a contact name, phone number, and email address for your agency with your comments. Please send your response to:

¹ Title 14, California Code of Regulations, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, sections 15082, 15103, and 15375.

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Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent during the 30-day review period, from November 23, 2020 through December 23, 2020.

Notice of Scoping Meeting: Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15082(c) (Notice of Preparation and Determination of Scope of EIR), the City of El Cerrito will conduct a scoping meeting in order to solicit comments from adjacent cities, responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and interested parties requesting notice as to the appropriate scope and content of the Draft Supplemental EIR.

The **Scoping Meeting** on the Draft Supplemental EIR for the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update will be held on **December 3, 2020 at 7:00PM via teleconference** at:

<https://elcerrito.webex.com/elcerrito/onstage/g.php?MTID=e1452399b80ca2b6e6d33a3314410fc39>

Event ID: 146 334 4069

Event Password: SPASP2020

Join by Phone: 1-408-418-9388

Access code: 146 334 4069



Sean Moss, AICP
City of El Cerrito

November 20, 2020

Date

Notice of Preparation for a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the City of El Cerrito San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update

Project Title: San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update

Project Applicant: The City of El Cerrito

Introduction: The purpose of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is to inform decision-makers and the general public of the environmental impacts of a proposed project that an agency (in this case, the City of El Cerrito) may implement or approve. The EIR process is intended to: (1) provide information sufficient to evaluate a project and its potential for significant impacts on the environment; (2) examine methods (e.g., project-specific mitigations, uniformly applied development regulations) for avoiding or reducing significant impacts; and (3) consider alternatives to the proposed project.

A Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (Supplemental EIR) will provide the required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation for the proposed update to the Specific Plan (“project”), including an increase in residential and commercial development capacity (“development cap”).

A Supplemental EIR, as defined by CEQA Guidelines section 15163 (Supplement to an EIR), is the appropriate CEQA document for the Specific Plan Update mainly because: (1) the updates to the Specific Plan would be revisions and refinements to the already adopted San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan; (2) the Specific Plan Update would apply only to the Specific Plan area; (3) development under the cap increase would be subject to the updated Specific Plan; (4) the City has been evaluating individual projects subject to the Specific Plan based on the certified Specific Plan EIR; and (5) the associated Specific Plan updates and the increase in development under the proposed development cap increase might result in new significant environmental impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant impacts. Consistent with the certified 2014 EIR, the Supplemental EIR will be a Program EIR as defined by CEQA Guidelines section 15168. The previously certified EIR, as supplemented the Supplemental EIR, could continue to provide the CEQA coverage for future individual projects in the Specific Plan area, with no new CEQA document required.

The Draft Supplemental EIR for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update will tier off the certified San Pablo Ave Specific Plan Program EIR because the proposed updates are located within the Specific Plan area. CEQA encourages this process under CEQA Guidelines sections 15168 (Program EIR), 15152 (Tiering), and 15163 (Supplement to an EIR). This means that information and analysis from the Specific Plan EIR – as applicable and permitted under CEQA – can be used for the San Pablo Ave Specific Plan Update Supplemental EIR.

In accordance with CEQA, the Draft Supplemental EIR will include the following:

- A summary of the project, its potential significant environmental impacts, and mitigations required to avoid or reduce those significant impacts;
- A project description;
- A description of the existing environmental setting, potential environmental impacts, and mitigations for the project;
- Alternatives to the proposed project; and

- Other environmental consequences of the project, including (1) growth-inducing effects, (2) significant unavoidable impacts, (3) irreversible environmental changes, (4) cumulative impacts, and (5) effects found not to be significant.

Project Location: See Figure 1 (Location). The Specific Plan area is located in portions of the cities of El Cerrito and Richmond. The approximately 206-acre plan area extends for approximately 2.5 miles, from El Cerrito Plaza and El Cerrito's border with the City of Albany on the south, to the Ohlone Greenway near the BART tracks on the north.

At the south end of the plan area, the project boundary extends east to include the El Cerrito BART station and west along Central Avenue to Interstate 80 (I-80). Generally, the plan area includes the San Pablo Avenue roadway and the parcels fronting on the avenue. Most of the parcels (approximately 174 acres, or 84 percent) in the plan area are in El Cerrito, while other parcels on the west side of San Pablo Avenue (about 32 acres, or 16 percent) are in Richmond.

Project Description: See Figure 2 (Specific Plan), which illustrates the Specific Plan area. The Specific Plan Update is intended to increase residential and commercial development in the plan area, and update components of the adopted Specific Plan, which includes supporting the community vision to create a vibrant, walkable, sustainable, and transit-oriented corridor that respects surrounding neighborhoods. The Update proposes a development capacity increase of approximately 2,500 residential units and possibly a development capacity increase in commercial square footage. The Specific Plan updates will address the following topics:

Commercial Requirements:

- Review Major Commercial Street Standards, focused on Fairmont and Stockton
- Increase commercial area required on various street types
- Expand San Pablo Avenue Major Commercial north of Central to Stockton
- Review daylight plane and shadow standards
- Provide more flexibility for building height
- Clarify encroachments in street standards

Land Use:

- Increase flexibility for small-lot single-family residences on Central Avenue
- Clarify the "General Market" land use category
- Clarify what type of applications do not require a hearing and only a Notice of Application (Specific Plan Section 2.02.09.03)
- Simplify outdoor seating standards and process

Signage:

- Consider permitting certain permanent signage by right
 - Clarify definition of "Sign Area" and add definition of "Storefront"

The Specific Plan Update will update multi-modal transportation components including:

- Incorporate recommended best practices for "alert" systems and sight line requirements in Transit Oriented Development/Mixed Use environments

- Promote alternatives to single passenger vehicles
- Make commercial parking requirements more flexible
- Clarify bicycle parking requirements
- Clarify vehicle parking ranges
- Clarify standards for Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures
- Provide flexibility for smaller sites that may have difficulty complying with amenity zone, pedestrian zone, or activity zone requirements

The Plan Update will revise Open Space and Green Infrastructure components, as described below.

Open Space:

- Create minimum standards for common and private open space
- Add Plaza BART site to Open Space map to require on-site dedication for future project
 - Clarify locations where on-site open space is strongly encouraged/required
- Clarify when open space regulations are standards vs. guidelines

Green Infrastructure:

- Include references to the City's Green Infrastructure Plan and clarify green infrastructure guidelines and requirements.

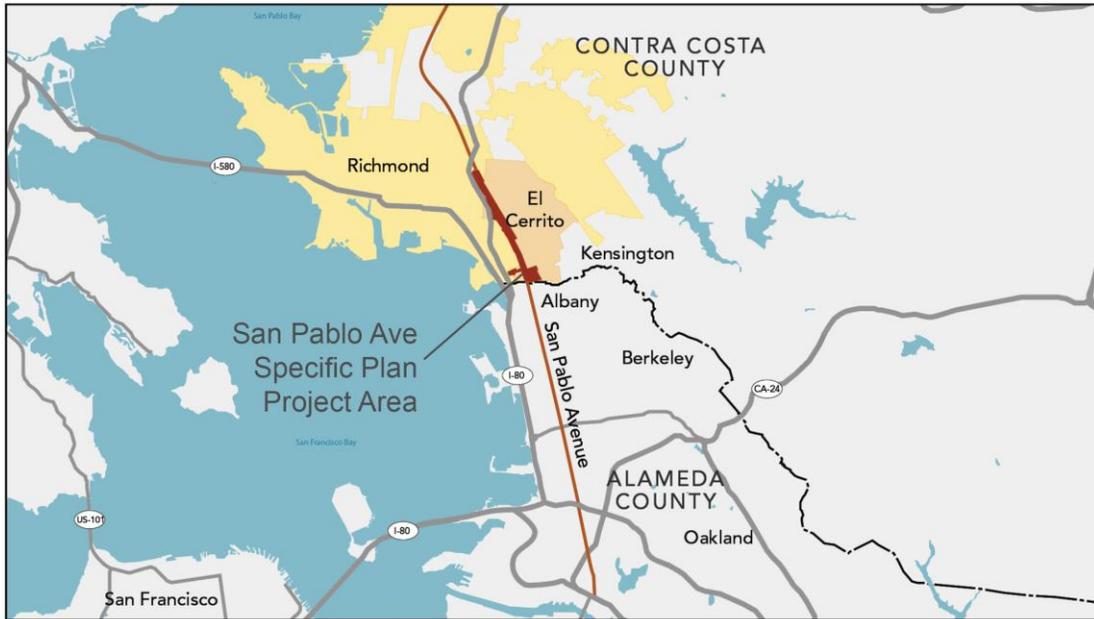


Figure 1 Location





Figure 2 Specific Plan



Required Approvals: *City of El Cerrito Discretionary Approvals.* Implementation of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update will require, but are not limited to, the following discretionary approvals by the City of El Cerrito:

- Certification of the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report
- Adoption of a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- Adoption of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update
- Adoption of general plan amendments and zoning changes as necessary to ensure consistency with the Specific Plan Update
- Discretionary review as necessary, including CEQA review, for future individual public and private development proposals in the plan area

Other Government Agency Approvals. Future individual public and private development proposals in the plan area would be expected to also require review or approvals from other jurisdictional agencies, including, but not limited to:

- East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD)
- Stege Sanitary District (SSD)
- San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD)
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

EIR Scope:

The City of El Cerrito has determined that the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update will require preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (Supplemental EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The following environmental topics will be evaluated in the Supplemental EIR:

- **Aesthetics:** The Supplemental EIR will describe all changes to the aesthetic and urban design implications of the Specific Plan Update, including visual relationships to the surrounding vicinity, potential light and glare impacts, and the potential impacts of the project on important surrounding vantage points. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Air Quality:** The Supplemental EIR air quality analysis will describe any changes to the existing local and regional air quality conditions in the Specific Plan area and vicinity; to the federal, State, and Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) regulations potentially applicable to the updated Specific Plan; and to General Plan and Specific Plan policies and components intended to reduce impacts during plan Update implementation. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Biological Resources:** The Supplemental EIR will evaluate the change in potential impacts on biological resources resulting from the project, including potential impacts on nesting birds. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Cultural, Tribal Cultural, and Historic Resources:** The Supplemental EIR will base analysis on the mitigation already in the certified Specific Plan EIR. The Supplemental EIR will recommend any necessary new or revised mitigations for cultural and tribal cultural resources and will describe any potential impacts and mitigation needs associated with historic resources.

Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.

- **Geology and Soils:** The Supplemental EIR will describe the potential geotechnical implications (including on any potential paleontological resources) of project construction and operation. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Energy:** The Supplemental EIR greenhouse gas (GHG) analysis will describe any changes to the existing GHG setting in the Specific Plan area and vicinity, to the GHG regulations potentially applicable to updated Specific Plan, and to General Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Specific Plan policies and components intended to reduce GHG emissions during plan implementation. The GHG analysis will evaluate whether the proposed development cap increase would have the potential to result in a new or substantially more severe significant GHG impact beyond that considered in the certified EIR. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.

Energy is a new category in CEQA Guidelines Appendix G (effective December 28, 2018). The Supplemental EIR energy analysis will evaluate the potential for the updated Specific Plan to result in impacts on energy resources such as diesel and gasoline fuel, electricity, and natural gas. The analysis will include brief environmental and regulatory setting discussions that place energy resources in the appropriate context, quantify the updated plan's net change in energy efficiency and total energy consumption (using information from the air quality emissions estimates and modeling), and evaluate whether implementation of the updated Specific Plan would result in the wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources. The analysis will document the energy-saving Specific Plan site design components and policies (e.g., site planning standards, proximity to regional arterials), building design standards (energy-efficient building materials and systems), and operating characteristics (e.g., trip-reducing and other energy-saving operations) that result in the efficient use of available energy resources.

- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** The Supplemental EIR will describe any hazardous material activities anticipated under the updated Specific Plan and will describe any associated potential impacts and mitigation needs. Any potential construction period hazards, hazardous material impacts, and mitigation needs will also be described.
- **Hydrology and Water Quality:** The Supplemental EIR will evaluate the water demands and wastewater generation projections for the plan area based on the updated Specific Plan., which will include the development cap increase. The assessment also will include a revised pipe size analysis. The Supplemental EIR will also evaluate potential impacts on hydrology and water quality resulting from project construction and development, including possible effects related to drainage and flooding. Project design components that address hydrology and water quality also will be described.
- **Land Use and Planning:** The Supplemental EIR will clarify and describe the potential effects of the updated Specific Plan on existing and planned land use characteristics, including the project's relationship to other adopted regional and local plans.

- **Noise:** The Supplemental EIR will describe any changes to the existing noise and vibration environment of the Specific Plan area and to noise standards and regulations potentially applicable to the individual projects that may occur in the plan area, including General Plan and Specific Plan policies. The Supplemental EIR's updated noise analysis will evaluate the potential for the development cap increase to result in new or substantially more severe significant noise impacts from changes in traffic levels and from the operation of new development projects, plus potential construction noise and vibration associated with future development projects in the plan area and related mitigation needs.
- **Population and Housing:** The Supplemental EIR will describe the anticipated effects of the Specific Plan Update on existing and projected population and housing characteristics. This information will be used to help forecast public service and utility needs for the plan area.
- **Public Services:** The Supplemental EIR will describe potential impacts on public services (police and fire protection, parks and recreation, and schools) and any mitigation needs.
- **Transportation and Circulation:** In accordance with the revised CEQA Guidelines (Section 15064.3) and as required by Senate Bill (SB) 743, the transportation impact analysis will use vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and not level of service (LOS), for the updated Specific Plan impact analysis. Since the City of El Cerrito has not yet adopted thresholds of significance or methodology for the VMT analysis, the methodology presented in this scope may need to be modified should the City adopt a VMT methodology prior to the Supplemental EIR analysis. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Utilities and Service Systems:** The Supplemental EIR will describe: (1) the Specific Plan Update utility and service system needs; (2) infrastructure improvements completed since certification of the previous EIR (August 2014); and (3) resulting additional impacts, including from the development capacity increase. Mitigation measures will be defined as necessary to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.
- **Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Mineral Resources, and Wildfire:** The Supplemental EIR will explain why these CEQA-defined environmental topics will not be affected by Specific Plan Update implementation.
- **Alternatives:** Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6, the Supplemental EIR will identify and compare a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed Specific Plan Update. Alternatives will be chosen based on their ability to avoid or reduce identified significant environmental impacts of the project while achieving most of the basic project objectives.
- **Other Environmental Consequences of the Project.** The Supplemental EIR will describe and evaluate (1) growth-inducing effects, (2) significant unavoidable impacts, (3) irreversible environmental changes, (4) cumulative impacts, and (5) effects found not to be significant.