

1. Introduction

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, Chapter 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15378(a), the proposed Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 (also known as Santa Rosa Forward), along with the associated Specific Plan and Santa Rosa City Code (SRCC) amendments, and Community-wide Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy (GHG Reduction Strategy) is considered a “project” subject to environmental review. The implementation of these plans is “an action [undertaken by a public agency] which has the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.” This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) provides an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of adoption and implementation of the proposed Santa Rosa General Plan 2050, associated Specific Plan and SRCC amendments, and GHG Reduction Strategy, herein referred to together or separately as the “proposed project.”

This Draft EIR identifies mitigation measures and alternatives to the proposed project that would avoid or reduce significant impacts. This Draft EIR compares the development of the proposed project with the existing baseline condition, described in detail in Chapter 4.0, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR. The City of Santa Rosa (City) is the lead agency for the proposed project. This assessment is intended to inform the City’s decision makers, other responsible agencies, and the public of the nature of the proposed project and its effect on the environment.

1.1 PROPOSED ACTION

If approved by the Santa Rosa City Council, the proposed project would replace the City’s existing General Plan, which was last comprehensively updated in 2009 and has a buildout horizon of 2035. The proposed project is intended to guide development and conservation in the city. The proposed General Plan 2050 would build off the current General Plan 2035 and provide a direct framework for the upcoming changes in Santa Rosa and the expected growth in the coming decades; as well as land use, transportation, and conservation decisions through the horizon year of 2050. Because California Government Code Section 65860 requires the city’s Specific Plans and Zoning Code to be consistent with its General Plan, the proposed project would also introduce amendments to the maps in the North Station Area Specific Plan and Downtown Station Area Specific Plan, as well as new zoning provisions including zoning map revisions on certain parcels throughout the city to ensure that the Specific Plans and Zoning Code conforms to the proposed General Plan 2050. Lastly, the proposed project would replace the City’s existing Climate Action Plan, which was adopted in 2012, with a GHG Reduction Strategy that would serve as the City’s strategic plan to reduce community-wide GHG emissions through 2045 and beyond.

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The environmental analysis in this Draft EIR assumes that the adoption and implementation of the proposed project would result in up to 24,090 new housing units, 65,766 new residents, and 14,091 new jobs by 2050. See Chapter 3, *Project Description*, of this Draft EIR for additional details on the proposed project. See Chapter 5, *Alternatives to the Proposed Project*, of this Draft EIR for a comparison of the current General Plan 2035 (No Project) and the proposed General Plan 2050.

1.2 EIR SCOPE

This EIR is a program EIR that analyzes the adoption and implementation of the proposed project. This is in contrast to a project-level EIR, which is used to identify and analyze the potential impacts of site-specific construction and operation. CEQA¹ and the CEQA Guidelines² allow the lead agencies to prepare a number of types of EIRs. Different types of EIRs are used for varying situations and intended uses. CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 states that program EIRs are appropriate when a project consists of a series of actions related to the issuance of rules, regulations, and other planning criteria.

In this case, the proposed project that is the subject of this EIR consists of long-term plans and a set of regulatory changes that would be implemented over time as policy documents and regulations guiding future development activities and City actions. No specific development projects are proposed as part of the proposed project. Therefore, this EIR is a program-level EIR that analyzes the potential environmental effects of the adoption and implementation of the proposed project. As a program EIR, it does not evaluate the impacts of individual projects that may be proposed in the future under the proposed project. However, if the program EIR addresses the program's effects as specifically and comprehensively as is reasonably possible, and later activities are within the scope of the effects examined in the program EIR, then additional environmental review may not be required for those future projects.³

When a program EIR is relied on for a subsequent activity, the lead agency must incorporate feasible mitigation measures and alternatives developed in the program EIR into the subsequent activities (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][3]). If a subsequent activity would have effects that are not within the scope of the program EIR, the lead agency must prepare a new Initial Study leading to a Negative Declaration, a Mitigated Negative Declaration, or an EIR, unless the activity qualifies for an exemption. For these subsequent environmental review documents, this program EIR will serve as the first-tier environmental analysis. The program EIR can also serve to streamline future environmental review of subsequent projects.

¹ The CEQA Statute is found at Public Resources Code, Division 13, *Environmental Quality*, Sections 21000 to 21189.

² The CEQA Guidelines are found at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, *Natural Resources*, Division 6, *Resources Agency*, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act*, Sections 15000 to 15387.

³ CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c) and CEQA streamlining provisions.

1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

1.3.1 DRAFT EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21080(d) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15063, the City determined that the proposed project could result in potentially significant environmental impacts and that a program EIR would be required. In compliance with CEQA Section 21080.4, the City circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the proposed project to the Office of Planning and Research State Clearinghouse and interested agencies and persons on February 7, 2023, for a 30-day review period. A public Scoping Meeting was held virtually on Monday, February 27, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. The NOP and scoping process solicited comments from responsible and trustee agencies, as well as interested parties regarding the scope of the environmental analysis to be conducted in the Draft EIR. Appendix A, *Notice of Preparation and Scoping Comments*, of this Draft EIR contains the NOP as well as the comments received by the City in response to the NOP.

This Draft EIR will be available for review by the public and interested parties, agencies, and organizations for a 45-day comment period starting Monday, October 7, 2024, and ending Wednesday, November 20, 2024. The Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing during this period to receive comments on the Draft EIR. During the comment period, the public is invited to submit written comments via mail or email on the Draft EIR to the City of Santa Rosa Planning and Economic Development Department by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 20, 2024. Comments may also be hand-delivered to the Planning and Economic Development Department, Room 3, by this deadline.

Written comments should be submitted to Amy Nicholson to the address or email below with “*Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 EIR*” as the subject.

Mail: Amy Nicholson, Supervising Planner- Advance Planning
Planning & Economic Development Department
City of Santa Rosa
100 Santa Rosa Avenue, Room 3
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Email: anicholson@srcity.org

1.3.2 FINAL EIR

After completion of the 45-day review period for the Draft EIR, the City will review all written comments received and prepare written responses to each comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIR. A Final EIR will then be prepared, which contains all of the comments received, responses to comments raising environmental issues, and any changes to the Draft EIR. The Final EIR will then be presented to the Planning Commission where a public hearing will allow for public comment on the Final EIR and to consider recommendation for certification of the Final EIR. Following the public hearing, the Final EIR will be presented to the City Council for consideration of the certification as the environmental document for the proposed project. All persons who commented on the Draft EIR and provided contact information will

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be notified of the availability of the Final EIR and the date of the public hearing, which is tentatively scheduled to be held in early 2025.

All responses to comments submitted on the Draft EIR by agencies will be provided to those agencies at least 10 days prior to certification of the EIR. The City Council will make findings regarding the extent and nature of the impacts as presented in the Final EIR. The Final EIR will need to be certified as having been prepared in compliance with CEQA by the City prior to deciding to approve or deny the proposed project. Public input is encouraged at all public hearings before the City.

If the City Council certifies the EIR, it may then consider action on the proposed project. If approved, the City Council would adopt and incorporate into the project all feasible mitigation measures identified in the EIR and may also require other feasible mitigation measures.

In some cases, the City Council may find that certain mitigation measures are outside the jurisdiction of the City to implement, or that no feasible mitigation measures have been identified for a given significant impact. In that case, the City Council, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, may nonetheless determine that economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the proposed project outweigh the unavoidable, significant effects on the environment.

1.3.3 MITIGATION MONITORING

CEQA Section 21081.6 requires that the lead agency adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for any project for which it has made findings pursuant to CEQA Section 21081 or adopted a Negative Declaration pursuant to CEQA Section 21080(c). Such a program is intended to ensure the implementation of all mitigation measures adopted through the preparation of an EIR or Negative Declaration. If mitigation measures are required, the MMRP for the proposed project will be completed congruently as part of the Final EIR process.

1.4 USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN EIR

1.4.1 TIERING PROCESS

CEQA includes several provisions to streamline the environmental review of qualified projects based on several factors. These include where environmental review has already occurred (e.g., a program-level EIR), which could apply to future development in the EIR Study Area.

The CEQA concept of “tiering” refers to the evaluation of general environmental matters in a broad program-level EIR, with subsequent focused environmental documents for individual projects. CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines encourage the use of tiered environmental documents to reduce delays and excessive paperwork in the environmental review process. This is accomplished in tiered documents by eliminating repetitive analyses of issues that were adequately addressed in the program EIR and by incorporating those analyses by reference.

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CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(d) provides for simplifying the preparation of environmental documents by incorporating by reference analyses and discussions. Where an EIR has been prepared or certified for a program or plan, the environmental review for a later activity consistent with the program or plan should be limited to effects that were not analyzed as significant in the prior EIR or that are susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152[d]).

By tiering from the program EIR, the environmental analysis for a future project would rely on the program EIR for the following:

- A discussion of general background and setting information for environmental topic areas;
- Overall growth-related issues;
- Issues that were evaluated in sufficient detail in the program EIR for which there is no significant new information or change in circumstances that would require further analysis;
- Assessment of cumulative impacts; and
- Mitigation measures adopted and incorporated into the proposed project.

1.4.1.1 BASE RESOURCE FOR GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

As a program EIR, this document and the mitigation measures presented herein, will be used as a guide for implementing the proposed General Plan 2050 goals, policies, and actions, as well as adopting changes in City codes, regulations, and practices. This program EIR will also be used as a base resource for reviewing future development projects. This document will assist in guiding the assessment of projects and provide environmental review tiering, where appropriate. Currently, the City completes the following steps in reviewing development projects, which will be carried forward under the proposed General Plan 2050 if adopted.

- **Project Consistency with the General Plan and City Codes.** When a new development project is filed with the City, it is reviewed for completeness and consistency with the General Plan 2050 goals, policies, and actions, and City codes and practices. Because City policies, actions, and codes, presented in this program EIR will minimize impacts, development projects will implement these measures to: (a) mitigate environmental impacts and (b) achieve consistency with the General Plan 2050 and compliance with City codes.
- **Projects Subject to Environmental Review.** For future development projects subject to environmental review, the resources contained in this EIR and carried forward in the General Plan 2050 will guide the scope of this review. For project-level environmental review, many of the topic areas studied in this program EIR will adequately cover and provide environmental clearance for the project. However, the preparation of site-specific studies and reports may be necessary based on the location and nature of the development project. The resources presented in this program EIR will assist in determining when and where a special, site-specific study is warranted. The City will develop a checklist that will be used as a guide for determining the scope of environmental analysis required for subsequent projects.
- **Projects Exempt from Environmental Review.** CEQA includes a long list of environmental review exemptions. Some of the future development projects may be exempt from environmental review as the project impacts will be adequately covered by this program EIR. However, many of the CEQA exemptions require compliance with specific criteria for the development project to qualify for the

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exemption. The resources contained in this EIR and carried forward in General Plan 2050 will be used to determine if the CEQA-prescribed criteria have been met to qualify for the exemption. One example of a CEQA exemption is for projects that are infill development and consistent with the General Plan land use designation and zoning district. CEQA provides for these types of projects to conduct streamlined review under CEQA Guidelines Section 15332 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15138.3 where the project meets certain criteria.