4.0 Introduction to the Environmental Analysis and Assumptions Used

4.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND ASSUMPTIONS USED

The following is an introduction to the environmental analysis of the project-specific and cumulative impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed General Plan. This introduction describes the general assumptions used in the analysis.

Please see the individual technical sections of the Draft EIR (Sections 4.1 to 4.13) for the specific assumptions and methodologies used for each technical subject.

ANALYSIS ASSUMPTIONS USED TO EVALUATE THE IMPACTS OF THE CITY OF MADERA GENERAL PLAN

BASELINE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS ASSUMED IN THE DRAFT EIR

The environmental setting of the City of Madera and the surrounding area is described in the individual technical sections of this Draft EIR (see Sections 4.1 through 4.13). In general, these sections describe the conditions of the City of Madera and the surrounding area as they existed when the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the project was released on December 27, 2007.

The Draft EIR also includes setting information that has been updated since release of the NOP, such as the status of large development projects in the General Plan Planning Area and in the vicinity of the Planning Area (see **Table 4.0-1**). With the exception of the North Fork Rancheria Hotel & Casino Resort, all of these large development projects are located in the Southeast Planning Area of Madera County, in Rio Mesa, approximately 15 miles southeast of the City of Madera. The North Fork Rancheria is located just north of the Madera city limits, in Madera County, within the City of Madera's General Plan Planning Area. The General Plan Update establishes policies specific to the North Fork Rancheria site and designates the site for Village Reserve land use designation.

There is one already approved Specific Plan that will increase the acreage of residential, commercial, school, and park uses in the Planning Area. The Madera State Center Community College Specific Plan was approved by the City in 1998. The Specific Plan, which covers approximately 1,867 acres in the southeastern corner of the Planning Area, proposes a variety of residential, commercial, office, and light industrial uses centered on a community college campus. The college campus portion of this project has been completed, but no other significant development has occurred.

This description of the environmental setting is in compliance with Section 15125(a) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, which requires that an EIR include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of a project as they exist at the time the NOP is published. The CEQA Guidelines also specify that this description of the physical environmental conditions should serve as the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether the impacts of a project are considered significant.

TABLE 4.0-1
PROPOSED & APPROVED PROJECTS

Project	Acres	Land Uses	Status	Location	Units or Building Sq. Ft.
North Fork Rancheria Hotel & Casino Resort	305	Hotel & Casino	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Madera County, just north of Madera city limits, west of SR 99 and north of Ave 17	472,000 sq ft
Liberty Grove	1,473	Residential & commercial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	
Silver Dust	60	Industrial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	
Tham	1,628	Primarily residential & commercial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	
Morgan	152	Primarily residential & commercial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	
San Joaquin River Ranch	3,976	Residential & commercial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	
Gateway Village	2,062	Residential, commercial & light industrial	Approved; CEQA review complete – 2007	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	5,836 units
Gunner Ranch West Specific Plan	1,032	Residential & Commercial	CEQA being completed/ awaiting discretionary action.	Southeast Madera County Planning Area	2,840 units

Source: County of Madera & City of Madera

GENERAL PLAN BUILDOUT AND YEAR 2030 CONDITION

Future growth in the General Plan Planning Area is guided by the land uses identified in the General Plan Land Use Map (see **Figures 3.0-7** and **3.0-8**). Buildout of the proposed General Plan Update is not expected to occur until roughly 2065, based on a projected residential growth rate of around 2.65 percent per year. This growth rate is a compilation of several sources, including past growth (which includes previous economic downturns) and projections produced as part of an ongoing regional planning effort.

The noise, water supply, and public service sections of this DEIR analyze impacts from growth to the year 2030 only. This differs from the total buildout of all of the growth designated by the General Plan Land Use Map including substantial growth predicted to occur well after 2030.

Section 5.0 of this Draft EIR, Cumulative Impacts Summary, analyzes climate change impacts resulting from greenhouse gas emissions through buildout. The traffic model developed for this EIR quantifies impacts from growth to 2030 only, but qualitatively analyzes impacts beyond 2030 through buildout. The air quality model developed for this EIR calculates mobile source emissions to 2030, in line with the traffic model, but calculates stationary source greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2030 through buildout.

Some sections analyze the Year 2030 Condition only because beyond that time horizon the City's growth patterns are more speculative and subject to change, rendering these analyses less accurate if they are based on growth projected post 2030. Other impact analyses completed as part of this EIR, such as biology, agriculture, portions of air quality as discussed above, and climate change, are based on impacts resulting from General Plan buildout rather than the Year 2030 Condition because their impacts are either based on ground disturbance associated with General Plan Update proposed land use patterns and types or because a buildout analysis is required under state guidelines.

It should be noted that the amount of development expected to actually occur by 2030 will likely be less than the 2030 growth projections used in this EIR. This EIR assumes a residential growth rate of approximately 5.7 percent per year between 2007 and 2030, compared to the 2.65 percent annual growth rate that is expected. The growth rate is assumed to be high for the 2030 analysis to ensure the maximum possible impacts that could occur by 2030 are considered and that the impacts of areas likely to develop and/or annex to the city are considered. Therefore, it is likely that the 2030 impacts in this EIR are overstated; this is consistent with CEQA's direction to provide a worst-case analysis. For more information on the growth projections, please see **Appendix B** (Madera General Plan EIR – Growth Projections for Year 2030, PMC, November 10, 2008).

Table 3.0-1 summarizes both the Year 2030 assumptions and the buildout projections of the General Plan Planning Area under the General Plan Update Land Use Map. **Table 3.0-2** and **Table 3.0-3** summarize the Year 2030 and buildout of the proposed General Plan Update by land use type. This EIR analysis is based on the land use numbers in **Tables 3.01, 3.0-2**, and **3.0-3**. Subsequent requests for increases in development potential beyond what is set forth in the General Plan would require approval of an amendment to the General Plan Update and are outside the scope of the analysis of this EIR.

STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Sections 4.1 through 4.13 of this Draft EIR contain a detailed description of current setting conditions (including applicable regulatory setting), an evaluation of the direct and indirect

environmental effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed General Plan, identification of proposed General Plan policies and action items that mitigate the environmental effects, additional feasible mitigation measures, and identification of whether significant environmental effects of the General Plan would remain after application of proposed policies and action items and feasible mitigation measures. The individual technical sections of the Draft EIR follow the following format.

Existing Setting

This subsection includes a description of the physical setting conditions associated with the technical area of discussion, consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125. As previously identified above, the existing setting is based on conditions as they existed when the NOP for the project was released on December 27, 2007.

Regulatory Framework

This subsection consists of the identification of applicable federal, state, regional, and local plans, policies, laws, and regulations that apply to the technical area of discussion.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The Impacts and Mitigation Measures subsection identifies direct and indirect environmental effects associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan Update and identifies those proposed General Plan Update policies and action items that mitigate the environmental effects. Standards of significance are identified and utilized to determine whether identified environmental effects are considered significant and require the application of mitigation measures. Each environmental impact analysis is identified numerically (e.g., Impact 4.1.1 – Division of Established Communities) and is supported by substantial evidence included in the discussion.

Mitigation measures for the proposed General Plan were developed through a thorough review of the environmental effects of the General Plan Update by consultants with technical expertise as well as by environmental professionals. After identification of proposed General Plan policies and action items that mitigate the environmental impact being discussed, any additional feasible mitigation measures that could minimize significant adverse impacts are discussed, after which the impact discussion notes whether the impact has been mitigated to a less than significant level or remains significant and unavoidable.

Cumulative Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures

This subsection is an analysis of the proposed General Plan's contribution to cumulative impacts to the environment. The analysis focuses on whether the General Plan's contribution is cumulatively considerable (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130; see also the following subsection: Approach to the Cumulative Impact Analysis, and Section 5.0 Cumulative Impact Summary). A cumulative impact occurs from the change in the environment that results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time (CEQA Guidelines Section 15355(b)). Accordingly, the cumulative setting includes related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the region.

APPROACH TO THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

Definition of Cumulative Setting

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130 requires that EIRs include an analysis of the cumulative impacts of a project when the project's effect is considered cumulatively considerable. In general, the cumulative setting conditions considered in this Draft EIR are based on:

- **Local Adopted General Plans.** The existing land use plans in the Madera region consisting of Madera County, Fresno County, and the cities of Chowchilla, Fresno, Clovis, and Merced.

- **Large-Scale Development Projects.** Consideration of large-scale proposed and approved development projects listed in **Table 4.0-1**. This list is intended to describe large-scale projects from the recent past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future development activities in the Madera region that, when considered with the proposed General Plan, have the potential to have cumulatively considerable impacts. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of projects in the Madera region.

- **Effect of Regional Conditions.** Consists of consideration of background traffic volumes and patterns on state highways (e.g., SR 99), background air quality conditions, and other associated environmental conditions that occur within the San Joaquin Valley region, both within and outside of the Planning Area.

- **Consideration of Existing Development Patterns.** This consists of consideration of the current environmental conditions of existing development and past land use activities in the region. It includes major land use activities such as the operation of the Madera Municipal Airport, agricultural activities, and conversion of open space and agricultural lands resulting from existing development patterns.

- **The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint.** The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint depicts a way for the region to grow through the year 2050. The blueprint identifies a general density and transportation scenario, as well as a set of principles. While only advisory, the Blueprint will be the most comprehensive policy guidance in the San Joaquin Valley for long-term regional land use and transportation planning. The updated City of Madera General Plan is consistent with these blueprint features.

  The Blueprint has adopted an overall vision for growth: *Madera County will be composed of unique cities, communities and a diverse population that is supported by a vibrant economy, a healthy and sustainable environment and public safety, accomplished through a land use and transportation system that supports livable communities and interregional coordination and connectivity, while preserving agricultural and natural resources.*

Each technical section of the Draft EIR includes a description of the geographic extent of the cumulative setting based on the characteristics of the environmental issue under consideration as set forth in Section 15130(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Consideration of Cumulative Impacts

Each technical section in the Draft EIR considers whether the project's effect on anticipated cumulative setting conditions is cumulatively considerable (i.e., a significant effect).

"Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065(a)(3)). The determination of whether the project's impact on cumulative conditions is considerable is based on a number of factors including consideration of applicable public agency standards, consultation with public agencies, and expert opinion. The environmental effects of potential development of the individual planning areas within the General Plan Planning Area are incorporated in the cumulative impact analysis. Section 5.0, Cumulative Impacts Summary, provides a summary of the cumulative impacts associated with the General Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTS USED IN THIS EIR

This Draft EIR utilizes technical information and analyses from previously prepared EIRs that are relevant to the consideration of environmental effects of the proposed General Plan, which is supported by the State CEQA Guidelines (see Sections 15148 [Citation] and 15150 [Incorporation by Reference]). In addition to materials cited, the following EIRs have been used in this Draft EIR:

- State Center Community College EIR
- Ventana Specific Plan EIR
- Gateway Galleria EIR
- Madera Town Center EIR
- Commons at Madera Fair EIR
- County of Madera General Plan EIR
- City of Madera General Plan EIR (previous version)

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE DRAFT EIR

This Draft EIR uses the following terminology:

Cumulatively Considerable: A cumulative significant impact would result when the project would contribute considerably to a significant physical impact on the environment expected under cumulative conditions.

Less Than Significant Impact: A less than significant impact would cause no substantial change in the physical condition of the environment. (No mitigation is required for project effects found to be less than significant.)

Planning Area: The Planning Area for the City of Madera General Plan includes the incorporated city, the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI), and a larger study area, as shown in **Figure 3.0-2** in Section 3.0, Project Description. The Planning Area represents the area which the City envisions may ultimately be included either in its Sphere of Influence or in the incorporated city limits. For the size of the Planning Area and related information, please see Section 3.0, Project Description.

Potentially Significant: A potentially significant impact is one that may or may not occur and where a definite determination cannot be made. Feasible mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified to avoid or reduce the project's effects on the environment to a less than significant level.

Significant and Unavoidable Impact: A significant and unavoidable impact would result in a substantial change in the environment that cannot feasibly be avoided or mitigated to a less than significant level if the project is implemented.

Significant Impact: A significant impact would cause (or would potentially cause) a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions of the environment. Significant impacts are identified by the evaluation of project effects using specified standards of significance provided in each technical section of the EIR. Identified significant impacts are those where the project would result in an impact that can be measured or quantified, while identified potentially significant impacts are those impacts where an exact measurement of the project's effect cannot be made but substantial evidence indicates that the impact could exceed standards of significance. A potentially significant impact may also be an impact that may or may not occur and where a definite determination cannot be made. Mitigation measures and/or project alternatives are identified to avoid or reduce to a less than significant level project effects to the environment.

Standards of Significance: A set of significance criteria used by the CEQA lead agency (City of Madera) as well as by other public agencies with regulatory jurisdiction over the project to determine at what level or threshold an impact would be considered significant. Significance criteria used in this EIR are derived from the State CEQA Guidelines, factual or scientific information, regulatory performance standards of local, state, and federal agencies, and goals, objectives, and policies. Specified significance criteria are identified at the beginning of the impact analyses in each technical section of the EIR.

Subsequent Projects/Activities: Anticipated development projects (e.g., residential, commercial, park, recreational) that would occur in the future and would implement the General Plan. This would include public infrastructure and utility extension projects including, but not limited to, roadway widenings and extensions, intersection improvements, and water, stormwater, and wastewater distribution improvements. This would also include second-tier planning efforts, such as master plans, village plans, and specific plans.

REFERENCES

City of Madera. 2008.

County of Madera. 2008.

Madera Transportation Commission, San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, http://www.maderactc.org/blueprint.htm. 2008.