
1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR or FEIR) was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15132). The City of Chico is the lead agency for the environmental review of the proposed City of Chico General Plan Update. This FEIR summarizes the expected environmental impacts resulting from adoption and implementation of the updated General Plan, as well as responds to comments received on the Draft EIR.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EIR

OVERVIEW OF CEQA REQUIREMENTS FOR PREPARATION OF AN EIR

The City of Chico, serving as the lead agency, has prepared this EIR to provide the public and responsible and trustee agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of the proposed General Plan Update. As set forth in the provisions of CEQA (Public Resources Code Sections 21000 through 21177) and implementing regulations (California Code of Regulations, Title 14 Sections 15000 et seq., the CEQA Guidelines), public agencies are charged with the duty to consider the environmental impacts of proposed development and to minimize these impacts where feasible while carrying out an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, including economic, environmental, and social factors.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15121(a) states that an EIR is an informational document for decision-makers and the general public that analyzes the significant environmental effects of a project, identifies possible ways to minimize significant effects, and describes reasonable alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid its adverse environmental impacts.

CEQA requires the preparation of an environmental impact report prior to approving any project which may have a significant effect on the environment. For the purposes of CEQA, the term "project" refers to the whole of an action which has the potential to result in a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378[a]). With respect to the proposed Chico General Plan Update, the City has determined that adoption and implementation of the updated General Plan is a project under this definition.

BACKGROUND OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS OF THE PROJECT

The following is an overview of the environmental review process for the Chico General Plan Update that has led to the preparation of this FEIR.

Notice of Preparation and Initial Study

In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the City prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the proposed project on December 10, 2008. The City was identified as the lead agency for the proposed project. This notice was circulated to the State Clearinghouse and to the public, local, state, and federal agencies, and other interested parties to solicit comments on the proposed project. The NOP was posted on the City's website. Two scoping meetings were held on January 13, 2009, to receive comments. Concerns raised in response to the NOP were considered during preparation of the Draft EIR. The NOP and responses by interested parties are presented in Appendix A of the Draft EIR. An Initial Study for the project was prepared and released for public review along with the NOP. Its conclusions supported preparation of an EIR for the project. The Initial Study is also included in Appendix A of the Draft EIR.

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Draft EIR

The Draft EIR (DEIR) was released for public and agency review on September 30, 2010. The public comment period was from September 30, 2010, to November 30, 2010. A public comment meeting on the DEIR was held on November 9, 2010.

The DEIR contains a description of the project, description of the environmental setting, identification of project impacts, and mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant, as well as an analysis of project alternatives. The Draft EIR was provided to interested public agencies and the public and was made available for review at the following locations: City of Chico Planning Services Department, 411 Main Street, Chico; Butte County Library, Chico Branch, 1106 Sherman Avenue, Chico; and Meriam Library, Special Collections, 3rd floor, CSU, Chico. The Draft EIR was also available on the City's website at <http://www.ci.chico.ca.us/>.

Final EIR

The City received nine comment letters from agencies, interest groups, and the public regarding the Draft EIR, as well as verbal comments heard at the public comment meeting. This document responds to the written and verbal comments received as required by CEQA. This document also contains minor edits to the Draft EIR, which are included in Section 4.0, Minor Revisions to the Draft EIR, and details changes made to the General Plan Update since public release of the DEIR in Section 5.0, Minor Revisions to the Proposed General Plan. This document constitutes the FEIR.

Certification of the Final EIR/Project Consideration

The City will review and consider the FEIR. If the City finds that the FEIR is "adequate and complete," the City may certify the FEIR. The rule of adequacy generally holds that the EIR can be certified if: (1) it shows a good faith effort at full disclosure of environmental information; and (2) it provides sufficient analysis to allow decisions to be made regarding the project in contemplation of its environmental consequences.

Upon review and consideration of the Final EIR, the City may take action to adopt, revise, or reject the proposed Chico General Plan Update. A decision to adopt the Chico General Plan Update would be accompanied by written findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations for significant and unavoidable impacts in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 and Section 15093. Public Resources Code Section 21081.6 also requires lead agencies to adopt a mitigation monitoring and reporting program to describe measures that have been adopted or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment.

1.2 TYPE OF DOCUMENT

The CEQA Guidelines identify several types of EIRs, each applicable to different project circumstances. This EIR has been prepared as a Program EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 which states:

A program EIR is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either:

(1) Geographically,

- (2) *As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions,*
- (3) *In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or*
- (4) *As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.*

The program-level analysis considers the broad environmental effects of the overall proposed General Plan Update. This EIR will be used to evaluate subsequent projects and activities under the proposed General Plan. Additional environmental review under CEQA for various actions taken to implement the proposed General Plan may be required based on the subsequent project's consistency with the General Plan and the analysis in this EIR. As individual projects or activities under the General Plan Update are proposed, the City will be required to examine the projects or activities to determine whether their effects were adequately analyzed in the program EIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168). If the projects or activities would have no effects beyond those analyzed in this EIR, no further CEQA review would be required.

1.3 INTENDED USES OF THE EIR

This EIR is intended to evaluate the environmental impacts of the project to the greatest extent possible. This EIR should be used as the primary environmental document to evaluate all subsequent planning and permitting actions associated with projects in the city that are consistent with the General Plan. Subsequent actions that may be associated with the proposed General Plan Update are identified in Section 3.0, Project Description, of the Draft EIR.

1.4 ORGANIZATION AND SCOPE OF THE FINAL EIR

This document is organized in the following manner:

SECTION 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

Section 1.0 provides an overview of the EIR process to date and what the FEIR is required to contain.

SECTION 2.0 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 2.0 includes an updated Executive Summary that provides a brief project description and presents a summary table of probable environmental effects.

Section 3.0 – COMMENTS AND RESPONSES TO COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT EIR

Section 3.0 provides a list of commenters, copies of written comments (coded for reference), and the responses to those written comments made on the Draft EIR.

SECTION 4.0 – MINOR REVISIONS TO THE DRAFT EIR

This section consists of revisions to the Draft EIR that are a result of responses to comments, as well as minor staff edits that do not change the intent or content of the analysis or mitigation measures. Revisions appear in ~~striketrough~~ and underline.

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SECTION 5.0 – MINOR REVISIONS TO THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN

This section consists of revisions to the proposed General Plan Update since public release of the DEIR.