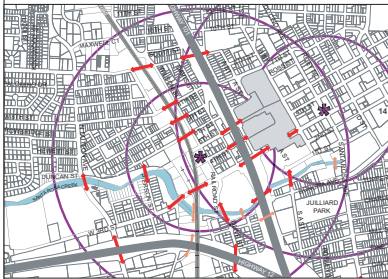


DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN PROGRAM EIR

State Clearinghouse Number: 2006072104



Submitted to
City of Santa Rosa February 1, 2007

Prepared by:
City of Santa Rosa, Advanced Planning and Public Policy Department

Lead EIR Consultant:
DESIGN, COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT



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Draft Program EIR

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I INTRODUCTION

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to provide an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of adopting the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan, which has been prepared by the City of Santa Rosa. Because the Specific Plan may be implemented over time, a program-level environmental document, as defined by CEQA Guideline Section 15168, is appropriate. A program-level document is appropriate when a project consists of a series of smaller projects or phases that may be implemented separately. Under the program EIR approach, future projects or phases may require additional, project-specific environmental analysis. In order to identify whether additional analysis would be necessary when the project is implemented, the Lead Agency (the City) will need to determine the following:

- ◆ Whether the planned characteristics of the project are substantially different from those defined in the Program EIR;
- ◆ Whether the project would require additional mitigation measures; or
- ◆ Whether specific impacts were not evaluated in sufficient detail in the Program EIR.

If any of these conditions apply, then a project-specific Initial Study or EIR would be necessary to identify how the impacts of the project differ from those identified in this EIR or what additional mitigation measures would be necessary. This EIR is anticipated to provide a basis for future project-level CEQA analysis.

The assessment in this EIR is designed to inform City of Santa Rosa decision-makers, other responsible agencies, and the public-at-large of the nature of the project and its effect on the environment. Additionally, when appropriate, this Draft EIR identifies mitigation measures that, if effectively implemented, would reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts. Furthermore, this Draft EIR examines alternatives to the proposed project that could reduce or avoid the identified significant impacts.

A. Proposed Action

The City of Santa Rosa has created the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan to address the development and re-development of the 647-acre area in and around the downtown area of Santa Rosa, centered around the proposed Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) rail station. The Specific Plan would also require some amendments to the Santa Rosa General Plan to make the two documents consistent. The adoption of proposed amendments to the General Plan would establish new land use designations and would ensure consistency between the Specific Plan and the City of Santa Rosa General Plan. The project details for the Specific Plan are described in more detail in Chapter 3 of this Draft EIR.

B. EIR Scope, Issues and Concerns

1. Type of Document and Intended Uses

This EIR is intended to evaluate the environmental impacts of implementing the Specific Plan to the greatest extent possible. Because some uncertainty exists regarding the specific development projects that would be proposed subsequent to the approval of the Specific Plan and the exact nature of those uses, the document has been prepared in sufficient detail to support approval of the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan or an alternative version of the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan, but may need to be augmented in connection with future actions in conjunction with individual parcels, depending upon the nature of such proposals. To minimize the need for future costly studies, mitigation measures set out in this EIR will, when possible, provide performance standards to assure environmental impacts are averted and to guide planning and evaluation of future development projects proposed under the Specific Plan.

CEQA provides a number of processes for allowing lead agencies to supplement previously prepared plan- or zoning-level environmental analyses at the project level of decision-making while at the same time avoiding redundant

and duplicative analysis. At least three of them apply here. One is the “program EIR” (CEQA Guidelines §15168); the second is the “tiering” process (Public Resources Code, §§ 21093, 21094; CEQA Guidelines, §15152); and the other is the process set forth in Public Resources Code section 21083.3 and CEQA Guidelines section 15183, which applies, among other things, to projects consistent with previous “zoning actions” for which EIRs are prepared. Nothing in CEQA makes these processes exclusive of one another, or prevents agencies from relying on more than one of them.

This EIR should therefore be treated as a “program EIR,” a “first tier EIR,” and an EIR for a “zoning action.” The following discussion describes how, under each of the processes mentioned above, the City can use this document in connection with later project approvals.

A Program EIR is an EIR prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project, such as a Specific Plan. A program EIR generally establishes a framework for tiered or project-level environmental documents that are prepared in accordance with the overall program (see CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(a)). The program EIR enables the agency to examine the overall effects of the proposed course of action and to take steps to avoid unnecessary adverse environmental effects. Use of the program EIR also enables the Lead Agency to characterize the overall program as the project being approved at that time. Following this approach when individual activities within the program are proposed, the agency would be required to examine the individual activities to determine whether their effects were fully analyzed in the program EIR. If the activities would have no effects beyond those analyzed in the program EIR, the agency could assert that the activities are merely part of the program which had been approved earlier, and no further CEQA compliance would be required. This approach offers many possibilities for agencies to reduce their costs of CEQA compliance and still achieve high levels of environmental protection.

In any event, as noted above, this “Program EIR” also functions as a “first tier” EIR. Thus, future site-specific approvals may also be narrowed pursuant

to the rules for tiering set forth in CEQA Guidelines section 15152. That section provides, for example, that, where a first tier EIR has “adequately addressed” the subject of cumulative impacts, such impacts need not be revisited in second- and/or third-tier documents. Furthermore, second- and third-tier documents may limit the examination of effects to those that “were not examined as significant effects” in the prior EIR or “[a]re susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance by the choice of specific revisions in the project, the imposition of conditions, or other means.”

Finally, Public Resources Code section 21083.3 and CEQA Guidelines section 15183 generally limit the scope of necessary environmental review for site-specific approvals following the preparation of an EIR for a “zoning action.” For such site-specific approvals, CEQA generally applies only to impacts that are “peculiar to the parcel or to the project,” except where “substantial new information” shows that previously-identified impacts will be more significant than previously assumed. Notably, impacts are considered not to be “peculiar to the parcel or to the project” if they can be substantially mitigated pursuant to previously adopted “uniformly applied development policies or standards.”

The City intends this EIR to be used by other local, State, and federal agencies in the approval process of related entitlements, approvals, and/or permits associated with development within the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan. These agencies are identified preliminarily below in Chapter 3. To the extent that the CEQA streamlining processes described above are available to such agencies, they may choose to rely on them as well.

2. Environmental Review Scoping

The scope of this Draft EIR for the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan was established by the City of Santa Rosa during the “scoping process” that considered comments from public agencies and the community regarding the project after carrying out an Notice of Preparation (NOP). The City circulated the NOP on July 25th, 2006 that described the proposed project and topical areas to be discussed in this EIR. Two public scoping meetings on the

EIR was held on August 9th and 16th, 2006 at the Mayor's Conference Room in Santa Rosa City Hall. The NOP was sent to a list of persons and agencies known to be interested in the project. The NOP comment period extended from July 25th, 2006 to August 28th, 2006. Because it was anticipated that the project may cause potentially significant impacts on the environment, the City directed this EIR to be prepared without the need for an initial study.

Based on the scoping process, the following environmental issue areas were found to involve potentially significant impacts and are addressed in this EIR:

- ◆ Aesthetics
- ◆ Air Quality
- ◆ Biological Resources
- ◆ Cultural Resources
- ◆ Geology and Soils (includes Mineral Resources)
- ◆ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ◆ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ◆ Land Use (includes Agricultural Resources)
- ◆ Noise
- ◆ Population and Housing
- ◆ Public Services and Recreation
- ◆ Transportation and Circulation
- ◆ Utilities and Infrastructure

C. Report Organization

This report is organized into the following chapters:

- ◆ **Chapter 1:** Introduction provides an introduction and overview of the document.
- ◆ **Chapter 2:** Report Summary provides a synopsis of the environmental impacts from the proposed project, describes recommended mitigation measures, and indicates the level of significance of impacts before and after mitigation.

- ◆ **Chapter 3:** Project Description describes the proposed project in detail, including the project location, surrounding uses, project characteristics, and required permits and approvals.
- ◆ **Chapter 4:** Environmental Evaluation provides an analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and presents recommended mitigation measures to reduce their significance, as necessary.
- ◆ **Chapter 5:** Alternatives to the Proposed Project considers three alternatives to the proposed project, including the CEQA-required “No Project Alternative.”
- ◆ **Chapter 6:** CEQA-Required Assessment Conclusions briefly explains the relationship of the project to other environmental issues included under CEQA’s purview.
- ◆ **Chapter 7:** Report Preparation identifies the preparers of the Draft EIR.

D. Environmental Review Process

As required by State Law, this Draft EIR will be available for review by the public and interested parties, agencies and organizations for a 45-day period. The City of Santa Rosa will hold public hearings with the Planning Commission and City Council on the EIR during and after the review period. The public is invited to attend the hearing to offer oral comments on this Draft EIR.

Comments on the Draft EIR may also be submitted in writing during the 45-day review period to:

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Following the close of the public comment period, a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) will be prepared to respond to all substantive comments related to environmental issues surrounding the project. The FEIR will be available for public review prior to consideration of its certification by the City of Santa Rosa City Council.

Once the City Council certifies the FEIR, it will also consider the project itself, which may be approved or denied. If the project is approved, the City Council may require mitigation measures specified in this EIR as conditions of project approval. Alternatively, they could require other mitigation measures deemed to be effective mitigations for the identified impacts, or it could find that the mitigation measures cannot be feasibly implemented. For any identified significant impacts for which no mitigation measure is feasible, the City Council will be required to adopt a finding that the impacts are considered acceptable because specific overriding considerations indicate that the project's benefits outweigh the impacts in question.

