

Chapter 3

Environmental Analysis

3.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Organization of the Technical Analysis

This chapter of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) presents a description of environmental conditions that may be affected by construction and operation of the proposed Menlo Gateway project and the proposed General Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment (GPA/ZOA) (proposed project) and the potential impacts that could occur with approval of the proposed project or the GPA/ZOA independent of the Menlo Gateway project. The environmental analysis has been prepared in accordance with CEQA, as amended (Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq.), and the State CEQA Guidelines. Each CEQA topic or environmental issue area in Chapter 3 is given its own section; information in each of these sections is presented in the following subsections:

- **Setting**—describes existing baseline conditions, including the environmental context and regulatory background.
- **Impact Assessment**—identifies standards of significance and evaluates how the proposed project would affect the baseline conditions. If the change to the baseline conditions would exceed the significance thresholds, a significant impact would result, and feasible mitigation measures to reduce, eliminate, or avoid the significant impacts are provided. The impact assessment evaluates both the project-specific and cumulative impacts of the project.

Classification of Impacts

In accordance with Section 15022(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, the City of Menlo Park uses the significance criteria designated by CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines (see Appendix G of the Guidelines), which are used to evaluate project impacts throughout this document. These criteria are listed at the beginning of the impact assessment subsection, under the subsection, “Standards of Significance.”

For each impact identified, a level of significance is determined using the following classifications:

- *Significant (S)* impacts include effects that exceed established or defined thresholds. For example, traffic volumes that exceed local intersection level-of-service standards would be considered a significant adverse impact.
- *Potentially significant (PS)* impacts include those cases where it is not precisely clear whether a significant effect would occur; the analysis in these instances conservatively assesses the credible worst-case conditions, but the discussion acknowledges that there is some uncertainty regarding the credible extent of the impact, given that certain final design-level details of a project cannot be known at this stage.

- *Less-than-significant (LTS)* impacts include effects that are noticeable but do not exceed established or defined thresholds. For example, traffic congestion caused by an increase in the development and density of population as a result of a project may be perceptible, but may not exceed acceptable thresholds or standards for traffic delays. Therefore, the effect would not be considered significant.
- *No impact (NI)* includes situations where there is no adverse effect on the environment.

In determining the level of significance, the analysis assumes that the proposed project would comply with all applicable laws, regulations, policies, and ordinances summarized in the Regulatory Setting subsection of each topic area. Therefore, compliance with applicable requirements is not identified as mitigation.

Enumeration of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts presented in this chapter of the DEIR are defined according to an alpha-numerical system that identifies the environmental issue. For example, NO-1 denotes the presentation of the first impact in the Noise section. The two-letter codes used to identify the environmental issues discussed in this section are:

- AE – Aesthetics
- AQ – Air Quality
- BR – Biological Resources
- CR – Cultural Resources
- HY – Hydrology/Flood Hazards
- HM – Hazardous Materials
- LU – Land Use
- NO – Noise
- PH – Population and Housing
- PS – Public Services
- TR –Traffic and Circulation
- UT – Utilities and Service Systems
- CC – Climate Change

Mitigation measures are numbered to correspond to the impacts they address; e.g., Mitigation Measure BR-1.1 refers to the first mitigation for Impact 1 in the Biological Resources section.

Environmental Approach to Addressing Project-Specific and Cumulative Impacts

The project consists of a proposed change to the City's General Plan to create a new land use designation and a change to the City's Municipal Code to amend the zoning ordinance to include a new zoning district. In addition, the project includes a proposed development plan to construct new office/R&D, hotel, health club, restaurant, retail/community facilities and parking facilities. For the purposes of the EIR analysis, the worst-case scenario assumes maximum development permitted under the proposed new zoning district. Most of the analysis evaluates the project assuming the worst-case scenario, but in some instances the proposed development plan itself is also evaluated (e.g., Utilities and Service Systems, Hydrology and Water Quality). The Aesthetics Section evaluates development of the proposed buildings included as part of the development application. Please see Table 2-1 in Chapter 2, Project Description, for the maximum allowable development under the proposed M-3 district and Table 2-3 which includes development proposed under the development application.

In addition to the evaluation of project-specific impacts, CEQA also requires an evaluation of cumulative impacts. In accordance with CEQA, the discussion of cumulative impacts must reflect the severity of the impacts and the likelihood of their occurrence; however, the discussion need not be as detailed as the discussion of environmental impacts attributable to the project alone. According to Section 15355 of the CEQA Guidelines:

“Cumulative impacts” refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.

- (a) The individual effects may be changes resulting from a single project or a number of separate projects.
- (b) The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.

Throughout this DEIR, cumulative impacts are denoted by a CM suffix to the impact number (i.e., Impact NO-1CM). An analysis of cumulative impacts follows the project-specific impacts and mitigation measures evaluation in each section. An introductory statement that defines the cumulative context being analyzed for respective sections (e.g., the City of Menlo Park, the Bay Area Air Basin) is included at the beginning of the cumulative impacts section. In some instances, an impact may be considered less than significant as a result of the implementation of the proposed project, but would be considered potentially significant in combination with development of the surrounding area. In some instances, a potentially significant impact may result on a project level, but would not result in a cumulatively considerable impact.