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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 EIR PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, this **environmental impact report** (EIR) has been prepared by the City of Redwood City to describe the environmental consequences of the City-proposed Downtown Precise Plan. The Downtown Precise Plan project, as articulated in the *Public Review Draft Downtown Precise Plan*, summer 2006 (Draft Precise Plan), is comprised of objectives, goals, strategies, actions, and development regulations intended to establish a contemporary vision and set forth the specific land use parameters, development standards, and urban design criteria necessary to facilitate and guide successful development within the City's approximately 193-acre Downtown over the next approximately 15 years.

The proposed overall Precise Plan objective is to assist the City and the City's Redevelopment Agency in providing for, and encouraging buildout of, a unique and robust Downtown. The Precise Plan intent is to provide for restructuring land use, density, architectural character, streetscapes, and parking provisions as necessary to create a well-designed, contemporary, and financially viable Downtown. The Draft Precise Plan includes standards (mandatory) and guidelines (preferred, not mandatory) for site development (e.g., land use, building heights, setbacks, frontages); streets, landscaping, and public space; parking; architecture; and signage in the Precise Plan area.

A stated specific objective of the Precise Plan is to provide housing concentrated in the Downtown. The Precise Plan, in concert with the City's Draft General Plan *Housing Element*, is intended to provide for the expansion of city housing choices by encouraging compact, transit-accessible, pedestrian-oriented housing and mixed use (commercial/housing) development in the Downtown at densities and heights greater than currently permitted. The Draft Precise Plan stipulates that this housing and mixed use development be conveniently located near public transportation, shopping, employment, recreation, and other community facilities.

The specific City approvals required to implement the proposed Downtown Precise Plan include:

- (1) adoption of the Draft Precise Plan;
- (2) adoption of associated amendments to the 1990 Redwood City Strategic General Plan (text and map) as necessary to ensure consistency between the General Plan and Precise Plan policies for land use mix, density, and other Downtown characteristics; and
- (3) approval of a rezoning of the Precise Plan area to the City's "P" (Planned Community District) zone to reflect and implement the land uses and development standards specified by the Precise Plan, and to allow housing and mixed use development at Precise Plan-identified locations.

This EIR has been prepared by the City to provide the CEQA-required environmental documentation for each of these Downtown Precise Plan-related approvals. As used in this EIR, the terms "Redwood City Downtown Precise Plan," "Downtown Precise Plan," "Draft Precise Plan," "Precise Plan," and "project" are intended to be synonymous and refer to all aspects of the current Precise Plan proposal, including all of the approval actions listed above. This EIR is intended to serve as a public information and disclosure document identifying those environmental impacts associated with the proposed project that are expected to be significant, and describing mitigation measures and alternatives that could minimize or eliminate significant adverse impacts and increase beneficial effects.<sup>1</sup> Such impacts and needed mitigations are discussed in this EIR to the level of detail necessary to allow reasoned decisions about the project and conditions of project approval. As a result of the information in this EIR, the City Council of Redwood City may act to approve or deny these various project actions, and/or to establish any associated requirements or conditions of approval considered necessary to mitigate identified project impacts on the environment.

As the Lead Agency, the City also intends this EIR to serve as the CEQA-required environmental documentation for consideration of this project by other Responsible Agencies<sup>2</sup> and Trustee Agencies<sup>3</sup> (e.g., San Mateo County Office of Environmental Health, Regional Water Quality Control Board) which may have limited discretionary authority over future site-specific development proposals facilitated by this project.

## 1.2 PROGRAM EIR APPROACH AND ASSUMPTIONS

### 1.2.1 Program EIR

This EIR has also been formulated as a **program EIR**. A program EIR is a particular EIR approach authorized by section 15168 (Program EIR) of the CEQA Guidelines for use in documenting the environmental implications of community general plans, redevelopment plans, specific plans, precise plans, and other planning "programs" which involve a series of interrelated actions taken by a governmental authority that can be characterized as one project to achieve an overall program goal. The CEQA-established program EIR concept and authority are described in more detail in appendix 20.1 of this EIR (Program EIR Authority). The approach taken in preparing this EIR under the program EIR authority has been to describe the anticipated broad-based, project areawide and community-wide impacts of the proposed Redwood City Downtown Precise Plan. The EIR describes the cumulative, aggregate effects of the combination of potential Precise Plan actions and associated development scenarios on project areawide and community-wide environmental conditions. Such impacts are described at a level of detail consistent with the level of detail provided in the *Public Review Draft Downtown Precise Plan* document (summer 2006).

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<sup>1</sup>CEQA Guidelines section 15149(b).

<sup>2</sup>Under CEQA Guidelines, the term "Responsible Agency" includes all public agencies, other than the Lead Agency, which have discretionary approval power over aspects of the project for which the Lead Agency has prepared an EIR.

<sup>3</sup>Under CEQA Guidelines, the term "Trustee Agency" means a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by the project which are held in trust by the people of California.

As also set forth under CEQA, the scope of this program EIR is limited to the description of those project-related impacts and mitigation measures under the above topic headings that can be identified at this time, without being highly speculative. The more detailed impacts of future individual, site-specific, infrastructure, residential, commercial, and mixed use development actions that may be facilitated by the project, but are not yet specifically described, are not described in this program EIR; rather, the CEQA-required environmental review of such subsequent individual actions will be undertaken at a later time, if and when such actions come before the City in the form of a specific public improvement project or development application. At that time, when the details of the individual action are sufficiently defined, the action will be subject to its own, project-specific, environmental determination by the City that either: (1) it is fully covered within the scope of this program EIR, (2) it is exempt from CEQA (under sections 21080 et al. of the Public Resources Code), (3) it warrants preparation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration (under sections 21064.5 et al. of the Public Resources Code), or (4) it warrants preparation of a focused EIR limited to certain site-specific issues. It is intended that this program EIR will provide the City-certified environmental document for use by the City as a baseline and context for "tiering" any such subsequent environmental documentation.

### **1.2.2 Impact Assessment Assumptions**

The purpose of this program EIR is to evaluate the likely cumulative environmental consequences (impacts and benefits) with full realization of the Downtown buildout potential anticipated with adoption of the proposed Precise Plan, and to describe mitigation measures and alternatives that could minimize or eliminate potentially significant adverse environmental impacts and increase beneficial effects.<sup>1</sup> The Precise Plan area buildout assumptions used as the basis for the impact analyses in this program EIR are derived from the land use and site development standards, architectural standards/guidelines, parking recommendations, and streetscape design standards/guidelines described by the Draft Precise Plan document.

The impact analyses in this EIR are based on the conservative (most intensive development) assumption that the Precise Plan will be fully successful in meeting its objectives and, as a result, downtown Redwood City will reach full buildout under the parameters of either a "Maximum Intensity" or "Moderate Intensity" Precise Plan development limitation alternative over the next approximately 15 years. Each impact analysis chapter in this EIR (land use and planning; population and housing; aesthetics and visual resources; cultural and historic resources; transportation and circulation; public services, utilities, and infrastructure; etc.) includes a description of related existing conditions, followed by a description of Precise Plan-facilitated buildout conditions and associated impacts and mitigation needs, under either the "Maximum Intensity" or the "Moderate Intensity" buildout alternative.

### **1.2.3 Impact Assessment Baseline**

CEQA Guidelines section 15125(a) and (e) stipulate that the existing environmental setting (the environmental conditions in the project vicinity at the time the environmental analysis is begun) should constitute the baseline physical conditions by which it is determined whether an impact is significant. Pursuant to this guideline, all impact assessments in this EIR are based on comparison of the projected future "with project" conditions (i.e., buildout under either the Precise Plan "Maximum Intensity" or "Moderate Intensity" alternative) with the existing

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<sup>1</sup>CEQA Guidelines section 15149(b).

environmental setting rather than with the future "without project" condition (i.e., buildout under the existing Redwood City Strategic General Plan). For a generalized comparison of anticipated future "with project" conditions with future "without project" conditions (i.e., with what would be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the Precise Plan were not approved), see the discussion of Alternative 4 (No Project: Existing Land Use Policy) in chapter 18 of this EIR (Alternatives Evaluation Overview).

### 1.3 EIR SCOPE--SIGNIFICANT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

As required by the state CEQA Guidelines, the scope of this EIR includes all environmental issues to be resolved and all areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency (the City), including those issues and concerns identified as possibly significant by the City in its preliminary environmental review (Initial Study<sup>1</sup>) of the project, and by other agencies, organizations, and individuals in response to the City's Notice of Preparation<sup>2</sup> (dated April 28, 2006). These environmental concerns include (listed in the order that these topics are addressed in this EIR):

1. Land use and planning,
2. Population and housing,
3. Aesthetics and visual resources,
4. Cultural and historic resources,
5. Transportation and circulation,
6. Public services, utilities, and infrastructure,
7. Noise,
8. Air quality,
9. Hazards and hazardous materials,
10. Biological resources, and
11. Geology and soils.

### 1.4 "SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS" AND OTHER KEY EIR TERMINOLOGY

This EIR identifies those adverse environmental impacts that are expected to be "significant," and corresponding mitigation measures warranted to eliminate or reduce those impacts to less-than-significant levels. Where it is determined in this report that a particular impact cannot be mitigated to a less-than-significant level, the EIR identifies that impact as "unavoidable." Section 17.2 of the EIR (Unavoidable Significant Adverse Impacts) includes a summary list of all significant adverse project impacts identified as "unavoidable." Identified significant adverse impacts that are not listed in section 17.2 as "unavoidable" can be mitigated to a less-than-significant level by implementation of the associated mitigation measure or measures identified in this EIR.

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<sup>1</sup>The City's Initial Study for the project is included in appendix 20.2 of this EIR.

<sup>2</sup>The Notice of Preparation (NOP) is a CEQA-required brief notice sent by the Lead Agency to notify the Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and potentially involved federal agencies that the Lead Agency plans to prepare an EIR for the project, and solicits guidance regarding EIR scope and content. The City's NOP for the Downtown Precise Plan project is included in appendix 20.2 of this EIR.

These particular EIR terms ("significant," "unavoidable," "mitigation") and other key CEQA terminology used in this report are defined in the box on the following page.

## **DEFINITIONS OF KEY EIR TERMINOLOGY**

### **Significant/Potentially Significant Impact**

"Significant effect on the environment" means a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance. (CEQA Guidelines, section 15382.) *"An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. A social or economic change related to a physical change may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15382.)

### **Significant Cumulative Impact**

"Cumulative impacts" are defined as *"two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15355.)

### **Unavoidable Significant Impact**

"Unavoidable significant impacts" are defined as those significant adverse environmental impacts for which either no mitigation or only partial mitigation is feasible. If the project is to be approved without imposing an alternative design, the Lead Agency (the City) must include in the record of the project approval a written statement of the specific reasons to support its action--i.e., a "statement of overriding considerations." (CEQA Guidelines, sections 15126.2(b) and 15093(b).)

### **Significance Criteria**

The criteria used in this EIR to determine whether an impact is or is not *"significant"* are based on (a) CEQA-stipulated "mandatory findings of significance"--i.e., where any of the specific conditions occur under which the Legislature and the Secretary of Resources have determined to constitute a potentially significant effect on the environment, which are listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15065; (b) the relationship of the project effect to the adopted policies, ordinances and standards of the City and of responsible agencies; and/or (c) commonly accepted practice and the professional judgment of the EIR authors and Lead Agency staff.

### **Mitigation Measures**

For each significant impact, the EIR must identify a specific "mitigation" measure or set of measures capable of *"(a) avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action; (b) minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation; (c) rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the impacted environment; (d) reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation or maintenance operations during the life of the action; or (e) compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15370.)

SOURCE: Wagstaff and Associates, 2006.

## 1.5 REPORT ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

The impact and mitigation information in this EIR is generally organized in chapters under the eleven environmental headings listed above (land use and planning; population and housing; etc.). Each environmental chapter includes sections describing the following for that issue:

- (1) the environmental setting;
- (2) pertinent plans and policies; and
- (3) impacts and mitigation measures (impacts anticipated with the proposed project--i.e., under either the Maximum Intensity or Moderate Intensity project buildout scenarios, and measures recommended to mitigate potential significant adverse impacts).

In addition, this report includes a chapter summarizing the EIR information in terms of various **CEQA-required assessment considerations**, including project "growth-inducing impacts," "unavoidable significant adverse impacts," "irreversible environmental changes," "cumulative impacts," and "effects found not to be significant" (chapter 17); and an **alternatives evaluation overview** (chapter 18).