
4. GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

To understand the regional environmental background into which the proposed Downtown Precise Plan would be introduced, the project's existing local and regional setting and associated City of Redwood City planning objectives are briefly summarized below. The EIR Project Description (chapter 3) and each EIR environmental issue chapter (chapters 5 through 15) include detailed environmental setting information.

Project Location. As illustrated on Figures 3.1 through 3.3 in chapter 3 of this EIR (Project Description), the proposed Precise Plan area ("Downtown") is located in Redwood City, at the eastern edge of San Mateo County. The City of Redwood City is bounded generally by San Francisco Bay to the east; the cities of Menlo Park and Atherton, and unincorporated County areas, to the south and west; the city of Woodside to the west; and the city of San Carlos and unincorporated County areas to the north and west. Regional access to the Precise Plan area is provided by U.S. Highway 101 (Bayshore Freeway) via the Whipple Avenue/Veterans Boulevard interchange and the Woodside Expressway (State Highway 84) interchange. Subregional access is provided by El Camino Real (State Route 82), a north-south roadway that extends from San Jose to San Francisco.

Redwood City is located at the geographic center of the San Francisco Bay Area's Peninsula subregion, approximately 25 miles from both San Francisco and San Jose. To the north are San Mateo and the San Mateo Bridge; to the south are Palo Alto and the Dumbarton Bridge. The City's downtown includes a Caltrain station that provides inter- and extra-regional transportation service between San Francisco and Gilroy, about 30 miles south of San Jose.

Population and Land Use. Redwood City has an area of approximately 19 square miles of land and an estimated population of 77,300 (ABAG Projections 2005, ABAG, December 2004). The City core, comprised of the Downtown, an adjacent workplace district, and two historic residential neighborhoods, is located between U.S. 101 and El Camino Real. The City core and Downtown incorporate a segment of El Camino Real, the oldest and most extensive north-south arterial in California. Residential neighborhoods, lying predominantly to the west of El Camino Real below the nearby coastal foothills, comprise the remaining bulk of the city west of U.S. 101. Commercial, large-scale office, multifamily development, marshlands, and the San Francisco Bay shoreline comprise the land use pattern within the City boundary on the eastern side of U.S. 101.

Downtown is the City's most urban district. The intersection of Broadway and Main Street historically has been the center of Redwood City since 1854, and the Downtown area has always been the City's government, commercial, and community-gathering center. Predominantly commercial land uses lie to the north and south of the Downtown; low-density residential neighborhoods comprise the remainder of the surrounding area.

Visual Environment. The existing visual environment of the Redwood City Downtown is composed of a mix of old and new commercial retail, office, institutional, civic, and residential development surrounded by less intensive commercial, office, R&D, light industrial, and

residential neighborhoods. No coherent pattern of land use, building form, architecture, streetscape or signage treatments has been established.

Historic Resources. Downtown Redwood City contains numerous historic resources as defined by CEQA, and potential historic resources, including industrial, municipal, commercial, office, and residential building types. Forty-two significant and potentially significant historic properties are located in the Precise Plan area, and another 12 are adjacent to the Precise Plan boundary.

Noise Environment. The primary noise sources in the Precise Plan area are automobile and truck traffic along downtown streets. Intermittent aircraft overflights and Caltrain activity are also audible. In addition, ambient noise is generated by existing commercial development throughout the area.

Air Quality. The Precise Plan area's location near San Francisco Bay has a major influence on the climate and air quality of the area. Bay breezes from the north dominate the area during the spring and summer months. The pollution potential of the Plan area is moderate compared to other portions of the Bay Area. Ventilation is relatively good; however, transport of pollutants from upwind urban areas is common. During periods of light or calm winds, which typically occur in the fall and winter months, the entire Bay Area air basin is subject to stagnation and poor air quality.

Biological Resources. Urban landscape is the primary habitat found in the Precise Plan area. This "habitat unit" is dominated by introduced, opportunistic species adapted to high levels of disturbance. Salt marsh vegetation, a sensitive vegetation type and habitat for special-status species, occurs along the banks of Redwood Creek in the downtown area.

Geology and Soils. The Precise Plan area is within a broad structural trough of the California Coast Ranges that extends from an area south of Hollister northward beyond San Pablo Bay. This structural depression, which contains San Francisco Bay, has been subsiding and filling with alluvium during the past five to eight million years. No active or probable active fault traverses the Plan area.

The Downtown Precise Plan. In the interest of achieving a unique and robust Downtown, the City has determined that formulation of a Downtown Precise Plan is warranted to provide for a restructuring of Downtown land use, density, architectural character, streetscapes, and parking provisions. Towards that end, the City retained an urban design consultant, Freedman Tung & Bottomley, to assist City staff with preparation of the Precise Plan. The resulting *Public Review Draft Downtown Precise Plan* is the subject of this draft environmental impact report. The Draft Precise Plan is intended to reflect the results of extensive community dialogue, including public study sessions, and various background studies conducted by staff, Freedman Tung & Bottomley, and their technical consultants (traffic, infrastructure, historic resources, etc.). The Public Review Draft Precise Plan was released in late summer of 2006.

A stated particular objective of the Precise Plan is to provide more 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 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.