



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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Marin County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission
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SUBJECT: Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the Housing and Safety Element Update to the Marin Countywide Plan

Dear Supervisors and Commissioners,

Building and Safety
Environmental Health Services
Planning
Environmental Review
Housing
Sustainability
Code Enforcement
GIS
Federal Grants

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that after a brief presentation of the proposed project, EIR process, and summary of principal findings of the Draft EIR by staff, your Board and Commission open the public hearing to public comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIR. At the conclusion of public testimony, staff recommends that your Board and Commission:

1. Close the public hearing on the Draft EIR;
2. Discuss issues regarding the project's impacts that are of primary concern to your Board and Commission; and
3. Instruct the EIR consultant to prepare the Final EIR based upon the written responses to all of the oral comments received at the Draft EIR hearing, as well as all of the written comments received during the public review and comment period.

www.marincounty.org/cda

SUMMARY:

Project Overview

The proposed Project is comprised of updates to the Housing Element and Safety Element of the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan (2007 CWP) in compliance with the requirements for General Plans in State Planning and Zoning Law; associated amendments to other elements in the CWP as necessary to ensure consistency; and amendments to the Marin County Code to provide for effective implementation of the project (collectively the "Project"), and is described in more detail in *Chapter 3, Project Description*, of the Draft EIR. Both updates will be adopted as amendments to and incorporated into the 2007 CWP.

The Project proposes goals, policies, and programs that will provide County staff and discretionary bodies with a foundation for decisions related to long-

range planning for housing development and safety related to climate change and resiliency planning.

Marin County has prepared an update to the Housing Element (Housing Element Update) for the planning period 2023 through 2031. As part of the Housing Element Update, the Project proposes locations for housing that would facilitate up to 5,124 new housing units to be developed, which meets the County's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) as well as a reasonably foreseeable number of density bonus units and a buffer number of additional units recommended by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. The Project also proposes rezoning of sites at these locations as necessary to accommodate and enable the development of these new housing units.

The County has also prepared an update to the Safety Element (Safety Element Update) to address climate change resilience. SB 379 requires all counties and cities to review and update their general plan safety elements with climate change adaptation measures. The update consists of the following three parts: 1) A vulnerability assessment that identifies the risks climate change poses to the local jurisdictions; 2) Identification of adaptation and resiliency goals, policies, and objectives; and 3) Feasible implementation measures. The Safety Element Update also addresses other legislative mandates to reduce fire and flood risk and plan for emergency evacuation.

Type and Purpose of EIR

This Draft EIR has been prepared as a program EIR for the Housing Element and Safety Element Updates to the 2007 CWP. A program EIR is a type of EIR authorized by Section 15168 (Program EIR) of the State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for use in documenting the environmental impacts of community general plans, specific plans, precise plans, and other planning "programs."

This EIR describes the reasonably foreseeable countywide impacts of the Project. Further, this EIR describes the cumulative, aggregate effects of the Project along with other reasonably foreseeable projects, and describes impacts at a level of detail consistent with the level of detail of the proposed Project.

In accordance with the definition of a "program EIR," the EIR evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the collective, overall development potential and not the future site-specific impacts of any future individual development project, since no such projects are proposed at this time.

The adoption of the proposed Housing and Safety Element Updates would not result in the immediate construction of any new development or approval

of any new site-specific projects. All future development projects proposed within the County planning area that require discretionary approval by the County would require site-specific applications subject to the County's development review and approval processes, including environmental documentation to comply with CEQA where applicable, and other environmental requirements (e.g., County, State). Non-discretionary (ministerial) projects must be consistent with State and County requirements. Public projects would be required to be consistent with CWP policies and also to comply with CEQA; compliance with the County Development Code would not be mandatory.

Subsequent activities undertaken by the County and applications for future development projects to implement the Housing and Safety Element Updates will be examined for consistency with this program EIR to determine the appropriate level of environmental review required under CEQA. As with all projects proposed in the unincorporated areas of the County, projects will be reviewed to determine whether they are subject to CEQA compliance at such time as the County receives a permit application for the project and the details of the individual project are defined.

The County has prepared this program EIR to allow for streamlining future CEQA compliance by providing program-level information and data about the housing sites, and by identifying potentially significant environmental impacts and associated mitigation measures that may be used in analyzing future site-specific development projects. It is anticipated that proposals found to be consistent with this program EIR will be able to rely on its analysis as appropriate. Future development proposals with specific additional impacts not analyzed in the program EIR may "tier" off the analysis by focusing only on those additional impacts.

Draft EIR Process

As part of a larger consultant agreement to prepare the Housing and Safety Element Updates, on May 18, 2021, the County independently selected and contracted with the consulting firm, MIG, to prepare the EIR for the Project. County staff released a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on December 8, 2021, to notify agencies and interested members of the public that an EIR was being prepared for the Project.

County staff held a public scoping meeting on the Project on January 11, 2022. During both the scoping period and at the scoping meeting, interested parties were invited to submit their comments on issues that should be included in the scope of the EIR analysis. A compilation of comments received during the 45-day scoping period and at the January 11 meeting are included in *Chapter 2, Summary*, of the Draft EIR.

County staff distributed the Draft EIR, a Notice of Completion (NOC), and notice of public hearing on the Draft EIR on October 7, 2022, to members of the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, State Clearinghouse, state and local agencies and special districts, surrounding property owners, and other interested groups and individuals. The NOC and notice of public hearing were published in a newspaper of general circulation to begin a 45-day public review and comment period on the adequacy of the Draft EIR, which concludes on November 21, 2022.

DRAFT EIR FINDINGS:

Identified Impacts

The Draft EIR identified a total of 18 project impacts as significant or potentially significant, including 14 project impacts that were also determined to be cumulative impacts. Table 2-2 in *Chapter 2, Summary*, of the Draft EIR contains the list of compiled impacts and mitigation measures. Feasible mitigation measures are available to eliminate or reduce four of the potentially significant project impacts to a less-than-significant level. These impacts were in the topical areas of Biological Resources and Cultural/Historic Resources.

The Draft EIR finds that the project would result in 15 impacts that are significant and unavoidable with regard to the following topical areas: Aesthetics (effects on scenic vistas; existing visual character and quality), Air Quality (local air plan conflict; exceedance in criteria air pollutants/toxic air contaminant emissions), Cultural/Tribal Cultural and Historic Resources (effects on historic resources), Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Energy (GHG emission quantity & inconsistency with adopted plans), Noise and Vibration (traffic noise levels), Transportation (impacts related to vehicle miles traveled), and Utilities and Service Systems (water supply; wastewater treatment capacity).

Cumulative Impacts

The Draft EIR identifies a total of 14 cumulative impacts, which are all significant and unavoidable.

Three impacts related to water supply were found to be significant and unavoidable on both a project and cumulative level. No feasible mitigation was available for these impacts. Given the substantial public interest expressed to date in water supply constraints, these impacts are detailed below:

Impact 19-2a: Project and Cumulative Water Supply Impacts: West Marin Community Service Districts and North Marin Water District - West Marin. Parts of the unincorporated County are served by community

service districts and water districts whose supplies are dependent upon water obtained from local wells and streams. Under drought conditions, water in the wells and streams has decreased to levels such that the districts have imposed restrictions for existing customers and moratoriums on new connections. Multiple new connections can result in demands in excess of available supply. Bolinas Community Public Utility District and Inverness Public Utility District do not have sufficient water supplies available to serve the Project or cumulative (Project and Districts' commitments outside of the Project) scenarios during normal, dry, and multiple dry years. This represents *a potentially significant impact that cannot be mitigated.*

Impact 19-2b: Project and Cumulative Water Supply Impacts: North Marin Water District and Marin Municipal Water District (now named Marin Water). Parts of the unincorporated County are served by North Marin Water District (NMWD), the majority of whose supplies are dependent upon water purchased from Sonoma County Water Agency and piped into the County. Other parts of the unincorporated County are served by Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD), the majority of whose supplies are dependent upon water stored in Marin County reservoirs. When these Districts have access to full annual water entitlements and full reservoir capacity, they are able to accommodate population growth as indicated in their "2020 Urban Water Management Plan for North Marin Water District" and "MMWD Water Resources Plan 2040."

However, due to drought impacts in Sonoma County, NMWD is unable to receive its full annual entitlement from Sonoma County Water Agency and has adopted an ordinance imposing moratoriums on new connections in order to work within its restricted supply. Additionally, until recently, MMWD had imposed restrictions on irrigation connections for new development due to water shortages in its reservoirs as a result of multiple years of less than average rainfall. MMWD's restriction on irrigation connections was lifted in 2022 because large storm events in the winter of 2021-2022 filled the reservoirs.

Because there is future uncertainty about the amount of water that would be available for the Districts to supply to customers during the current, ongoing drought, and the Districts are in the early stages of seeking alternate water sources, possible multiple new connections proposed in the Project and cumulative (Project and Districts' commitments outside of the Project) scenarios could result in demands in excess of available supply during dry and multiple dry years, which would be *a potentially significant impact that cannot be mitigated.*

Impact 19-2c: Project and Cumulative Water Supply Impacts: Individual Water Supply Systems. Parts of the unincorporated County are outside of community service and water district service areas, and developed parcels

need to rely on private, individual water supply systems with water obtained from wells and local streams. The Project includes sites which will need to rely on individual water systems.

State and local requirements for small water systems will help ensure that the number of units in a development do not exceed the capacity of new or existing wells to supply water. System capacity will be based on the water supply investigations required for individual developments at the time they are proposed. Under drought conditions, groundwater can decrease to levels below the supply needed to sustain development. This could result in demands in excess of available supply during normal, dry, and multiple dry years, which would be a *potentially significant impact that cannot be mitigated*.

Major Conclusions

The Draft EIR reaches the following major conclusions:

- Future potential development facilitated by the Project would result in 15 significant unavoidable impacts. This EIR identified mitigation measures for each impact, if mitigation was available. In some instances, the mitigation would not be sufficient to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level and in other cases it is not definite whether the mitigation would be sufficient due to the uncertainty of future conditions that could exist at the time a development proposal is submitted.
- The Board must adopt a Housing Element that meets the RHNA in order to comply with State law, and the Proposed Project as well as the identified Project Alternatives will result in significant and unavoidable impacts. Therefore, as part of an approval action, decision-makers will need to adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations, determining that the benefits outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Project.
- The Project is currently inconsistent with the interrelated MTC/ABAG Plan Bay Area 2050, the CARB 2017 Scoping Plan, and the Marin County 2030 Climate Action Plan (CAP) based on the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) that would result from the State-mandated RHNA for unincorporated Marin County.
- Some potential housing sites proposed by the Project include land designated as Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Land. Uses not permitted or conditionally permitted by the County Code would require a change in land use designation, which would be a conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use, which would be a significant impact. However, several adopted CWP policies that protect

agricultural uses would ensure that any potential impacts related to the conversion or change in farmland to non-agricultural are addressed, reducing the impact to less-than-significant. For example, Policy AG-1.1 would limit residential development to that which is reasonably related to agriculture, and Policy AG-1.4 would apply non-agricultural zoning only in areas where conflict with agricultural uses will be minimized.

- Water suppliers in the county experience supply deficits during extended drought periods, and the total number of housing units proposed under the Project would increase demands in some areas of the county that already are experiencing supply deficits.
- Some areas of the county have limited wastewater disposal capacity, in some instances due to limited septic expansion opportunities. Housing units proposed under the Project in those areas would exacerbate constrained systems.

Alternatives

To provide a basis for further understanding of the environmental effects of a proposed project and possible approaches to reducing its identified significant impacts, CEQA requires an EIR to also "...describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives."

Pursuant to CEQA, the Draft EIR identifies and evaluates the following three alternatives to the Project:

- **Alternative 1: No Project – Existing Countywide Plan.** State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e) requires an EIR to analyze the specific alternative of "No Project." The purpose of describing and analyzing the No Project alternative is to allow decision-makers to compare the impacts of approving a proposed project with the impacts of not approving it. The No Project Alternative shall discuss the existing conditions at the time the EIR Notice of Preparation is published, as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services.

Additionally, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(3)(a) states that when the project is the revision of an existing land use or regulatory plan, the "No Project" alternative will be the continuation of the existing plan. Typically, this is a situation where new projects would be proposed under the existing plan. Thus, the impacts of the proposed project would be compared to the impacts that would occur under the existing plan. The Draft EIR found that the No Project Alternative does not meet any of the

Housing and Safety Elements Update project objectives, including objectives related to legal requirements for Housing Elements, and therefore is not considered a feasible project alternative.

- **Alternative 2: Reduced VMT Alternative.** The Reduced Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Alternative would locate most of the proposed housing sites, except those screened out by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research “Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA” (December 2018), to within an approximate two-mile radius of the U.S. 101 corridor, including 0.5 miles on either side of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to Fairfax. The intent of this alternative is to reduce the significant unavoidable VMT impact, and the resulting significant unavoidable air quality and GHG impacts, by lowering the average per capita VMT. This alternative would place more housing sites nearer to the urban core of Marin County and closer to transit and employment, and remove some potential housing sites that are in the more rural areas of the unincorporated county. Compared to other parts of the county, the urban core of Marin County would (1) tend to have lower VMT per capita, and (2) have substantially better VMT mitigation options available because of proximity to mass transit and other transportation demand management (TDM) solutions. This alternative would result in lower VMT per capita than the proposed Project; however, it would still result in significant unavoidable VMT, air quality, and GHG impacts.
- **Alternative 3: Reduced Utility Impact Alternative (Water & Wastewater).** The Reduced Utility Impact Alternative would relocate housing sites from service districts that do not have the capacity to serve new development to areas closer to the City-Centered/Baylands Corridor where water and wastewater service providers have greater capacity. This alternative would also relocate housing sites that would require significant infrastructure improvements in order to avoid the impacts of infrastructure construction. This alternative focuses on reducing impacts on the environment due to construction of new infrastructure for public utility districts providing water or wastewater treatment to unincorporated areas of Marin County. This alternative would have significant and unavoidable impacts that are similar to the proposed Project.

The State CEQA Guidelines require that an EIR’s analysis of alternatives identify the “Environmentally Superior Alternative” among all of those considered. Based on a comparison of impacts discussed in *Chapter 22, Alternatives*, the Draft EIR finds that Alternative 2, Reduced VMT Alternative, would allow the County to obtain most of the Housing Element Update objectives and all of the Safety Element Update objectives while reducing some but not all environmental impacts and would therefore be the “environmentally superior alternative.” Alternative 2 is the environmentally superior alternative because it reduces more impacts (VMT, Air Quality, and GHG) and substantially meets the County’s stated objectives for the Project.

However, Alternative 2 would not fully meet the objective of providing housing throughout unincorporated county communities because it would reduce the number of units in the Project Sites Inventory by 479 by eliminating the larger housing sites in the more rural communities of the county. The total number of housing units under this alternative would still meet the County's RHNA, and smaller sites that can be screened out from the CEQA VMT analysis would still be part of the alternative. Although this alternative would reduce the Project's per capita VMT and the resulting air quality and GHG emissions by 10 to 15 percent, the VMT, air quality, and GHG impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

COMMENTS RECEIVED:

Comments received prior to the packet distribution date for the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission hearing on the Draft EIR are attached to this letter (Attachment # 1). Any additional comments received after that time will be forwarded to the Board and Commission at, or prior to, the hearing date.

PUBLIC HEARING AND NEXT STEPS:

The purpose of the public hearing is for the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission to receive oral comments on the adequacy of the Draft EIR. Following the public hearing and the close of the public review and comment period on November 21, 2022, the EIR consultant will compile written responses to all comments received during the 45-day review period, which, along with the Draft EIR and any resulting changes to the Draft, will represent the Final EIR.

The Final EIR will then be released for public review prior to recommendation for certification of the Final EIR by the Planning Commission, and ultimately consideration of the Final EIR for certification by the Board of Supervisors. In order to approve the Project or an alternative to the Project, the Board of Supervisors will need to certify that the Final EIR complies with CEQA, make Findings, adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations.

EQUITY IMPACT:

The County believes in equitable communities, where all community members have access to healthy affordable housing. Evidence shows that access to stable affordable housing in communities of opportunity has broad positive impacts. It can lead to better health and education outcomes and higher lifetime earnings, especially for children. Under state law, the Housing Element is required to include an assessment of fair housing to address barriers to fair housing choice and identify sites and programs that provide

housing opportunity for lower income families and individuals near high-quality schools, employment opportunities, and public transportation. State law also requires local governments to identify meaningful goals to address the impacts of systemic issues such as residential segregation, housing cost burden, and unequal educational or employment opportunities to the extent these issues create and/or perpetuate discrimination against protected groups. These requirements will be incorporated into the Housing Element Update, including a site selection recommendation.

Further, the County followed the State Adaptation Planning Guide for the Safety Element Update, in part because it provides clear guidance on assessing climate change impacts on vulnerable populations. The Vulnerability Assessment prepared as part of the Safety Element Update defines several vulnerable populations that are at greater risk from climate change impacts because they lack adaptive capacity. The assessment of climate change impacts on a range of populations provides the necessary steps for considering new policies that address inequities in how different populations are impacted by and able to respond to climate change.

Equity considerations have been incorporated into the Project and are reflected in the Project Objectives identified in the EIR. The process of adopting Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations allows your Board and Planning Commission to reflect and acknowledge equity and other important policies in consideration of projects that could result in significant unavoidable impacts under CEQA.

FISCAL/STAFFING IMPACT:

There is no general fund impact, because funding to complete the Housing and Safety Element Update EIR is available in CDA's budget.

REVIEWED BY:

<input type="checkbox"/> Department of Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> County Counsel	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

SIGNATURE:


Rachel Reid
Environmental Coordinator


Sarah Jones
Acting Director

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Letters of Comment on the Draft EIR