

# Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report has been prepared to identify and evaluate the potential environmental effects of adopting the proposed Castro Valley General Plan. This chapter describes the purpose of and overall approach to preparation of the EIR.

## **I.1 PURPOSE OF EIR**

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Alameda County is the lead agency responsible for ensuring that the proposed Castro Valley General Plan, which will be part of the Alameda County General Plan, is adopted in compliance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et. seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3). The EIR has been prepared to inform Alameda County decision-makers, County staff, other interested agencies, and the general public about the proposed plan and the potential environmental consequences of its approval. The DEIR also examines alternatives to the proposed plan and identifies measures, most of them incorporated in the Plan itself, to reduce or avoid possible significant impacts of implementing the proposed policies and actions.

CEQA requires that the agency with primary responsibility for approval of a project (the lead agency) evaluate the project's potential impacts and determine the level of environmental review required. More specifically, this EIR can serve three primary purposes:

- Ensure that Alameda County meets CEQA requirements by providing a complete and comprehensive program-level evaluation of the potential impacts of the proposed Castro Valley Plan on the physical environment;
- Inform Castro Valley residents, property owners, and other community members as well as members of the Castro Valley Municipal Advisory Council, County Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors of the Plan's potential environmental impacts before taking action; and
- Assist decision-makers in determining what amendments need to be made to County land use regulations and other implementation actions based on a comprehensive assessment of the proposed Plan's environmental impacts.

This Draft EIR will be used by the Castro Valley Municipal Advisory Council, the Alameda County Planning Commission, and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors as they review and act on the proposed General Plan. Once the Board of Supervisors certifies the Draft EIR and the Final EIR, which includes responses to comments received during the 45-day public review period, it will be used as a basis for environmental review of projects the County and its agencies undertake within the Castro Valley Planning Area or projects that may have environmental effects within the Castro Valley Planning Area. These agencies may include the Alameda County Redevelopment Agency or other agencies that take actions to implement the Castro Valley Redevelopment Strategic Plan.

## **1.2 GENERAL PLAN PROCESS & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

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The proposed General Plan was prepared over a three-year period from 2004 to 2007 with extensive input from the community. The planning effort began during the summer of 2004 with a meeting in Castro Valley that more than 400 people attended. The proposed policies and actions were developed through a series of six interactive public workshops and four meetings of the Castro Valley Municipal Advisory Council (MAC).

The first workshop outlined the planning process and provided an opportunity for participants to identify issues of concern and express their goals and desires for the community's future. Four subsequent sessions included an overview of existing conditions and issues; specific topics including residential neighborhoods, transportation, public facilities, commercial areas and economic development; and community input on priorities and alternative strategies for achieving objectives over the next 20 years. At a fifth workshop in December, 2006, participants provided feedback on a list of 15 major initiatives proposed to accomplish community goals during the next 20 years and voted on priority projects and programs to carry out the initiatives. The sixth workshop, on March 29, 2006, was a scoping session for the environmental review process and also included review of land use proposals, population and employment projections, and traffic impacts policies, and proposed actions.

The Notice of Preparation for the Draft EIR was filed with the State Office of Planning and Research Clearinghouse on March 7, 2007 (SCH# 2006032036). Appendices A and B include the NOP and the comments received.

The Castro Valley MAC held hearings on the draft Plan and the EIR at meetings in February and April 2007, which will be followed by hearings on the proposed Plan and the Draft EIR before the Alameda County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors tentatively scheduled for May and June, 2007.

## **1.3 APPROACH**

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This is a Program EIR, which the CEQA Guidelines defines as an EIR prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either geographically, as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects, which can be mitigated in similar ways. (Section 15168)

This EIR has been prepared for use as a basic reference document to avoid unnecessary repetition of facts or analysis in subsequent project-specific assessments. It focuses on the overall effects of the proposed General Plan but does not examine the effects of potential site-specific projects that may be undertaken to implement this program in the future. In fact, as noted below, this EIR assumes that specific development projects will require independent and more detailed environmental assessment to meet CEQA requirements. Because many of the proposed policies are intended to be general, with details to be specified during implementation, many of the impacts can only be described in general or qualitative terms.

In order to carry out many of the proposed policies, the County needs to adopt or approve specific actions such as zoning regulations, zoning map amendments, specific plans, capital improvement programs, etc. This EIR may, but will not necessarily, preclude the need for environmental review of these projects.

This Program EIR is intended as the basic environmental assessment for an overall program of projects that would be undertaken over a 20-year period. It represents the best effort to evaluate potential effects of the proposed General Plan given its long-term horizon. While many conditions will likely change during the build-out period, the EIR reflects the best current knowledge of development, economic, travel, and other factors. The EIR is also based on a few key assumptions:

- Specific plans applicable to the Planning Area and individual development projects prepared pursuant to the General Plan will be receive project-specific environmental evaluation, as necessary, before approval by the County;
- All policies in the General Plan will be fully implemented and all future development in the Planning Area will be consistent with the General Plan Land Use Map; and
- Build-out of the General Plan will occur by 2025. Development will be incremental but will not be undertaken in discrete phases. Conditions affecting development between adoption and buildout will vary according to market forces and decisions by individual property owners and developers. For this reason, any assumptions about interim stages would be speculative.

#### **1.4 ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THE EIR**

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The process for identifying issues to be evaluated in this EIR included the initial analysis of existing conditions, comments made during community workshops on the General Plan and at the Scoping Meeting held on March 29, 2006, and responses to the Notice of Preparation. Based on this input and evaluation of the Planning Area's physical characteristics, development potential, and future prospects, it was determined that the General Plan could have potentially significant impacts in the following areas:

- Land Use
- Parks, Open Space, and Recreation
- Public Facilities and Services
- Transportation and Circulation
- Biological Resources
- Fire Hazards
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Seismic, Geological, and Landslide Hazards
- Hydrology, Flooding, and Water Resources

- Hazardous Materials
- Cultural Resources
- Visual Quality

## **I.5 DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE**

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Section 15150 of the CEQA Guidelines allows an EIR to incorporate by reference all or portions of documents that are a matter of public record or are generally available to the public. All of these documents are available from the Alameda County Planning Department, 224 West Winton Avenue, Hayward, California. The Castro Valley Plan documents can be downloaded from the Castro Valley General Plan website at <<http://www.castrovalleygeneralplan.org>> and the Draft Redevelopment Strategic Plan can be downloaded from the County Redevelopment Agency website at <<http://www.acgov.org/cda/redevelop/projects/cv/plan.htm>>.

*Castro Valley General Plan Existing Conditions Report* (March 2005). This document includes baseline information regarding existing conditions and anticipated trends and future conditions that will influence future development in the Castro Valley Planning Area. It includes a preliminary list of planning issues that was refined as the planning process proceeded. The Existing Conditions Report was used as a basis for identifying alternative approaches for meeting the community's objectives and for the environmental setting descriptions in this document.

*Castro Valley General Plan Public Workshop Summaries* (July 2004, November 2004, March 2005, July 2005, December 2005). This series of reports presents background information about the topics the Plan covers, describes alternative strategies for approaching the issues of foremost concern to Castro Valley and summarizes the major themes and comments expressed by the community in response to these proposals.

*Castro Valley Redevelopment Strategic Plan* (December 2005) The Strategic Plan is the result of a planning process undertaken by the Alameda County Community Development Agency to develop a physical improvement plan for the Castro Valley Boulevard Corridor and create a strategy for enhancing retail activity in the downtown area. The Castro Valley Redevelopment Citizen's Advisory Committee participated in formulating the Plan, which implements the Eden Area Redevelopment Plan's proposals for the Castro Valley Sub-Area.

*Castro Valley Central Business District Specific Plan* (1993)

*Alameda Countywide Transportation Plan* (2004)

*Fairview Area Specific Plan* (1997)

*Alameda County General Code, Title 17 (Zoning)*

*Eden Area Implementation Plan* (2000)

*Alameda County General Plan: Resources Conservation Element* (1994); *Scenic Route Element* (1966 amended 1994); *Open Space Element* (1973); *Housing Element* (2003)

*Specific Plan for Areas of Environmental Significance* (1977)

*Specific Plan for the Upper Madison Avenue/Common Road Area* (1975)

*Unincorporated Eden Area (Portion) Plan* (1983 amended 1995)

## **1.6 ORGANIZATION OF EIR**

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The DEIR is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction provides a summary of the proposed action and environmental review process; reviews the assumptions that govern the assessment and identifies the issues addressed; and discusses the overall purpose, use, and organization of the EIR.

Chapter 2: Project Description describes the proposed Castro Valley General Plan including projected land use acreages, population, housing, and employment as well as the Plan's key policies and action proposals.

Chapter 3: Environmental Setting, Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures is divided into 13 sub-sections, each of which is devoted to a specific element of the physical environment. For each topic, there is a description of the existing physical setting, the regulatory setting, identification of potential environmental impacts and their level of significance, and description of proposed Plan policies and actions that are intended to mitigate potential impacts to less than significant levels. Based on the analysis, no additional mitigation measures are required because the Plan as proposed will reduce all potential impacts to less than significant levels.

Chapter 4: Alternatives describes several alternative development scenarios that were evaluated and rejected during the planning process. Two alternatives to the proposed Draft General Plan are fully evaluated. One is the required No Project alternative, which assumes continued implementation of the 1985 General Plan as amended by Alameda County voters in 2000 with the adoption of Measure D. The other is the Castro Valley Boulevard Reduced Lane Alternative, which reduces the number of travel lanes on Castro Valley Boulevard to one-through lane in each direction.

Chapter 5: CEQA-Required Analysis provides the required analysis of the overall impacts of the proposed project, including: effects found not to be significant; growth-inducing impacts; the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and the enhancement of long-term productivity; significant irreversible and unavoidable impacts; and cumulative impacts for the environmental issues found to have significant cumulative effects.

Chapter 6: Report Preparation identifies the reference documents, publications, and literature reviewed and cited, and provides a summary of those involved in report preparation.

Appendices:   A: Notice of Preparation  
                  B: Responses to Notice of Preparation  
                  C: Alameda County Congestion Management Agency CMP Analysis  
                  D: General Plan Implementation Actions

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