

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

3.0.1 ORGANIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the existing conditions (environmental setting) in the City and its Sphere of Influence (“project area”) and describes the potentially significant direct and indirect environmental impacts that can be reasonably anticipated as a result of the implementation of the proposed project. This PEIR analyzes, at a programmatic level, those environmental issues identified in the 2005 Notice of Preparation and the 2011 Reissued Notice of Preparation, additional issues identified during the NOP public comment periods, issues identified during the original public circulation period for the draft PEIR in 2007, and issues arising from post-2007 revisions of the GPU (including the District Plans). This PEIR also provides a programmatic analysis of the potential environmental effects of the proposed 3rd Street Annexation; incorporates an environmental analysis of the proposed Downtown Master Plan as it is reflected in the Historic District Plan; and adds a discussion of greenhouse gas emissions derived from the proposed Climate Action Plan. The analysis of greenhouse gas emissions has been prepared pursuant to the guidance provided by Section 15064.4 (Determining the Significance of Impacts from Greenhouse Gas Emissions) of the 2011 State CEQA Guidelines.

The impact discussion in each section identifies those policies and implementing programs from the proposed project that serve to mitigate or reduce potentially significant environmental impacts. If significant impacts are identified, mitigation measures, where feasible, which will avoid or substantially lessen these impacts are also proposed.

The organization of the environmental issues/topics discussed in this chapter is summarized in **Table 3.0-1, Organization of Environmental Analysis**.

Table 3.0-1, Organization of Environmental Analysis

Section 3.1 Land Use & Planning (including Agricultural Resources)	Section 3.9 Hydrology and Water Quality
Section 3.2 Cultural and Paleontological Resources	Section 3.10 Hazards and Hazardous Material
Section 3.3 Aesthetics	Section 3.11 Geology and Soils
Section 3.4 Transportation and Circulation	Section 3.12 Mineral Resources
Section 3.5 Noise	Section 3.13 Population and Housing
Section 3.6 Air Quality	Section 3.14 Public Services
Section 3.7 Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Section 3.15 Parks and Recreation
Section 3.8 Biological Resources	Section 3.16 Utilities and Service Systems

Each environmental issue is addressed in a separate section of this chapter and is organized into eight sections, as follows:

1. Introduction - Provides a brief introduction to the environmental issue discussion contained in the section.
2. Environmental Setting - Describes the baseline physical environmental conditions against which the environmental impacts associated with the proposed project and potential future development are assessed in order to determine whether the impacts are significant.
3. Regulatory Section - Summaries the federal, state, regional and local laws and regulations that are applicable to the environmental issue.
4. General Plan Update Goals & Policies - Identifies the goals and policies that are contained within the proposed General Plan Update that are applicable to the environmental issues. Applicable goals and policies contained within the proposed Downtown Master Plan, Housing Element and Climate Action Plan will also be identified.
5. Significance Thresholds - Provides the thresholds that are the basis of conclusions of significance. The City of Lake Elsinore has not established local CEQA significance thresholds as described in Section 15064.7 of the State CEQA Guidelines; therefore Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines is used as the basis for defining the significance thresholds discussed in this PEIR.

While the criteria for determining significant impacts are unique to each issue area, the analysis applies the following definitions of levels of impact:

- “No impact” - The project will cause no adverse changes to the environment.
- “Less than Significant Impact” - The impact does not reach the threshold of significance therefore will cause no substantial adverse change to the environment.
- “Potentially Significant Impact” - The impact reaches or exceeds the threshold of significance identified in the PEIR.
- “Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated” - The identified impact is potentially significant and will cause a substantial adverse change to the environment but the impact can be reduced to below a level of significance through implementation of mitigation measures

- “Significant and Unavoidable” – The impact would cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment, and no feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level
6. “Impact Analysis” – Evaluates the proposed project’s environmental impacts taking into consideration all phases of the project including planning, development, and operation. This subsection discusses each significance threshold separately with a discussion of the potential changes to the existing physical environment that may occur as a result of project implementation. Evidence, based on factual and scientific data, is presented to show the cause and affect relationship between the proposed project and the potential changes in the environment. All of the potential direct and reasonably foreseeable indirect effects are considered, giving due consideration to both the short-term and long-term effects.

Following the discussion of potential environmental effects of the proposed project relative to the significance threshold, proposed mitigation measures are identified; followed by a conclusion regarding the significance of the potential effects. The project’s environmental effects are categorized as either “effects found not to be significant” or “potentially significant impact.” For effects found not to be significant, the PEIR provides a brief discussion of the reasons for that finding.

Identified mitigation measures are program-specific measures that would be required to avoid a significant adverse impact; to minimize a significant adverse impact; to rectify a significant adverse impact; to reduce or eliminate a significant adverse impact over time; or to compensate for the impact.

7. “Level of Significance After Mitigation” – Provides a summary of the proposed project’s total level of significance related to the environmental issue discussed in the subsection.
8. “References” – Provides a list of those reference documents that were utilized in the preparation of the environmental analysis contained in the subsection.

3.0.2 BASELINE YEAR

As described above, the environmental setting describes the baseline physical environmental conditions against which the environmental impacts associated with the proposed project and potential future development are assessed in order to determine whether the impacts are significant. In order to describe the environmental setting, it is necessary to establish a baseline date at which these conditions exist.

The basis for identification of the baseline year for analysis within an EIR is established by Section 15125(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines. Section 15125(a) states that:

“An EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published, or if no

notice of preparation is published, at the time environmental analysis is commenced, from both a local and regional perspective. *This environmental setting will normally constitute the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether an impact is significant.* The description of the environmental setting shall be no longer than is necessary to an understanding of the significant effects of the proposed project and its alternatives.” [Emphasis added]

The NOP was originally distributed on or about November 15, 2005. Therefore the physical environmental conditions that existed at that time constitute the baseline conditions described in this PEIR.

Information collected and research completed in 2005 is summarized in the Background Reports used in the preparation of this PEIR. The information provided in the Background Reports identifies baseline environmental conditions and is summarized in the certain EIR sections. The Background Reports are included as Appendix B of this document.

Given the broad programmatic nature of this PEIR, some of the baseline conditions have been updated from those previously described in the Draft PEIR that was circulated in 2007 and the 2008 Final PEIR; using more recent resource data available from federal, state, regional, local and other sources. The discussion for each environmental issue section in this chapter provides specific information on the types of data used to characterize baseline conditions and prepare each individual analysis.