

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) examines the potential effects of the draft updated General Plan for the City of Simi Valley (proposed project). The City of Simi Valley is the lead agency for this project. The background for the General Plan Update and the legal basis for preparing an EIR are described below.

1.1 PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

The current General Plan for the City of Simi Valley was comprehensively updated in 1988 and contains ten elements. Although the General Plan has not been comprehensively revised until now, there have been periodic amendments to several elements since that time. A list of current elements of the General Plan and the dates of their last revisions are shown in Table 1-1 (Elements of the General Plan). The Housing Element was certified by the State Department of Community Development in 2002 in response to the state Regional Housing Needs Assessment requirements. Although the Land Use Element was updated to reflect the establishment of an urban growth boundary around the community in 1998, a comprehensive land use analysis has not been completed. Thus, a comprehensive update of the General Plan is necessary to reflect current conditions as well as the community's vision for development build out within Simi Valley.

Table 1-1 Elements of the General Plan	
<i>State Required Elements</i>	<i>Current General Plan</i>
Land Use	Land Use (1988, Amended periodically. Last Amendment: 2008)
Housing	Housing (certified by HCD in 2002. Last Amendment 2006)
Open Space	Open Space/Conservation (1988, Amended 2001)
Conservation	
Circulation	Circulation (1988, Amended 2004)
Safety	Safety (1988, Technical Appendix Updated in 1999)
Noise	Noise (1988)
Optional Elements, per local discretion	Recreation (1988)
	Community Services (1988)
	Economic Development (1988)
	Air Quality (1988, updated 1991)

The proposed General Plan Update is a comprehensive update of the current General Plan. Elements of the existing General Plan will be re-organized by thematic topic for clarity and to avoid redundancy, as encouraged by the state's General Plan Guidelines. The updated City of Simi Valley General Plan will be organized into six comprehensive chapters. These chapters will include topics required by the seven mandatory state elements in addition to optional topics proposed by the City. These chapters include:

■ Community Development

Topics:

- > Land Use and Community Design
 - Growth and Change
 - Citywide Land Use and Urban Design
 - Citywide Land Use Neighborhoods and Districts
 - Community Sub-Areas and Districts
 - Land Use Designations
 - Land Use Map
- > Economic Development
- > Historic Resources

■ Housing

Topics:

- > Housing Needs Assessment
- > Housing Constraints
- > Housing Resources
- > Housing Plan

■ Natural Resources

Topics:

- > Open Space and Natural Features
- > Visual Resources
- > Water Conservation and Water Quality
- > Energy Resources
- > Air Quality
- > Archaeological and Paleontological Resources

■ Community Services

Topics:

- > Parks and Recreation Facilities
- > Park and Recreation Programs
- > Trails
- > Human Services (Community Service Programs)
- > Arts and Culture
- > Community Education
- > Libraries

■ Safety and noise

Topics:

- > Emergency Preparedness
- > Police Services, Crime Prevention, and Protection
- > Geologic and Seismic Hazards

- > Fire Services
- > Urban and Wildland Fire Hazards
- > Flood Hazards
- > Hazardous Materials
- > Noise and Land Use Compatibility
- > Mobile Noise Sources
- > Stationary Noise Sources

■ **Mobility and Infrastructure**

Topics:

- > Mobility
 - Circulation and Mobility
 - Roadway Standards
 - Level of Service
 - Traffic Signal and Controls
 - Access and Improvements
 - Regional Transportation
 - Operation and Maintenance
 - Public Transit
 - Neighborhood Traffic Management
 - Parking
 - Intelligent Transportation Systems
 - Transportation Demand Management
 - Walkable Communities
 - Bikeways
 - Goods Movement
- > Infrastructure and Utilities
 - Water
 - Wastewater
 - Storm Drainage
 - Solid Waste
 - Energy
 - Telecommunications

The updated General Plan will establish an overall development capacity for the City and surrounding areas, and will serve as a policy guide for determining the appropriate physical development and character of the City. The General Plan will apply to all properties within the City of Simi Valley.

The updated General Plan was reviewed by the General Plan Advisory Committee and requires review and recommendation by the Simi Valley Planning Commission and the discretionary adoption of the plan by the City Council. Adoption of the General Plan is considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is, therefore, subject to CEQA requirements. In accordance with Section 15121 of the CEQA Guidelines, the purpose of this EIR is to serve as an informational document that:

... will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project.

The EIR must also disclose significant environmental impacts that cannot be avoided, growth inducing impacts, effects not found to be significant, and significant cumulative impacts of all past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects.

This EIR has been prepared as a Program EIR pursuant to Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines. A Program EIR is an EIR that is prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project. As stated in the CEQA Guidelines, the use of a Program EIR can provide the following advantages:

1. Provide an occasion for a more exhaustive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in an EIR on an individual action
2. Ensure consideration of cumulative impacts that might be slighted in a case-by-case analysis
3. Avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations
4. Allow the Lead Agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures at an early time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts
5. Allow reduction in paperwork

This EIR will review the existing conditions of the City of Simi Valley, analyze potential environmental impacts from implementation of the draft updated General Plan, identify policies from the draft updated General Plan that serve to reduce and minimize impacts, and identify mitigation measures, if necessary, to reduce potentially significant impacts of the draft updated General Plan. As the EIR does not focus on any specific development projects within the City, subsequent activities in the City that involve individual projects must be examined in light of the Program EIR to determine whether any additional environmental review is necessary. If it is determined that an individual project would result in adverse impacts on the environment, an additional environmental document would then be required.

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15166, an EIR is being prepared to satisfy the necessary requirements for a General Plan update. The EIR provides a general overview of the existing physical conditions, demographics, and trends in the City and assesses the physical environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the draft updated General Plan.

The purpose of this report is to serve as an informational document for the public and City of Simi Valley decision-makers. The process will culminate with Planning Commission and City Council hearings to consider certification of a Final EIR (FEIR) and a decision on whether or not to approve the draft updated General Plan. This EIR also is intended to serve as a resource to inform and support the City's future consideration of other, less significant and more specific General Plan and/or Zoning Amendments that arise from time to time.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE EIR

This EIR addresses the potential environmental effects of implementation of the draft updated General Plan within City of Simi Valley and its sphere of influence. As the draft updated General Plan is a

comprehensive plan that outlines the future potential for growth and development within the City, the scope of the EIR includes an examination of all environmental issues that are considered in Appendix G of the 2011 CEQA Guidelines. In addition, the environmental issues analyzed in this document will also include those areas determined to be potentially significant by the Notice of Preparation (NOP), responses to the NOP, and City staff. The NOP and comment letters received during the NOP review period are included in Appendix A of this EIR. The NOP identified that the EIR would address potential impacts to the following issue areas associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan Update:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology/Soils
- Global Climate Change
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population/Housing
- Public Services, including:
 - > Fire Protection
 - > Police Protection
 - > Schools
 - > Parks
 - > Other public facilities
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Utilities/Service Systems, including:
 - > Sewer
 - > Solid Waste
 - > Water Supply
 - > Electricity
 - > Natural Gas

In preparing the EIR, pertinent policies of the draft updated General Plan were evaluated for their ability to reduce impacts resulting from the draft updated General Plan. Regional and local agencies that regulate and provide services to the City were also contacted for information. A list of references and persons consulted are provided at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 6 (Alternatives) of the EIR was prepared in accordance with Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines, which requires an evaluation of a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. It also identifies the “environmentally superior” alternative among the alternatives assessed.

1.2.1 Environmental Setting/Definition of the Baseline

According to Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project to provide the “baseline condition” against which project-related impacts are compared. Normally, the baseline condition is the physical condition that exists when the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The NOP for the General Plan Update EIR was published December 1, 2009. The CEQA Guidelines recognize that the date for establishing an environmental baseline cannot be rigid. Because physical environmental conditions may vary over a range of time periods, the use of environmental baselines that differ from the date of the NOP is reasonable and appropriate when doing so results in a more accurate or conservative environmental analysis.

The baseline year (2009) is used for all impact areas analyzed in this EIR to determine impacts. For analytical purposes, impacts associated with implementation of the draft updated General Plan are derived from the environmental setting of 2009. This EIR presents and analyzes the proposed allowable growth scenario within the City from 2009 through a planning horizon of 2035.

1.2.2 Plan Comparison

This EIR evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed land use changes and associated growth potential compared to the existing setting/baseline conditions, as described above. In some cases, the existing General Plan (1988) growth potential is also discussed to provide additional information to the reader of the differences or changes between the existing General Plan (1993) and the proposed General Plan Update. However, the impact analysis presented in this EIR is not a comparison of the existing General Plan (1988) to the draft updated General Plan, but, rather, a comparison of existing conditions to the updated General Plan.

1.3 INTENDED USE OF THE EIR

This EIR has been prepared to analyze potentially significant environmental impacts associated with future development resulting from implementation of the draft updated General Plan, and also addresses appropriate and feasible mitigation measures or project alternatives that would minimize or eliminate these impacts. Additionally, this EIR will provide the primary source of environmental information for the City of Simi Valley, which is the Lead Agency, to use when considering the draft updated General Plan.

This EIR is intended to provide decision-makers and the public with information that enables them to intelligently consider the environmental consequences of the proposed action. This EIR identifies significant or potentially significant environmental effects, as well as ways in which those impacts can be reduced to less-than-significant levels, whether through the imposition of mitigation measures or through the implementation of specific alternatives to the project. In a practical sense, this document functions as a technique for fact-finding, allowing concerned citizens and agency staff an opportunity to collectively review and evaluate baseline conditions and project impacts through a process of full disclosure.

1.4 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE, AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

Per the CEQA Guidelines, this EIR defines lead, responsible, and trustee agencies. The City of Simi Valley is the lead agency for the project because it holds principal responsibility for approving the project. A responsible agency refers to a public agency other than the lead agency that has discretionary approval over the project. The draft updated General Plan is a planning document for the City of Simi Valley to utilize moving forward. As such, the draft updated General Plan does not address a specific or proposed development plan, and no responsible agencies are identified at this time. Subsequent development projects will be subject to discretionary approval by the City and, depending on the development proposal, other public agencies. In addition to the City of Simi Valley, future projects within the City may require approval from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) regarding water quality and quantity, as well as potential discharges into surface waters; California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) regarding biological resources; California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) regarding roadways within the City that are under the maintenance of the state; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding waters of the US and wetlands.

A trustee agency is a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project, which are held in trust for the people of the state. As discussed above, the General Plan Update is a planning document for the City of Simi Valley and does not address a specific or proposed development plan. As such, no trustee agencies are identified at this time. However, in relation to future development within the City, trustee agencies may include the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) regarding biological resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding waters of the US and wetlands, and the Air Quality Management District regarding issues of air quality and associated permitting.

1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

This EIR has been prepared to meet all of the substantive and procedural requirements of CEQA of 1970 (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.), California CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15000 et seq.), and the rules, regulations and procedures for the implementation of CEQA as adopted by the City of Simi Valley. Accordingly, as discussed above, the City of Simi Valley has been identified as the Lead Agency for this project, taking responsibility for conducting the environmental review and approving or denying the project.

The updated General Plan will serve as a comprehensive document that will guide future potential growth and development within the City. The Lead Agency has determined that an EIR for the draft updated General Plan Update would best serve the City if it contains a comprehensive examination of all environmental issues that are contained in Appendix G of the 2011 CEQA Guidelines. The EIR analyzes all aspects of the updated General Plan to determine whether any aspect of the project, either individually or cumulatively, may cause a significant effect on the environment with regards to the environmental issues listed above in Section 1.2.

The City filed an NOP, included in Appendix A, with the California Office of Planning and Research (OPR) as an indication that an EIR would be prepared. In turn, the NOP was distributed to involved public agencies and interested parties for a 30-day public review period beginning December 1, 2009.

The purpose of the public review period was to solicit comments on the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be included in the EIR. The City received nine comment letters on the NOP, which are included in Appendix A of this EIR. Agencies or interested persons who did not respond during the public review period of the NOP will have an opportunity to comment during the public review period for this EIR, as well as at subsequent hearings on the General Plan Update. In addition to the filing of the NOP, the City held a Public Scoping meeting on December 16, 2009, to encourage and solicit comments from the general public on the proposed General Plan Update.

Moving forward, this EIR will be distributed to affected agencies, surrounding cities, involved public agencies, and interested parties for a 45-day review period in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15087. During the 45-day public review period, this EIR is available for general public review on the City's website (www.simivalley.org) and at the following locations:

Ventura County Public Library (Simi Branch)
2969 Tapo Canyon
Simi Valley, CA 93063

Department of Environmental Services
3855 (A) Alamo Street
Simi Valley, CA 93063

Interested parties may provide comments on the EIR in written form. Comments should be addressed to the City of Simi Valley to the following address:

Lauren Funaiolo, Senior Planner
Department of Environmental Services
City of Simi Valley
2929 Tapo Canyon Road
Simi Valley, CA 93063-2100
805.583.6772

Upon completion of the 45-day public review period, written responses to all comments raised with respect to environmental issues discussed in the EIR will be prepared and incorporated into the Final EIR (FEIR). Furthermore, written responses to comments received from any public agencies will be made available to these agencies at least 10 days prior to the public hearing during which the certification of the FEIR will be considered. These comments, and their responses, will be included in the FEIR for consideration by the City of Simi Valley Planning Commission and City Council, as well as any other public decision-makers.

According to *Public Resources Code* (PRC) Section 21081, the Lead Agency must make specific Findings of Fact ("Findings") before approving the FEIR, when the EIR identifies significant environmental impacts that may result from a project. The purpose of the Findings is to establish the link between the contents of the FEIR and the action of the Lead Agency with regard to approval or rejection of the project. Prior to approval of a project, one of three findings must be made:

- Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the FEIR.

- Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the FEIR.

Additionally, according to PRC Section 21081.6, for projects in which significant impacts will be avoided by mitigation measures, the Lead Agency must include a mitigation monitoring program (MMP) as part of the FEIR. The purpose of the MMP is to ensure compliance with required mitigation during implementation of the project.

However, environmental impacts may not always be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. When this occurs, impacts are considered significant and unavoidable. If a public agency approves a project that has significant and unavoidable impacts, the agency shall state in writing the specific reasons for approving the project, based on the FEIR and any other information in the public record. This is termed a “Statement of Overriding Considerations” and is used to explain the specific reasons why the benefits of a proposed project make its unavoidable environmental effects acceptable. The statement is prepared, if required, after the FEIR has been completed, yet before action to approve the project has been taken. Ultimately, the lead agency must certify the FEIR, prior to approving a specific project. In the case at hand, the City of Simi Valley (as the lead agency), would need to certify the FEIR prior to approving the updated General Plan.

1.6 AREAS OF CONTROVERSY AND ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED

During the environmental review process, NOP comment letters were received from various parties which raised issues of concern. These comment letters, and verbal comments received at the public scoping meeting (Appendix A) were used to determine areas of potential controversy and issues to be resolved. These issues are discussed within the technical sections of this document, and summarized below.

- Traffic impacts to local, county, and state facilities
- Increased development densities
- Impacts to aesthetics
- Compliance with National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permits
- Impacts resulting from contaminated soils
- Impacts related to hydrology
- Impacts to biological resources
- Impacts to air quality

1.7 DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This EIR has been designed for easy use and reference. To help the reader locate information of particular interest, a brief summary of the contents of each section of the EIR is provided. References are contained at the end of each respective chapter. The following chapters are contained within the EIR:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**—This chapter describes the purpose, approach, intended use, and scope of the EIR, a summary of the environmental and public review process, agencies relevant to the proposed project, the availability of the EIR, documents incorporated by reference, and a brief outline of this document’s organization.
- **Chapter 2: Summary**—This chapter contains a summary of the proposed project, as well as a summary of environmental impacts, proposed mitigation, level of significance after mitigation, and unavoidable impacts.
- **Chapter 3: Project Description**—This chapter provides a detailed description of the General Plan Update, including a description of the project location, environmental setting and regulations, project background, project objectives, and project characteristics.
- **Chapter 4: Environmental Analysis**—This chapter describes and evaluates the environmental issue areas, applicable environmental thresholds, environmental impacts (both short-term and long-term), policy considerations related to the particular environmental issue area under analysis, mitigation measures capable of minimizing environmental harm, and a discussion of cumulative impacts. Where additional actions must be taken to ensure consistency with environmental policies, recommendations are made, as appropriate.
- **Chapter 5: Other CEQA Considerations**—This chapter provides analysis, as required by CEQA, regarding impacts that would result from the General Plan Update, including effects found not to be significant, growth-inducing impacts, significant irreversible change to the environment, and significant and unavoidable impacts.
- **Chapter 6: Project Alternatives**—This chapter analyzes feasible alternatives to the General Plan Update, including No Build, No Project/Existing General Plan, and a Reduced Density Alternative.
- **Chapter 7: Report Preparers**—This chapter identifies all individuals responsible for the preparation of this EIR.