

CHAPTER 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is a first-tier evaluation of the environmental effects associated with the adoption and implementation of the La Mesa 2012 General Plan. This Program EIR was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.), and the Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA published by the Resources Agency of the State of California (California Administrative Code Section 15000 et seq.).

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM EIR

This Program EIR is intended to provide information to public agencies, the general public, and decision makers regarding potential environmental impacts related to adoption and implementation of the 2012 General Plan. The purpose of an EIR, under the provisions of CEQA, is “to identify the significant effects on the environment of a project, to identify alternatives to the project, and to indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be mitigated or avoided” (PRC Section 21002.1[a]).

According to the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15168), a Program EIR may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project, are related geographically, and are logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, or plans. A Program EIR allows for a more comprehensive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in a project-specific EIR, and ensures consideration of cumulative impacts that might be less observable when examined on a project-by-project basis.

This Program EIR provides first-tier analysis of the environmental effects of implementing the 2012 General Plan. Section 15152 of the CEQA Guidelines indicates that tiering is appropriate when the sequence of analysis is from an EIR prepared for a General Plan, policy, or program, or negative declaration for another plan, policy, or program of lesser scope, or to a site-specific project EIR or negative declaration. Subsequent activities in accordance with the 2012 General Plan must be examined in light of this Program EIR to determine whether additional environmental analyses must be conducted and documentation prepared. If a subsequent project or later activity would have effects that were not examined in this Program EIR, or were not examined at an appropriate level of detail to be used for the later activity, an Initial Study would need to be prepared. If the City of La Mesa (City) finds that, pursuant to Section 15152 of the CEQA Guidelines, no new effects would occur and no new mitigation measures would be

required for a subsequent project, the City can approve the activity as being within the scope of the project covered by this Program EIR, and no new environmental documentation would be required.

This Program EIR serves as an informational document for use by public agencies, the general public, and decision makers. This Program EIR is not a City policy document. It does, however, discuss the impacts of development pursuant to implementation of the 2012 General Plan and analyzes project alternatives. This Program EIR serves as the CEQA environmental document for use by the City Council in evaluating the environmental impacts of the 2012 General Plan prior to the adoption of the General Plan.

1.2 LEAD AND RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

A lead agency is defined as the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project that may have a significant impact on the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15367). The City of La Mesa is the lead agency for preparation and certification of this Program EIR, as defined by CEQA.

Responsible agencies are defined as those public agencies that propose to carry out or approve a project for which a lead agency is preparing an EIR, and includes all agencies other than the lead agency that have discretionary approval power over the project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15381). No other public agencies directly carry out or have discretionary approval authority over the adoption of the General Plan except for the City.

1.3 SCOPE OF THIS EIR

The 2012 General Plan EIR is a Program EIR. CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(a) defines a Program EIR as an EIR that may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related (1) geographically; (2) as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with the issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental impacts that can be mitigated in similar ways.

A Program EIR, which can be used as the basic, general environmental assessment for an overall program of projects (in this case, the 2012 General Plan), has several advantages. First, it provides a basic reference document to avoid unnecessary repetition of facts or analysis. Second, it allows the lead agency to look at the broad, regional impacts of a program of actions before its

adoption and eliminates redundant or contradictory approaches to the consideration of regional and cumulative impacts.

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15143, a lead agency should limit the discussion of environmental effects in the EIR to specific issues where significant effects on the environment may occur. An Initial Study was prepared and circulated with a Notice of Preparation (NOP), as discussed in Section 1.4. The Initial Study provided a preliminary analysis of potential environmental effects to identify those topics that require further study in this EIR and those that would be unlikely to occur and, therefore, need not be discussed further in the EIR. The Initial Study is provided as Appendix A to this EIR. The analysis within the Initial Study indicated that implementation of the 2012 General Plan may have an effect on several environmental topic areas. These topics are listed below and are the focus of this EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Noise
- Paleontological Resources
- Population and Housing
- Public Services, Utilities, and Energy
- Transportation and Traffic

1.4 PUBLIC REVIEW AND PARTICIPATION PROCESS

Consistent with the requirements of CEQA, the City conducted public outreach efforts during the preparation of this Program EIR to contact affected agencies, organizations, and individuals who may have an interest in the 2012 General Plan. This early and open consultation with the relevant agencies, organizations, and individuals assisted in defining the scope of this Program EIR, as discussed in Section 1.3.

Notice of Preparation/Scoping Meeting

The City initiated the EIR scoping process on June 14, 2012, through the circulation of an NOP. The NOP was received by the State Clearinghouse at the California Office of Planning and Research on June 14, 2012. The State Clearinghouse is responsible for monitoring compliance of state agencies in providing timely responses. The State Clearinghouse assigned identification number SCH No. 2012061053 to this Program EIR.

The NOP provides formal notification to all federal, state, and local agencies involved with funding or approval of the 2012 General Plan, and to other interested organizations and members of the public, that an EIR will be prepared. The NOP is intended to encourage interagency communication concerning the 2012 General Plan and provide sufficient background information about the 2012 General Plan so that agencies, organizations, and individuals can respond with specific comments and questions on the scope and content of the Program EIR. A copy of the NOP is provided in Appendix A, as well as all of the written responses received during the initial 30-day NOP period. Comment letters were received from the following agencies and organizations:

- City of El Cajon
- City of San Diego
- State of California, Public Utilities Commission, Railroad Crossing Engineering Section
- State of California, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit
- State of California, Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, Department of Transportation (Caltrans), District 11
- State of California, Department of Fish and Game, San Diego Region 5
- State of California, Department of Toxic Substances
- State of California, Native American Heritage Commission
- San Diego County Regional Airport Authority

In addition, the City held a public scoping meeting on the evening of June 21, 2012, to gather feedback and comment on the scope of the EIR. The meeting was announced on the City's website and through mailed invitations to the surrounding jurisdictions and related responsible agencies. No members of the public or other agency personnel attended the scoping meeting.

Availability of Draft Program EIR

The Draft Program EIR is available at the City of La Mesa City Hall and the La Mesa Library for a 45-day public review period from February 7 to March 25, 2013.

La Mesa City Hall is located at 8130 Allison Avenue in La Mesa.

The La Mesa Library is located at 8030 Allison Avenue, adjacent to City Hall.

Documents may be reviewed during regular business hours:

La Mesa City Hall – 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (closed alternating Fridays)

La Mesa Library – 9:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday; 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

The General Plan EIR will also be available on the City’s website at www.cityoflamesa.com. Agencies and individuals are invited to comment on the information contained in the Program EIR. Where possible, those responding should provide the information they feel is lacking in the Program EIR, or should indicate where the information can be found.

All comments on the Program EIR should be sent to:

City of La Mesa
Community Development Department
Attn: Chris Jacobs, AICP, Senior Planner
8130 Allison Avenue
La Mesa, CA 91942

Following a 45-day period of circulation and public review of the Program EIR, all comments and the City’s responses to the comments will be incorporated into a Final Program EIR prior to certification of the document by the La Mesa City Council.

1.5 STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PROGRAM EIR

This Program EIR is organized into an Executive Summary and nine chapters.

Executive Summary. The Executive Summary includes a brief description of the 2012 General Plan, and summarizes impacts and mitigation measures.

Chapter 1. This Introduction explains the purpose and scope of the Program EIR, defines the lead and responsible agencies, and describes the public review process.

Chapter 2. The Project Description provides a description of the 2012 General Plan, the regional setting, the 2012 General Plan characteristics and objectives, and the intended use of the Program EIR.

Chapter 3. The Environmental Setting describes the physical characteristics of La Mesa and the environmental resources found within the City. Existing land use patterns and the transportation network are also described.

Chapter 4. The Environmental Impact Analysis covers all of the environmental topic areas that are potentially affected by implementation of the 2012 General Plan. The subsections of Chapter 4 contain the core analysis within the Program EIR.

Chapter 5. The Analysis of Long-Term Effects includes maximum theoretical build-out, cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, significant irreversible environmental impacts, and areas of no significant impact.

Chapter 6. The Alternative Analysis proposes a range of alternatives to the 2012 General Plan and examines the environmental impacts of the alternatives. This analysis is required by CEQA to provide decision-makers and the public with a framework for evaluating the 2012 General Plan against other viable alternatives.

Chapter 7. The Other Considerations Required by CEQA section covers growth-inducing impacts, significant irreversible environmental changes, and a summary of impact conclusions.

Chapter 8. References includes a list of the source documents used to prepare the Program EIR.

Chapter 9. The Preparers of the document are listed in Chapter 9.

Appendices. The Appendices includes the Notice of Preparation and Responses to the Notice of Preparation (Appendix A) and technical documents (Appendices B through E) included as supporting information to this Program EIR.

In compliance with PRC Section 21081.6, a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) will be prepared as a separately bound document that will be adopted in conjunction with the certification of the Final Program EIR and 2012 General Plan.

1.6 GENERAL APPROACH TO PROGRAM EIR ANALYSIS

As discussed above, the approach to the analysis presented in this EIR is programmatic. Each environmental issue is analyzed in the same manner, starting with a discussion of the existing environmental setting. Thresholds of significance are then defined and used to measure the 2012 General Plan's potential impact. If the General Plan would result in a significant impact for a particular environmental issue, mitigation measures are included within the discussion. Each mitigation measure is a procedure, program, or technique that requires City action, either alone or in collaboration with non-City organizations or state and federal agencies. Some of the implementation programs are processes or procedures that the City currently administers (such as development project review), while others identify new programs or projects. This analysis includes a discussion on the level of significance of each environmental impact after proposed mitigation measures are incorporated.