

7 OTHER CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter discusses the potential to induce growth and significant and irreversible impacts on the environment. These are other issues for which CEQA requires analysis in addition to the specific issue areas discussed in Chapter 4, “Environmental Impact Analysis.”

7.1 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

In accordance with Section 15126.2(e) of the State CEQA Guidelines, “an EIR must discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment.” In addition, when discussing growth-inducing impacts of a proposed project, “it must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.2(e)).

The following discusses ways in which the 2040 General Plan could foster economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Growth can be induced in a number of ways, such as through the elimination of obstacles to growth, through the stimulation of economic activity within the region, or through the establishment of policies or other precedents that directly or indirectly encourage additional growth. Although growth inducement itself is not considered an environmental effect, it could potentially lead to environmental effects. In general, a project may foster spatial, economic, or population growth in a geographic area if the project removes an impediment to growth (e.g., the establishment of an essential public service, the provision of new access to an area, a change in zoning or general plan land use designation) or if economic expansion or growth occurs in an area in response to the project (e.g., changes in revenue base and employment expansion).

7.1.1 Population and Economic Growth

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Project Description,” the project is a comprehensive update to the Ventura County General Plan that establishes the community’s vision for the development of Ventura County through the year 2040 and will serve as the fundamental land use policy document for the County. It is important to acknowledge that the 2040 General Plan would not facilitate growth in the county; rather, it is intended to shape the location and type of development that would otherwise occur on land zoned and planned for certain uses. The 2040 General Plan would concentrate future growth in the county within Existing Community area designation (boundary) and Urban area designation (boundary), and the 2040 General Plan would not make changes to unincorporated areas within city spheres of influence, which are the probable future growth areas of the incorporated cities.

The growth projections used in the 2040 General Plan and this draft EIR are derived from forecasts published by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) for the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCAG 2017). The SCAG forecast includes a net increase by 2040 of 4,099 people and 1,281 households above existing conditions (year 2015) that would be accommodated through incremental build-out of

the 2040 General Plan (as shown in Table 3-3 in Chapter 3, “Project Description”). This represents an approximately 4 percent increase in population and households by 2040 relative to existing conditions (2015).

The unincorporated county is also projected to have 2,986 additional employment opportunities by 2040. This would foster economic sustainability within the County. It would also result in greater employment-generating uses that may generate a secondary demand for goods and services to support new and expanding businesses. Thus, the 2040 General Plan would accommodate future development that could result in economic growth; however, the growth would be consistent with the regional growth forecasts that have been adopted for the County.

As described further in Section 4.14, “Population and Housing,” growth would be expected to occur without implementation of the 2040 General Plan. The philosophy of the 2040 General Plan is that the County would be prepared and able to accommodate forecasted growth, while adhering to policies that define where and how development would occur.

7.1.2 Removal of Obstacles to Growth

Growth in an area may result from the removal of physical impediments or restrictions to growth, as well as the removal of planning impediments resulting from land use plans and policies. In this context, physical growth impediments may include nonexistent or inadequate access to an area or the lack of essential public services (e.g., water service), while planning impediments may include restrictive zoning and/or general plan designations.

The 2040 General Plan concentrates growth within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and Urban area designation (boundary), which could intensify the uses over what currently exists in some areas. The 2040 General Plan would not, however, alter the Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations located outside of Existing Community and Urban area designations (consistent with the Save Open Space & Agricultural Resources [SOAR] initiative).

In general, and subject to certain exceptions, SOAR requires countywide voter approval of any (1) substantive change to the 2040 General Plan’s Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use goals or policies, and (2) redesignation of land with Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations. In November 2016, Ventura County voters renewed the County’s SOAR initiative and extended its provisions through 2050. Similarly, voters in eight of the county’s 10 cities renewed SOAR initiatives adopted by the respective jurisdictions that are applicable within their boundaries (the cities of Ojai and Port Hueneme have not adopted SOAR measures). SOAR measures within cities establish voter-controlled urban growth boundaries, known as City Urban Restriction Boundaries. The County SOAR initiative’s Agricultural, Open Space, and Rural goals and policies are included in the 2040 General Plan with only technical, non-substantive revisions for clarification and internal consistency with the rest of the 2040 General Plan.

The County of Ventura, cities within the county, and the Ventura Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) adopted the Guidelines for Orderly Development to direct urban-level development and services to the incorporated cities. Through Policies LU-1.1 and LU-2.1 in the 2040 General Plan, the County would continue to work with these entities to promote and maintain reasonable city boundaries and spheres of influence to prevent growth-inducing

urban development in unincorporated areas, and require unincorporated urban development to be located in areas designated as Existing Communities and unincorporated urban centers consistent with the Guidelines for Orderly Development.

Similarly, greenbelt agreements, voluntary agreements between the County and one or more cities, are used to limit development of agricultural and/or open space areas within the unincorporated county. Through greenbelt agreements, cities express their commitment to not annex any property within a greenbelt while the County expresses its commitment to restrict development to uses consistent with existing agricultural or open space zoning. There are seven greenbelts in Ventura County totaling approximately 164,000 acres. The existing greenbelt agreements between the County and incorporated cities would be unaffected by adoption of the 2040 General Plan.

The 2040 General Plan includes policies and implementation programs to develop and maintain infrastructure to accommodate forecasted growth. This includes public facilities and services, transportation infrastructure, wastewater treatment and disposal, public utilities, electricity, and parks and recreation facilities. Future development consistent with the 2040 General Plan could necessitate the construction of additional distribution and collection systems in areas that are not currently served by public utilities. In addition, it is anticipated that upgrading/upsizing of existing utilities could occur in areas where there is significant reinvestment in vacant or underutilized areas. It is expected that utilities would be appropriately sized to accommodate future development, rather than oversizing for unforeseen development, which would be more costly and not supported by forecasted growth estimates.

7.1.3 Conclusion

Planning documents, such as general plans, serve as blueprints for future population and job growth that is projected to occur. The 2040 General Plan is designed to accommodate forecasted growth in population and jobs in the county by 2040. For the plan area, this increase is anticipated to be 4,099 additional residents, 1,281 housing units, and 2,986 additional employment opportunities by 2040 (or approximately 164 people, 51 housing units, and 119 jobs per year, averaged over the 25-year period between 2015 and the 2040 planning horizon). The 2040 General Plan includes a comprehensive policy framework designed, in large part, to control and focus forecasted growth and minimize potential environmental impacts associated with that growth. The 2040 General Plan does not include land use designations or policies or implementation programs that would promote growth beyond population projections. Therefore, because growth in the county will occur with or without approval of the 2040 General Plan, and because the 2040 General Plan would not in and of itself induce growth, but rather would control and focus growth, impacts related to growth inducement would be **less than significant**.

7.2 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of significant irreversible environmental changes that could result from implementation of the 2040 General Plan. Generally, a project would result in significant irreversible environmental changes if:

- ▶ the primary and secondary impacts would commit future generations to similar uses;

- ▶ the nature of the project would involve uses that could result in irreversible damage associated with potential environmental accidents;
- ▶ the project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources; or
- ▶ the proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project involves the wasteful use of energy).

The 2040 General Plan would result in the long-term commitment of resources as a result of future development. While it would concentrate future development within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and Urban area designation (boundary), the 2040 General Plan would allow future development in undeveloped areas that result in the conversion of undeveloped land to urbanized or other developed uses. These conversions are considered a permanent irreversible change and would occur directly through construction of land uses, infrastructure, and other physical improvements on undeveloped land. Future development could result in significant irreversible loss of sensitive vegetation communities that support rare, threatened, or endangered species, and impacts to these resources would be significant and irreversible. Direct loss of Important Farmland or classified farmland that could occur during 2040 General Plan implementation would also be significant and irreversible. Greenhouse gas emissions generated as a result of future development would be significant and irreversible because they would persist in the atmosphere well beyond the 2040 horizon year.

Construction and operational activities associated with future development under the 2040 General Plan would result in the irreversible consumption of nonrenewable resources, such as gasoline and diesel for on-road transportation and stationary engines and equipment, natural gas for space heating, cooking, and generating electricity, and water resources for indoor plumbing and outdoor landscaping. The irreversible commitment of limited resources is inherent in any development project, or in this case, a program of future development projects. Resources anticipated to be irreversibly committed over the horizon of the 2040 General Plan include but are not limited to: lumber and other forest products; sand, gravel, asphalt, and concrete; petrochemicals; construction materials; and steel, copper, lead, and other metals. As described in Section 4.6, "Energy," the construction and operational activities associated with future development under the 2040 General Plan would not result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy. The permanent and irreversible changes to the existing physical environment as a result of the 2040 General Plan have been described throughout this draft EIR.

The CEQA Guidelines also require a discussion of the potential for irreversible environmental damage caused by an accident associated with the project. While future development under the 2040 General Plan could result in the use, transport, storage, and disposal of hazardous wastes, as described in Section 4.9, "Hazards, Hazardous Materials, and Wildfire," all such activities would be required to comply with applicable State and federal laws that strictly regulate transport, use, disposal, and storage of hazardous materials, which significantly reduces the likelihood and severity of accidents that could result in irreversible environmental damage.