

6 MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The EIR analysis identified potential for cumulative impacts in each of the areas of the environment that were assessed in the EIR except for Land Use and Planning. Agricultural conversion, air quality and greenhouse gas impacts, impacts on groundwater supply, and increased traffic are all unavoidable effects of growth and development. The Butte County General Plan EIR recognized that both conversion of agricultural lands and production of greenhouse gases would be significant and unavoidable with the implementation of the 2030 General Plan and future growth, and Butte County has adopted statements of overriding considerations with respect to these environmental impacts.

The cumulative impacts expected from the project were mitigated to the extent possible with the project design, and any residual impacts are in line with acceptable limits as defined by the applicable Butte County General Plan goals and policies. Conversion of agricultural lands would occur on a small portion of economically unproductive orchard and in an area that has been targeted by the County as appropriate for residential expansion for the community of Durham. Air quality impacts and greenhouse gas production would be partially offset by standard mitigations of the Butte County Air Quality Management District. There would be a net reduction in production of greenhouse gases and groundwater usage with replacement of a portion of the orchard with a compact residential development. The traffic study showed that intersections within the project vicinity can be expected to operate an LOS of A or B. BCAG growth models project a minor decrease in LOS to C under future conditions, except for one peak PM hour period at one intersection. The proposed project will have a significant VMT impact since it generates more than 110 vehicle trips per day and it generates home-based VMT per resident exceeding 16.7, which does not meet the 15 percent below the average BCAG region home-based VMT per resident in 2020.

6.1 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative development in the long-term is assumed to be in accordance with buildout of the General Plan 2030. The General Plan 2030 EIR projected that buildout of the General Plan would result in the development of approximately 13,700 residential units in unincorporated areas by 2030, along with industrial and commercial space. This level of development in unincorporated areas of Butte County would result in extensive conversion of rural and agricultural lands to urban uses. Although the General Plan EIR 2030 found that goals, policies, actions and regulations of General Plan 2030 would reduce and partially offset the conversion of farmland, a significant and unavoidable impact would occur because of the approximately 4,700 acres of farmland would be designated for non-agricultural uses. The project site is 49.4 acres of that land that was re-designated to a non-agricultural use.

6.2 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

The EIR analysis suggests that the project could have slight growth-inducing impacts. Annexation of the project site into the Durham Irrigation District's service area that poses a hurdle to development could increase the ease of development of adjacent properties; however, the likelihood of development occurring and an estimation of its impacts would be speculative.

6.3 SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

A draft Initial Study (2019) found significant environmental effects in a number of areas and developed mitigations to minimize the impacts and reduce them to less than significant levels. The redesigned project evaluated in this EIR included many of these mitigations as aspects of the project design.

Potentially significant environmental effects were found in this focused EIR in the areas of Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases, Biological Resources, Hydrology and Water Quality, and Transportation and Traffic. Mitigations were developed and included in the EIR to minimize the impacts in these areas (see Section 7 Mitigations for summary). When implemented, these mitigations should reduce potential impacts to a level of less than significant.

The proposed project exceeds the more than 110 vehicle trips per day and it generates home-based VMT per resident exceeding 16.7, which does not meet the 15 percent below the average BCAG region home-based VMT per resident in 2020, which will have a significant effect on air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

6.4 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

With development of the project, the 49.4 acres will be irreversibly lost to agricultural use. The loss of the land for agricultural production in the long-term is assumed to be in accordance with buildout of the General Plan 2030. This level of development in unincorporated areas of Butte County would result in extensive conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses. Although the General Plan EIR 2030 found that goals, policies, actions and regulations of General Plan 2030 would reduce and partially offset the conversion of farmland, a significant and unavoidable impact would occur because of the approximately 4,700 acres of farmland would be designated for non-agricultural uses.