
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The California Environmental Quality Act and the Guidelines promulgated thereunder (together “CEQA”) require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be prepared for any project which may have a significant impact on the environment. An EIR is an informational document, the purposes of which, according to CEQA are “...to provide public agencies and the public in general with detailed information about the effect which a proposed project is likely to have on the environment; to list ways in which the significant effects of such a project might be minimized; and to indicate alternatives to such a project.” The information contained in this EIR is intended to be objective and impartial, and to enable the reader to arrive at an independent judgment regarding the significance of the environmental impacts resulting from the proposed project.

This EIR evaluates the potential environmental impacts that may be associated with development under the West Landing Specific Plan (the “Plan”), located in an unincorporated area of Stanislaus County, adjacent to the City of Ceres.

The City of Ceres has directed consultants to prepare the West Landing Specific Plan and will act as the Lead Agency for CEQA review. In addition to approval of the Specific Plan, additional City approvals would be required, including certification of the environmental document, a General Plan Amendment, and rezoning. Subsequent City of Ceres approvals may include subdivision maps, tentative maps, final maps, final parcel maps, site plan approvals, use permits, grading permits, building permits, and related final development approvals.

An annexation application will be submitted to the Stanislaus County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) after the required City of Ceres approvals. As part of the Project description, annexation would include annexing the entire site to the City of Ceres, adjusting the boundaries of the school districts so that the entire Plan area falls into the Ceres Unified School District and adjusting the emergency services boundaries so the entire plan area falls within the City of Ceres Police and Fire Districts.

New development within the currently undeveloped portion of the Plan area (approximately 660 acres of primarily agricultural land) would include construction of up to a total of 3,635 residential units (with an additional 24 units anticipated to remain in the Carol Lane neighborhood); up to 884,200 square feet of retail commercial; up to 383,910 square feet of office space; up to 802,100 square feet of light industrial and/or Research and Development uses; 16 acres for two elementary schools; and about 47 acres of parks. There are no plans to change or replace the existing 18.1-acre Carol Lane neighborhood, which would be anticipated to remain. To the east of Crows Landing Road, the existing G3 Enterprises industrial facility would be expected to continue to expand on their 126.6 acre site with similar uses to those currently found in this area, and potentially including some commercial and business park uses; and the 173.9-acre County facilities would be expected to continue to develop with an estimated additional 381,150 square feet of County offices and facilities as well as a 5 acre animal shelter site.

EIR REVIEW PROCESS

This EIR is intended to enable City decision makers, public agencies and interested citizens to evaluate the broad environmental issues associated with the overall character and concept of the proposed Project.

In reviewing the Draft EIR, readers should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible environmental impacts associated with the Project. Readers are also encouraged to review and comment on ways in which significant impacts associated with this Project might be avoided or mitigated. Comments are most helpful when they suggest additional specific alternatives or mitigation measures that would provide better ways to avoid or mitigate significant environmental impacts. Reviewers should explain the basis for their comments and, whenever possible, should submit data or references in support of their comments.

During the 45-day review period for this Draft EIR, interested individuals, organizations and agencies may offer their comments on its evaluation of Project impacts and alternatives. The comments received during this public review period will be compiled and presented together with responses to these comments in the Final EIR. Comments should be submitted in writing during this review period to:

Tom Westbrook
Planning and Building Division Manager
City of Ceres
Planning Division
2220 Magnolia St
Ceres, CA 95307

Please contact Tom Westbrook at tom.westbrook@ci.ceres.ca.us (phone: 209-538-5778) if you have any questions regarding this project.

Together, this Draft EIR (DEIR) and the Final EIR (FEIR) will constitute the EIR for the Project. The City of Ceres Planning Commission and the City Council will review the EIR documents and will determine whether or not the EIR provides a full and adequate appraisal of the Project and its alternatives.

After reviewing this Draft EIR and the Final EIR, and after reviewing the recommendation of the City of Ceres Planning Commission regarding the certification of the EIR as adequate and complete, the City Council will be in a position to determine whether or not the EIR should be certified. An EIR does not control the agency's ultimate discretion on the Project. However, as required under CEQA, the agency must respond to each significant effect identified in the EIR by making findings and, if necessary, by making a statement of overriding considerations. In accordance with California law, the EIR on the Project must be certified before any action on the Project can be taken. Once the EIR is certified, the City of Ceres will then consider whether the Project as currently proposed should be approved, revised, or rejected. This determination will be based upon information presented on the entirety of the Project, including its impacts and probable consequences, and the possible alternatives and mitigation measures available.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE EIR

A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was issued in December, 2008, to solicit comments from public agencies and the public regarding the scope of the environmental evaluation for the Project. The NOP

and all written responses are presented in **Appendix A**. The responses were taken into consideration during the preparation of the Draft EIR. Major issues raised in response to the NOP include:

- Stanislaus County concerns that planned growth in their on-site facility be accommodated, the potential for contaminated agricultural soils and appropriate handling of future hazardous materials, the loss of agricultural resources and compliance with County guidelines, and the appropriate planning of adequate infrastructure and service systems.
- City of Modesto concerns that additional intersections in their jurisdiction be analyzed for potential impacts.
- Caltrans comments that individual projects should submit traffic studies as they begin to develop and that the Native American Heritage Commission should be consulted.
- California Department of Conservation concerns related of the loss of agricultural land and lands under Williamson Act contract.
- Public comments that traffic surrounding the existing flea market is problematic and problems could be compounded by additional development and traffic generation in the area.

Each of these issues are responded to and addressed in subsequent sections of this Draft EIR.

Following this brief introduction to the Draft EIR, the document's ensuing chapters include the following:

Chapter 2: Executive Summary and Impact Overview

Chapter 3: Project Description

Chapter 4: Aesthetics

Chapter 5: Agricultural and Forest Resources

Chapter 6: Air Quality

Chapter 7: Biological Resources

Chapter 8: Cultural Resources

Chapter 9: Geology and Soils

Chapter 10: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Chapter 11: Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Chapter 12: Hydrology and Water Quality

Chapter 13: Land Use and Planning

Chapter 14: Mineral Resources

Chapter 15: Noise

Chapter 16: Population and Housing

Chapter 17: Public Services and Recreation

Chapter 18: Transportation and Traffic

Chapter 19: Utilities and Service Systems

Chapter 20: Other CEQA Considerations

Chapter 21: Alternatives

Chapter 22: References

Appendices

In Chapters 4 through 20, existing conditions are discussed in the “Setting” section, followed by an evaluation of environmental impacts that may be associated with the Project and the mitigation measures that would reduce or eliminate these impacts, where feasible.