

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION
November 14, 2024

PROJECT TITLE

General Plan 2050 Draft Environmental
Impact Report (DEIR)

APPLICANT

The City of Santa Rosa

ADDRESS/LOCATION

Citywide

PROPERTY OWNER

Citywide

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

Citywide

FILE NUMBERS

NA

APPLICATION DATES

Not applicable

APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES

Not applicable

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

Not applicable

FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

Not applicable

PROJECT SITE ZONING

Various

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

Various

PROJECT PLANNER

Nancy Woltering, AICP CEP

RECOMMENDATION

Receive public comments and provide
direction on the General Plan 2050 Draft
EIR

Agenda Item # 11.2
For Planning Commission Meeting of: November 14, 2024

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR WEEKS AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING
COMMISSION

FROM: NANCY WOLTERING, AICP CEP, SENIOR PLANNER
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: SANTA ROSA GENERAL PLAN 2050 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT REPORT

AGENDA ACTION: RECEIVE PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE ADEQUACY OF THE
DRAFT EIR

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Planning Commission hold a public hearing on the General Plan 2050 Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and provide comments on the Draft EIR.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed General Plan Update, referred to as “the Proposed Plan.”

An EIR is intended to inform decision-makers and the general public of the potential significant environmental impacts of a Proposed Plan. The EIR also considers the availability of mitigation measures to minimize significant impacts and evaluates reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Plan.

The Draft EIR is available for review to the public and interested agencies for a period of 45 days, which closes on November 20, 2024. The purpose of the review period and this public hearing is to obtain comments “on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and ways in which the significant effects of the project might be avoided and mitigated” (Section 15204, CEQA Guidelines).

ROLE OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

The Planning Commission has an opportunity to review and provide comments on the Draft EIR and take comments from the public during the public hearing. All comments and responses will be published within a Final EIR document to be distributed prior to the future Commission meeting when the Commission will be asked to take action by providing a recommendation to the City Council on the Final EIR and General Plan Update.

BACKGROUND

1. Project Description

General Plan 2035: The existing General Plan was adopted in 2009 and included a horizon year of 2035. Between 2009 and 2022, State planning laws changed significantly. During this period, Santa Rosa also experienced low housing production and increased homelessness. Further, the city and community experienced devastating wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and social justice unrest following the killing of George Floyd. These challenges brought the need for a more resilient and equitable city to the forefront of every aspect of planning.

General Plan 2050: The City initiated the General Plan update in March 2020, with a focus on creating a General Plan that would create an inclusive, healthy city, supporting the needs of all Santa Rosans. As part of this process, the City developed a robust public engagement process to reach many of the city's residents who had not necessarily been part of previous planning forums—conducting workshops in English and Spanish in the four quadrants of the city, and online; holding numerous pop-ups at food courts, farmers' markets and schools; working on art installations; developing a video, online survey, and coloring book for children; and, attending student presentations on General Plan topics at a local high school. Through this process, the City, working with its Consulting Team—PlaceWorks and MIG, prepared a comprehensive update to its existing General Plan to guide development and conservation in Santa Rosa through 2050. The history and timeline for this process, and the documents, video, coloring books, and art projects prepared as part of the project are posted on the General Plan 2050 project website: (<https://www.santarosaforward.com/>).

The overall purpose of the proposed General Plan 2050, also known as Santa Rosa Forward, is to create a policy framework that creates a vision for the long-term physical form and development of Santa Rosa, while preserving and enhancing the quality of life for Santa Rosa residents. The proposed Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 brings the current General Plan up to date with the latest State and federal legislation pertaining to urban development, transportation,

climate resilience, and safety, and responds to local and regional housing needs, fosters economic growth and local job creation, enhances civic identity and placemaking, and protects sensitive natural resources. Zoning and/or land use changes supporting additional development capacity are proposed in select areas only. Changes to the city's transportation infrastructure propose new pedestrian and bicycle connections across Highways 101 and 12; road diets and roadway widenings; and installation of protected bike lanes and other improvements for non-motorized transportation.

The General Plan functions as the city's primary land use regulatory tool. The city's other plans such as specific plans, the creek master plan, the bicycle and pedestrian master plan (now the proposed *active transportation plan*), corridor plans, vision plans, design guidelines, and the zoning code are all required to be consistent with the general plan.

Key Characteristics of the General Plan 2050

Vision and Objectives: Through extensive public outreach, the planning team worked with the community to develop its vision statement and the 13 ideals that activate the statement (<https://www.santarosafoward.com/>).

1. Realize Santa Rosa's Vision as a diverse, equitable, and sustainable community built on civic engagement that empowers everyone to provide and support equal and affordable opportunities to obtain housing, education, and jobs; to enjoy vibrant cultural events and arts; and to live healthy lives in resilient neighborhoods that adapt to social and environmental change.

The full Santa Rosa vision, with all 13 ideals, is depicted in the following image:



2. Ensure compliance with changes in State Law, including but not limited to, developing an Environmental Justice element, and a Safety Element that is correlated with the requirements of the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.
3. Develop a plan that accommodates a level of growth that could reasonably occur over the next 2.5 decades, and that plans for both growth and conservation.
4. Create a city with an increasingly dense urban core. Streamline future development by focusing on infill sites near transit to make the most of existing infrastructure. Ensure strong connections between land use, transportation, utilities, and other infrastructure.
5. Focus development in the 21 Areas of Change, the majority of which capitalize on infill opportunities in and around Priority Development Areas and Transit Priority Areas. Activate Areas of Change by developing complete neighborhoods that are walkable/bikeable and increasingly protected from environmental hazards.
6. Provide a range of housing types to meet the needs of all Santa Rosa residents, including multi-family structures, “missing middle” units (such as duplex, triplex, cottage court, multiplex, and live/work), and single-family residences with accessory dwelling units, within neighborhoods that are increasingly walkable/bikeable.
7. Create a cross-sector approach to integrating greenhouse gas reduction into all parts of the general plan, so that implementing the plan supports the City in reaching its climate mandates.
8. Create new opportunities for a vital, thriving downtown and entertainment district.
9. Preserve community character and environmental, historic, and cultural resources, as the city develops and becomes denser. Creatively blend old and new development to create a cohesive urban fabric and public realm.

Projected Growth and Development

The General Plan 2050 plans for the following level of population growth and development:

EIR Table 3-6: Proposed 2050 Buildout Projections in the EIR Study Area

Category	Existing Conditions (2019)	Projected Growth 2019-2050 (Proposed Project)	Buildout Estimates (2050)
Housing Units	75,850	24,090	99,940
Total Population	197,980	65,760	263,740
Jobs	77,590	14,090	91,680

Notes: Numbers are rounded from original sources.

Source: City of Santa Rosa, PlaceWorks, Sonoma County Transportation Authority, and W-Trans, 2023, *Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 Travel Demand Model*.

The projections for population, housing units, and employment for the 2050 General Plan vary from the existing 2035 General Plan projections, as follows:

- higher total population numbers (263,740 vs. 237,000 people)
- higher number of housing units at buildout (99,940 vs. 96,925 units)
- lower employment numbers at buildout (91,680 vs. 132,100 jobs)

The General Plan 2050 also anticipates the following:

- 2,128,000 sq. ft. of office space
- 727,000 sq. ft. of institutional space
- 945,000 sq. ft. of retail
- 71 acres of recreation-based uses
- 69 new hotel rooms
- 800,000 sq. feet industrial space
- 700,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space

Key characteristics of the General Plan 2050

General Plan Chapters: The General Plan covers both State mandated and customized subjects in Chapters 2-6. The eight mandated elements include Land Use, Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, Safety, Noise, Environmental Justice, and Housing. The customized optional sections of the General Plan

include Economic Development, Greenhouse Gas Reduction, Urban Design, Hillside Policies, Tribal Cultural Resources, Historic Preservation, Art and Culture, Parks, and Children and Families. Each chapter includes goals, policies and actions intended to achieve the community's vision for the future.

Draft General Plan 2050 Land Use Diagram: The draft 2050 General Plan Land Use Diagram is similar to the existing land use diagram but adds additional housing and commercial capacity to neighborhoods across the city through zoning changes that implement the General Plan. These zoning changes are primarily within Areas of Change.

Areas of Change: The plan identifies 21 Areas of Change where the city will focus efforts on addressing housing, services, connectivity, and additional infrastructure needs to develop complete neighborhoods. Areas of change were identified for focus due to the existence of underutilized or undeveloped land or a dated development pattern where new infrastructure, services and/or amenities would result in complete neighborhoods with more attractive livable environments. Complete neighborhoods, with accessible services, parks, and schools, allow people to meet their daily needs walking, biking and via other forms of non-motorized travel.

Equity Priority Areas: A number of goals, policies, and actions in the General Plan 2050 give priority to specific areas and/or populations in Santa Rosa where residents are most subject to economic, health and environmental burdens. Though a goal, policy, or action may apply broadly, this prioritization means that the City will first concentrate efforts on providing infrastructure and services in historically underserved communities and/or core neighborhoods to advance key aims of environmental justice, social equity, and complete neighborhoods.

Priority Development Areas (PDAs)/Transit Priority Areas (TPAs): The General Plan 2050, supported by State housing laws, provides a framework for incentivizing housing, jobs, and services in Priority Development Areas and Transit Priority Areas. These areas of the city are well-served by public transportation, providing people better access to goods and services without needing to use private automobiles.

Active Transportation: The General Plan further focuses on transportation improvements that emphasize transit access and better connections for bicyclists and pedestrians to create a city that is more accessible by non-motorized modes of travel. The project includes road diets in some places and road widenings to facilitate improved access and evacuation during emergencies.

The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy: The General Plan utilizes a cross-sector approach to reducing greenhouse gases; measures from the Communitywide Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Strategy are integrated into all chapters of the General Plan, so that implementing the General Plan supports

reducing greenhouse gases. The GHG Reduction Strategy replaces the City's 2012 Climate Action Plan and guides the City in reaching State mandates for reducing greenhouse gases, including achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, the horizon year for the proposed General Plan.

Zoning/City Code Amendments

Implementation of the General Plan will require the following changes to the Zoning Code and other parts of the City Code to ensure consistency.

(1) The proposed project includes revisions to the land use designations and zoning districts on 11 parcels, as recommended by City staff, to better align with the vision of the proposed General Plan. Proposed revisions also include two additional recommended general plan and zoning changes on two parcels to align with existing use as park sites (DEIR Table 3-2).

(2) The proposed project includes 14 parcels in Areas of Change with recommendations to the zoning district to better align with vision of creating complete neighborhoods (DEIR Table 3-3).

(3) The proposed project includes refinements to the zoning map to ensure consistency with the General Plan land use designations. Because these amendments are being made to reflect what is currently allowed on the property under the General Plan, these amendments would not result in new development potential in these locations.

(4) The project includes revisions to Zoning Code Table 2-1 to indicate that the Retail and Business Services Neighborhood Shopping Center General Plan Land Use Classification is implemented by the Neighborhood Commercial Zoning District. Zoning Code Table 2-2 will be revised to reflect permitted uses in the Neighborhood Mixed Use Zoning District to be consistent with the Neighborhood Mixed Use General Plan Description.

(5) The project incorporates a Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Overlay Zone into the Zoning Code to allow opportunities for constructing missing middle housing. MMH is often referred to as adding "gentle density" because it adds units without changing the visual character of neighborhoods, and generally contributes to the walkable/bikeable public realm. The MMH overlay could be combined with any residential or mixed-use primary zoning district identified by the MMH Regulatory Plan. The proposed new zoning district identifies Missing Middle Housing zones and allows for a Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Bonus of potential future housing within these zones. The MMH Bonus would be determined on a case-by-case basis for qualifying projects.

(6) The project revises the Subdivision Code to address changes in the types of parkland that make up the City's 6 acre/thousand population goal.

Specific Plan Amendments

Local streets were removed from the proposed General Plan 2050 Land Use Diagram and circulation maps since they are not factored into traffic modeling for the General Plan and may change as specific projects are implemented in the future. Removing local streets from these maps avoids the need to prepare a General Plan Amendment at a future date when additional connections may be added or removed with specific projects. To be consistent, minor revisions will be made to the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and North Station Area Specific Plan circulation/mobility figures and text to eliminate references to proposed local streets.

1. Project History

March, 2020	General Plan 2050 Project Initiation
December 8, 2020	Council accepted the CAC Member Selection Process and approved the CAC Organizational Framework
July 20, 2021	The Council and Planning Commission reviewed and provided input on the Santa Rosa Forward Community Vision Statement
November 16, 2021	The Council and Planning Commission received a report on the Equity Priority Communities' Empowerment and Outreach Work Plan
May 24, 2022	The Council and Planning Commission received a report on the draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives
October 25, 2022	The Council and Planning Commission received a report on the Preferred Alternative
February 7, 2023	Notice of Preparation (NOP) Distributed (30-day response period (February 7 – March 8, 2023) provided for project scoping)
March 13, 2023	City provided notification of Proposed Project and EIR pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 to locally affiliated Tribes. Consultation has been on-going throughout the project.
July 1, 2023	Draft General Plan released *
Summer 2023	Public Workshops in each quadrant of the city and online, pop-up events, and public survey
August 17, 2023	Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board Study Session on Draft General Plan
August 23, 2023	Community Advisory Board Study Session on Draft General Plan
August 24, 2023	Waterways Advisory Committee Study Session on Draft General Plan

September 7, 2023	Design Review Board Study Session on Draft General Plan
September 14, 2023	Planning Commission Study Session on Draft General Plan
September 20, 2023	Cultural Heritage Board Study Session on Draft General Plan
September 26, 2023	City Council Study Session on Draft General Plan
October 7, 2024	Revised Draft General Plan released
October 7, 2024	General Plan 2050 Draft EIR Circulated for Public Review
October 7, 2024	Notice of Availability of Draft EIR and Notice of Public Hearing distributed
October 13, 2024	Notice of Availability and Notice of the November 14, 2024, Public Hearing on the adequacy of the General Plan 2050 Draft EIR was published in the Press Democrat
November 14, 2024	Planning Commission Public Hearing on the adequacy of the General Plan 2050 Draft EIR

Staff Comment*: Given the magnitude of the comments received, the General Plan was revised and re-released on October 7, 2024, along with the General Plan 2050 Draft EIR.

ANALYSIS

1. General Plan 2050 Program EIR

The City, acting as the Lead Agency, has prepared a Draft EIR to address the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed General Plan 2050.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that local government agencies, prior to taking action on projects over which they have discretionary approval authority, consider the environmental consequences of such projects. Topics evaluated in the EIR include aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, population and housing, public services, parks and recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

The Draft EIR has been prepared at a programmatic level pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 and is therefore referred to as a Program EIR. Program-level environmental review documents are appropriate when a “project” consists of a series of actions related to the issuance of rules, regulations, and other planning criteria. A Programmatic EIR does not evaluate impacts of future construction level projects that are consistent with the General Plan. It does allow subsequent project-level environmental review for future development to tier off the Program EIR, utilizing existing analysis and mitigation, as is applicable, and therefore streamlines the CEQA process for subsequent projects.

Key Findings of the Draft EIR:

- (1) Environmental Issue areas in which impacts were less than significant without mitigation include: aesthetics; energy; greenhouse gas emissions; hazards and hazardous materials; land use and planning; population and housing, public services, parks and recreation; and utilities and service systems.
- (2) Environmental Issue Areas with potentially significant impacts that can be reduced to less-than-significant levels with identified policies and mitigating actions include: biological resources; cultural resources; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; and tribal cultural resources.
- (3) The project would result in Significant, Unavoidable impacts in the following Environmental Issue Areas: agricultural resources; air quality; noise, transportation; and wildfire.

Significant and Unavoidable impacts are summarized below.

Agricultural Resources:

- *Impact AG-1 (Conversion of CEQA Important Farmland):* Implementation of the proposed project could result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland (together referred to as “CEQA Important Farmland”) to non-agricultural uses.
- *Impact AG-2 (Loss of Williamson Act Lands):* Implementation of the proposed project could result in the loss of agricultural land under the Williamson Act.
- *Impact AG-4 (Cumulative Loss of Agricultural Lands):* The proposed project in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects could result in a significant cumulative impact with respect to the conversion of CEQA Important Farmland and Williamson Act properties to non-agricultural uses.

Air Quality

- *Impact AIR-2b (Operational Air Quality Emissions):* Buildout of the proposed project could generate operational emissions that could exceed the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s (BAAQMD) regional significance thresholds for reactive organic compounds (ROG), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀).
- *Impact AIR-3b (Air Quality Impacts to Sensitive Receptors):* Large industrial or warehouse development projects under the proposed project could expose air quality-sensitive receptors to substantial toxic air contaminants (TACs) and particular matter (PM_{2.5}) concentrations that exceed the BAAQMD project-level and cumulative significance thresholds.

- *Impact AIR-5 (Cumulative Air Quality Impacts and Sensitive Receptor Exposure):* The proposed project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, could result in cumulative air quality impacts with respect to generation of criteria pollutant and exposure of substantial pollutant concentrations to sensitive receptors.

Noise

- *Impact NOI-1a (Exposure of Sensitive Receptors to Excessive Construction Noise):* Construction activities associated with potential future development could expose sensitive receptors to excessive noise from construction equipment.
- *Impact NOI-1b (Operational Noise Impacts):* Operational vehicle traffic noise increases could exceed the City's significance thresholds with implementation of the proposed project.
- *Impact NOI-4 (Cumulative Noise Impacts):* Implementation of the proposed project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, could result in cumulative noise impacts with respect to generation of construction-and-transportation related noise.

Transportation:

- *Impact TRAN-2a (Residential VMT Impact):* Implementation of the proposed project could result in a significant vehicle miles traveled (VMT) impact for residential VMT per capita.
- *Impact TRAN-2b (Roadway Network VMT Impact):* Implementation of the proposed project could result in a significant roadway network VMT impact associated with increasing the capacity of the arterial street network.
- *Impact TRAN-5 (Cumulative VMT):* The proposed project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, could result in a significant cumulative impact with respect to VMT.

Wildfire

- *Impact WF-2 (Increasing Wildfire Risks in Wildfire Prone Areas):* Potential future development over the buildout of the proposed project could increase population, buildings, and infrastructure in wildfire prone areas, thereby exacerbating wildfire risks.
- *Impact WF-5 (Cumulative Impacts associated with Pollutant Concentrations and Wildfire):* Potential development over the buildout horizon of the proposed project could, in combination with other surrounding and future projects in the State Responsibility Areas (SRA), Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ),

or Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Areas (WUIFA), result in cumulative impacts associated with exposure of project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or uncontrolled spread of a wildfire due to slope, prevailing winds or other factors.

While impacts are identified as being Significant and Unavoidable for the proposed project, impacts may still be determined to be less-than-significant for subsequent projects. For example, if housing projects are proposed in Priority Development Areas (PDAs) or Transit Priority Areas (TPAs), they would not result in significant, unavoidable impacts to Transportation or Air Quality, because these locations would be beneficial with respect to vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and associated air (criteria pollutant) emissions, given availability of transit. As “infill” sites, the projects would also generally be categorically exempt from CEQA.

Project Alternatives Considered

CEQA requires that an EIR describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project and evaluate the comparative merits of the project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a)).

(A) *No Project Alternative*: The Current General Plan (2035) remains in effect.

Development of the city would continue to be subject to existing policies, regulations, development standards, and land use designations as the exiting General Plan. The new GHG Reduction Strategy would not be implemented.

(B) *Increased Density Alternative*: Focuses future commercial and residential growth in Priority Development Areas (PDAs)/Transit Priority Areas (TPAs). Parcels designated as Medium Low density residential (8.0-13.0 units per gross acre) in Areas of Change that are in or adjacent to PDAs and/or TPAs would be redesignated to Medium High density residential (8.0-18.0 units per gross acre) allowing more opportunities for more dense housing connected to transit facilities. Assumes the same number of households, residential units, population, and jobs would occur as are proposed with the proposed project.

2. Summary of Public Comments

Key issues raised in response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Draft EIR on February 7, 2023:

- Protection of biological resources
- Adequacy of water supply and increased water demand
- Annexation of land into the city limits
- Protection of radiofrequency radiation

Public Correspondence received to date on the General Plan 2050 Draft EIR is included in Attachment 3.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact related to this item as the funding has been allocated for the General Plan 2050 and EIR.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

An Environmental Impact Report is being prepared for the project, in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Draft EIR identifies Significant Unavoidable impacts in the following five environmental issue areas: Agricultural Resources; Air Quality; Noise; Transportation; and Wildfire. The adequacy of the Draft EIR is the subject of this Public Hearing.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Council and Planning Commission held a joint meeting on October 25, 2022, in which they reviewed the Preferred Alternative, which was the basis of the Draft General Plan 2050. On September 14, 2023, the Planning Commission held a Study Session and provided comments on the Draft General Plan.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The project was noticed as a public hearing per the requirements of Chapter 20-66 of the City Code. Notification of this public hearing was provided by publishing a 1/8th page notice in a newspaper of general circulation, electronic notice to parties that had expressed interest in the project, and bulletin board postings at City Hall, on the City website, and on the project specific Santa Rosa Forward website (www.santarosaforward.com). Pursuant to Government Code Section 65091, where necessary, the city has incorporated notice procedures to the blind, aged, and disabled communities. These procedures include audio amplifier/assistive listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – [Draft General Plan 2050 – October 2024 with Appendices](#)

Attachment 2 – [General Plan 2050 Draft Environmental Impact Report \(EIR\) with Appendices](#)

Attachment 3 – Public Correspondence

CONTACT

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