



## County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services

# FAQs - CEQA 15183 Exemption Process

### ZONING DIVISION

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#### What is the CEQA §15183 exemption process?

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15183 allows a streamlined environmental review process for projects that are consistent with the densities established by existing zoning, community plan or general plan policies for which an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was certified.

The County of San Diego certified an EIR for the General Plan Update (GPU) on August 3, 2011. Projects that are consistent with the densities and use characteristics considered by the GPU EIR may qualify for the 15183 exemption process.

#### How do I know if my project qualifies for a 15183 exemption?

Projects submitted with an Application for an Environmental Initial Study ([PDS-367](#)) will be automatically evaluated for eligibility by the assigned Planning & Development Services (PDS) project manager. In order to qualify for a CEQA 15183 exemption, the following findings must be made:

1. The project is consistent with the development density established by existing zoning, community plan or general plan policies for which an EIR was certified.
2. There are no project specific effects which are peculiar to the project or its site.
3. There are no project specific impacts which the GPU EIR failed to analyze as significant effects.
4. There are no potentially significant off-site and/or cumulative impacts which the GPU EIR failed to evaluate.
5. There is no substantial new information which results in more severe impacts than anticipated by the GPU EIR.

#### What types of projects qualify for the 15183 process?

Most subdivisions (Tentative Maps, Tentative Parcel Maps) that do not include other discretionary permit types will qualify for the 15183 process. Minor permit types, such as Boundary Adjustments, Site Plans, and Administrative Permits may also qualify if not otherwise exempt from CEQA. Major and Minor Use Permits may qualify only if the use type and operating characteristics are consistent with the analysis performed for the GPU EIR. General Plan Amendments, Specific Plan Amendments, and Rezones will generally not be eligible unless the proposed change is minor in nature and remains consistent with the GPU EIR analysis.

#### Does Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) apply to projects that qualify for a 15183-exemption process?

If a project qualifies for a 15183-exemption process and can demonstrate that the projects impacts were adequately covered under the County's General Plan, no additional VMT analysis would be required. A project would demonstrate this through a traffic study using level of service (LOS) that would show whether the projects impacts are covered by the General Plan EIR. If you have questions about a specific project, please submit a pre-application (Initial Consultation) and staff can review your specific application and let you know what information is needed to make a determination. The Initial

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Consultation \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ available \_\_\_\_\_ at:  
[https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/pds/zoning/formfields/PDS-PLN-ESUB\\_Initial\\_Consult\\_Meeting.pdf](https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/pds/zoning/formfields/PDS-PLN-ESUB_Initial_Consult_Meeting.pdf).

### **Does the 15183-exemption process apply to every project in every circumstance as long as they are consistent with the General Plan and zoning?**

No, the 15183-exemption process may not apply to every project in every circumstance, the 15183-exemption process can be used where an individual project can demonstrate that a projects impacts were adequately covered under the County's General Plan, and then no additional VMT analysis would be required. Whether a project qualifies for the 15183-exemption process is determined on a case-by-case basis.

### **How is the 15183 exemption process different from other CEQA exemptions?**

The 15183 exemption process typically requires a more detailed environmental analysis than other CEQA statutory and categorical exemptions. Unlike other exemptions, mitigation may also be required under the 15183 process. Projects which qualify for a categorical or statutory exemption will generally not benefit from the 15183 process.

### **How is the 15183 process different than the ND or EIR process?**

CEQA section 15183 requires an evaluation of direct project impacts in the same manner as the Negative Declaration (ND) and EIR process. However, unlike a ND or an EIR, projects which rely on the 15183 process may benefit from the cumulative analysis contained within GPU EIR and the application of predefined mitigation and avoidance measures. Under this process, public review is not required therefore projects qualifying for the 15183 exemption can generally be completed in less time and at a reduced cost compared with the Negative Declaration and EIR processes.

### **Are environmental technical studies required under the 15183 process?**

A project-specific environmental analysis must be completed as part of the 15183 process. Technical studies, such as a biological technical report or a traffic impact analysis, may be required if a project would result in a potential environmental impact. Please refer to the County's Transportation Study Guide (TSG) for determination of when a project-specific Local Mobility or LOS Analysis may be required to determine if the project will qualify for the 15183 Exemption.  
<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/SB743.html>

### **Do cumulative impacts need to be studied under the 15183 process?**

Additional analysis of cumulative impacts will generally not be required unless it is determined that the project may result in an impact which was not adequately evaluated in the GPU EIR.

### **Is mitigation required under the 15183 process?**

In order to rely on the 15183 process, project proponents must agree to implement any applicable design and/or mitigation measures as prescribed by the GPU EIR. This includes payment into the County's Transportation Impact Fee (TIF) program to address cumulative impact mitigation identified in the GPU EIR. Information on the County's TIF program can be found on the County's website:  
<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/dpw/land/tif.html>.

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**How will the 15183 determination be documented?**

Your PDS project manager will complete a Certificate of Determination and a CEQA Guidelines §15183 checklist to document a project's eligibility.

**Is a public hearing required?**

CEQA requires a noticed public hearing if mitigation or design standards specified in the GPU EIR are proposed to reduce a project impact. Projects which require a public hearing as part of the permit approval process will satisfy this requirement through regular hearings before the Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, or Board of Supervisors. Special publicly noticed hearings will be held for projects which would not otherwise require a hearing.

**Are there any recording Fish and Game or recording fees associated with the 15183 process?**

No Fish and Game fees are required; however, a \$50 fee is required to record a Notice of Exemption.

***For additional information, contact***  
***PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES***  
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