

PLANNING FOR 5255 MT. ETNA DRIVE



SUMMARY OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

San Diego is experiencing a severe housing affordability crisis. The County of San Diego (County) is committed to helping alleviate this crisis and has identified the former Regional Crime Lab site at 5255 Mt. Etna Drive in Clairemont Mesa as suitable for development of a multi-family affordable home community.

While the site is owned by the County, it is located within the boundaries of the City of San Diego (City). To demolish the former Crime Lab and facilitate development of an affordable home community, the County must first pursue a Community Plan Amendment (CPA) and rezone. The CPA process requires an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The County is proposing to amend the General Plan and Clairemont Mesa Community Plan and to rezone the property to allow for the future development of multi-family residential units. Under the proposed CPA and rezone, 297 multi-family units would be the maximum density allowable on site without an affordable housing density bonus. The County plans to seek a density bonus to build up to 404 residential units.



COMMUNITY PLAN AMENDMENT

The County's primary objectives for the proposed project are:

1. Establish the ability for residential developers to construct affordable homes on surplus County property, consistent with San Diego regional housing policies.
2. Deliver a development-ready site, including demolition and removal of existing onsite structures and related facilities, and provision of stubbed-out utilities.
3. Encourage an increase in the supply and variety of housing types – affordable for people of all ages and income levels – in an area with existing or planned frequent transit service (i.e., transit priority area) and with access to a variety of public and commercial services.
4. Ensure high quality development occurs on the site through the development of architectural and landscape supplemental development regulations.

The CPA and rezone would allow:

- Up to 297 multi-family units without an affordable housing density bonus. However, the County plans to seek a density bonus to build up to 404 residential units.
 - The Draft EIR analyzed up to 404 residential dwelling units in anticipation of the density bonus. 404 units would be the maximum number of units sought by the applicant at the site.
- Approximately 1,500 square-feet of non-residential ground floor public space.
- A maximum building height of 70 feet above grade, including accessory building features such as parapets, elevator towers, and stairwells.
- Specific development regulations related to building articulation to create visual interest, enhance the pedestrian experience, assist in diminishing the overall mass of buildings, and create variation from an exterior perspective.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is an informational document that informs public agency decision-makers and the general public of the significant environmental effects of a project, identifies possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describes reasonable alternatives to a proposed project.

Chapter 2 of the EIR discusses areas for which the proposed project would result in either (1) significant impacts that cannot be avoided and/or (2) significant impacts that can be avoided, reduced, or minimized through mitigation measures. Chapter 3 of the EIR discusses effects that were identified as not significant. A summary is included on the following page.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE AREAS STUDIED IN THE EIR

Less than Significant Impacts	Significant and Mitigated Impacts	Significant and Unavoidable Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetics • Energy • Greenhouse Gas Emissions • Land Use and Planning • Population and Housing • Public Services • Recreation • Utilities and Service Systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Quality (only during construction activity) • Hazards and Hazardous Materials (only during construction activity) • Noise and Vibration (only during construction activity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic and Transportation

Air Quality

There would be potential impacts to air quality from the use of construction equipment. However, with the use of off-road diesel equipment that meets U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Tier 4 emission standards or equivalent, and other emission control technology, the impacts to air quality would be mitigated to less than significant.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

There would be potential impacts due to removal of an underground storage tank and potential to encounter contaminated media, including asbestos and lead materials. However, the potential impacts would be mitigated to less than significant with the implementation of a soil management plan and soil sampling, a worker health and safety plan, and evaluation of asbestos and lead-based paint prior to demolition of the existing building.

There would also be potential impacts to emergency access during construction activities due to potential lane closures. A traffic control plan would be implemented to allow adequate access and traffic circulation. With a traffic control plan, potential impacts would be less than significant.

Noise and Vibration

Noise from construction equipment is expected during construction activities. However, implementing certain construction equipment techniques and placing temporary noise barriers at the site would mitigate potential impacts to less than significant.

Traffic and Transportation

There would be significant and unavoidable impacts to traffic and transportation. To minimize impacts at certain locations, there would be restriping of lanes and signal optimizations to improve traffic flow prior to issuance of the first building permit and occupancy of the site.

The County is accepting public comments on the Draft EIR from Oct. 9, 2019 - Nov. 25, 2019.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

CEQA requires an EIR to consider a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that would lessen the significant impacts identified for the project. Alternatives are described below.

No Project/No Redevelopment Alternative. This alternative would not require a CPA and rezone. The existing vacated former Crime Lab facility would remain on the site. Building demolition would not occur, and the site would not be regraded to prepare for development. This alternative would have less than significant impacts.

No Project/Existing Clairemont Mesa Community Plan and Zoning Alternative. This alternative would not require a CPA and rezone and the existing vacated former Crime Lab facility would be demolished and the site graded to prepare for future commercial development. The site would be available for sale to a developer for the construction of a commercial office development. This alternative would allow for the future construction of up to 70,000 square feet of medical office use, with supporting retail space, as permitted by existing zoning. Compared to the proposed project, this alternative would require similar mitigation related to air quality (but would have less emissions due to a lower-stature structure), noise, and hazardous materials. This alternative would continue to have significant and unavoidable impacts related to transportation and traffic, with an increase in trip generation due to the allowable medical office uses.

Reduced Intensity Project Alternative. This alternative would result in the same CPA and zone change as the proposed project and the existing vacated former Crime Lab facility would be demolished. Under this alternative, the site would be entitled for the construction of a 312-unit affordable housing community, which would house approximately 633 people. This alternative was developed to reduce the traffic impacts by decreasing the unit count to a point where at least one traffic impact would be reduced to less than significant. Significant and unavoidable impacts to a segment of Balboa Avenue near I-805 would be avoided by this alternative.

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines, the No Project Alternative/No Redevelopment Alternative would be the environmentally superior alternative because it would substantially lessen impacts to issue topics to a less than significant level. However, CEQA states that if the environmentally superior alternative is the No Project alternative, the EIR shall also identify the environmentally superior alternative from among the other alternatives. The Reduced Intensity Project Alternative would be the environmentally superior alternative from the remaining alternatives because it would reduce vehicle trips and avoid significant and unavoidable traffic impacts associated with the proposed project at one roadway segment location and lessen significant impacts at intersections and other roadway segments in the study area. This alternative would also meet many of the basic project objectives.

Opportunities for Public Involvement

The County is committed to open, inclusive and ongoing communication with the community throughout the planning and design processes for the site. The County encourages public comments on the Draft EIR.

How to Submit Comments

Comment Period: Oct. 9, 2019 – Nov. 25, 2019

By Email: marc.cass@sdcounty.ca.gov

By Mail: Department of General Services,
5560 Overland Ave., Suite 410, San Diego, CA 92123
ATTN: Marc Cass

Comments must be postmarked by Nov. 25, 2019,
for consideration in the Final EIR.

For ease of reference, the
proposed CPA is included
as Appendix B of the EIR.

For More Information

A copy of the Draft EIR is available for download
at www.sdhcd.com.

For more information, please contact the County
of San Diego: Omar Passons at Omar.Passons@sdcounty.ca.gov
or Angela Jackson-Llamas
at Angela.Jackson-Llamas@sdcounty.ca.gov.