
5. CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 GROWTH-INDUCING EFFECTS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines require a discussion of the ways in which a proposed action could be growth-inducing. CEQA identifies a project to be growth-inducing if it extends urban services into a previously unserved or underserved area; extends a major transportation corridor into a previously unserved or underserved area; or removes a major obstacle to development and growth. Secondary or indirect growth generally relates to retail and other service employment related to new development activity. New employees from commercial development and new population from residential development represent direct forms of growth. These growth increments expand the size of local markets for labor or retail and spending and induce additional economic activity in the area to capitalize on the direct growth. Growth may also be induced by lowering or removing infrastructural barriers to growth, improving transportation access to an area, or by creating an amenity such as a recreation facility that attracts new population or economic activity.

Typically, the growth-inducing potential of a project would be considered a significant growth-inducing impact if it fostered growth or a concentration of population, or created capacity to accommodate growth above and beyond what was permitted by the relevant plans or contained in growth projections of independent regional planning agencies. However, the creation of growth-inducing potential does not automatically lead to growth, whether it would be below or above a projected level. Growth at the local level is regulated by the land use policies of local governments in California, but growth can only happen through capital investment in new economic opportunities by the private or public sectors (predominantly the former). Development pressures are created by the desires of investors to mobilize their resources in a particular region or locality. These pressures help to structure the local politics or growth and the local jurisdiction's posture on growth management and land use policy. The growth-inducing potential or pressure created by a project is therefore mediated by the locality itself.

The proposed Murrieta General Plan sets in place policies that will help to define and direct future growth in the City of Murrieta. The Plan also provides land use designations and development densities for all areas of the City. The Plan provides residential growth, potentially adding 38,255 new dwelling units to the City at buildout, bringing the total number of dwelling units in the City to 50,906. These households would support a potential population increase of about 105,450 residents at buildout. Non-residential development would increase employment in Murrieta by 63,000 jobs for a total of approximately 73,200 jobs at buildout. While the General Plan will guide and direct this growth, growth will ultimately be dependent on capital investment in the City.

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Growth-inducing impacts are considered to be those effects of a project that result in growth beyond that proposed by the project itself. A project is generally considered growth-inducing if it results in the extension of urban services, infrastructure, or a transportation corridor into a previously unserved area or, removes a major obstacle to growth. The proposed City of Murrieta General Plan would result in growth inducing impacts and the extension of infrastructure into previously unserved areas. However, the growth projected under the proposed Land Use Element is not substantially greater than the levels allowed under the Southwest Area Plan which is the basis for the current growth projections anticipated by SCAG.

Along with local direct growth induced by the fulfillment of the Murrieta General Plan are non-local, indirect growth impacts. These consist of increased demand for more personal and business services, consumer goods, employment opportunities, and housing throughout the region that are associated with Murrieta's growth. This share of associated growth that will be borne by other communities in Riverside, San Diego, Orange and San Bernardino County. Many interdependent demographic and economic variables prevent a reasonable estimate of these regional impacts.

5.2 SHORT-TERM USES OF THE ENVIRONMENT VERSUS LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

CEQA Section 21100 of the Public Resources Code states that the relationship between the local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity must be discussed in an EIR. This discussion must include the cumulative and long-term effects of the proposed plan which adversely affect the environment. Special attention should be given to impacts which narrow the range of beneficial uses of the environment.

The proposed Land Use Element provides a framework for development within the City by designating land use types and specifying development potential. Although changes to General Plan land use designations can be made, the commitment of areas of the City to certain land uses in the short-term could preclude development of these areas with other land uses. Development of the proposed General Plan has considered options to the type and amount of development proposed with the goal of achieving the maximum long-term benefit to the City while attempting to avoid significant environmental effects.

Although long-term impacts of the Plan have been reduced to less than significant levels, impacts would still result with development under the proposed Plan. These impacts would include increased demands on the transportation system, increases in energy and water consumption, and increases in demand for public services and utilities.

Justification for growth and associated environmental impacts that would occur under the Plan is based on the City's need to meet demands for employment, commercial and industrial facilities, and housing, while maintaining adequate levels of public services and the economic viability of the City.

5.3 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Under CEQA, an EIR is required to disclose irreversible effects resulting from the implementation of a proposed project [CEQA Guidelines Section 15126 (f)]. Impacts associated with a proposed development may be considered to be significant and irreversible if:

- The project would involve a large commitment of non-renewable resources.
- The primary and secondary impacts of a project would generally commit future generations to similar uses (such as a highway improvement that provides access to a previously inaccessible area).
- The project involves uses in which irreversible damage could result from potential environmental accidents associated with the project.

CEQA also states that irretrievable commitments of resources are to be evaluated to ensure that such consumption is justified.

Development would commit future generations to the uses specified in the General Plan, through the conversion of vacant and open space lands to more urban uses. While this would be considered significant the General Plan is a document that is meant to change and can be amended in response to changing conditions and priorities within the City. Readily available natural resources will be used in construction and a minimum of open space will be lost where development is currently permitted. Increases in demand for and the use of gasoline, fuel oil, and natural gas stemming from future growth is not expected to result in shortfalls in the availability of these resources. While it is clear that some irreversible environmental changes will occur, it is important to point out that the General Plan is an essential document for the City which is intended to support reasonable growth, avoid significant impacts on the environment, and maintain the economic viability and quality of life in the City.

5.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

CEQA requires discussion in an Environmental Impact Report of impacts which are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. "Cumulatively considerable" refers to the incremental effects of an individual project which are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

Cumulative impacts would occur through loss of vacant land common to all areas of urban growth in the southwest Riverside County region. While the acreage that is converted to urban uses may be relatively small in any given instance, each parcel converted contributes to an increase in impervious surfaces at each site, thus generally increasing peak flows and decreasing times of concentration of surface runoff. While the amount of new runoff from each site would be incrementally very minor, the cumulative effect of all developments on the City's local drainage system and regional wastewater treatment systems would add substantially to existing flow volumes. Similarly, degradation of the quality of surface waters as well

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as that of groundwater would be slight for each individual dwelling unit but would add to the cumulative contaminant load carried into the hydrologic environment.

The project's contribution to the growth and urbanization of the Cities of Murrieta and Temecula and other unincorporated areas in southwest Riverside County will also result in the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of natural habitat areas. As established in the Biological Resources section, the Murrieta General Plan Area supports a rich and diverse flora and fauna including known occurrences and potential habitat for special-status species. Implementation of the proposed project will, therefore, contribute significantly to the loss of biological resources in the region. While project-specific impacts can be mitigated to a less-than-significant level the cumulative net loss of land area supporting areas of natural habitat will overcome any one projects' ability to compensate for lost habitat values. Therefore, cumulative impacts to biological resources are considered to be *significant and unavoidable*.

Other cumulative effects would consist of increased traffic congestion and associated increases in noise and pollutant emissions into the atmosphere resulting in a potential for a lessening in air quality. As cumulative development increases traffic volumes in the area, the noise environment would become increasingly incompatible with residential uses.

Increased cumulative demand for public services, including police, fire and schools would also occur. This would be both a service impact as well as a fiscal impact upon City and other agency expenditure patterns.

Cumulative impacts of development under the Murrieta General Plan should be continually monitored through the environmental review process of proposed projects, and additional detailed mitigation measures should be included as part of project EIR's performed for individual projects as development occurs in the City of Murrieta.