

5.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT

CEQA requires that an EIR identify alternatives to a project as it is proposed. The CEQA Guidelines specify that the EIR should identify alternatives that “will feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but will avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project.” The purpose of this section is to determine whether there are alternatives of design, scope or location that will substantially lessen the significant impacts, even if those alternatives “impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives,” or are more expensive. (Section 15126.6)

In order to comply with the purposes of CEQA, it is important to identify alternatives that reduce the significant impacts that are anticipated to occur if the project is implemented and to try to meet as many of the project’s objectives as possible. The Guidelines emphasize a common sense approach -- the alternatives should be reasonable, should “foster informed decision making and public participation,” and should focus on alternatives that avoid or substantially lessen the significant impacts.

The possible alternatives to the project are those that the Lead Agency have discretionary authority to select. In this case, since the County of San Benito is the Lead Agency with discretionary approval over the residential project, the alternatives include variations of both the college campus and residential projects. The Lead Agency possible options and, therefore, alternatives to the project are:

- 1) Abandon the project; this constitutes a “no project” alternative;
- 2) Reduce the scale of the project, either the size of the site or the number of students, residences, or both; this constitutes the “reduced scale” alternative;
- 3) Select another site for the project.

The discussion of alternatives should include enough information to allow a meaningful evaluation and comparison with the proposed project. The CEQA Guidelines state that if an alternative would cause one or more additional impacts, compared to the proposed project, the discussion should identify the additional impact, but in less detail than the significant effects of the proposed project.

The three critical factors to consider in selecting and evaluating alternatives are, (1) the significant impacts from the proposed project that could be reduced or avoided by an alternative, (2) the project’s objectives, and (3) the feasibility of the alternatives available. Each of these factors is discussed below

Significant Impacts of the Project

As discussed above, the CEQA Guidelines advise that the alternatives analysis in an EIR should be limited to alternatives that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project and would achieve most of the project objectives.

The significant impacts of the projects include: transportation, air quality, noise, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, biology, visual and aesthetics, and energy.

Objectives of the Project

While CEQA does not require that alternatives must be capable of meeting all the project objectives, their ability to meet most of the objectives is relevant to their consideration. The following represent the objectives for the Gavilan San Benito Campus project and Fairview Corners Residential Project:

San Benito Campus and Fairview Corners Combined Objectives:

- Create a high-quality and functionally integrated environment.
- Coordinate land use and infrastructure planning to support the combined proposed project development.
- Provide a complementary mix of public, commercial/retail and residential uses.
- Create a pedestrian-oriented project with an emphasis on an open space network of landscaped streets, sidewalks and public space for the surrounding community.
- Ensure that infrastructure capacity meets the requirements of the combined projects.
- Promote an environmentally sustainable community that supports quality of life through energy conservation.
- Establish a coordinated and efficient streetscape and urban design plan that integrates the proposed land uses.
- Achieve the successful integration of the college campus and residential community.
- Implement Sustainable Development construction practices to the maximum extent possible without increasing baseline construction costs.
- Implement Sustainable Design Principles to promote regeneration of the natural environment, minimizing impact on its resources while affording sound economical development to the greatest extent possible.

San Benito Campus Objectives:

- Develop a 3,500-student (full-time equivalent) campus in San Benito County to serve the existing and future needs of the Gavilan College District's population.
- Establish a campus within the southern sector of the Gavilan College District to better serve both existing and future students and the long-term educational needs of the area.
- Reduce the travel distances and times, and associated traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution emissions from students commuting to outlying college campuses.
- Provide reasonable access to Hollister and other San Benito County residents and minimize traffic impacts on local communities by locating near major arterial roads.
- Utilize architectural design, lighting, signage, and landscape materials to give the project a distinctive and pleasing appearance.
- Establish clearly defined sense of arrival through the establishment of appropriate signage entry features, landscape and hardscape.
- Provide for an efficient campus layout with sufficient land to comply with State of California standards for a comprehensive community college campus.
- Provide for enhanced pedestrian mobility within the campus and enhance opportunities for public transit access and utilization.
- Provide for access or close proximity to available utilities and infrastructure improvements.
- Avoid hazards such as earthquake faults, floodplains and airport hazards and mitigate as necessary to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of students.

- Provide convenient recreational opportunities through the provision of pedestrian connections to athletic fields and open space areas.
- Provide opportunity for housing and retail uses that support the campus environment.
- Provide affordable housing opportunities that meet the needs of faculty and students.

Fairview Corners Objectives:

- Create a mutually supportive relationship between the residential community and the adjacent college campus that integrates connections and facilitates shared infrastructure.
- Obtain approval for development of up to 220214 dwelling units.
- Provide for housing opportunities in close proximity to employment opportunities, public transportation, public facilities, and goods and services.
- Provide a range and mix of lot and building sizes to meet the needs of a variety of households.
- Provide a transition of lot sizes, placing larger lots adjacent to existing residential uses and smaller lot sizes adjacent to the college campus.
- Provide affordable housing and open space opportunities for the college campus.
- Minimize the noise and speed of traffic to ensure the safety of residents through the design of cul-de-sacs and curvilinear streets.
- Provide for housing opportunities in close proximity to existing utilities and infrastructure improvements.
- Create a high-quality vibrant residential community that is visually attractive and compatible with the surrounding area, including the adjacent Cielo Vista subdivision.
- Provide convenient pedestrian connections and recreational opportunities through the provision of pocket parks and open space areas.

Feasibility of Alternatives

CEQA, the CEQA Guidelines, and case law on the subject have found that feasibility can be based on a wide range of factors and influences. CEQA’s general definition of feasibility is “capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors.” Among the factors that may be taken into account in considering the feasibility of an alternative are “...site suitability, economic viability, availability of infrastructure, general plan consistency, other plans or regulatory limitations, jurisdictional boundaries...and whether the proponent can reasonably acquire, control, or otherwise have access to the alternative site...” (Section 15126.6 (f)(1)).

5.1 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

The CEQA Guidelines require an EIR to include a “No Project” alternative, which addresses both “the existing conditions, as well as what will be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project is not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services.”

The No Project alternative consists of a continuation of the existing annual discing and periodic cattle grazing of the 137-acre site. As long as the property owner continues with this operation, the existing conditions could continue.

The project site is located within an unincorporated area of San Benito County and within the Service Area and Sphere of Influence of the Sunnyslope County Water District. The property is designated for a five-acre minimum lot size under the San Benito County General Plan and is zoned Rural. Under this General Plan designation, a maximum of 27 houses could be developed. However, because of the Interim Area of Special Study overlay designation, it has been envisioned for higher intensity and five acre “ranchettes” has not been considered the optimum use of the land.

The project site is also within the City of Hollister Planning Area and is designated Residential Estate in the Hollister General Plan. This designation is the same as Rural under the County’s General Plan; therefore, a maximum of 27 houses could be developed.

There is a possibility either of the projects could not be approved and only one of the projects would be developed. This would result in 80-acres or 57-acres of the 137-acre property remaining undeveloped. Compared to both projects developing, the environmental impacts would be proportionately reduced. There would be less traffic, noise, air quality, and energy impacts. Impacts and mitigation required for biological resources, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, cultural resources would be similar to approval of both proposed projects. The impacts associated with development of each project (college campus project and residential project) are discussed below in subsequent sections.

Assuming that neither of the projects are developed, the No Project Alternative would not meet any of the project objectives.

5.1.1 Comparison of Environmental Impacts

The continued operation of existing uses on the project site would not result in any significant impacts, as defined by CEQA.⁸³ Impacts from the continued operation of the site would be those that occur from the conditions reflected throughout this EIR in the sections entitled “Existing Setting”. The No Project Alternative (assuming the continued use of the existing agricultural uses) would avoid the significant environmental impacts of the project; however, it would also fail to implement several environmental benefits that result from the project.

5.2 REDUCED RESIDENTIAL ALTERNATIVE

The Reduced Residential Alternative consists of one-half acre (0.5-acre) residential lots on 57-acres of the property and full buildout of the college campus on the same 80-acres as the proposed project. The one-half acre residential lots used in this analysis was based upon consistency with the adjacent residential subdivision to the west. The Reduced Residential Alternative would be developed on the same property, but there would be only 112 single-family houses compared to ~~220~~214 under the proposed project. The campus development would continue to include a 3,500 FTES campus, with 35,000 square feet of retail and 70 on-campus housing units.

⁸³ Section 15126.6 (e) (3) (B) of the CEQA Guidelines state the following, “If the project is other than a land use or regulatory plan, for example a development project on identifiable property, the “no project” alternative is the circumstance under which the project does not proceed. Here the discussion would compare the environmental effects of the property remaining in its existing state against environmental effects which would occur if the project is approved.”

5.2.1 Comparison of Environmental Impacts

The Reduced Residential Alternative would generate 6,399 net new daily trips on the roadway network, with 531 occurring in the AM peak hour and 632 occurring in the PM peak hour.⁸⁴ This can be compared to the trips of the proposed project, which are 7,433 net new daily trips, with 612 occurring in the AM peak hour and 741 occurring in the PM peak hour. This Reduced Residential Alternative would have a significant impact at the following two study intersections: Airline Highway and Union Road intersection and Fairview Road and Hillcrest Road intersection. The proposed project would result in significant impacts to the two intersections listed above plus the Memorial Drive and Hillcrest Road intersection.

The results of the peak-hour traffic signal warrant checks under reduced density project conditions indicate that the addition of project traffic would not create a need to signalize any of the unsignalized study intersections. The proposed project would create the need to signalize the Memorial Drive and Hillcrest Road intersection.

Peak-hour highway segment levels of service were evaluated for the section of SR 25 between US 101 and SR 156 and the section of SR 156 between Union Road and The Alameda. The Reduced Residential Alternative peak-hour level of service results for the study highway segments indicate that one highway segments would continue to exceed Caltrans' level of service standard during the peak hours with operations in the LOS E range, similar to conditions under the college project and residential project.

The Reduced Residential Alternative would impact two intersection and one highway segment; these impacts could be mitigated by participation in the Regional TIF program and would constitute a fair-share contribution toward the necessary mitigation measures at the various roadway locations. While the Reduced Residential Alternative would result in significant impacts and mitigation measures, this alternative would result in reduced transportation impacts, compared to the proposed project.

Air quality and noise construction impacts would be similar to the proposed project, because this alternative would still involve multiple phases of construction and there would still be adjacent sensitive receptors. The operational noise impacts would be similar to than the proposed project, because the traffic generation is not substantially less than the proposed project. The energy usage impacts would be slightly less than the proposed project because the 108 single-family houses would not make a substantial difference in energy usage compared to the proposed project. Water quality, biology, geology, and visual impacts would similar to the proposed project because this alternative would also result in construction and development on the entire 137 acres.

5.2.2 Relationship to Project Objectives

This Alternative would meet all of the college campus objectives but would not fully meet the Fairview Corners objectives, because it includes 108 fewer dwelling units than the proposed residential project and lacks a range of residential lots sizes and building sizes.

⁸⁴ A transportation impact analysis was prepared for this project alternative. Further details on this analysis can be found in Appendix A of this document, the Fairview Corners/Gavilan College Transportation Impact Analysis by Hexagon Transportation Consultants, July 2008.

5.2.3 Conclusion

While this alternative is feasible from a land use and planning standpoint and would establish a college campus and single-family residential development, it would not fully meet the Fairview Corners residential goals and objectives. This alternative would reduce transportation impacts at one intersection compared to the combined projects.

5.2 ALL RESIDENTIAL ALTERNATIVE

The All Residential Alternative consists of one-half acre (0.5-acre) residential lots on all 137-acres of the property. The one-half acre residential lots used in this analysis was based upon consistency with the adjacent residential subdivision to the west. The college campus would not be included in this alternative. The All Residential Alternative would include 272 single-family houses compared to ~~220~~214 with the proposed project.

5.2.1 Comparison of Environmental Impacts

The All Residential Alternative would generate 2,603 net new daily trips on the roadway network, with 204 occurring in the AM peak hour and 275 occurring in the PM peak hour.⁸⁵ This can be compared to the trips of the proposed project, which are 7,433 net new daily trips, with 612 occurring in the AM peak hour and 741 occurring in the PM peak hour. This Alternative would have a significant impact at the following two study intersections: Airline Highway and Union Road intersection and Fairview Road and Hillcrest Road intersection. The proposed project would result in significant impacts to the two intersections listed above plus the Memorial Drive and Hillcrest Road intersection.

The results of the peak-hour traffic signal warrant checks under reduced density project conditions indicate that the addition of project traffic would not create a need to signalize any of the unsignalized study intersections. The proposed project would create the need to signalize the Memorial Drive and Hillcrest Road intersection.

Peak-hour highway segment levels of service were evaluated for the section of Highway 25 between US 101 and Highway 156 and the section of Highway 156 between Union Road and The Alameda. The All Residential Alternative peak-hour level of service results for the study highway segments indicate that both highway segments would continue to exceed Caltrans' level of service standard during the peak hours with operations in the LOS E range.

The All Residential Alternative would impact two intersection and two highway segments, these impacts could be mitigated by participation in the Regional TIF program and would constitute a fair-share contribution toward the necessary mitigation measures at the various roadway locations. While the All Residential Alternative would result in significant impacts and mitigation measures, this alternative would result in reduced transportation impacts compared to the proposed project.

Air quality and noise construction impacts would be similar to the proposed combined projects, because this alternative would still involve multiple phases of construction and there would still be adjacent sensitive receptors. Due to the reduced traffic generation, operational noise impacts would

⁸⁵ A transportation impact analysis was prepared for this project alternative. Further details on this analysis can be found in Appendix A of this document, the Fairview Corners/Gavilan College Transportation Impact Analysis by Hexagon Transportation Consultants, July 2008.

be less than the proposed project. The energy usage impacts would be less than the proposed college campus and residential projects because the 272 single-family houses would require less than the proposed college campus and residential projects. Water quality, biology, geology, and visual impacts would be similar to the proposed college campus and residential projects because this alternative would also result in construction and development on the entire 137 acres.

5.2.2 Relationship to Project Objectives

This alternative would not meet any of the Gavilan College District's college campus objectives or the combined project objectives. It would meet some of the Fairview Corners objectives residential alternatives but would lack a range of residential lots sizes and building sizes and would not be able to utilize the joint infrastructure and recreational facilities of the proposed college campus and residential projects.

5.2.3 Conclusion

This Alternative would result in less transportation and energy impacts than the proposed project. While this alternative is feasible from a land use and planning standpoint and would establish a single-family residential development, it would not fully meet the Fairview Corners residential goals and objectives. Since the alternative would not develop a college campus, it would not meet any of the objectives of the Gavilan College District to serve the growing demand for community college education services in San Benito County.

5.3 LOCATION ALTERNATIVE

Gavilan Campus Site Selection Process

CEQA Guidelines encourage consideration of an alternative site when significant effects of the project might be avoided or substantially lessened. Only locations that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project and meet most of the project objectives need be considered for inclusion in an EIR.

As discussed previously in this section, the main objective of the college campus project is to serve the existing and future needs of the Gavilan College District's population. The City of Hollister and San Benito County communities are geographically separated and have a distinct identity from the other communities served by the Gavilan College District. The population in these areas has been growing, and is expected to continue growing. Consequently, Gavilan has determined that a new, full-service campus is needed in San Benito County to properly serve the long-term educational needs of this area.

The Gavilan College District has been engaged in a search for property in the City of Hollister and San Benito County areas since 2004, when the need for a San Benito campus was first identified as part of the voter approved facilities improvement bond approved under provisions of Proposition 39. Their multi-year site consideration and selection process is summarized in *Section 2.2 Project Background – Gavilan College District Process* of this EIR.

Also described in *Section 2.2*, twelve of the initially considered sites were evaluated and deemed unsuitable due to land cost, access and/or site configuration, airport issues, agricultural easements, topography, lack of utilities, proximity to the Gilroy campus, and other environmental factors.

The Alternative Site numbers correspond to the numbers shown on Figure 4 and Table 2.2-1.

Alternative Site #10

One of the sites considered as one of the final four warranting more in-depth consideration was Alternative Site #10, the 130-acre Citation Site, located on McCloskey Road, just under one mile east of San Felipe Road (Hwy 156). Alternative Site #10 has a San Benito County General Plan designation of *Rural Residential* allows one-half acre minimum lot size. This alternative site is located outside of the Hollister city limits, but inside of the City of Hollister's Planning Area. According to the City of Hollister General Plan, the Citation site has a designation of *Residential Estate*, same as the proposed project.

5.3.1 Comparison of Environmental Impacts

The lands surrounding the Citation site to the north, south, and west are primarily in agricultural production. Therefore, development of the proposed project at this site would result in increased pressure to convert farmlands to non-agricultural uses. Parcels on the south and west sides of this property are adjacent to prime agricultural farmland. Due to the immediate proximity of active farmland, this site could be exposed to nuisance impacts from agricultural operations including odors, dust, and noise.

No known threatened or endangered plant or animal species are known to be present on Alternative Site #10. Although, one wildlife species is considered to have a potential to occur on the site is the San Joaquin kit fox. Santa Ana creek crosses the northeastern edge of Alternative Site #10 and there is also potentially suitable habitat for California tiger salamander and California red legged frog on the site. This site would have greater land use compatibility impacts and greater loss of agricultural lands impacts compared to the proposed project site.

Santa Ana Creek is a riparian corridor that would need to be avoided on Alternative Site #10. Any impacts to the corridor would require consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, if jurisdictional wetlands or State Waters were to be affected by site development. Riparian impacts are not an issue at the proposed project location.

Creeks tend to be highly sensitive areas for archaeological resources and, therefore, development of the project at Alternative Site #10 may result in greater cultural resources impacts than the project site. Additionally, there are a few buildings on this site greater than 50 years of age, which would need to be evaluated for historic significance.

Alternative Site #10 is not located near a recorded fault trace and, therefore, would avoid potential seismic impacts related to the presence of the Tres Pinos fault crossing the proposed project site. All locations in the Hollister area are subject to strong seismic shaking.

Alternative Site #10 is located inside of the Runway Protection Zone (Clear Zone) for the Hollister Municipal Airport. This site would require plan review from both the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the California Department of Transportation. These are impacts not occurring at the project site.

There is a high-voltage power line running along the southern property boundary and setbacks

required by the California Education Code must be applied. The project site has standard 21 kv distribution lines, as shown on record drawings provided by PG&E. Therefore, there are no setback requirements needed between the campus and/or residential development and the power lines. This is also present at the proposed project site.

Alternative Site #10 is characterized by flat terrain and near and distant views are agricultural and residential. Development of the project at this alternative site would result in a similar change in visual character as the proposed project site. Therefore, Alternative Site #10 would not avoid the project's significant unavoidable visual impact.

Development of the project at Alternative Site #10 would generate generally the same amount of traffic as the project at the proposed site. Development at this site, therefore, would not avoid the project's impacts to the regional roadway system (i.e., segments of Highway 25 and 156). Roadway improvements would be required at McCloskey Road, including adding lanes for increased capacity between San Felipe Road and Fairview Road, and installation of traffic signals.

Alternative Site #10 is located within a recorded Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year floodplain. All structures on this site would need to be elevated above the 100-year flood elevation and/or the site would need to be removed from the flood plan through a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR). The proposed project site is not within a FEMA floodplain.

5.3.2 Relationship to Project Objectives

Alternative Site #10 would meet some of the Gavilan San Benito Campus objectives but would not meet the College's objective to avoid hazards such as floodplains and airport hazards.

5.3.3 Conclusion

While this alternative is feasible from a land use and planning standpoint and would establish a college campus for the Gavilan College District, it would not fully meet all Gavilan's objectives. This alternative would avoid seismic fault impacts but would result in similar transportation, air quality, noise, energy, and visual impacts. In addition, Alternative Site #10 would result in new or greater impacts from biological, land use, agricultural, cultural, and flooding impacts compared to the proposed project.

5.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

The CEQA Guidelines state that an EIR shall identify an environmentally superior alternative. Based on the above discussions, the environmentally superior alternative is the No Project Alternative, because all of the project's significant environmental impacts would be avoided if no new construction occurred under this Alternative. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2), however, states that "if the environmentally superior alternative is the No Project Alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives."

The Residential Alternative would be the environmentally superior alternative because it would result in less transportation, operational noise impacts, and less energy usage than the proposed project. This Alternative would not meet any of the San Benito Campus objectives because the college campus project was eliminated. An alternative that would meet some of both project objectives and still reduce project impacts would be the Reduced Residential Alternative. This alternative would

also be the environmentally superior to the proposed project because it would reduce the traffic and air pollution impacts of the project and would meet most of the projects' objectives.