

CHAPTER 5

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

CEQA requires the consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project. Section 15126.6(c) of the CEQA Guidelines states:

...the range of potential alternatives to the proposed project shall include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the project and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant effects. The EIR should briefly describe the rationale for selecting the alternatives to be discussed. The EIR should also identify any alternatives that were considered by the lead agency but were rejected as infeasible during the scoping process and briefly explain the reasons underlying the lead agency's determination.

The range of alternatives should have the potential to reduce or eliminate potential adverse impacts to a less than significant level, while achieving most of the basic objectives of the original project. The significant impacts associated with the proposed Specific Plan are analyzed in detail in the topical chapters of this EIR. They include (among others) loss of recreational park space, increased traffic congestion, and potential relocation removal of historic structures.

Alternatives that reduce these significant impacts while achieving most of the basic objectives of the proposed Specific Plan (see Chapter 3.0) would satisfy CEQA Guidelines §15126.6 and provide a range of alternatives for consideration by the decision makers.

5.2 SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The following sections describe the alternatives considered in this EIR.

5.2.1 No Project Alternative

CEQA requires the analysis of the No Project Alternative. In this case, the No Project Alternative is further subdivided into two scenarios: the No Project – No Build scenario, in which development in the Plan Area is held static, and the No Project – General Plan Buildout scenario, which assumes development of the planning area in accordance with the existing General Plan. Both scenarios are analyzed herein.

5.2.2 Commercial-Intensive Scenario

The buildout analyzed in the EIR assumes residential (rather than commercial or office) land uses are built wherever allowable, particularly in second stories of the downtown. It is also possible under the Plan for second stories to be developed with commercial use, as opposed to residential use, in the mixed-use areas.

In general, residential land uses produce fewer vehicle trips but generate greater demand for water, wastewater treatment, and other public services.

5.3 ALTERNATIVES PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

The following are alternatives that may have been considered during the Specific Plan or EIR process but were eliminated from further review.

5.3.1 100% Redevelopment

The project, as described in the EIR, assumes turnover of existing structures to new development. One option not considered reasonable is 100% new buildout, which would require nearly complete redevelopment of the existing built environment, with development to the maximum allowable under the proposed plan and code. This scenario is considered unlikely for a number of reasons:

- It is not considered reasonable to assume that all property owners will elect to raze and develop new buildings.
- This scenario does not account for constraints such as preserved/protected historic buildings.

This alternative is not considered further because it is not considered reasonably foreseeable.

5.3.2 Other Locations/Relocation of Development

Infill and redevelopment in the Downtown is central to the General Plan and other previous planning efforts for Soledad. As stated earlier, this EIR is tiered from the General Plan EIR. The land use designations and development potential set forth in the General Plan resulted from years-long planning efforts that involved the community and City and regional organizations, as well as thorough evaluations of developable area, infrastructure and other resources. The project is a plan specific to the historic downtown of the City of Soledad. An alternative in another location is not considered.

5.3.3 Specific Plan Alternatives

There were no Specific Plan alternatives identified in the process that were rejected from further consideration. Alternatives regarding access (e.g., overpasses and interchange options), and type of development (e.g., a community college or a hotel on the railroad parcels) are described in the Specific Plan as options and are addressed to the extent reasonably foreseeable in the EIR.

5.4 ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

5.4.1 No Project – No Build Alternative

This alternative is akin to the existing setting and conditions described throughout the EIR.

5.4.1.1 Aesthetics and Cultural Resources

The General Plan includes goals and programs intended to promote beautification in Downtown Soledad, including through restoration and improvement of historic and potentially historic structures. Retaining the status quo is considered inconsistent with adopted planning documents and a more significant impact than the proposed project.

5.4.1.2 Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases

The No Build alternative would generate no additional emissions and would therefore have no impact regarding air quality and GHGs. Impacts are considered less adverse when compared to the proposed Specific Plan.

5.4.1.3 Hydrology/Water Quality

Exercising the No Build alternative would preclude implementation of strategies in the proposed Specific Plan for increasing infiltration opportunities, and improving the quality of runoff. However, limiting new development to existing conditions would reduce traffic and eliminate new building, which would reduce total new runoff from the planning area and reduce contamination associated with vehicles. Impacts are considered less than significant, and less adverse than the proposed Specific Plan.

5.4.1.4 Land Use/Planning and Parks

Previous planning efforts, including the City's Redevelopment Plan (now obsolete) and the General Plan identify blighted conditions throughout the planning area, including substandard conditions in existing building stock. The City's General Plan includes several policies and programs supporting the redevelopment and revitalization of the Downtown. Holding development at existing conditions and levels is inconsistent with the existing planning for the area. Impacts are significant and adverse, contrary to the impacts of the proposed Specific Plan.

Allowing no additional development would eliminate impacts associated with provision of sufficient park acreage. Impacts are less than significant, and less adverse than the Specific Plan.

5.4.1.5 Transportation and Traffic

Under existing conditions (No Build alternative), traffic would operate at acceptable levels of service. Deficiencies in pedestrian connections would remain. Parking would continue to be abundant. Impacts are considered less than significant, and less adverse than the proposed Specific Plan.

5.4.1.6 Water Resources

Water resources are considered more than sufficient to support buildout of the proposed Specific Plan. However, under the No Build Alternative, no development and no increase in the demand for water resources would occur. Impacts are considered less than significant, and less adverse than the proposed project.

5.4.2 No Project – General Plan Buildout Alternative

This alternative consists of buildout of the planning area and surrounding areas in accordance with the existing General Plan, as amended to date. The particulars of this buildout scenario are outlined in Table 5-1.

Buildout of the planning area in accordance with the General Plan would result in higher unit counts and square footage totals in all building categories when compared to the proposed Specific Plan. All impact areas analyzed in the EIR would be affected by this alternative.

Table 5-1. General Plan Land Use Designations and Buildout Potential Within the Plan Area

General Plan Land Use	FAR/dwelling units per acre	Maximum Buildable Square Feet (General Plan)	Maximum Residential Units (General Plan)
Industrial (I)	0.6	552,940	0
Service Commercial (SC)	0.4	127,690	0
General Commercial (GC)	0.4	242,730	0
Downtown Commercial (DC)	0.4	221,200	253
Public Facilities/General Commercial (PF/GC)	0.4	77,410	0
Downtown Commercial/ General Commercial (DC/GC)	0.4	48,000	0
Downtown Commercial/ High Density Residential (DC/HDR)	0.4	48,000	55
Downtown Commercial/ Service Commercial (DC/SC)	0.4	86,400	99
Public Facilities (PF)	0.4	150,514	0
Medium Density Residential (MDR)	20	0	399
Medium Density Residential/ Single Family Residential (MDR/SFR)	20/6	0	24
Single Family Residential (SFR)	6	0	123
Single Family Residential/ Neighborhood Commercial (SFR/NC)	6/0.4	108,800	37
Total		1,663,683	1,056

Source: Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc. Estimates based on block by block mapping with General Plan overlay. Numbers are maximums and do not include an assessment of site specific conditions which may affect buildout potential.

5.4.2.1 Aesthetics and Cultural Resources

Buildout of the General Plan could improve aesthetics in the planning area assuming development occurs consistent with General Plan policies and Design Guidelines. Impacts are considered less than significant after mitigation, similar to the proposed project.

Buildout of the General Plan could result in substantially the same impacts to historic resources as the proposed project. Impacts are considered significant but mitigable, similar to the proposed project.

5.4.2.2 Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases

Buildout of the General Plan would have more severe operational air quality impacts when compared to the proposed project. Impacts are considered significant, but relatively more adverse compared to the proposed project.

5.4.2.3 Hydrology and Water Quality

Buildout of the planning area in accordance with the existing General Plan would address issues associated with existing runoff as buildings are developed or redeveloped. Buildout of the General Plan would increase the development potential of the area; however, buildout at General Plan levels would not necessarily increase building footprints, or measurably decrease infiltration potential in the area. Impacts are considered significant but mitigable, similar to the proposed project.

5.4.2.4 Land Use/Planning and Parks.

Buildout of the planning area in accordance with applicable plans would not create significant impacts associated with land use and planning. This alternative would allow development and redevelopment in the planning area. Assuming existing plans and policies are followed, sufficient parks acreage would be provided under this alternative. Impacts are considered less than significant, and relatively less adverse than the proposed project.

5.4.2.5 Transportation and Traffic

Buildout of the planning area in accordance with the existing General Plan would result in higher traffic volumes compared to the proposed project. The circulation pattern would not be substantially different from either existing conditions or the proposed Specific Plan, although alternatives for freeway on-ramps may differ slightly. Buildout of the entire General Plan resulted in level of service "F" at all area intersections, however, buildout of the planning area itself is not likely to result in such severe levels of service. Contributing traffic volumes from expansion areas was the main reason for deficient levels of service at buildout of the General Plan. Traffic volumes will be higher than the proposed project; impacts are considered significant but mitigable, similar to the proposed project but slightly more adverse.

5.4.2.6 Water Resources

To the extent that the General Plan allows a greater amount of development in terms of square footage and unit count, buildout under the General Plan will result in increased demand for water, both over existing conditions and when compared to the proposed Specific Plan. Impacts are considered significant, and relatively more adverse than the proposed project.

5.4.3 Commercial-Intensive Scenario Alternative

5.4.3.1 Aesthetics and Cultural Resources

Exercising the commercial option would have similar, less than significant impacts associated with aesthetics compared to the proposed plan.

Exercising the commercial option would have similar, significant impacts associated with cultural resources compared to the mixed residential and commercial option.

5.4.3.2 Air Quality and GHG

To the extent that traffic increases under this alternative, air quality impacts may be slightly more severe; however, operational impacts are expected to be less than significant, similar to the residential option.

5.4.3.3 Hydrology and Water Quality

Exercising the commercial option would have similar, less than significant impacts associated with hydrology and water quality compared to the mixed residential and commercial option.

5.4.3.4 Land Use/Planning and Parks.

Development of commercial, as opposed to residential, units in the downtown is consistent with the General Plan, similar to the mixed residential and commercial option analyzed in the EIR. The development of commercial use would reduce or eliminate new residential populations in the Downtown, eliminating the need for additional park space. Impacts are less than significant, and relatively less adverse than the proposed Specific Plan.

5.4.3.5 Transportation and Traffic

Assuming more commercial space, as opposed to residential space, is constructed, trips would be expected to increase over the residential option. Impacts, however, should remain less than significant, similar to the proposed project, since circulation pattern alterations would remain the same.

5.4.3.6 Water Resources

Depending on the type of commercial tenants replacing the residential component, water demand may decrease slightly under the commercial option. Impacts, however, are considered less than significant, similar to the proposed project.

5.5 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

Based on the discussion and evaluation in Table 5-2, assuming all topics are valued the same, the No Project – No Build alternative is the environmentally superior alternative, as no development and no impacts would occur. CEQA states that when the No Project Alternative is environmentally superior, the next most superior alternative should also be considered. The next most superior alternative is the commercial intensive scenario possible under the proposed Specific Plan because it would slightly reduce the need for additional parks to serve the residential uses proposed in the Specific Plan.

Table 5-2. Comparison of Alternatives

Topic	No Project – No Build	No-Project – GP Buildout	Commercial Intensive Scenario
Aesthetics and Cultural Resources	>	=	=
Air Quality and GHG	<	>	=
Hydrology and Water Quality	<	=	=
Land Use Planning and Parks	>	<	<
Traffic	<	>	=
Water Supply	<	>	=
Overall Comparison to Specific Plan	<	>	<

Note: All topics are considered of equal weight

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