KEY AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

The existing General Plan is over 30 years old. Some of the policies are out of date and State requirements have changed substantially. Below are major issues of concern; others may be added.

Agriculture and Soil Resources

The Planning Area includes about 360 acres of agricultural land. Some of this land could be converted to very low-density residential or commercial recreation uses under the proposed General Plan.

Land Use and Housing

The proposed General Plan would increase the land acreage in Very Low Density and Residential with Open Space classifications, contributing to protection of open space. It would increase land acreage in Mixed Use classifications, encouraging redevelopment that includes housing on certain commercial sites. The proposed Plan would create five specifically targeted commercial designations, to facilitate distinct identities for different areas.

Overall, the proposed Plan is estimated to increase residential development capacity by 265 units. It would increase medium- and high-density housing potential by about 575, providing more potential affordable housing sites. The Plan would increase non-residential development potential by about 550,000 square feet. These changes have implications that will be further explored in the EIR.

Transportation

New development that takes place under the proposed General Plan and Local Coastal Plan may or may not lead to additional traffic on area roadways. This could result in significant impacts to level of service on segments of Highway 1 and/or Highway 35 (Skyline Boulevard).

Air Quality

The Bay Area Air Basin is currently in nonattainment of state and federal ozone standards and for California's standards for fine and respirable particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5). If vehicle miles traveled on roadways would increase as a result of the proposed General Plan and Local Coastal Plan, there could be a small contribution to the regional air quality problem. In addition, toxic air contaminants (TACs) could be an issue in certain locations.

Climate Change

Climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions has the potential to cause a number of tangible, adverse impacts. Greenhouse gas emissions from the Planning Area could represent a small contribution to this cumulative impact. In Pacifica, increased flooding and erosion due to sea level rise have the potential to be serious direct impacts (see Flooding and Geological Hazards, below.)

Noise

Highway 1 is a significant source of noise, which could impact new development along the corridor.

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

People treasure the views of ridges and the ocean that define Pacifica. New development on open, visible sites has the potential to change the visual experience of the city. Potential locations of concern are Fassler

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Ridge; the face of Cattle Hill; Gypsy Hill; and Milagra Canyon. There could also be concern about increased building height on some sites close to Highway 1.

Cultural Resources

Archaeological resources have been found and recorded in the Planning Area, and the Area features the types of environments where Native American cultural resources have been found elsewhere in San Mateo County. There are also three sites listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places; two additional State-recognized sites; and a number of official local landmarks. The potential to disturb any of these resources will be considered in the EIR.

Biological Resources

The Planning Area's undeveloped land provides habitat or potential habitat for a variety of species and natural communities. These are extensively updated since the previous General Plan. Some of these have special status, having been listed under the federal or state Endangered Species Acts or identified in the California Natural Diversity Database.

- Critical habitat has been designated for the steelhead trout in San Pedro Creek;
- Expansion of critical habitat for California red-legged frog on Sweeney Ridge is under consideration;
- Special status plant communities identified along northern coastal bluffs;
- Potential Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) in Sharp Park Golf Course, Mori Point, Rockaway Quarry;
- High habitat value area on Milagra Ridge;
- Wildlife movement corridor between Milagra Ridge and Sharp Park/Sweeney Ridge.

Flooding

Portions of Pacifica are within FEMA-designated flood zones. The potential impacts of flooding on new development under the General Plan and Local Coastal Plan and on critical infrastructure, beaches, and habitat, could be exacerbated over the long-term by potential sea level rise.

Geological and Seismic Hazards

Pacifica's geography and the presence of active seismic faults make it susceptible to geological hazards. Most import are the potential for:

- Slope failure due to seismic activity or other conditions;
- Seismic groundshaking and liquefaction;
- Coastal erosion.

Winter storm surges and coastal erosion may be exacerbated by sea level rise, and result in property damage and loss; impacts to infrastructure; loss of sensitive habitat; and loss of beaches.

Hazardous Materials and Wildland Fires

The high proportion of undeveloped land on rugged slopes in close proximity to developed neighborhoods brings with it the risk of fire hazards. The adequacy of existing and proposed fire prevention services to protect persons and property will be considered.

As of 2009, the Planning Area included 13 sites undergoing cleanup or monitoring for contamination. The EIR will consider the potential impacts that these and other sources of hazardous materials could have on residents and visitors.

Hydrology and Water Resources

The Planning Area includes five streams, some of which drain multiple channels. San Pedro Creek is a year-round stream which is identified as critical steelhead habitat, and has also been listed by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board as an impaired water body. The potential impact of new development under the General Plan on water quality will be evaluated.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

The Planning Area has a wealth of public, accessible open space. At the same time, there is a shortage of neighborhood parks and recreation facilities. It is also important that the General Plan and Local Coastal Plan provide public access to the ocean as much as possible. The EIR will evaluate the impact of the proposed General Plan on public access to parks, recreation, and the coast.

Public Facilities and Services

Growth under the proposed Plan could result in an increased demand for schools, fire and police protection, and other public services. The adequacy of public facilities to meet this demand under the Plan will be considered.

Utilities

Water, wastewater, and energy infrastructure capacity will also be reviewed and compared with estimated demand with development under the proposed General Plan.