

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. PURPOSE OF THIS EIR

In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) describes the environmental consequences of the University Village at San Pablo Avenue Project (project). The City of Albany is the lead agency for review of this project. This EIR is designed to fully inform decision-makers in the City of Albany, other responsible agencies, and the general public of the project and the potential environmental consequences of approval and implementation. The EIR also examines the various alternatives to the proposed project and recommends a set of mitigation measures to reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts.

### B. PROPOSED PROJECT

The 5.3-acre project site is located within University Village, a 77-acre area owned by University of California and situated in the City of Albany in northern Alameda County, California. The project site is located on two separate “blocks” (Blocks A and B) within the University Village development and includes the area generally bounded by San Pablo Avenue, Codornices Creek, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and Village Creek.

On Block A (located northwest of the San Pablo Avenue/Monroe Street intersection) the proposed project would include the development of a 55,000 square foot Whole Foods Market, or similar full service grocery store, and associated parking lot. Additional parking would be located under the Whole Foods market. This block would also include a 2,000 foot retail structure, pedestrian and bike paths and stormwater drainage facilities.

Block B (located southwest of the San Pablo Avenue/Monroe Street intersection) would include a 175-unit senior housing facility and 28,000 square feet of retail space fronting on San Pablo Avenue and Monroe Street. A pedestrian/bike path and stormwater drainage facilities would also be located on this block.

Other improvements associated with the project would include changes to 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Monroe Street, the installation of a pedestrian/bike path along Codornices Creek, a pedestrian/bike crossing of San Pablo Avenue and the installation of drainage swales and a stormwater detention swale. Additional description of the proposed project is presented in Chapter III.

### C. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In January 1998, the Regents of the University of California approved the *University Village & Albany/Northwest Berkeley Properties Draft Master Plan* and certified the Focused Environmental

Impact Report (EIR)<sup>1</sup> that evaluated potential environmental effects caused by the Plan's implementation. This Plan identified the property along San Pablo Avenue frontage (including the project site) as an economic development opportunity.

In 2004, the University amended the Master Plan. These amendments focused on the second and third phases (referred to as "Steps") of construction of University Village; Step 1 was completed in 2000 (Figure III-2 shows the proposed Steps of the 2004 Master Plan Amendments). The amendments included demolition of older housing units, construction of new units, construction of community facilities, and construction of retail space. The 2004 Master Plan also expanded the area considered for commercial and mixed use to include more of the San Pablo Avenue frontage. In June 2004, the University of California Regents certified the EIR prepared for the 2004 Master Plan,<sup>2</sup> and approved construction of Step 2. Step 2 was completed in 2008.

The current proposed project would fall within Step 3 of the 2004 Master Plan. In 2007, the University demolished the 1940's barrack-style student housing which was located on the entire parcel south of Monroe Street and a portion of the parcel north of Monroe Street. The portion of the northern parcel within the Gill Tract includes a residence (Gill House) that has been used for office space, research buildings and greenhouses, and several trailers associated with the agricultural research facilities. All these structures are currently vacant.

As an autonomous state institution, land use decisions of the University that support the University's educational mission are exempt from land use regulations of local jurisdictions. However, the proposed project would be developed by a third party and include development of the grocery store, retail space, and senior housing (all of which are outside the scope of the University's educational mission) this project would be subject to the land use regulations of the City of Albany. The City of Albany is the lead agency for this Environmental Impact Report and the University of California is a responsible agency.

Some of the environmental conditions, as well as the proposed project, have changed since the 2004 Subsequent Focused EIR was certified, requiring new environmental review. Some portions of the 1998 or 2004 EIRs contain information that is useful for the current analysis of environmental impacts. Where data from the previous documents are used, they are cited, updated and expanded upon as needed and discussed in further detail in regards to its relation to the current proposal.

## **D. EIR SCOPE**

The City of Albany circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) that included a list of potential environmental effects that could result from the proposed project. The NOP was published on March 31, 2008 and was distributed to local, regional and State agencies. Additionally, the City held a scoping session to receive comments from the public on April 22, 2008. Comments received by the City on the NOP were taken into account during the preparation of the EIR. The NOP and written comments received on the NOP and are included in Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> EIP Associates, 1997. *Focused Draft Environmental Impact Report, University of California, Berkeley Draft Master Plan – University Village & Albany/Northwest Berkeley Properties, State Clearinghouse No. 97072039*. August 29

<sup>2</sup> LSA Associates, Inc., 2004. *Subsequent Focused EIR for the University Village & Albany/Northwest Berkeley Properties Master Plan Amendments, State Clearinghouse No. 1997072039*. January 30.

This Draft EIR focuses on the areas of concern identified in the NOP and comments received on the NOP. The following environmental topics are addressed in this EIR:

- A. Transportation, Circulation and Parking
- B. Air Quality
- C. Global Climate Change
- D. Noise
- E. Biological Resources
- F. Hydrology and Water Quality

The following topics were not included as separate topics within this EIR: Agricultural Resources; Cultural Resources; Geology and Soils; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Land Use and Planning; Mineral Resources; Population and Housing; Public Services; and Recreation. These topics were evaluated in an Initial Study/Environmental Checklist (provided as Appendix A of this EIR), and the City as Lead Agency determined that the project would not cause significant impacts related to these topics. For some environmental topics analyzed in the Initial Study/Environmental Checklist, mitigation measures have been presented which would reduce potential impacts to a less-than-significant level. These topics are also discussed in the Effects Found Not to Be Significant section of Chapter VI.

## **E. REPORT ORGANIZATION**

This EIR is organized into the following chapters:

- *Chapter I – Introduction:* Discusses the overall EIR purpose, provides a summary of the proposed project and the project background, describes the EIR scope, and summarizes the organization of the EIR.
- *Chapter II – Summary:* Provides a summary of the impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project, describes mitigation measures recommended to reduce or avoid significant impacts, and describes the alternatives to the proposed project.
- *Chapter III – Project Description:* Provides a description of the project background, the project site, the project objectives, a description of the proposed project, discretionary actions, and uses of this EIR.
- *Chapter IV – Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures:* Describes the following for each environmental technical topic: existing conditions (setting), potential environmental impacts and their level of significance, and mitigation measures recommended to mitigate identified impacts. Potential adverse impacts are identified by levels of significance, as follows: less-than-significant impact (LTS), significant impact (S), and significant and unavoidable impact (SU). The significance of each impact is categorized before and after implementation of any recommended mitigation measures(s).
- *Chapter V – Alternatives:* Provides an evaluation of three alternatives to the proposed project.

- *Chapter VI – CEQA-Required Assessment Conclusions:* Provides an analysis of effects found not to be significant, growth-inducing impacts, unavoidable significant environmental impacts, significant irreversible changes, and cumulative impacts.
- *Chapter VII – Report Preparation:* Identifies preparers of the EIR, primary City contacts, references used, and the persons and organizations contacted.
- *Appendices:* The appendices contain the NOP, Initial Study, comment letters on the NOP, technical calculations, and other documentation prepared in conjunction with this EIR.