



PLANNING DIVISION

STAFF REPORT

TO: PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: Tricia Schimpp, Contract Planner **DEPARTMENT:** Planning & Community Environment

AGENDA DATE: November 29, 2006

SUBJECT: **City of Palo Alto Emergency Water Supply and Storage Project:**
Comments regarding the adequacy of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for a proposed 8-Hour Emergency Water Supply and Storage Project to upgrade five existing groundwater wells, construct up to three new wells, construct a new storage reservoir and pump station, and upgrade an existing pump station. The City has identified and evaluated six potential locations for new wells and four potential locations for the 2.5 million gallon (MG) storage reservoir.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning and Transportation Commission:

1. Accept public testimony on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR);
2. Close the public hearing;
3. Provide Commission comments on the DEIR; and
4. Forward comments on the DEIR and direct the consultant and staff to prepare a Final Environmental Impact Report/Response to Comments.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this hearing is to accept public testimony and Commission comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Emergency Water Supply and Storage Project described below. The DEIR has been prepared for this project by Environmental Science Associates (ESA), with City staff assistance and technical assistance by Carollo Engineers. This DEIR was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines prepared by the Office of Planning and Research.

Notice of Preparation/EIR Scoping Process

In February of 2006, a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was made available for public review,

indicating the City's intent to prepare an EIR and soliciting input regarding the issues to be addressed. In addition, these documents were distributed to local and state agencies, as well as interested groups, for review and comment. As part of the required 30-day public review period, the Utilities Advisory Council (UAC) held a public scoping meeting on March 8, 2006 for members of the public to comment on the potential impacts that should be addressed in the DEIR.

DEIR Public Review Period: The DEIR was completed and distributed for public review on November 8, 2006. Consistent with the CEQA Guidelines, a minimum 45-day public review period is required for the DEIR and the comment period will close on December 22, 2006. Subsequent to public testimony and along with the written comments submitted on the DEIR during the 45-day public review period (November 8 – December 22, 2006), a Final EIR (FEIR) with Responses to Comments will be prepared by the EIR consultant and staff.

Although hearings on DEIRs are not a CEQA requirement, public participation is an essential part of the CEQA process. During the public review period for the DEIR, the Planning and Transportation is holding this hearing to receive public comments focused solely on the environmental assessment of the project. The Commission or staff is not required to respond to questions or comments raised by the public at this hearing. The Commission can also provide comments on the DEIR. All comments made at the hearing will be responded to in writing in the FEIR.

FEIR Certification: CEQA requires certification by Council of the FEIR prior to discretionary action on the project. The Commission will hold a second public hearing to review and recommend to Council on (1) the adequacy of the FEIR and (2) recommendation of the project. Although no land use entitlements are required for the Emergency Water Supply and Storage project, the Commission is requested to recommend on the site alternatives relative to land use considerations that would make one well or reservoir location preferable over another.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

The City of Palo Alto currently relies on the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) Hetch Hetchy system for its water supply. According to the California Department of Health Services (DHS), the City does not have enough water to meet normal and emergency demands in the event of a temporary shutdown of the SFPUC aqueducts. The DHS recommends an emergency water supply in a stand alone system that could supply eight hours of maximum day water demand while maintaining fire fighting reserves.

Currently, the City owns five groundwater wells, which are available for limited use during a drought or emergency. The proposed Emergency Water Supply and Storage Project is intended to correct the deficiency in the City's emergency water supply. The proposed project would support a minimum of eight hours of normal water use at the maximum day demand level and four hours of fire suppression at the design fire duration level, and would be capable of providing water supplies for up to 30 days. The proposed groundwater system may also be used to a limited extent for water supply during drought conditions (up to 1,500 acre feet), and potentially for up to an average day supply during extended shutdowns of the SFPUC system. The proposed project would provide 11,000 gpm of reliable well capacity and 2.5 million gallons (MG) of water storage for emergency

use in Pressure Areas 1, 2 and 3 by:

1. Rehabilitating all five of the existing City wells:
 - Hale well site – in Timothy Hopkins Creek Park (Hopkins Park), adjacent to San Francisquito Creek at the intersection of Hale Street and Palo Alto Avenue
 - Rinconada Park well site – in Rinconada Park located along Hopkins Street
 - Fernando well site – in Boulware Park, on Fernando Avenue near Matadero Creek
 - Peers Park well site – the southeast corner of Peers Park adjacent to the railroad
 - Matadero well site – on Matadero Avenue, between El Camino Real and Matadero Creek
2. Constructing up to three new wells (two located at sites selected from those listed below and one located proximate to the selected new reservoir site as listed in the following #3):
 - Eleanor Pardee Park – northeast area of the park away from the demonstration gardens
 - Main Library/Community Gardens – northwest corner of the community gardens
 - Heritage Park – Waverly Street to the north, Bryant Street to the south, Homer Street to the west, and Channing Street to the east
 - Middlefield site – south side of Middlefield Avenue at a vacant lot between Lincoln and Kingsley Streets
 - Downtown Parking Lots – exact location not yet determined
 - California Avenue Parking Lots – exact location not yet determined
3. Constructing a new 2.5 MG storage reservoir, associated pump station and new well at one of the following sites:
 - El Camino Park – between El Camino Real and Alma Street
 - Stanford Shopping Center North site – the northernmost parking lot of the Stanford Shopping Center
 - Stanford Shopping Center South site – the parking lot accessed from Quarry Road immediately north of Arboretum Road
 - Town and Country Shopping Center site – the triangular parking lot behind the Town and Country Shopping Center where Embarcadero Road intersects Alma Road
4. Upgrading an existing pump station (Mayfield Pump Station)

Park Improvement Ordinances are required for upgrades to existing wells (Hale Well, Rinconada Well, Peers Park Well) and construction of new water facilities (Eleanor Pardee Park Well, El Camino Park Reservoir and Well) located on dedicated park lands. The project improvements at these sites would occur within existing structures including fenced-in areas or would be located below grade and the surface area returned to park use following construction. Any associated ancillary features such as hatches and vents would be small in size and designed for park use (i.e. park bench or other complementary feature).

Review by the Historic Resources Board would be required if new construction at the Hale Well site could result in any modification to the existing pump house, which has been identified as an historic property eligible for the National Register.

Review by the Architectural Review Board would be required for all new above ground structures or expansion to existing above ground structures located on non-dedicated park land (Fernando Well, Matadero Well, Library/Community Center Well, Middlefield Well, Downtown Parking Lots Well, California Avenue Parking Lots Well, Stanford Shopping Center North and South Reservoir, Town and Country Shopping Center Reservoir, Mayfield Pump Station).

Additionally, the project is subject to the regulations of outside agencies and permits may be required from: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Regional Water Quality Control Board, State Water Resources Control Board, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California Air Resources Board, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. In addition, the project must comply with the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program.

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (DEIR)

The following discussion addresses only the potentially significant impacts identified in the DEIR that are key to the project and a brief description of the mitigation measures that have been identified to reduce the impact to less than significant. The DEIR also addresses additional potentially significant impacts that are mitigated by existing regulations and standard procedures. With the exception of noise during construction at all sites and potential loss of parking spaces at the California Avenue Downtown Parking Lots site, the mitigation measures effectively reduce the potential impacts to less than significant levels.

1. Recreation Resources Impacts

Impact 3.2-3: Construction of some proposed project facilities would temporarily disrupt access to or enjoyment of existing recreation facilities. If such disruption resulted in disruption of recreational use or the diversion of a large number of recreation users to other recreational facilities within the project region, overcrowding could occur at those facilities during peak-use periods. This potentially significant impact would be reduced to less-than-significant impact with the following mitigation measures:

3.2-3a: Public notification program.

3.2-3b: Reschedule park usage.

2. Visual Quality

Impact 3.3-3: Well drilling activities would require 24 hour activities over 6 weeks, and could result in light and glare effects as experienced from adjacent streets and residential uses. This potentially significant impact would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with the following mitigation measure:

3.3-3a: Regulations for nighttime lighting for construction such that no light source is directly visible from neighboring residential areas.

3. Hydrology and Water Quality

Impact 3.5-4: Increased groundwater recovery to meet emergency demands or drought demands

would have the potential to result in groundwater levels below historical low elevations. This potentially significant impact would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with the following mitigation measures:

3.5-4a: Aquifer test following construction to verify basin's response to pumping.

3.5-4b: Limit emergency demand pumpage to 1,500 acre-feet in one year and restrict production until groundwater levels recover to pre-pumping levels.

Impact 3.5-6: Placement of new wells would alter localized groundwater gradients during emergency operations, and could result in direct effect to the efficiency of existing wells due to well interference. This potentially significant impact would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with the following mitigation measure:

3.5-6: To avoid drawdown of greater than 40 feet, new wells shall not be located closer than 500 feet from existing production wells.

4. Cultural Resources

Impact 3.7-2: The Hale Well pump house is a tile-roofed edifice and has been identified as an historic property eligible for the National Register and any alteration to the existing structure could result in a significant impact. This potentially significant impact would be reduced to less-than-significant impact with the following mitigation measure:

3.7-2: Review of project actions by the Historic Resources Board and rehabilitate in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings or Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*.

Note: Subsequent to publication of this DEIR, staff is investigating previous rehabilitation activities to the Hale Well pump house that may have degraded the historic integrity of the structure that may affect the National Register eligibility status.

5. Traffic and Circulation

Impact 3.8-4: The proposed project would permanently reduce parking supply at all proposed well (5 spaces) and storage reservoir (10 spaces) locations. This displacement of parking spaces at the shopping center sites is less than significant because those sites are adequately or more than adequately supplied with existing parking spaces. This potentially significant impact at the parking lot sites would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with the following mitigation measure:

3.8-4e: In lieu parking fees for each parking space lost at the Downtown Parking Lots site.

3.8-4f: Redesign parking layout at the California Avenue Parking Lots site. **If redesign of the lot cannot accommodate all required parking spaces, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.**

6. Noise and Vibration

Impact 3.10-1: Construction of proposed facilities and well drilling activities would generate temporary noise levels above existing ambient conditions, resulting in City Municipal Code violations. The drill rig would operate 24 hours a day for a period of up to three weeks per well site, making all nighttime drilling a violation of the Municipal Code relating to regulated hours for construction. **The following mitigation measures would reduce noise levels from construction, but impacts would continue to be significant for most project sites.**

3.10-1a: Site project facilities at least 100 feet from property lines adjacent to sensitive receptors, if sufficient space is available.

3.10-1b: Installation of engineered sound wall or noise blanket during 24-hour construction activities.

3.10-1c: Notification of construction schedule to all residents and other sensitive receptors within 1,000 feet of construction sites.

3.10-d: Compliance with Municipal Code 9.10.06 (with the exception of well drilling and testing).

The noise impacts remain significant for 24-hour drilling activities at all sites except the Stanford Shopping Center North, and other equipment noise effects at all sites except Downtown Parking Lots, El Camino Park, Stanford North, and Town and Country Shopping Center sites.

Cumulative Impacts

For purposes of the cumulative analysis of this DEIR, the geographic area of the project includes the City of Palo and unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County, bounded by Route 280 to the west, Highway 101 to the East, the City of Menlo Park to the north, the cities of Los Altos and Mountain View to the south, and further extending from Sunnyvale just south of Los Altos and Mountain View to San Carlos just north of Menlo Park.

Cumulative impacts were evaluated based on the planned and approved projects in the project vicinity, summarized in Table 4-1. With the exception of construction noise, the cumulative impacts are found to be less than significant.

Unavoidable Significant Adverse Effects

CEQA requires that the DEIR identify and discuss significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project is implemented. The DEIR concludes that the proposed mitigation measures would reduce most impacts to less than significant levels.

However, the noise impacts remain significant for 24-hour drilling activities at all sites except the Stanford Shopping Center North, and other equipment noise effects at all sites except Downtown Parking Lots, El Camino Park, Stanford North, and Town and Country Shopping Center sites.

Additionally, the loss of parking spaces at the California Parking Lots site is potentially significant and unavoidable.

Site Alternatives

A total of six potential well sites and four potential reservoir sites for implementation of three new wells and one new reservoir were examined. With the implementation of the mitigation measures in Chapter 3, implementation of the proposed project at any of the identified well and reservoir sites would meet the stated project objectives. These impacts and the unavoidable construction noise impacts would be common to any location within the City of Palo Alto. Therefore, all of the well locations are considered equivalent in terms of environmental impacts. Additionally, due to tradeoffs in the potential loss of parking spaces and the disruption of recreational area, the DEIR found none of the reservoir sites as environmentally superior.

Alternative to the Project

Pursuant to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the DEIR is required to review alternatives to the proposed project. Project alternatives are presented and analyzed in Chapter 5 of the DEIR. The following is a brief summary of the project alternatives that were developed and analyzed in the DEIR:

1. No Project Alternative

A “No Project” alternative is required to be assessed under the provisions of CEQA. This Alternative would not provide additional groundwater pumping capacity or reservoir storage necessary to meet the DHS minimum emergency supply criteria of 8-hours in the event of an outage to the SFPUC water system. As such, this alternative would not meet any of the project objectives.

2. Local Facilities Alternative

The City of Palo Alto currently has water supply interconnections with Mountain View, Stanford University and East Palo Alto, all of which rely on SFPUC for between 90 and 100 percent of their water supply. No formal agreements exist between these communities to provide water to each other in the case of a water supply emergency, and it is unlikely that they would be willing to construct the emergency water supply facilities needed to meet the City of Palo Alto’s emergency water supply objectives. In addition, the infrastructure and piping needed to convey the required flow rate of water to Palo Alto under emergency supply conditions would significantly increase the project cost.

Connections with local facilities would not meet either the 8-hour emergency supply or fire flow objectives, due to their mutual reliance on water supply from upon the SFPUC. As such, this alternative is not comparable with the proposed project objectives and is not considered environmentally superior to the proposed project.

3. Santa Clara Valley Water District Western Pipeline Extension Alternative

A report was prepared by SCVWD to assess the feasibility of extending an existing supply pipeline from Mountain View along Foothill Expressway which could then serve Palo Alto. While the SCVWD has adequate supplies to meet Palo Alto water demands under normal operating conditions, these supplies may be affected by emergency conditions to the extent that the water supply would not be adequate.

Although the proposed new pipeline could be constructed, the SCVWD would require a “take-or-pay” contract that would require the City to pay a minimum of 90 percent of the scheduled delivery amount of water regardless of actual water usage. Additionally, the construction of the approximately 15 mile pipeline extension and 3 miles of distribution pipeline within Palo Alto would result in substantial construction related impacts, having the highest overall environmental constraint of the proposed alternatives. As such, this alternative is not comparable with the proposed project objectives and is not considered environmentally superior to the proposed project.

4. Desalination Plan Alternative

This alternative was identified as having moderate to high constraints for water quality and would result in a 10 to 15 acre site and 4.5 miles of distribution system. Construction of facilities would result in greater impacts across all issue areas. As such, this alternative is not comparable with the proposed project objectives and is not considered environmentally superior to the proposed project.

Growth Inducement

The proposed project is intended to correct the deficiency in the City’s emergency water supply and would not directly foster population growth or result in the construction of additional housing. Additionally, the proposed groundwater system would also be used to a limited extent for water supply during drought conditions. During non-drought years, the City would shut down each of the groundwater wells and associated chloramines systems. As such, implementation of the proposed project during drought conditions would not directly foster population growth or result in the construction of additional housing.

NEXT STEPS

Subsequent to the completion of the public review period on December 22, 2006, a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) will be prepared. Written responses will be provided to all comments submitted in writing or at this public hearing, as part of the FEIR. Following preparation of the FEIR, the Planning and Transportation Commission will conduct a public hearing scheduled for February 14, 2007, and will recommend on the adequacy of the FEIR to the City Council. Additionally, the Planning and Transportation Commission will make a recommendation on the proposed project to the City Council.

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