

3 Environmental Setting

This section provides a general overview of the environmental setting for the City of Solvang (City) Comprehensive General Plan Update (referred to in this Environmental Impact Report [EIR] as “2045 General Plan” or “proposed project”). More detailed descriptions of the environmental setting for each environmental issue area can be found in Section 4, *Environmental Impact Analysis*.

3.1 Regional Setting

Solvang is located in the Santa Ynez Valley in central Santa Barbara County, approximately 25 miles northwest of Santa Barbara and 6 miles north of the Pacific Ocean (see Section 2.1, Planning Area Location and Setting, in Section 2, *Project Description*). The city of Buellton is located about 3 miles to the west, the township of Santa Ynez is located 2 miles to the east, and the communities of Los Olivos and Ballard are located two to three miles to the north. State Route 246 (also known as Mission Drive) bisects Solvang and provides a key regional east-west link between Highway 101 and State Route 154.

Solvang is situated primarily along an alluvial plain formed by the Santa Ynez River and on the southeastern edge of the Purisima Hills. Solvang is surrounded by the Purisima Hills to the north, the upper Santa Ynez Valley to the east, the Santa Ynez Mountains to the south, and the lower Santa Ynez Valley to the west.

3.2 Physical Setting

The 2045 General Plan covers approximately 3.1 square miles (1,968 acres) of land within Solvang’s Planning Area. Solvang is characterized as a compact city which has evolved into a widely recognized tourist destination in the village core due to its unique architecture. The Mission District contains the Mission Santa Inés and the surrounding open space around the mission. Other influences include surrounding wineries and agricultural uses, and the Chumash reservation and casino. A breakdown of existing land uses in the Planning Area is provided in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Existing Land Uses

Land Use	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	6.1	0.3%
Commercial	119.5	6.1%
Industrial	42.2	2.1%
Miscellaneous	22.9	1.2%
Office	24.3	1.2%
Public and Quasi Public	34.2	1.7%
Recreational and Open Space	230.3	11.7%
Residential	1,069.0	54.3%
Roadways and Parking Lots	306.0	15.5%
Vacant	113.4	5.8%
Total	1,968.0	100%

Solvang is located within the Alisal Creek-Santa Ynez River sub-watershed which is approximately 25,817 acres in size and includes portions of the city of Buellton. The local climate in Solvang is characterized by warm summers and cool, wet winters.

3.3 Baseline and Cumulative Project Setting

3.3.1 EIR Baseline

Section 15125 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines states that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) “should include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published.” Section 15125 states that this approach “normally constitute[s] the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether an impact is significant.”

This EIR evaluates impacts against existing conditions for the baseline year of 2023, which is the year that the Notice of Preparation (NOP) was published.

3.3.2 Approach for Impact Analysis

The programmatic nature of the 2045 General Plan necessitates a general approach to the evaluation of existing conditions and impacts associated with the proposed project. As a programmatic document, this EIR presents a regionwide assessment of the impacts of the 2045 General Plan. Because the EIR is a long-term document intended to guide actions over 20 years into the future, analysis relies on program-level and qualitative evaluation. Quantitative analyses are provided where applicable with available information. During future stages in planning and implementation of specific elements of the 2045 General Plan, project-specific CEQA documents will be prepared by the appropriate project implementation agency.

3.3.3 Approach for Cumulative Analysis

CEQA defines cumulative impacts as two or more individual actions that, when considered together, are considerable or will compound other environmental impacts. Cumulative impacts are the changes in the environment that result from the incremental impact of development of the proposed project and other nearby projects. For example, traffic impacts of two nearby projects may be insignificant when analyzed separately but could have a significant impact when analyzed together. Cumulative impact analysis allows an EIR to provide a reasonable forecast of future environmental conditions and can more accurately gauge the effects of a series of projects.

Because the proposed project is comprised of the 2045 General Plan, rezoning, and pending development projects considered by the 2045 General Plan, cumulative impacts are treated somewhat differently than would be the case for a project-specific development. Section 15130 of the State *CEQA Guidelines* provides the following direction relative to cumulative impact analysis:

Impacts should be based on a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or areawide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact.

By its nature, a general plan considers cumulative impacts insofar as it considers cumulative development that could occur within a city’s plan area over a defined timeframe. Therefore, the analysis of project impacts also largely constitutes the cumulative analysis. The 2045 General Plan

addresses cumulative conditions by design. As such, the environmental analysis of the 2045 General Plan presented throughout this EIR is a cumulative analysis consistent with CEQA policies.

The cumulative impact analyses included in each of the environmental issue areas addressed in Section 4 of this EIR examine impacts associated with implementation of the 2045 General Plan, in addition to implementation of projected development for Santa Barbara County, which surrounds Solvang, to address cumulative effects from growth extending beyond the Plan Area.

When evaluating cumulative impacts, CEQA allows the use of either a list of past, present, and probable future projects, including projects outside the control of the lead agency, or a summary of projections in an adopted planning document, or a combination of the two approaches. The cumulative analysis presented below uses a projections-based approach. (See *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15130B)(1). Land use and growth projections for the City, which are the subject of analysis throughout this EIR, are combined with the growth projections for the adjoining County. Santa Barbara County borders Solvang to the north, south, east, and west. The City of Buellton is located approximately 1.6 miles west of Solvang. Buellton and Solvang do not share any boundaries; however, due to proximity, Buellton is considered when evaluating cumulative impacts. Buellton is also included in the overall Santa Barbara County projections. Therefore, for most issue areas, Santa Barbara County is referred to in this analysis as the “cumulative impact analysis area.”

Table 3-2 shows the 2020 population and housing units and the 2045 projected population and housing units for the City of Solvang and Santa Barbara County. However, for some topics where cumulative impacts are more localized (e.g., noise) or broader (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions), the cumulative impact area may be smaller or larger than the County. If a different cumulative impact area other than the County was used, it is noted under the “cumulative impact” section in the applicable subsection of Chapter 4.

Table 3-2 Population and Housing Projections of Cumulative Analysis Area, 2020-2045

	Population		Housing Units	
	2020	2045	2020	2045
City of Solvang	5,644	6,300	2,566 ¹	3,063 ²
Santa Barbara County	444,895	517,500	159,317	184,000

¹ 2,566 existing housing units reflect 2019 buildout data (Mintier Harnish 2023), which was used in the table to maintain consistency throughout the EIR analyses.

² 3,063 projected housing units are based on 2019 buildout data (Mintier Harnish 2023), which was used in the table to maintain consistency throughout the EIR analyses.

Sources: Census 2020a, 2020b; SBCAG 2019; Mintier Harnish 2023

As shown in Table 3-2, the City comprised approximately 1.3 percent of the 2020 County population and 1.6 percent of the number of housing units in the County in 2020. By 2045, this proportion is expected to remain similar (approximately 1.2 percent of the County population and 1.7 percent of housing units in the County). Thus, under both current and forecasted future conditions, the City represents a relatively small portion of the growth in the cumulative analysis impact area.

Analysis of the cumulative effects of the 2045 General Plan for each environmental issue area is presented at the ends of Sections 4.1 through 4.17.

This page intentionally left blank.