



CEQA EIR FAQs

City of San Bruno

What is CEQA?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a state law that requires state and local agencies to inform decisions makers and the public about the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects, and to identify ways to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible. Unless otherwise exempt, if a project has the potential to cause adverse impacts, the public agency must prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

What CEQA is and what CEQA is not:

- CEQA is a process, not a permit
 - It doesn't prescribe development standards.
 - It doesn't prescribe acceptable levels of risk.
 - It doesn't specify regulations that projects must follow (local, state, and federal codes apply).
 - It doesn't prescribe study methods.
 - It doesn't recommend whether a project should be approved or denied
- It does require analysis and disclosure of the project's potential impacts, mitigation when feasible, and discussion of those impacts through a public process.
- CEQA places primary responsibility in the hands of the Lead Agency, which is the public agency that has the principal authority for carrying out or approving a project.

What is an EIR?

An EIR is a document that contains in-depth studies of potential environmental impacts of a project, including construction and operation of a project, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid significant impacts, and an analysis of alternatives. The EIR itself does not determine whether a project will be approved; instead, it is an informational and disclosure document taken under consideration during the City's decision-making process. If a project has one or more significant impacts, the decision makers must adopt a statement of overriding considerations finding that the benefits of the project outweigh the significant unmitigable impacts.

What are the contents of an EIR?

Generally, an EIR covers the following resource areas:

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| • Aesthetics | • Energy | • Land Use & Planning | • Recreation |
| • Agriculture & Forestry | • Geology & Soils | • Mineral Resources | • Transportation |
| • Air Quality | • Greenhouse Gas Emissions | • Noise | • Tribal Cultural Resources |
| • Biological Resources | • Hazards & Hazardous Materials | • Population & Housing | • Utilities & Service Systems |
| • Cultural/Historic Resources | • Hydrology & Water Quality | • Public Services | • Wildfire |

An EIR also includes a project description, describes the environmental setting, identifies significant project and cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, feasible mitigation measures to avoid or lessen any significant environmental impacts, and alternatives to the project.

When is CEQA compliance required, and who is responsible for certifying an EIR?

A public agency must comply with CEQA when it undertakes an activity defined by CEQA as a "project." A project is an activity undertaken by a public agency or a private activity that requires discretionary approval from a public agency and may cause either a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect change in the environment. Discretionary approval means that there is an exercise of judgment or deliberation by a governing body, such as the Planning Commission or City Council, in determining whether a project will be approved or a permit will be issued. Discretionary planning and land use approvals include Design Permits, Conditional Use Permits, and legislative actions such as Zoning Amendments and General Plan Amendments.

Who prepares the EIR and who pays for it?

An EIR must reflect the independent judgement of the lead agency. San Bruno contracts with a qualified environmental consultant to prepare an EIR. The project applicant is responsible for paying for the cost of EIR preparation through a reimbursement agreement with the City.

What are the major steps to the CEQA Process and when can I provide input on a CEQA document?

Public input is a critical component of the CEQA environmental review process. There are many opportunities to participate including via email, mail, or during public meetings. Additionally, when a Draft EIR has been completed, the City must notify the public that the Draft EIR is available for review and comment through the Notice of Availability (NOA). The NOA will include general information about a project; the comment period; the date, time, and location of any scheduled public hearings; and the location where the Draft EIR and supplemental information is available for review. The public review and comment period is generally 45 days.

Major steps include:

Activity	Purpose	Public Participation Opportunity
1 Notice of Preparation (NOP)	Communicates to the public, agencies, and organizations an EIR is being prepared. Also serves to solicit input on the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR.	Public Comment. The NOP is typically circulated to nearby property owners, posted on the project website, mailed to responsible agencies, and filed with the County Clerk and the State Clearinghouse. The public may submit comments at any time during the public comment period. Public Meeting. A public meeting is often held to solicit scoping comments from the public.
2 Draft EIR	The Draft EIR includes a project description, identification of significant environmental impacts, feasible mitigation measures and alternatives	The Draft EIR includes publication of NOP public comments.
3 Notice of Availability (NOA)	An NOA signals that the Draft EIR is available for public review and comment for no less than 45 days. The NOA also identifies where the Draft EIR may be reviewed and how to submit comments on the Draft EIR.	Public Comment. The NOA is typically circulated to nearby property owners and interested parties, posted on the project website, and filed with the County Clerk and the State Clearinghouse. The public may submit comments at any time during the public comment period. Public Meeting. A public meeting is typically held to solicit comments from the public on the Draft EIR.
4 Final EIR	A Final EIR includes the Draft EIR, responses to public comments received during the Draft EIR comment period and any additional relevant project information.	The Final EIR includes comments and responses to Draft EIR public comments.
5 Certification	A certification is an official position taken by the City indicating that the EIR has complied with CEQA for the identified project.	Public Meeting. The decision-making body certifies the EIR with a portion of the meeting dedicated to public comment. If the project requires City Council approval, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing to make a recommendation on the certification of the EIR to the City Council.

How does the Final EIR respond to public input?

The Final EIR includes the Draft EIR, comments received on significant environmental issues, and responses to such comments. Comments should focus on the sufficiency of the Draft EIR in identifying and analyzing environmental impact, and ways in which the significant environmental effects of the project might be avoided or reduced. The City, as the lead agency for the project, in turn, must evaluate all comments on significant environmental issues received on the Draft EIR and prepare a written response. The written response must address the significant environmental issue raised.

How Does an EIR Influence Decision-making?

The Lead and Responsible Agencies must consider the information in the EIR before taking final action on the project. Feasible mitigation must be incorporated into the approval, reducing the project's environmental impacts. Mitigation becomes conditions of approval or other requirements enforced by the agency. The Lead Agency must explain itself: findings are adopted to describe the disposition of each significant impact and rejected alternatives. A "Statement of Overriding Considerations" is adopted if any impacts are unavoidable and the agency intends to approve the project.

Where can I learn more about the CEQA Process?

The California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation provides additional material and links to learn about CEQA. Please visit <https://lci.ca.gov/ceqa/> for more information.

CEQA Process Diagram

