

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter evaluates project alternatives. CEQA requires an EIR to assess a reasonable range of project alternatives that might achieve project objectives with less environmental impact than the proposed project. *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15126(d)(2) requires that a “No Project” alternative must also be presented in the EIR. The alternatives to be considered should include those that offer substantial environmental advantages over the proposed project, and that may feasibly be accomplished considering the various economic, environmental, social, technological and legal factors.

The proposed project would establish the Montalvin Manor Redevelopment Project Area, and undertake redevelopment activities that could be funded through tax increment received by the Contra Costa County Redevelopment Agency.

The project objectives are as follows:

- Eliminate blight in the community, as defined by the California Community Redevelopment Law;
- Encourage economic development consistent with the provisions of the Contra Costa County General Plan; and
- Provide decent and affordable housing to all segments of the community.

The alternatives identified for consideration are as follows:

Alternative A: No Project

Alternative B: Reduced Project Area

Alternative C: Private Development

The discussion below presents a description of each alternative and an analysis of the respective alternative in the context of CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines. The discussion focuses on the comparative environmental attributes of the respective alternative and the degree to which the identified alternative might accomplish the project objectives. CEQA does not require the alternatives to be analyzed in the same level of detail as the proposed project, and the discussion below therefore presents a qualitative analysis, including discussion of an environmentally superior alternative.

4.1 ALTERNATIVE A: NO PROJECT

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVE A: NO PROJECT

Under Alternative A: No Project, no redevelopment Project Area would be established, no redevelopment activities would occur, and no change in the General Plan land use designations would be made.

It is not possible to quantify the exact level of private and public development that might occur between now and the General Plan planning horizon under the No Project Alternative. With this alternative, however, there would be no redevelopment activity to fund public improvements, and to attract an increased level of private investment in the proposed Project Area. It is reasonable to assume that in the absence of this stimulus the rate of residential and commercial development and rehabilitation would be substantially lower than would be experienced with redevelopment.

The Montalvin Manor Redevelopment Project Area is characterized by blight conditions. The Tara Hills Shopping Center on the south side of San Pablo Avenue has deteriorated. Structures in the shopping center present a poor appearance. The parcel at the southeast corner of Tara Hills Drive and San Pablo Avenue, designated for commercial uses, remains vacant and unimproved, with the exception of an existing structure that is now unoccupied. In the absence of redevelopment it is likely that the existing structure would remain either vacant or underutilized, and that the portion now vacant would remain undeveloped.

The 670-home Montalvin Manor subdivision contains numerous single-family structures in need of rehabilitation. Redevelopment activities could include financial programs to assist owners in improving such structures, and eliminating building code deficiencies. In the absence of redevelopment the condition of such structures would be expected to remain substantially the same.

The MonTara Bay Community Center could benefit from redevelopment through funding for upgrading the physical facility, and redevelopment funds could be used to improve the physical condition and amenities at Montalvin Park. In the absence of redevelopment funding the improvement of these facilities would depend on existing programs and funds, which have been limited.

COMPARISON OF IMPACTS

Under the Alternative A: No Project, no redevelopment Project Area would be established and no redevelopment activities would occur. The County would not have access to tax increment to fund public improvements, and tax increment funds would not be available to support housing rehabilitation programs in the Project Area.

The absence of redevelopment could be apparent in a variety of ways:

- (a) **Aesthetics:** Redevelopment activities could result in support for improving the appearance of the commercial properties in the Project Area, and in the absence of redevelopment no change in the physical appearance of the commercial properties is anticipated.

Redevelopment activities would generally have a beneficial impact on visual resources, including efforts to rehabilitate housing and streetscapes in the Project Area. The proposed project does not include any proposed actions that would restrict views or construct features that would have an adverse visual impact, and the No Project Alternative does not avoid or minimize adverse visual impacts. The environmental impact of Alternative A: No Project on the aesthetics of the Project Area would most likely be negative, depriving the area of a potential source of support for improvement in its condition.

- (b) **Air Quality:** The short-term construction-period air quality impacts that could be associated with redevelopment activities would be avoided with Alternative A: No Project, as would any longer-term air quality impacts.
- (c) **Biological Resources:** The proposed project could result in development of vacant parcels in the eastern portion of the Project Area at an earlier date than would occur in the absence of redevelopment. Biological resources issues relate primarily to impacts on Garrity Creek and resources present on the vacant parcel on the northeast corner of San Pablo Avenue and Tara Hills Drive. These resources would not be less likely to be disturbed in the absence of development, and the No Project alternative is, therefore, environmentally superior.
- (d) **Cultural Resources:** With less potential for new development activities with the No Project alternative, the impacts on cultural and historic resources would be reduced. The Project Area is predominantly urbanized, and potential impacts to cultural resources can be adequately mitigated. Any reduction in impacts would appear to be negligible.
- (e) **Geology and Soils:** The proposed project would not increase the density of existing housing, but could result in development of multi-family housing and retail businesses on the vacant parcel now designated for such uses in the General Plan. Commercial development on the parcel located on the southeast corner of San Pablo Avenue and Tara Hills Drive could be encouraged by redevelopment of the Project Area. Impacts related to geology and soils under redevelopment, while not significant, would be avoided entirely by the No Project alternative. In the absence of redevelopment and the receipt of tax increment funds, however, resources to fund rehabilitation of structures would not be available, thus decreasing opportunities for improving the safety of existing buildings.
- (f) **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** Under the No Project alternative there may be reduced funding available for the clean-up of sites within the Project Areas that may contain

hazardous materials. The No Project alternative could reduce the amount of new development that would potentially be exposed to such materials.

- (g) **Hydrology and Water Quality:** Alternative A: No Project would avoid some development that could have an impact on water quality due to potential erosion and increased runoff due to impervious surfaces. Under the No Project alternative, any improvements to the existing drainage system in the Project Area would be dependent on private development or existing County programs and funding. The No Project alternative would not be superior to the proposed project in this regard.
- (h) **Land Use, Population and Housing:** Redevelopment would probably not result in substantial land use changes in the Project Area, because the Tara Hills Shopping Center property is committed to commercial uses, and no substantial change in land use designations for vacant properties is proposed.

With redevelopment, it can be anticipated that increased activity at the Tara Hills Shopping Center could provide additional employment opportunities. This additional employment could increase the demand for housing in the community, and encourage relocation to the region for those so employed. The No Project alternative would avoid this potential increased demand for housing. The magnitude of any such impacts, given the size of the existing shopping center and other parcels within the Project Area that are designated for commercial uses, is negligible.

In the absence of redevelopment in the Project Area, there would be fewer resources committed to housing rehabilitation, and the quality and safety of existing housing would be less likely to improve. In terms of housing, the impact of the No Project alternative would probably be negative.

- (i) **Noise:** The proposed project could result in temporary noise impacts, but these are considered less than significant. Any redevelopment would be consistent with the General Plan and the various goals that apply to noise avoidance and limitation. The No Project alternative would have only a negligible impact on future noise levels.
- (j) **Public Services, Utilities and Related Facilities:** The No Project alternative would not facilitate new development in the Project Area, and this would most likely result in a continuation of existing demand for public services and facilities. There would be some environmental impacts associated with increasing demand for such services and facilities as a result of the proposed project, and these might be avoided with the No Project alternative. The redevelopment process, however, has as one of its goals an improvement in the level of public services, and the benefits of having redevelopment resources committed to this effort would not be obtained with the No Project alternative. The No Project alternative would not provide opportunities to fund improvements at the MonTara Bay Community Center or Montalvin Park through tax increment.

- (k) **Transportation:** Redevelopment could result in the development of vacant parcels at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Tara Hills Drive at an earlier time than might occur without redevelopment, and the No Project alternative might, therefore, avoid or delay some traffic impacts. Under the No Project Alternative, development of the two vacant parcels at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Tara Hills Drive would not be facilitated, and development might be delayed. Traffic generated by development of these parcels would contribute to a cumulative significant and unavoidable impact at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue with Tara Hills Drive and Richmond Parkway. The cumulative conditions at each of the intersections would deteriorate, however, with or without development of the two vacant parcels.

Redevelopment activities would support continued development of the roadway system in the community in a manner consistent with the General Plan Circulation Element. The improvement of the County's roadway system, however, is critical to its continued economic health, and such efforts would continue in the absence of any redevelopment. Any benefit that may be gained by avoiding project-specific impacts associated with roadway projects due to the absence of redevelopment is outweighed by the disadvantage that could accrue to the community because of lack of resources to respond to these changing circumstances that could otherwise have been made available through redevelopment and the use of tax increment.

4.2 ALTERNATIVE B: REDUCED PROJECT AREA

This alternative would result in establishing a redevelopment Project Area, but the Project Area would be limited to the existing 670-home Montalvin Manor subdivision north of San Pablo Avenue, and west of the mobile home park. Redevelopment activities could include financial programs to assist owners in improving such structures, and eliminating building code deficiencies. No redevelopment activities, programs or funding would occur with respect to the remainder of the proposed Project Area. This would preclude redevelopment activities that could result in improved economic performance and appearance of the Tara Hills Shopping Center, improvement of the physical facilities and amenities at MonTara Bay Community Center and Montalvin Park, and redevelopment activities that could be directed to improvement of infrastructure.

- (a) **Aesthetics:** Alternative B would result in improvements to housing in the Montalvin Manor subdivision, and these improvements would have a beneficial impact on aesthetics in the reduced Project Area. Programs for façade improvements and increased economic vitality of the Tara Hills Shopping Center and commercial properties to the north would not occur. The potential adverse impacts of those programs can be adequately mitigated, and this alternative is not, therefore, environmentally superior in this regard.
- (b) **Air Quality:** Reduction in the size of the Project Area could avoid some project-specific impacts such as generation of dust, but such impacts would be less than significant. Regional air quality would not be affected by reducing the Project Area.

- (c) **Biological Resources:** The Reduced Project Area alternative would avoid all impacts that could occur to biological resources related to Garrity Creek and the parcel designated for multi-family use. This alternative would be environmentally superior to the proposed project.
- (d) **Cultural Resources:** Any impacts on cultural and historic resources would be reduced. The Project Area is predominantly urbanized, and potential impacts to cultural resources can be adequately mitigated. Any reduction in impacts would appear to be negligible.
- (e) **Geology and Soils:** Because the proposed Project Area is predominantly urbanized, the proposed project is not anticipated to result in a substantial increase in the risk due to seismic activity or other exposure to hazards relating to soils. By reducing the Project Area, this alternative would reduce the resources available to the County in rehabilitating commercial structures that could provide a benefit in terms of safety.
- (f) **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** Reduction in the size of the Project Area would tend to reduce the potential exposure of persons to hazardous materials that may be present on the commercial properties. This alternative would, however, also reduce the resources that may be made available through redevelopment for the clean-up of such sites.
- (g) **Hydrology and Water Quality:** The Project Area is predominantly urbanized, and the impacts on drainage and water quality that would result from redevelopment are not expected to be substantial. Reduction of the Project Area would reduce the resources available to the County in dealing with needed infrastructure improvements.
- (h) **Land Use, Population and Housing:** Alternative B would not affect the land uses that now exist in the reduced Project Area.
- (i) **Noise:** Noise impacts from the proposed project would be temporary and less than significant. The reduced project alternative would avoid some of these impacts.
- (j) **Public Services, Utilities and Related Facilities:** This alternative would reduce the area that could benefit from redevelopment resources that could be committed to improving public facilities that provide needed services to the community's residents. Some short-term construction impacts would be avoided, but the alternative would make it more difficult to undertake maintenance and improvement of public infrastructure, including the MonTara Bay Community Center and Montalvin Park.
- (k) **Transportation:** Increases in traffic that could potentially result from increased economic activity would be avoided by reducing the Project Area. The County would have reduced resources, however, for the purpose of improvements to roadways that may be needed in the future. In the absence of redevelopment, cumulative impacts at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue with Tara Hills Drive and Richmond Parkway would still result in deterioration of traffic conditions at these intersections to unacceptable levels.

4.3 **ALTERNATIVE C: PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT**

Under this alternative the Montalvin Manor Redevelopment Project Area would be established, but the County and redevelopment agency would rely to a greater extent on private efforts to eliminate blight.

One of the basic premises of redevelopment is that existing blight cannot be eliminated without redevelopment efforts, and the attendant use of tax increment by the redevelopment agency. This alternative would emphasize financial assistance to private development projects, including low interest loans and land write-downs or subsidies. The County would not be expected, under this alternative, to undertake any substantial infrastructure improvements, and would not implement redevelopment programs directed at the improvement of the physical condition and amenities at MonTara Bay Community Center or Montalvin Park.

The precise nature of private development projects that might be proposed is unknown, and comparative environmental impacts cannot be quantified. The discussion below compares Alternative C to the proposed project on a qualitative basis.

- (a) **Aesthetics:** Alternative C would reduce the extent of redevelopment of vacant properties within the Project Area, resulting in a continuation of existing conditions. Redevelopment of commercial properties with Agency assistance would not occur. New development would be subject to review for design and visual amenities, and redevelopment of existing developed areas and infrastructure improvements could result in substantial improvement to the Project Area aesthetics, but to a lesser degree than would occur with the proposed project. Alternative C would not be environmentally superior in this regard.
- (b) **Air Quality:** The reduction in public efforts could reduce short-term air quality impacts, but would probably not affect regional air quality.
- (c) **Biological Resources:** Alternative C would avoid some of the impacts that could occur to biological resources related to Garrity Creek and the parcel designated for multi-family use. This alternative would be environmentally superior to the proposed project.
- (d) **Cultural Resources:** Some reduction in impact on cultural and historic resources would result from a reduction in the number of public projects. The reduction in impacts would be negligible because the Project Area is predominantly urbanized, and cultural resources can be protected through applicable mitigation measures.
- (e) **Geology and Soils:** Alternative C would provide fewer opportunities for economic development through the use of tax increment funds for the funding of public improvements, and a lower level of private development could result. New construction that could expose persons to hazards due to soils and geologic conditions would be reduced, but the risk posed by such development, given the Uniform Building Code requirements applied to new construction, would be less than significant in any event.

- (f) **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** It is unlikely this alternative would have an impact on the number of additional persons that might be exposed to hazardous materials. It would reduce the resources that would be made available for the clean-up of any hazardous sites that now exist or are discovered in the future.
- (g) **Hydrology and Water Quality:** Private development projects would be required to comply with the County's requirements regarding drainage impacts related to specific projects, but there would be fewer programs for long-term maintenance and improvements of infrastructure deficiencies. This could have an adverse impact on water quality.
- (h) **Land Use, Population and Housing:** Private development would be consistent with the Contra Costa County General Plan, and would not have adverse land use impacts. Specific projects generated by landowners and developers would be subject to the County's project review process. By emphasizing private development, the public effort to improve the general appearance of the commercial properties and building facades would probably result in less improvement in terms of visual resources.

Redevelopment funds would not be available for the improvement of the MonTara Bay Community Center and Montalvin Park, and these facilities would continue in their present condition. Each of these facilities could benefit from increased maintenance and site improvements, and such activities would improve the aesthetic quality of the facilities. This alternative would result in fewer improvements to the aesthetics and visual quality of the proposed Project Area than the proposed project.

Reliance on private development would most likely result in less intensive improvement in economic performance of commercial properties, with reduced impacts in terms of population and housing. The benefits of improved economic performance, including increased tax revenues and resources for improvement of public facilities and infrastructure would also be reduced. Reliance on private development would reduce the availability of revolving loans and other programs for housing rehabilitation, thus reducing financial assistance resources to property owners who might wish to rehabilitate existing housing. The status quo would remain, and the potential for substantial improvement in the condition of existing housing forgone.

- (i) **Noise:** The reduction in public efforts could reduce short-term noise impacts.
- (j) **Public Services, Utilities and Related Facilities:** Reliance on private development would result in fewer public efforts with regard to maintenance and improvement of the County's public infrastructure, including the MonTara Bay Community Center and Montalvin Park, and a greater reliance on improvements that have a reasonable connection to private development projects. Project-specific impacts could be reduced, but the long-term impacts in terms of level of service could be greater due to a reduction in public efforts.

- (k) **Transportation:** Reliance on private development would result in fewer public efforts with regard to redesign and improvement of the roadways within the proposed Project Area, and a greater reliance on improvements that have a reasonable connection to private development projects. Project-specific impacts could be reduced, but the long-term traffic impacts in terms of level of service could be greater due to a reduction in roadway improvement efforts.

4.4 **ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE**

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, project alternatives have been evaluated for their comparative environmental superiority. Based on this evaluation, it has been determined that none of the identified alternatives is environmentally superior to the proposed project.

The proposed project would provide a feasible means of providing financial assistance for improvement in the physical and economic conditions of the Project Area. The proposed project provides the fewest environmental impacts with the greatest potential beneficial impacts to the environment.

Table 4-1 summarizes the alternatives analysis set forth above with respect to each identified alternative, with brief text comparing the identified alternative with the proposed project. In those cases in which the alternative is environmentally superior to the proposed project, the text is prefaced with (+); in those cases in which the alternative either would produce additional impacts, or would forego beneficial environmental effect, the text is prefaced with (-).

**Table 4-1
Summary of Alternatives**

Environmental Impact Category	No Project Alternative	Reduced Project Area	Private Development
Aesthetics	(-) No aesthetic improvements	Some improvements would not be made	Some improvements would not be made
Air Quality	(+) Short-term and long-term air quality impacts of project avoided	Lesser impacts, but not substantial	Lesser impacts, but not substantial
Biological Resources	(+) Impacts on resources in Garrity Creek avoided	(+) Impacts on resources in Garrity Creek avoided	(+) Impacts on resources in Garrity Creek might be avoided
Cultural Resources	Negligible reduction in impacts	Negligible reduction in impacts	Negligible reduction in impacts
Geology and Soils	Impacts avoided but no resources for rehabilitation	Some impacts avoided, but fewer funds for rehabilitation	Some impacts avoided, but fewer funds for rehabilitation
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	Exposure reduced, but clean-up resources unavailable	Exposure reduced, but clean-up resources also reduced	Exposure reduced, but clean-up resources also reduced

Environmental Impact Category	No Project Alternative	Reduced Project Area	Private Development
Hydrology and Water Quality	Impacts avoided, but new infrastructure unavailable	(-) Some impacts avoided, but new infrastructure unavailable outside of Project Area	(-) Some impacts avoided, but fewer resources for public infrastructure
Land Use, Population and Housing	(-) Neutral effect on land use and population; negative impact on housing	Fewer impacts on population	Fewer impacts, but fewer resources
Noise	No change from existing conditions	Impacts of project are less than significant; some would be avoided	Impacts of project are less than significant; some would be avoided
Public Services	(-) No new demand for services, but funds for improvements of public facilities would be unavailable	(-) Demand would be reduced, but funds for improvements of public facilities would be reduced	(-) Demand would be reduced, but funds for improvements of public facilities would be reduced
Transportation	No new demand, but no funds for roadway improvements	Some reduction, but fewer funds for roadway improvements	Some reduction, but fewer funds for roadway improvements