

II. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE EIR

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared by the City and County of San Francisco, the Lead Agency for the 950 Mason Street – Fairmont Hotel Revitalization and Residential Tower Project, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).¹ This document is a project-level EIR pursuant to *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15161.² Under the San Francisco Administrative Code, Chapter 31, the San Francisco Planning Department is responsible for CEQA review for all City and County of San Francisco projects. An EIR is an informational document that is intended to make the public and decision-makers aware of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed project and to present mitigation measures and feasible alternatives to avoid, eliminate, or reduce the environmental impacts of a project. This EIR examines the potential, significant physical environmental impacts that would result from the proposed project and provides the environmental information and evaluation necessary for decision-makers to adopt and implement the proposed project.

The City and County of San Francisco must consider the information in this EIR and respond to each significant effect identified. The City will use the certified EIR, along with other information and public processes to determine whether to approve, modify, or disapprove the proposed project, and to specify any applicable environmental conditions as part of project approvals. For purposes of this EIR, the project sponsor for the proposed project is the Fairmont Hotel Company – San Francisco LP.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The project sponsor submitted an Environmental Evaluation application (EE application) to the City and County of San Francisco Planning Department (Planning Department) on January 16, 2008. The filing of the EE application initiated the environmental review process as outlined below.

The EIR process, as implemented by the Planning Department, includes several steps: preparation and circulation of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft EIR, a public scoping period to receive public

¹ California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.

² According to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Sections 1500 et seq. (CEQA Guidelines), Section 15161, a project EIR is the most common type of EIR and examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. This type of EIR focuses primarily on the changes in the environment that would result from the development project, and it examines all phases of the project including planning, construction, and operation.

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comments on the scope and content of the Draft EIR³, publication of a Draft EIR for public review and comment⁴, Planning Commission Draft EIR hearing, preparation of responses to public comments on the Draft EIR, and Planning Commission certification of the Final EIR. Following a hearing before the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), a public hearing to consider approval or rejection of the project will be conducted by the Planning Commission.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

The Planning Department issued an NOP for the proposed project on January 21, 2009 notifying responsible agencies and other interested parties and members of the public that an EIR would be prepared for the proposed project. The NOP indicated the full range of environmental topics anticipated to be addressed in the EIR. The NOP and its 30-day public comment period were advertised in the San Francisco Examiner and mailed to public agencies, organizations, nearby property owners, and other individuals likely to be interested in the potential impacts of the proposed project. The Planning Department did not hold an optional public scoping meeting for the proposed project. In response to the NOP, written comments were received during the public comment period (January 21 to February 20, 2009) by both public agencies and individuals. A total of 175 letters (via mail) and email comment letters were received. A copy of the NOP is included in Appendix A of this EIR.⁵ Comments received in response to the NOP identified the following potential environmental issues for the proposed project:

- Land Use – consider effects of compatibility with surrounding uses.
- Aesthetics – potential effects of the proposed project’s design and scale in relation to the neighborhood and views from surrounding areas.
- Cultural Resources – potential effects to the Tonga Room.
- Transportation and Circulation – potential effects on traffic flow during construction and operation, loading dock operations, parking, and public transit.
- Noise – potential noise effects from demolition and construction activities.
- Air Quality – potential air quality effects from demolition and construction activities.
- Wind and Shadow – potential for the proposed project to create new shadow.
- Geology and Soils – consider the effects of excavation and removal of bedrock.

³ No public scoping meeting occurred for Case No. 2008.0081E, 950 Mason Street - Fairmont Hotel Revitalization and Residential Tower Project.

⁴ The Draft EIR distribution list is available for review at the Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, as part of Case No. 2008.0081E.

⁵ The NOP comment letters are available for review at the Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, as part of Case No. 2008.0081E.

- Hazards and Hazardous Materials – potential effects of exposure to asbestos by demolition and excavation activities and handling of hazardous materials.

Issues that were raised during the NOP public comment period concerning the environmental impact analysis were considered during the preparation of this Draft EIR. Other issues raised, such as the merits of the project design, cost of construction, potential effects on the market value of property in the area, and potential discretionary approvals granted by the City are not environmental issues. These issues may be considered by the decision-makers during the project-approval process, but are not discussed in this document.

CHANGES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT AFTER PUBLICATION OF THE NOP

At the time of the NOP publication on January 21, 2009, the elevation drawings of the proposed residential tower depicted a rounded south face, and a rotunda at the California and Powell Streets entrance. A combination of 200- and 300-foot height limits would be applicable to the proposed residential tower. At the time of the NOP publication, the southern portion of the proposed residential tower within the 200-foot height limit was proposed to be 280 feet. Thus, the NOP stated that the southern portion of the proposed residential tower would require a Planning Code height reclassification from 200 feet to 300 feet. The project sponsor had also proposed a comparable “offset” reduction in height classification (from 320 feet to 200 feet) of the southeast corner of the property. Since the issuance of the NOP, the proposed residential tower’s southern portion has been redesigned to be 200 feet in height. The proposed residential tower therefore no longer requires a Planning Code height reclassification and an “offset” reduction in height classification is no longer proposed. The design of the currently proposed residential tower, as viewed from Powell and Mason Streets, depicts a residential tower with squared-off south face and an atrium (rather than a rotunda) at the California and Powell Streets entrance.

The NOP also stated that up to 111 existing hotel rooms in the historic 1906 Fairmont Hotel would be remodeled to consolidate them into larger rooms, for a net reduction of 60 rooms. The project sponsor now proposes a net reduction of up to 60 rooms. The historic 1906 Fairmont Hotel would therefore have a total of 305 to 365 hotel rooms upon project completion, depending on how many rooms are consolidated (if any).

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The Cirque Room located on the Fairmont Hotel Lobby/Podium Courtyard Level is no longer proposed to be removed. A minor change is now proposed to widen the existing opening to connect to the new restaurant space west of the Cirque Room.

DRAFT EIR

This Draft EIR will be circulated for public review and comment for a period of 45 days from April 28, 2010 to June 16, 2010.⁶ Written comments concerning the accuracy and adequacy of the Draft EIR will be accepted during this period. An HPC hearing on the Draft EIR would occur prior to the Planning Commission hearing. A public hearing will be held before the Planning Commission to solicit public comment on the adequacy and accuracy of information presented in this Draft EIR. The public hearing on this Draft EIR will be held on **June 10, 2010** in Room 400, City Hall, Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, beginning at 1:30 p.m. or later (call 415-588-6422 the week of the hearing for a recorded message giving a more specific time).

Specific technical studies prepared for the environmental analysis of the proposed project include a transportation impact analysis by LCW Consulting (2009); a Historical Resources Evaluation (HRE) by Knapp and Associates (2009); a Historic Resources Evaluation Response (HRER) prepared by the San Francisco Planning Department; a wind opinion letter prepared by Don Ballanti (2009); a shadow analysis prepared by CADP (2009); a geotechnical investigation prepared by Treadwell and Rollo (1999); a geotechnical feasibility assessment prepared by Treadwell & Rollo (2008); and a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment prepared by ATC Associates, Inc. (2006).⁷

Documents and studies referenced in this Draft EIR are available for review at the City of San Francisco Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94103, as part of Case No. 2008.0081E. Written comments on the Draft EIR may be submitted until the close of business on June 16, 2010.

⁶ The Draft EIR distribution list is available for review at the Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, as part of Case No. 2008.0081E.

⁷ These technical studies and detailed data reports are available for review at the Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, as part Case No. 2008.0081E.

Written comments should be submitted to:

Bill Wycko, Environmental Review Officer
c/o 950 Mason Street – Fairmont Hotel Revitalization and
Residential Tower Project EIR
San Francisco Planning Department
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

FINAL EIR

After close of the public comment period, written responses will be prepared to address substantive comments received on environmental issues, and revisions to the Draft EIR will be identified. All of this information will be presented in a Comments and Responses document to the Planning Commission along with the Draft EIR. If deemed compliant with CEQA requirements, the Planning Commission will certify the Final EIR.

Following EIR certification, project decision-makers will use the information in the Final EIR in their deliberations on the proposed project. If the decision-makers decide to approve the proposed project, they will include in their approval action the following findings of fact: identification of all significant impacts that would result; a discussion of mitigation measures or alternatives that have been adopted to reduce significant impacts to less-than-significant levels; a determination as to whether mitigation measures or alternatives are within the jurisdiction of other public agencies and therefore must be rejected; and if applicable, an explanation of the reasons for rejecting mitigation measures or alternatives, as infeasible.

A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) must be adopted as part of the approval action, if mitigation measures are made part of the project. The MMRP identifies the mitigation measures included in the project, the entities responsible for carrying out the measures, and timing of implementation. If significant unavoidable impacts remain after all feasible mitigation measures are included in the project, and if the Planning Commission elects to approve the proposed project, it must adopt in its findings a statement of overriding considerations explaining how the benefits of the proposed project outweigh its significant unavoidable impacts. Under CEQA some impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. City decision-makers, specifically the Planning Commission, may decide to impose additional conditions (i.e., improvement measures) on the Proposed Project to further reduce the less-than-significant impacts of the project.

ORGANIZATION OF THE EIR

This EIR document is organized into eight chapters plus an appendix. The EIR includes the following chapters:

Chapter I – Summary: This chapter provides a summary of the proposed project, the environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project, and mitigation measures that could avoid, eliminate, or reduce potentially significant impacts of the project. A summary of alternatives to the proposed project, and areas of controversy, and issues to be resolved are also provided.

Chapter II – Introduction: This chapter provides project overview, summary of the environmental review process, EIR organization, and project background.

Chapter III – Project Description: This chapter provides a detailed description of the project components and their construction, operation of project, project history, objectives of the project sponsor, and approvals required to implement the project.

Chapter IV – Environmental Setting and Impacts: This chapter is organized by environmental topic, as follows:

- A. Land Use
- B. Aesthetics
- C. Population and Housing
- D. Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- E. Transportation and Circulation
- F. Noise
- G. Air Quality
- H. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- I. Wind and Shadow
- J. Recreation
- K. Utilities and Service Systems
- L. Public Services
- M. Biological Resources
- N. Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- O. Hydrology and Water Quality
- P. Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Q. Mineral and Energy Resources
- R. Agricultural and Forest Resources

Individual topic sections describe the following for each environmental topic: existing conditions (Setting), regulatory setting as applicable, thresholds of significance (Significance Thresholds), and potential environmental impacts (Impact Evaluation). For each of these environmental topics, existing

conditions in the project area are described first and serve as the baseline for analysis of potential environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project. The environmental analyses address construction and operational impacts, where relevant. Cumulative impacts (Cumulative Impacts) of the proposed project are also analyzed for each environmental topic, at an appropriate level of detail. Mitigation Measures are identified within each environmental topic to avoid, eliminate, or reduce potentially significant adverse impacts. Improvement measures to reduce the effects of less-than-significant impacts are also identified, where appropriate.

Chapter V – Other CEQA Issues: This chapter addresses other topics required by the *CEQA Guidelines*, including a summary of potentially significant and unavoidable impacts, irreversible effects associated with the proposed project, and a discussion of the proposed project’s growth inducement potential.

Chapter VI – Alternatives: This chapter provides an evaluation of three alternatives to the proposed project, including the “no project” alternative as well as an “environmentally superior” alternative that could avoid or lessen identified significant adverse impacts for the proposed project.

Chapter VII – EIR Preparers and Persons and Organizations Consulted: This chapter identifies the references used and persons and organizations contacted during preparation of the Draft EIR.

Appendix A – Notice of Preparation

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