

5. *Alternatives to the Proposed Project*

The following discussion is intended to inform the public and decision makers of feasible alternatives to the proposed Project that would avoid or substantially lessen any significant effects of the proposed Project.

The CEQA Guidelines set forth the intent and extent of alternatives analysis to be provided in an EIR. Section 15126.6(a) of the CEQA Guidelines states that:

An EIR shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives. An EIR need not consider every conceivable alternative to a project. Rather it must consider a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that will foster informed decision making and public participation. An EIR is not required to consider alternatives which are infeasible. The lead agency is responsible for selecting a range of project alternatives for examination and must publicly disclose its reasoning for selecting those alternatives. There is no ironclad rule governing the nature or scope of the alternatives to be discussed other than the rule of reason.

5.1 PURPOSE

The alternatives evaluated in this Draft EIR were developed consistent with Section 15126.6(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, which states that:

Because an EIR must identify ways to mitigate or avoid the significant effects that a project may have on the environment (Public Resources Code Section 21002.1), the discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.

5.2 POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

All of the potential environmental impacts associated with development of the proposed Project were found to be either less than significant without mitigation or less than significant with mitigation. No significant and unavoidable impacts would occur as a result of construction and operation of the proposed Project. A summarized list of the potential impacts is listed below.

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5.2.1 LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS WITHOUT MITIGATION

The impacts that would be less than significant without mitigation include the following:

Aesthetics¹

- The proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to aesthetics.

Air Quality

- The proposed Project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan.
- During operation, the proposed Project would not violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation.
- The proposed Project would not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the Project region is in nonattainment under an applicable federal or State ambient air quality standard (including releasing emissions which exceed quantitative thresholds for ozone precursors).
- The proposed Project would not expose on-site sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations from off-site emission sources.
- The proposed Project would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations from Carbon Monoxide (CO) Hotspots.
- The Project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, would not cumulatively contribute to air quality impacts in the San Francisco Bay Area Air Basin from construction and operational criteria air pollutant emissions, and from on-site construction community risk hazards.

Biological Resources

- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to biological resources.

Cultural Resources

- The proposed Project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in Section 15064.5.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to Cultural Resources.

¹ As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Aesthetics, of this Draft EIR, pursuant to Senate Bill 743, aesthetic impacts of residential or mixed use projects located on an infill site in a “transit priority area” “shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment.” For that reason, the information related to potential aesthetics impacts is for informational purposes only.

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Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

- The proposed Project would not generate GHG emissions, either directly or indirectly, that would have a significant impact on the environment.
- The proposed Project would have the potential to be inconsistent with measures adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions to achieve the City's local GHG reduction target, as outlined in the City of Walnut Creek's Climate Action Plan.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, would not result in a significant cumulative impact with respect to GHG emissions.

Land Use and Planning

- The proposed Project would not conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the Project (including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in a less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to land use and planning.

Noise

- The proposed Project would not result in the exposure of persons to or generation of excessive groundborne vibration or ground borne noise levels.
- The proposed Project would not result in a substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the Project vicinity above levels existing without the Project.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to noise.

Population and Housing

- The proposed Project would not displace substantial numbers of existing housing or people, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to population and housing.

Public Services

- The proposed Project would not result in the need for new or physically altered fire protection or police service facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives.
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to fire protection and police services.

Transportation and Traffic

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- The proposed Project would not conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, taking into account all modes of transportation including mass transit and non-motorized travel and relevant components of the circulation system, including but not limited to intersections, streets, highways and freeways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and mass transit under the following scenarios:
 - Existing with Project
 - Near-Term (2016) With Project Traffic Conditions
 - Cumulative (2030) with project Traffic Conditions
- The proposed Project would not conflict with an applicable congestion management program, including, but not limited to level of service standards and travel demand measures, or other standards established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways.
- The proposed Project would not substantially increase hazards due to a design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment).
- The proposed Project, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to transportation and traffic.

5.2.2 LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS WITH MITIGATION

The impacts that would be potentially significant, but less-than-significant with mitigation include the following:

Air Quality

- During construction, the proposed Project could have the potential to violate an air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation.
- The proposed Project would have the potential to expose off-site sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations from construction activities.
- The Project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, could cumulatively contribute to air quality impacts in the San Francisco Bay Area Air Basin to off-site construction community risk hazards.

Biological Resources

- The proposed Project could potentially have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on species identified as candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Cultural Resources

- The proposed Project would have the potential to cause a significant impact to an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5 of the CEQA Guidelines.
- The proposed Project would have the potential to directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site, or unique geologic feature.

Noise

- The proposed Project would result in the exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies.
- The proposed Project would have the potential to result in a substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the Project vicinity above levels existing without the Project.

The choice of alternatives to the proposed Project for analysis in this Draft EIR focused on those that would further reduce and avoid the impacts found to be potentially significant, but less than significant with mitigation measures, as listed above.

5.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As stated above, the range of potential alternatives to the project shall include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the proposed Project. The proposed Project includes the development of a high-density apartment building, consisting of 178-units with associated amenities and two levels of subterranean parking directly across from the Walnut Creek BART Station. The Project will seek to accomplish the following objectives:

- Redevelop an underutilized property to provide a high-quality, high-density residential apartment project directly across Ygnacio Valley Road from the Walnut Creek BART station that provides a well-designed and well-situated residential community for current and future residents desiring to reside in a transit friendly environment in Walnut Creek with transit connectivity to the larger Bay Area.
- Use the architectural design of the building and associated site hardscape/landscaping features to create a strong statement of “entry” or “gateway” for those arriving by car or BART into Walnut Creek, embellished by using artwork and prominent architectural features;
- Utilize the sloping topography of the site and architectural design to harmonize and establish a contextual relationship between this high density development and the surrounding environments located on the each side of the property, minimizing the aesthetic impact of parking.
- Build a project consistent with the goals of the Built Environment Element contained in General Plan 2025, including Policy 10.1 to “support the development of high-density residential near and around the Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill BART stations,” Policy 12.2 to “support infill and redevelopment in existing urban areas,” and Goal 15 to “enhance connectivity and mobility throughout the city.”

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- Build a project consistent with the City's Priority Development Area (PDA) designation by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) through the Bay Area's Regional FOCUS program, which was intended to encourage high density new development in close proximity to transit nodes that will help to reduce GHG emissions through a reduction in vehicle trips. This objective is also consistent with the goals of the 2011 Climate Action Plan which encourages a conversion of vehicular trips to non-vehicular trips or transit trips (Transit and Land Use Goal 3);
- Build a project consistent with the intent of the proposed West Downtown Specific Plan Area with its primary purpose to facilitate new commercial and residential development in proximity to the BART station and to create opportunities for increased use of transit, pedestrian and bike routes within the City's Priority Development Area. This objective will be achieved by enhancing and activating the pedestrian and bicycle connection from Lacassie Avenue to the BART station through landscaping and new bike lanes and providing parking for residents and visitors consistent with BART-proximate ratios.

5.4 SELECTION OF A REASONABLE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

Section 15126.6(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines states:

The range of potential alternatives to the proposed project shall include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the project and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant effects. The EIR should briefly describe the rationale for selecting the alternatives to be discussed. The EIR should also identify any alternatives that were considered by the lead agency but were rejected as infeasible during the scoping process and briefly explain the reasons underlying the lead agency's determination. Additional information explaining the choice of alternatives may be included in the administrative record. Among the factors that may be used to eliminate alternatives from detailed consideration in an EIR are: (i) failure to meet most of the basic project objectives, (ii) infeasibility, or (iii) inability to avoid significant environmental impacts.

5.4.1 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED AS BEING INFEASIBLE

As described above, Section 15126.6(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires EIRs to identify any alternatives that were considered by the lead agency but were rejected as infeasible during the scoping process, and briefly explain the reasons underlying the lead agency's determination. Section 15126.6(c) provides that among the factors that may be used to eliminate alternatives from detailed consideration in an EIR are (i) failure to meet most of the basic project objectives, (ii) infeasibility, or (iii) inability to avoid significant environmental impacts. The following is a discussion of alternatives that were considered and rejected, along with the reasons they were not included in the analysis.

5.4.1.1 ALTERNATE LOCATION

Development of an alternate site was considered and rejected as being infeasible for the proposed Project. A search for a site of similar size with close proximity to the Walnut Creek BART station in an area that was not adjacent to sensitive receptors (e.g., residential land uses) or located within 1,000 feet of substantial pollutant

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concentrations (e.g., high volume of vehicular traffic) to which future residents of the proposed Project could potentially be exposed was conducted as a means of reducing the proposed Project's significant-but-mitigable air quality and noise impacts. No such site was located. In addition, the Project Applicant does not currently own or control other potential sites for the proposed Project in the Core Area or anywhere else in Walnut Creek. Nor can the Project Applicant reasonably acquire or otherwise have access to such alternate sites (refer to Section 15126.6(f) of the CEQA Guidelines). As such, no feasible alternative locations were identified for the proposed Project.

5.4.1.2 HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL ALTERNATIVE

Under the height limits established in Measure A, a maximum building height of 89 feet could be developed on a portion of the Project site, which would afford greater density on the site (see Figure 3-5 in Chapter 3, Project Description, of this Draft EIR). However, development of a higher density alternative was considered and rejected for the Project because environmental impacts would not be reduced from those of the proposed Project.

5.4.1.3 ALTERNATE SITE PLAN ALTERNATIVE

Development of an alternate site plan was considered that would concentrate units further from I-680 to reduce potential health risks associated with substantial pollutant concentrations (e.g., high volume of vehicular traffic) to which future residents of the proposed Project could potentially be exposed. However, due to the Project's close proximity to I-680, it is not possible to implement a buffer greater than 1,000 feet from the pollution source per the Bay Area Air Quality Management District standards. Further, while an additional buffer may reduce health risks, the health risk assessment prepared for the project found potential impacts to be less than significant without mitigation. Ultimately, this alternative was rejected as being infeasible for the Project because the addition of a buffer would not meet the Project objectives (see above) and would not be necessary to reduce a significant air quality impacts.

5.4.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

In accordance with the CEQA Guidelines, two project alternatives and the comparative merits of the alternatives are discussed below. As previously stated, the alternatives were selected because of their potential to reduce the significant impacts of the proposed Project related to air quality, biological resources, GHG emissions, noise and transportation and traffic.

The alternatives to be analyzed in comparison to the proposed Project include:

- No Project
- General Plan 2025 Buildout

The first alternative discussed is the CEQA-required No Project Alternative. The second alternatives present development conditions that would occur under the General Plan 2025 (i.e. no amendment).

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5.4.3 ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The anticipated means for implementation of the alternatives can influence the assessment and/or probability of impacts for those alternatives. For example, a project may have the potential to generate significant impacts, but considerations in project design may also afford the opportunity to avoid or reduce such impacts. The alternatives analysis is presented as a comparative analysis to the proposed Project. The density and extent of residential development for the alternatives varies from the proposed Project. The same set of goals and policies apply under the No Project and General Plan 2025 Buildout alternatives as the proposed Project. The estimated buildout of each alternative, as well as the proposed Specific Plan, is provided in Table 5-1.

TABLE 5-1 COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES AND THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Alternatives	Total Units	Density	Project Size	Population	Maximum Height	Land Use	Zoning
Proposed Project	178	100 du/ac	1.82 ac	381	60 feet	MFSH	PD
No Project	20	35 du/ac	1.78 ac	43	20 feet	MFVH	M-1
General Plan 2025	87	50 du/ac	1.78 ac	191	50 feet	MFVH	M-1

Key:
du/ac = dwelling unit per acre
MFVH = Multi-Family Very High, 30.1-50 du/ac
MFSH = Multi-Family Special High, 50.1-100 du/ac
M-1 = Multi-Family Residential
PD = Planned Development

The alternatives analysis is presented as a comparative analysis to the proposed Project and assumes that all applicable mitigation measures proposed for the Project would apply to each alternative. The following analysis compares the potential significant environmental impacts of the two alternatives with those of the Project-related impacts for each of the environmental topics analyzed in detail in Chapter 4, Environmental Evaluation, of this Draft EIR. The impacts of each alternative are classified as greater, less, or essentially similar to (or comparable to) the level of impacts associated with the proposed Project.

Table 5-2 summarizes the relative impacts of each of the alternatives compared to the proposed Project.

NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

Description

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(1), the No Project Alternative is required as part of the “reasonable range of alternatives” to allow decision makers to compare the impacts of approving the proposed Project with the impacts of taking no action or not approving the proposed Project. Under this alternative, the proposed Project would not be constructed, and the Project site would remain in its current condition.

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Impact Discussion

The potential environmental impacts associated with the No Project Alternative are described below and are compared to the proposed Project.

TABLE 5-2 COMPARISON OF IMPACTS FROM PROJECT ALTERNATIVES AND THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Topic	Proposed Project	No Project	General Plan 2025
Aesthetics	LTS	>	=
Air Quality	LTS/M	=	=
Biological Resources	LTS/M	<	=
Cultural Resources	LTS/M	<<	=
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	LTS/M	<<	=
Land Use and Planning	LTS	>	=
Noise	LTS/M	<<	=
Population and Housing	LTS	=	=
Public Services	LTS	<	<
Transportation and Traffic	LTS	<	<

- Notes:
- LTS Less Than Significant
 - LTS/M Less Than Significant with Mitigation
 - << Substantially reduced impact in comparison to the proposed project
 - < Slightly reduced impact in comparison to the proposed project
 - = Similar impacts in comparison to the proposed project
 - > Slightly greater impact in comparison to the proposed project

Aesthetics

As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Aesthetics, of this Draft EIR, pursuant to Senate Bill 743, aesthetic impacts of residential or mixed use projects located on an infill site in a “transit priority area” “shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment.” For that reason, the information provided below is for informational purposes only.

Under the No Project Alternative, no grading, tree and vegetation removal, or new development would occur on the Project site and the existing aesthetic characteristics would remain unchanged. Currently the site is developed with a mix of older and moderately-maintained single-family and multi-family homes. The current conditions are not representative of the City’s goal for this part of Walnut Creek, which as stated in General Plan Goal 19 is to

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enhance the urban design quality of the Core Area and its subareas. In addition, due to the views to surrounding open spaces, hills, and Mount Diablo that are integral to the city's identity, sense of place, and character, General Plan 2025 designates Ygnacio Valley Road, which runs parallel to the Project site to the north, and the BART line, which runs parallel to the Project site on the west, as scenic corridors, and the intersection at North California Boulevard and Ygnacio Valley Road is designated as a gateway to the city. While construction of the proposed Project would not result in an adverse effect on a scenic vista, substantially damage scenic resources, or substantially alter the visual character in the Project area, given the site's location along the City's scenic corridors and that no new development representing improvements that meet Goal 19 as described above would occur, the fact that there would be no changes to the physically deteriorating visual character on the site under the No Project Alternative, the overall aesthetics impacts would be *slightly greater* from those of the proposed Project.

Air Quality

Project-generated fugitive dust and other pollutant emissions associated with construction activities at the site would not occur under this alternative; thereby, eliminating the Project's significant-but-mitigable air quality impacts. Same as the proposed Project, the No Project Alternative would not conflict or obstruct the implementation of Bay Area Air Quality Air District's 2010 Climate Action Plan or violate any air quality standards; thus, impacts would be the *similar* under both scenarios. Under the No Project Alternative, pollutant emissions associated with vehicle trips would not occur and emissions associated with residential development would not occur.

Under the proposed Project, the applicant would be required to implement Mitigation Measure AIR-4b, which would reduce the impacts associated with the off-site stationary, area, and mobile source emissions that would generate a substantial increase in pollutant concentrations to Project sensitive receptors (residents). Under the No Project Alternative, the existing residents would continue to be subject to this hazardous condition. Therefore, health risk impacts would be reduced under the proposed Project.

While no development would occur under the No Project Alternative, the air quality impacts under the proposed Project are fully mitigable with implementation of Mitigation Measure AIR-4a. Therefore impacts would be *similar* under both scenarios.

Biological Resources

Under the No Project Alternative the potential to modify habitat for any special-status species identified would not occur. No trees would be removed under the No Project Alternative; thus, no potential for conflicts with the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance would occur. This would eliminate the Project's significant-but-mitigable conflicts with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources. Overall impacts to biological resources would be *slightly reduced* from those of the proposed Project under this alternative because no development on the Project site would occur.

Cultural Resources

There are no known historic resources within the Project site; therefore, impacts to known cultural resources would be the *same* under both the No Project Alternative and the proposed Project. However, no ground-

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disturbing activities would occur under the No Project Alternative; therefore, this alternative would not have the potential to damage or destroy unknown archaeological or paleontological resources and human remains. Accordingly, the No Project Alternative would result in *substantially reduced* impacts from those of the proposed Project.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Under the No Project Alternative, no new high-density housing would be constructed, subsequently, no new vehicular trips would occur. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would result in *substantially reduced* GHG emissions when compared to the proposed Project. However, it should be noted that by increasing density at a location immediately adjacent to the BART station, the proposed Project carries out *Plan Bay Area* and is more consistent with a land use pattern that minimizes reliance on vehicular travel.

Land Use and Planning

Because the No Project Alternative would not involve any new development the site would remain in its current condition. Consequently, no trees would be removed under the No Project Alternative and no potential for conflicts with the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance would occur. However, the General Plan 2025 designates the Project site as Multi-Family Very High (MFVH) 30.1-50 dwelling units per acre (du/ac), a land use designation intended primarily for the city's conventional apartment complexes. The site currently has a total of 20 units, which makes the existing conditions a legal and non-conforming condition that is not in conformance with the General Plan 2025. Implementation of the proposed Project would require a General Plan Amendment to change the designation to Multi-Family Special High (MFSH), 50.1-100 du/ac in order to accommodate the Project's 100 du/ac; thus, the proposed Project would be consistent with General Plan 2025. Thus, overall impacts related to land use would be *slightly greater* when compared to the proposed Project.

Noise

Because the No Project Alternative would not involve any short-term noise from construction or long-term Project noise from operation, this alternative would eliminate the Project's significant-but-mitigable construction and long-term operational noise impacts. Therefore, noise impacts under this alternative would be *substantially reduced* from those of the proposed Project.

Population and Housing

While the 20 existing dwelling units and 43 existing residents would not be displaced under the No Project Alternative, the impacts would be *similar* to those of the proposed Project as it would adequately replace the existing housing with 158 high-density multi-family dwelling units that could accommodate up to 339 residents;² thus, no new housing would need to be constructed elsewhere. In addition, the Project Applicant would pay the City's established Affordable Housing Impact Fee upon issuance of the building permit or dedicate land as allowed

² The proposed Project would result in 178 new units, a net gain of 158 (178 new units minus 20 existing units.) Applying the Association of Bay Area Governments projections of the average household size of 2.14 persons for Walnut Creek in 2025, the proposed Project would result in 381 new residents, a net gain of 339 (381 new residents minus 43 existing residents.)

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in the City's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance under Municipal Code Chapter 2, Zoning, Article 9, Inclusionary Housing. Because inclusionary housing fees are paid on a per unit basis the proposed Project's greater density on the same site would proportionately provide the City with more affordable housing than under the No Project scenario. Furthermore, the Project Applicant would also be required to provide relocation assistance to households displaced as a result of the Project pursuant to Section 9-15.05 of the Walnut Creek Municipal Code.

While the provision of more affordable housing is a greater benefit to the City, the impacts to population and housing under the No Project Alternative would be *similar* to those under the proposed Project as it adequately addresses the replacement of housing and the relocation of displaced persons proportionate to the loss of homes and displaced persons.

Public Services (Fire and Police)

While impacts to public services would be less than significant without mitigation under the proposed Project, the No Project Alternative would result in no new development on the Project site and would not change the type or frequency of fire and police protection services required. Accordingly, overall impacts to public services would be *slightly reduced* when compared to those of the proposed Project.

Traffic and Transportation

While impacts to transportation and traffic under the proposed Project would be less than significant without mitigation, under the No Project Alternative, no new development on the site would occur and no new traffic trips would be generated. As such, no traffic impacts as a result of new development on the Project site would occur. Accordingly, overall impacts to transportation and traffic would be *slightly reduced* when compared to those of the proposed Project.

Relationship of the Alternative to the Objectives

Under the No Project Alternative, the proposed Project would not be approved and a high-density residential development across from the Walnut Creek BART station would not be constructed. Accordingly, this alternative does not meet any of the Project objectives.

5.4.3.2 GENERAL PLAN 2025 BUILDOUT ALTERNATIVE

Description

The General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would be similar to as the proposed Project in overall character, but developed at half the density and at a lower height. This alternative assumes that development on the Project site would occur as permitted under the existing General Plan 2025 land use designation and Zoning district. Under this alternative no General Plan or Zoning Ordinance amendments would occur and the site would remain designated as Multi-Family Very High (MFVH, 30.1-50 du/ac) and within the Multi-Family Residential (M-1)

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Zoning district. As such, this alternative evaluates the maximum development under this alternative; 87 high-density, multi-family units accommodating 191 residents.³ Given the site currently has 20 units and 43 residents, this alternative would result in a net increase of 67 units and 148 residents. The maximum height permitted under this alternative would be 50 feet (see Figure 3-4, in Chapter 3, Project Description, of this Draft EIR).

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative all other aspects of the proposed Project's components related to the construction schedule, apartment amenities, circulation, emergency access BART Proximate parking standards, landscaping, lighting and public art would be the same or scaled back proportionately.

Impact Discussion

The potential environmental impacts associated with the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative are described below and are compared to the proposed Project.

Aesthetics

As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Aesthetics, of this Draft EIR, pursuant to Senate Bill 743, aesthetic impacts of residential or mixed use projects located on an infill site in a "transit priority area" "shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment." For that reason, the information provided below is for informational purposes only.

Implementation of the proposed Project would not result in an adverse effect on a scenic vista, substantially damage scenic resources, or substantially alter the visual character in the Project area.

As with the proposed Project, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would allow a high-density, multi-family residential development on the Project site. While development under this alternative would result in reduced density (50 du/ac compared to 100 du/ac) and building height (50 feet compared to 60 feet) than that of the proposed Project, development allowed by the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would alter the existing setting the same as the proposed Project.

Same as the proposed Project, development under this alternative would be required to comply with the setback and stepback requirements outlined in the General Plan 2025 that are designed to protect the views of the surrounding open spaces, hills, and Mount Diablo from Ygnacio Valley Road and the BART line. Furthermore, the design of the proposed Project would also be subject to review by the City's Design Review Commission to ensure consistency with the City's Design Review Guidelines.

The changes to the configuration of the high-density, multi-family residential development on the site under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would not correspondingly reduce impacts related to visual resources in comparison to the proposed Project as both scenarios would involve introducing more intense urban development

³ This calculation is based on the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) projections of the average household size of 2.14 persons for Walnut Creek in 2025, as described in Chapter 4.8 of this Draft EIR.

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on a generally underdeveloped site. In light of the foregoing discussion, in regard both to substantial adverse effects on a scenic vista, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would have a *similar* impact in comparison to the proposed Project.

Air Quality

Development proposed under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would occur on the same Project site as the proposed Project with less high-density housing than the proposed Project (87 units compared to 178 units).

Project-generated fugitive dust and other pollutant emissions associated with construction activities at the site would occur the same as the proposed Project under this alternative; thereby, resulting in the same significant-but-mitigable air quality impacts. Same as the proposed Project, the General Plan 2025 would not conflict or obstruct the implementation of Bay Area Air Quality Air District's 2010 Climate Action Plan or violate any air quality standards; thus, impacts would be the *similar* under both scenarios. Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, pollutant emissions associated with vehicle trips and emissions associated with residential development would be *slightly less* than the proposed Project.

As with the proposed Project, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would have less than significant impacts associated with the off-site stationary, area, and mobile source emissions. Therefore, health risk impacts would be the *similar* to those of the proposed Project.

Accordingly, development under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in *similar* impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

Biological Resources

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, the same site would be redeveloped with less high-density residential development when compared to the proposed Project (87 units compared to 178 units). While this alternative would be less intense than the proposed Project, development under both scenarios would require the removal of all on-site vegetation. Therefore, in regard to substantial adverse effects, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would have a *similar* impact in comparison to the proposed Project.

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, development would proceed as currently planned for and allowed under existing land use designations. The City policies for the protection of biological resources and existing ordinances, including City's Tree Preservation Ordinance, would remain in place. Therefore, in regard both to conflicts with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in *similar* impacts in comparison to the proposed Project.

In summary, the development under the No Project Alternative would, overall, result in *similar* impacts to biological resources when compared to the proposed Project.

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Cultural Resources

There are no known historic resources within the Project site; therefore, impacts to known cultural resources would be the *same* under both the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative and the proposed Project.

The General Plan 2025 contains policies related to the protection of cultural resources and future development that would apply to both the proposed Project and this alternative. In addition, development under both scenarios would be subject to federal and State regulations. While less development would occur under this alternative than under the proposed Project, development under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would generally occur on the same amount of disturbed but undeveloped land as the proposed Project. Therefore, in regard to substantial adverse changes in the significance of either a historical or an archaeological resources and direct or indirect destruction of unique paleontological or geologic resources, sites, or features, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in *similar* impacts in comparison to the proposed Project.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Development proposed under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would occur within the same boundaries as the proposed Project with less high-density housing (87 units compared to 178 units).

Under the proposed Project, the construction of the proposed apartments would generate GHG emissions that would not either directly or indirectly have a significant impact on the environment. The proposed Project would not conflict with the City's General Plan 2025, the proposed West Downtown Specific Plan or the Metropolitan Transportation Commission/Association of Bay Area Governments' *Plan Bay Area* for the purpose of reducing the emissions of GHGs through vehicular trip reduction by locating higher density new development in close proximity to transit nodes, like the Walnut Creek BART station and would not conflict with the City's 2011 CAP. Because development under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would be held to the same standards as that of the proposed Project, it would result in *similar* impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

Land Use and Planning

Development proposed under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would generally be the same as that of the proposed Project, but would not result in a General Plan or Zoning Ordinance Amendment. The residential development under this alternative would have less high-density housing (87 units compared to 178 units).

There are no land use conflicts under the proposed Project or under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative. While the General Plan land use designation and Zoning district are different under the proposed Project and the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, both are consistent with their respective designations and districts. Under both scenarios all of the on-site trees would be removed; thus, the potential for conflicts with the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance would be *similar* to that of the proposed Project. Thus, overall impacts related to General Plan 2025 consistency would be *similar* under this alternative.

As noted above under the GHG emissions discussion, because the Project site is ideally suited for high-density housing in close proximity to transit nodes, like the Walnut Creek BART station, to reduce GHG emission through reduced vehicular trips, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative conditions would be consistent with the goals

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outlined in the City's General Plan 2025, 2011 Climate Action Plan and the proposed West Downtown Specific Plan Area. While the *Plan Bay Area* does not directly govern land uses within Walnut Creek, high-density development under this alternative would be consistent with this Plan as well.

Overall, land use and planning impacts would be *similar* under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative when compared to the proposed Project.

Noise

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, while less high-density residential development (87 units compared to 178 units) would occur than that under the proposed Project, development under both scenarios would be subject to the same General Plan 2025 policies that regulate noise. Therefore, noise related impacts as a result of implementing the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would be *similar* to those of the proposed Project.

Population and Housing

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, the 20 existing dwelling units and 43 existing residents would be displaced same as the proposed Project. The impacts would be *similar* to those of the proposed Project as development under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would adequately replace this housing with 87 high-density multi-family dwelling units that could accommodate up to 191 residents;⁴ thus, no new housing would need to be constructed elsewhere. In addition, the Project Applicant of the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would pay the City's established Affordable Housing Impact Fee upon issuance of the building permit or dedicate land as allowed under the City's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance under Municipal Code Chapter 2, Zoning, Article 9, Inclusionary Housing, same as the proposed Project. Because inclusionary housing fees are paid on a per unit basis the proposed Project's greater density on the same site would proportionately provide the City with more affordable housing than the General Plan Buildout Alternative. Furthermore, the Project Applicant would also be required to provide relocation assistance to households displaced as a result of the Project pursuant to Section 9-15.05 of the Walnut Creek Municipal Code.

While the provision of more affordable housing under the proposed Project would ultimately provide a greater benefit to the City's affordable housing program, the impacts to population and housing under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would be *similar* to those under the proposed Project as both scenarios adequately address the replacement of housing and the relocation of displaced persons proportionate to the loss of homes and displaced persons that would occur in either case.

⁴ The General Plan 2025 Alternative would result in 87 new units, a net gain of 67 (87 new units minus 20 existing units.) Applying the Association of Bay Area Governments projections of the average household size of 2.14 persons for Walnut Creek in 2025, the General Plan 2025 Alternative would result in 187 new residents, a net gain of 144 (187 new residents minus 43 existing residents.)

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Public Services (Fire and Police)

Buildout under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in fewer residential units (87 dwelling units compared to 178 dwelling units) and population (191 new residents compared to 381 new residents) than buildout under the proposed Project. As a result, the demand for fire and police services under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would be less. Because the estimated population of the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative and the proposed Project is less, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative is considered to result in a *slightly reduced* impacts to public services when compared to the proposed Project.

Traffic and Transportation

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, the high-density residential development would accommodate 87 new dwelling units, which is 91 fewer units than the 178 total new dwelling units under the proposed Project; therefore, fewer trips would result under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative conditions. The proposed Project would not conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, an applicable congestion management program, and would not substantially increase hazardous conditions. Therefore, reducing the amount of high-density housing on the site would result in *slightly reduced* traffic related impacts under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative in comparison to the proposed Project.

Relationship of the Alternative to the Objectives

Under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative, the site would be redeveloped with multi-family, high-density (albeit at half of the density of the proposed Project) residential apartments across from Ygnacio Valley Road from the Walnut Creek BART station, which would provide future residents desiring to reside in a transit friendly environment in Walnut Creek with transit connectivity to the larger Bay Area. This type of development would be consistent with the goals of the Built Environment Element contained in General Plan 2025, including Policy 10.1 to “support the development of high-density residential near and around the Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill BART stations,” Policy 12.2 to “support infill and redevelopment in existing urban areas,” and Goal 15 to “enhance connectivity and mobility throughout the city.” Additionally, development under the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would also be consistent with the *Plan Bay Area’s* Walnut Creek West Downtown Priority Development Area and the City’s 2011 Climate Action Plan by locating high-density residential near the BART station in an effort to reduce vehicular trips and subsequently reduce GHG emissions. Furthermore, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would meet the intent of the proposed West Downtown Specific Plan Area, which is to facilitate new commercial and residential development in proximity to the BART station and to create opportunities for increased use of transit, pedestrian and bike routes within the City’s Priority Development Area. Development under this alternative would be subject to City’s Design Review Commission to ensure consistency with the City’s Design Review Guidelines, which would ensure a high-quality development at this prominent gateway to the city. Accordingly, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative substantially meets all of the Project Objectives, but due to the reduced density when compared to the proposed Project, it does not fully address the objectives for high-density residential near the BART station at the same level. It also does not avoid any significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed Project.

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5.4.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

In addition to the discussion and comparison of impacts of the proposed Project and the alternatives, Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an “environmentally superior” alternative be selected and the reasons for such a selection be disclosed. In general, the environmentally superior alternative is the alternative that would be expected to generate the least amount of significant impacts. Identification of the environmentally superior alternative is an informational procedure and the alternative selected may not be the alternative that best meets the goals or needs of Walnut Creek. The Project under consideration cannot be identified as the environmentally superior alternative. Additionally, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2), if the environmentally superior alternative is the “No Project” Alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.

As discussed in the analysis above, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in less development than that of the proposed Project and as shown in Table 5-2 above, would result in similar impacts to the proposed Project’s significant-but-mitigable impacts to air quality, biological and cultural resources, and noise, and would slightly reduce the less-than-significant impacts to public services (fire and police services), and transportation and traffic. In addition, the General Plan Buildout Alternative, unlike the No Project Alternative, would not increase or worsen impacts from that of the proposed Project with respect to aesthetics and land use and planning. For these reasons, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative is considered the environmentally superior alternative.

In conclusion, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would generally meet the Project objectives, but substantially decrease the overall development from that of the proposed Project. As a result, the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative would result in similar environmental impacts as those of the proposed Project and consequently provide less affordable housing for the City of Walnut Creek. As described in Chapter 4.10, Population and Housing, due to the surge in development applications for new market rate apartment complexes, a low rental vacancy rate and increases in rents over the past year, the City is experiencing an increased demand for affordable rental housing.⁵ Therefore, while the General Plan 2025 Buildout Alternative is the environmentally superior alternative, it would not provide the greatest service to Walnut Creek with regards to affordable housing.

⁵ City Council Agenda Report, Housing Policy Guidelines, page 3, June 4, 2013.