

2 STUDY AREA 2: NORTH CHICO SPECIFIC PLAN

The North Chico Specific Plan (NCSP) study area consists of approximately 2,980 acres located northwest of the City of Chico and west of the Chico Municipal Airport. The NCSP was adopted in 1995 to comprehensively respond to development proposals while providing area-wide solutions to drainage, circulation and public services. Although most of the NCSP study area has not been built, portions have been developed with very low density residential uses. The remainder of the study area is currently used for agriculture and resource conservation.

- ◆ Alternative 1 follows the existing General Plan and NCSP, which designate the majority of this study area Very Low Density Residential. The existing General Plan and NCSP also call for a village core, including Medium, Medium High, and High Density Residential, allowing about 3,800 new homes, as well as 520 acres of retail, industrial and public uses.
- ◆ Under Alternative 2, the NCSP would be modified to increase the residential densities and retail, allowing about 6,000 new homes and 560 acres of retail, industrial and public uses.
- ◆ Under Alternative 3, the NCSP would be modified to decrease the residential densities and increase the retail and industrial uses, allowing about 1,600 new homes and 770 acres of retail, industrial and public uses.

A. *Economics*

1. **Market Viability**

Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 would have substantially similar market viability. The market viability of the residential components of all three alternatives is high, but the market viability of the retail and industrial components is mixed.

The Chico area is one of the more desirable housing markets in Butte County, and as a major employment center for the county, Chico should continue to be attractive to new resident. This means that homes planned in this study area should have good marketability. North Chico also enjoys strong potential market support for commercial development due to the large

existing population base in the greater Chico area, although this proximity also sets the study area up for competition with similar uses within the City itself. The numbers of new homes that would be allowed under Alternatives 1 and 3 would likely support a limited amount of small convenience stores or fast-food restaurants to serve new residents. The development foreseen under Alternative 2 would likely attract a greater amount of retail development, including the potential for a neighborhood shopping center with grocery store, drug store, casual restaurants, and personal services.

The very large quantities of retail and industrial development foreseen under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 would probably be out of scale relative to potential market support, therefore, it would be unlikely that the retail and industrial components of any of the alternatives would be fully developed during the General Plan time horizon. Therefore, all three alternatives receive a B.

2. Fiscal Impacts

Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 would all have substantially similar positive fiscal impacts, with a strong potential for fiscal benefits to the County.

The North Chico study area is located in Tax Rate Areas (TRAs) where Butte County is allocated between 17.2 and 17.6 percent of the property taxes, which is more than the allocation in parts of the County. Moreover, property values in this study area are likely to be higher in this part of the county than many others, due to the proximity to the City of Chico, resulting in higher property tax revenues. Because this study area is in a location where Butte County already provides services such as the full-time staffed Nord Fire Station #41 and Sheriff's patrols, and because this is a very accessible area, service provision should be relatively efficient and should increase costs only incrementally with new growth. The largest non-residential component of this alternative is industrial, which, because of comparatively low property values, does not tend to be a strong revenue generator. At the same time, industrial uses do not tend to create large service demands. These factors combine to create potential for strong fiscal benefits in all three alternatives. Even with the reduced amount of commercial

development that is likely to be absorbed by the market, all three alternatives have the potential to generate fiscal neutrality or fiscal benefits. Therefore, all three alternatives receive a B.

3. Jobs/Housing Balance

a. Alternative 1

The estimated jobs/housing balance would be two jobs for every one employed resident. Because the Chico area currently has a relatively even balance between the number of jobs and the number of employed residents in and around Chico, this alternative would adversely affect the Chico area's currently stable jobs/housing balance by generating an excess of jobs relative to employed residents, if fully developed. However, because the likelihood of full absorption of the commercial uses is low, the risk of realizing significant excess job generation in this area is also low. Therefore, Alternative 1 receives a C.

b. Alternative 2

The estimated jobs/housing balance would be two jobs for every one employed resident, meaning the study area would have a substantial surplus of jobs, although somewhat more balanced than Alternative 1, above. As in Alternative 1, the likelihood of full absorption of the commercial uses is low, so the risk of realizing significant excess job generation in this area is also low. Alternative 2 receives a C.

c. Alternative 3

The estimated jobs/housing balance would be eight jobs for every one employed resident, meaning the study area would have a very large surplus of jobs and would need to rely on other adjacent areas to supply at least 85 percent of the workers that would be employed in the study area. However, because the likelihood of full absorption of the commercial uses is low, the risk of realizing significant excess job generation in this area is also low. Alternative 3 receives a C.

B. Public Services

1. Fire and Emergency Services

The Butte County Fire Department and CAL FIRE provide fire protection and emergency services to the NCSP study area. In general, there is not adequate staffing to handle more than two serious fire events or several less-serious emergencies at once in Butte County. Any new development in the county would impact the level of fire protection and emergency services.

There is one fire station located within the boundaries of the NCSP study area, Fire Station 41, a career-staffed fire station located on the western border of the NCSP study area.

Portions of the western half of the NCSP study area have adequate service levels for suburban residential, industrial and retail development. The remainder of the study area has adequate service levels for only rural and very low density residential development. Specifically, the western half of the NCSP study area is located within a four-minute travel area for a first-due unit, and portions of this area are within eight minutes of three or more fire stations. The eastern half of the NCSP study area is located within an eight-minute travel area for a first-due unit.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 allows approximately 3,800 new homes. Much of the residential development within the village core would be at a suburban density, while the remaining residential development would be at a very low density. In addition, this alternative includes substantial retail and industrial development, primarily within the village core, but also along Highway 99. These uses typically require high fire and emergency service levels because they include assets of high economic value and generate customers that depend on those services.

The suburban residential, retail and industrial development within the village core would not have adequate levels of fire and emergency services due to

high travel times and the low concentration of career-staffed fire stations in the immediate area. Moreover, the level of development under this alternative would not support a new fire station, so there would be little opportunity to improve fire protection. Only very low density residential development and the relatively small retail and industrial development located outside of the village core would have adequate fire and emergency services. Because the majority of the development under Alternative 1 would not have adequate service levels, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Alternative 2 allows approximately 6,000 new homes, as well as significant retail and industrial development. Unlike Alternative 1, this alternative has enough development that it could support a new fire station in the NCSP study area. Therefore, this alternative receives a B.

c. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 allows significant retail and industrial development, covering approximately 660 acres, as well as some residential development. This amount of retail and industrial development could support a new fire station in the NCSP study area. Therefore, this alternative also receives a B.

2. Sheriff Services

The NCSP study area is served by the Northern Division of the Butte County Sheriff's Office (BCSO). The BCSO is currently understaffed and has limited capacity for expansion of its services. The Northern Division typically has about two deputies on duty in the Chico area. Because the NCSP study area is located near the Chico area, response times to this location are relatively quick.

There is no police station located within the boundaries of the NCSP study area. The Butte County Sheriff station in Chico, the closest police station, is located within 6 miles of the southern boundary of the study area and 10 miles of the northern boundary of the study area.

a. Alternatives 1 and 2

Alternatives 1 and 2 call approximately 3,800 and 6,000 new homes, respectively, generating the need for more than five new officers in an area with quick response times. Therefore, these alternatives receive a C.

b. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 calls for approximately 1,600 new homes, generating the need for about five new officers in an area with quick response times. Therefore, this alternative receives a B.

3. Capacity of School Districts

The NCSP study area is served by the Chico Unified School District (CUSD). The CUSD's total current enrollment is approximately 12,930 students, of which 8,440 students are in grades K-8, and 4,490 students are in grades 9-12. The District currently has capacity for a total of approximately 15,040 students, including 1,390 more K-8 students and 720 more 9-12 students. The CUSD's enrollment has been declining for the last ten years.

Although the CUSD is currently operating below capacity, it is important to note that there is significant growth expected within the city limits of Chico. Two major projects that were recently approved in the City of Chico include the Meriam Park and Mountain Vista-Sycamore Glen projects. These two projects are expected to generate approximately 1,280 K-8 students and 630 9-12 students. These projects do not include construction of new school facilities, so they will absorb most of the remaining capacity of the CUSD. Taking into account these projects, the CUSD has the capacity for 110 more K-8 students and 90 more 9-12 students.

The District has already purchased a 50-acre site for a new high school that would likely accommodate approximately 2,000 students, and has purchased a 12-acre site and conducted environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act for a new elementary school that could serve up to 550 students. These projects could be built if enrollment begins to outstrip capacity.

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a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, the NCSP study area could generate approximately 1,250 new K-8 students and 610 new 9-12 students, which would exceed the current capacity. However, the additional high school students could be accommodated by the expected capacity of the planned new high school. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 1 in all of the study areas within the CUSD could generate approximately 1,820 new K-8 students, about 1,710 students beyond current capacity, as well as approximately 890 new 9-12 students, about 800 students beyond current capacity. These additional students would create a need for the planned new elementary and high schools described above.

Because the high school students generated by this study area could be accommodated by the planned capacity, and the K-8 students generated by this study area would support a new K-8 school, this alternative receives a C.

b. Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, the NCSP study area could generate approximately 1,980 new K-8 students and 970 new 9-12 students, which would exceed the current capacity by about 1,870 K-8 students and 880 9-12 students. However, the additional high school students could be accommodated by the expected capacity of the planned new high school. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 2 in all of the study areas within the CUSD could generate approximately 4,520 new K-8 students, about 4,410 students beyond current capacity, as well as approximately 2,210 new 9-12 students, about 2,120 students beyond current capacity. These additional students would create a need for the planned new elementary and high schools described above.

Because the high school students generated by this study area could be accommodated by the planned capacity, and the K-8 students generated by this study area would support new K-8 schools, this alternative receives a C.

c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, the NCSP study area could generate approximately 530 new K-8 students and 260 new 9-12 students, which would exceed the current capacity. However, these additional students could be accommodated by the expected capacities of the planned new high school and elementary school. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 3 in all of the study areas within the CUSD could generate approximately 1,290 new K-8 students, about 1,180 students beyond current capacity, as well as approximately 630 new 9-12 students, about 540 students beyond current capacity. These additional students would create a need for the planned new elementary and high schools described above.

Because the number of new students generated by this study area could be accommodated by the planned capacities, this alternative receives a B.

C. Water

1. Water Supply

The NCSP study area is located within the Sacramento Valley Inventory Unit, where groundwater is stored in the Tuscan, Laguna, Riverbank and Modesto Formations. Groundwater in these formations primarily exists within the spaces between sand and gravel deposits, which generally allow greater recharge and access to groundwater than aquifers relying on the fractures and joints of rocks. The Tuscan Formation provides water for deep irrigation and municipal wells, while the Riverbank and Modesto Formations provide water for shallower domestic wells.

The Butte County Department of Water and Resource Conservation has divided Butte County into inventory units and sub-units so that information regarding water supply can be understood by region. The NCSP study area is located within the Vina Inventory Unit. The predominant source of water in the Vina Sub-Unit is groundwater, which is used for both urban and agricultural needs.

Although there are no water service providers currently operating within the NCSP, the California Water Service Company (Chico District) serves adjacent urbanized areas in Chico. This provider relies on over 60 wells that pump groundwater for urban needs in and around the City of Chico. It may be possible to serve urban development in this study area by connecting to the California Water Service Company network. However, the existing demand in the greater Chico area has created a cone of groundwater depression around the municipal water supply wells.

Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 call for significant growth, including residential, retail and industrial development. Although this growth would be located adjacent to a municipal water service district where future annexations could provide municipal water, there is a known cone of groundwater depression in this area. Therefore, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive a C.

2. Groundwater Recharge Potential

The NCSP study area is located within the Valley Inventory Unit. It may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area. Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 call for significant growth in this study area, and therefore receive a D.

D. Wastewater

The majority of the NCSP study area is not served by sewer. However, there are two County Service Areas (CSAs) that provide collection and treatment of domestic wastewater for individual subdivisions. These CSAs are overseen by the Butte County Division of Environmental Health with administration by the Butte County Department of Public Works. CSA 135 (Keefer Creek Estates) serves 25 parcels on approximately 40 acres along Kelsey Drive and along Keefer Road. CSA 169 (Pheasant Landing Subdivision) serves 17 parcels on approximately 70 acres along Garner Lane. Neither of these sewer systems is likely to need replacement for over ten years, and these CSAs are not expected to grow beyond the original designs of their wastewater systems.

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For the remainder of the NCSP study area, individual septic systems are currently used for wastewater treatment. About 150 acres along Highway 99 is within the Chico Urban Area. This area is subject to the Nitrate Compliance Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2001. This Plan enacts strict standards for density requirements for new septic systems.

The NCSP study area is also adjacent to the City of Chico, which provides wastewater collection and treatment services to its residents. It is possible that, in the future, this study area may be connected to Chico's municipal sewer system if the City were to annex this study area. According to LAFCO's 2006 Municipal Service Review of Domestic Water and Wastewater Providers in Butte County, the wastewater collection system operated by the City of Chico has sufficient capacity to support its current demand, although there are a few deficient sewer lines that could limit future development potential in some parts of the city unless they are upgraded. Furthermore, anticipated growth in Chico over the next several years is expected to cause wastewater flows to exceed existing capacity at the treatment plant unless it is upgraded.

a. Alternatives 1 and 2

Alternatives 1 and 2 call for approximately 3,800 and 6,000 new homes, respectively, at a range of densities, as well as retail and industrial uses. This level of development could create the ability to expand the adjacent municipal sewer system. However, City staff have indicated that this level of development may require a new sewer interceptor line to be constructed to connect to the City's wastewater treatment plant. The existing City sewer impact fees may not cover the costs of constructing new sewer interceptor lines. Therefore, Alternatives 1 and 2 receive a C.

b. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 calls for approximately 1,600 new homes at very low and medium densities, as well as retail and industrial uses. This level of

development could create the ability to expand the adjacent municipal sewer system, but it may not require the construction of a new sewer interceptor line. Therefore, Alternative 3 receives a B.

E. Circulation

The NCSP study area is served by Highway 99, Garner Lane, and Hicks Lane.

1. Proximity to Freeways and Major Roadways

Highway 99 runs along the west side of the NCSP study area. The study area is also served by a local minor roadway network. This study area receives an A for access proximity to major roadways.

2. Bicycle Circulation

Within the NCSP study area, planned bicycle facilities are located along Highway 99, Keefer Road, Garner Lane, and Hicks Lane. The location of the study area adjacent to the City of Chico also allows for bicycle access to jobs, schools, and services in Chico. Due to the study area's planned bicycle facilities and location adjacent to the City of Chico urban area, the study area receives a B.

3. Transit Service

Transit service is currently provided in the study area along Garner Lane and Lassen Avenue. This receives a B.

F. Airport Compatibility Zone Conflicts

Portions of the NCSP study area are located within Airport Compatibility Zones B1, B2, C, C1, C2 and D.

Under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3, portions of the Very Low Density Residential designations would be incompatible with the B1, B2, C, C1 and C2 Airport Compatibility Zones. The majority of the village core area is compatible with the Airport Compatibility Zones under all alternatives. However, the Public designation within the village core is intended for use as a school, which is a prohibited use within the C2 Zone in which it is located. Because portions of Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 are not consistent with the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan, they receive a C.

G. Potential Loss of Agricultural Land

Of the approximately 2,980 acres in the NCSP study area, approximately 480 acres are identified as Prime Farmland and approximately 805 acres are identified as Grazing Land. The Prime Farmland is located primarily in the northern and western portions of the study area and the Grazing Lands are located along the eastern border.

Under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3, the entire approximately 2,980 acres in the NCSP study area would be designated for non-agricultural uses, which would convert approximately 480 acres of Prime Farmland and approximately 805 acres of Grazing Land to non-agricultural uses. However, the NCSP's primary purpose, as approved, is to provide for a mixed-use development plan. In addition, an Environmental Impact Report was adopted for the NCSP which accounted for the loss of agricultural land. For these reasons, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive a C.

H. Biological Resources

This study area is located in the valley floor and is within the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area. The predominant land cover types are urban and orchard with grasslands and vernal pool grasslands in the east

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and south; ranchettes occupy most of the northeast arm along the valley of Rock Creek. Keefer Creek and Mud Creek run through the study area.

No special-status plants have been recorded in the study area.

One occurrence of burrowing owl is recorded within urban land in the south of the study area.

There is Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP)-modeled habitat in this study area for the following 23 species:

- ◆ Ahart's dwarf rush
- ◆ Bald eagle
- ◆ Butte County meadowfoam
- ◆ Conservancy fairy shrimp
- ◆ Ferris' milkvetch
- ◆ Giant garter snake
- ◆ Greene's tuctoria
- ◆ Hairy Orcutt grass
- ◆ Hoover's spurge
- ◆ Northwestern pond turtle (Mud Creek, Sycamore Creek, and Rock Creek and surrounding uplands)
- ◆ Peregrine falcon
- ◆ Spring-run and fall-run chinook (lower reaches of Mud Creek and Rock Creek)
- ◆ Steelhead (Mud Creek)
- ◆ Swainson's hawk
- ◆ Tricolored blackbird
- ◆ Valley elderberry longhorn beetle
- ◆ Vernal pool fairy shrimp
- ◆ Vernal pool tadpole shrimp
- ◆ Western burrowing owl
- ◆ Western spadefoot (Mud Creek, Sycamore Creek, upper reach of Keefer Slough)

- ◆ White-tailed kite
- ◆ Yellow-breasted chat

A portion of Mud Creek has been designated Critical Habitat for steelhead and Central Valley spring-run chinook. In the southern portion of the study area, parcels along Mud Creek are owned by the City of Chico, it is not known how the lands are managed.

Cottonwood riparian occurs along Rock Creek in the northeast of the study area. Vernal pool grasslands occur in the east and southeast. A small area of valley oak riparian woodland occurs along Mud Creek.

There is no deer herd habitat in the study area.

Although the alternatives differ in housing density, each would concentrate industrial, retail, and medium to high-density residential development in the southeastern portion of the study area in an area of grassland with vernal swale complex and potential habitat for special-status species, and within a Vernal Pool Core Recovery Area.

Therefore, these alternatives receive a C for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, a D for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, a D for Sensitive Habitats, and an A for Deer Herd Habitat.

I. Safety and Hazards

1. Fire Hazards

The NCSP study area includes low fire severity, moderate fire severity and high fire severity zones. Approximately 200 acres of the NCSP study area are within a high fire severity zone. Since Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 all call for development throughout the NCSP study area, all alternatives would result in 200 acres of development within a high fire severity zone. Therefore, alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive a D.

2. Flood Hazards

Approximately 710 acres of the NCSP study area is within the 100-year FEMA flood zone of the Mud Creek. Since Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 all call for development throughout the NCSP study area, all alternatives would result in development on approximately 710 acres within the 100-year FEMA flood zone and receive a D.

3. Geologic Hazards

The NCSP study has areas of slight, moderate and severe erosion potential. The majority of the NCSP study area has slight erosion potential. An area of severe erosion potential is located in the northeast of the study area. There are potentially significant subsidence hazards for most of the NCSP study area. There is zero to low and moderate landslide potential in the NCSP study area. The majority of the NCSP study area has very low potential for soil expansion. However, there are areas of high potential for soil expansion in the west of the study area as well as areas of very high potential for soil expansion in the east of the study area. There are no faults located within the NCSP study area or within a 50-foot radius. There is low and moderate potential for liquefaction within the NCSP study area.

Within the NCSP study area, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 would be subject to similar geologic hazards and similar potential effects on development. In all of the alternatives, approximately 40 acres of land designated for development have severe erosion potential. Approximately 2,900 acres of land designated for development are in areas with potentially significant subsidence hazards. Approximately 120 acres of land designated for development have a high potential for soil expansion and 220 acres have a very high potential. Landslide, fault and liquefaction hazards are not an issue for any of the alternatives.

Within the NCSP study area, all of the alternatives include substantial development in areas of highly and very highly constrained geologic hazards and, therefore, all of the alternatives receive a D.

J. Cultural Resources

The NCSP study area lies within portions of the Nord and Richardson Springs USGS 7.5' quadrangles. Approximately 15 percent of the land in the Nord Quadrangle and 25 percent of the land in the Richardson Springs quadrangle has been surveyed for cultural resources. To date, a total of 12 cultural resources sites have been recorded in the NCSP study area. This number includes 11 prehistoric sites and one site containing both prehistoric and historic period artifacts. Four sites have been evaluated as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including three prehistoric burial sites and the prehistoric/historic period site. Although this study area lies primarily on the valley floor, the presence of two creeks and one slough, coupled with the number of previously recorded sites, indicate this study area is highly sensitive for the presence of prehistoric resources, particularly along terraces above floodplains.

a. Alternative 1

This alternative results in the most acreage in residential development. Under this alternative, development may negatively impact significant cultural resources and Resource Conservation land use would not be available to protect significant cultural resources. Because there would be significant development and no Resource Conservation land use set aside that could be used to protect significant cultural resources, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, development may negatively impact significant cultural resources and Resource Conservation land use would not be available to protect significant cultural resources. Because there would be significant development and no Resource Conservation land use set aside that could be used to protect significant cultural resources, Alternative 2 receives a D.

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c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, development may negatively impact significant cultural resources and Resource Conservation land use would not be available to protect significant cultural resources. Because there would be significant development and no Resource Conservation land use set aside that could be used to protect significant cultural resources, Alternative 3 receives a D.

K. Notes

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