



Arcata Wastewater Treatment Facility Improvement Project CEQA Compliance Process

Abstract

The City of Arcata Wastewater Treatment Facility Improvement Project entails improvements and enhancements to the existing Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) that will bring the plant into compliance with its National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit, replace aging infrastructure and replace chlorine disinfection with ultra violet (UV) disinfection. Approval of the project is a discretionary action by a public agency and, therefore, subject to compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The purpose of CEQA is to disclose potential project-related impacts to decision makers and the public, identify methods to minimize impacts, identify feasible mitigation and/or alternatives to the project, and solicit and respond to comments from the public and other agencies. The CEQA compliance and public participation process typically takes 6 to 12 months to complete, depending on the type of disclosure document. Initial phases of the CEQA process (background studies and public meetings) began in 2015 and 2016.

1. Project Background

In May 2017, The City of Arcata published a Wastewater Treatment Facilities Plan to investigate alternatives and develop a recommended program for bringing the plant and associated disposal facilities into compliance with regulatory requirements, not only for the existing users but for anticipated General Plan growth projections. The Facilities Plan included a siting study which considered environmental constraints; the goal being to develop the optimal project and avoid and minimize impacts to the environment, to the extent feasible. The primary proposed improvements include:

- Construction of an oxidation ditch and additional clarifiers to improve WWTP performance;
- Modify existing oxidation pond aeration with enhanced aeration systems;
- Replacement of old headworks facility with a new headworks facility;

- Construction of a new multi-function membrane and equipment building or combination of two buildings;
- Installation of UV disinfection system to replace chlorine disinfection;
- Improve land based wetland/pond treatment;
- Change bay discharge point from Butcher Slough to the Brackish Marsh that flows to the bay via McDaniel Slough;

The next steps, as they pertain to environmental compliance are as follows:

- Continue to factor environmental considerations into the pre-design process;
- Continue the engineering pre-design process.

2. What is CEQA?

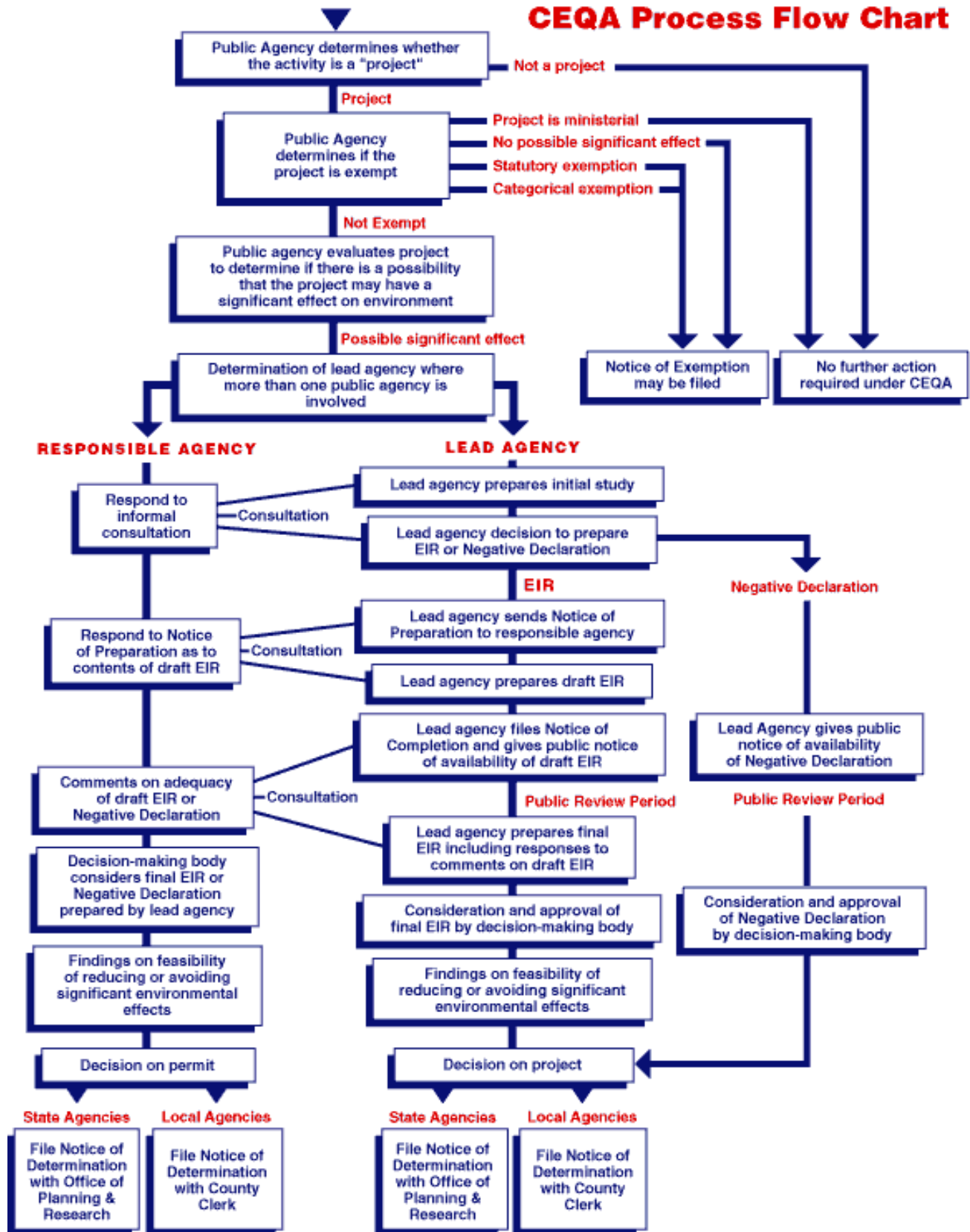
The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a state statute that requires state and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible. CEQA requires state and local agencies to make decisions with environmental consequences in mind by mandating that they:

- Disclose the potential environmental effects of a proposed project to decision makers and to the public;
- Identify methods to minimize those effects to the environment;
- Identify feasible mitigation measures and/or alternatives to the project;
- Solicit and respond to comments from the public and from other agencies concerned with the project.

Guidelines for the implementation of CEQA are in Title 14 Division 6, Chapter 3 Sections 15000- 15387 of the California Code of Regulations. The CEQA process is primarily designed to identify and disclose to decision makers and the public the significant environmental impacts of a proposed project prior to its consideration and approval. This is accomplished by the preparation of CEQA documents such as initial studies, mitigated negative declarations (MNDs), and/or environmental impact reports (EIRs).

If potential adverse environmental impacts are identified, the CEQA process next attempts to identify ways to prevent or reduce these impacts by requiring consideration of feasible project alternatives or the adoption of mitigation measures. For project impacts that cannot be avoided with appropriate mitigation methods, “Findings” and a “Statement of Overriding Consideration” is required. The City of Arcata aims to mitigate impacts to less-than-significant levels to the maximum extent practicable.

CEQA Process Flow Chart



4. What is the Project Timeline?

Lead, responsible, and trustee agencies assist each other in more thoroughly understanding the potential environmental impacts associated with a proposed project by inter-agency consultations. The CEQA process encourages and provides opportunities for public participation in the overall project planning process in one or more of the following CEQA processes:

- Scoping meetings
- Receipt of public notice
- Public/agency review and comment on Draft MND or EIR
- Response to comments
- Legal enforcement procedures (CEQA processes)
- Citizen access to the courts References: PRC sections 21000-21004, CCR (Guidelines) Sections 15002, 15086, 15087

5. How Can I Get Involved?

The City of Arcata will serve as the lead agency in the CEQA process. The preliminary aspects of the CEQA process (initial baseline studies) were initiated during 2014-2017. A MND typically takes six months to complete, depending on the type of disclosure document. An EIR, if deemed necessary, takes 12 months or longer to complete. The City of Arcata's Wastewater webpage (www.cityofarcata.org/331/Wastewater) contains current project information. Public comments are also invited at public meetings, via email, or via mail to eservices@cityofarcata.org. The Environmental Services Department recommends you:

- Monitor the project website;
- Add your email to the informational mailing list by sending an email request to: eservices@cityofarcata.org;
- Attend the Public Scoping Meeting;
- Attend subsequent CEQA public hearings;
- Review the Draft CEQA document and submit comments to: eservices@cityofarcata.org.