

CITY OF SAN JOSE

Policy PL-301

City List of Approved Environmental Consultants

April 8, 2025

To whom it may concern,

On April 4, 2025, the City published an updated City List of Approved Environmental Consultants after a new Request for Qualifications process in 2024. This updated list replaces the consultant list published in 2019. The City List of Approved Environmental Consultants includes consultants for both CEQA and NEPA reviews.

Effective **July 1, 2025**, applicants for all new private planning applications requiring documents for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) must use an environmental consultant on the updated City List of Approved Environmental Consultants published on April 4, 2025. Applicants with planning applications submitted and Planning fees paid prior to July 1, 2025, may hire a consultant on the original 2019 list or the updated list published on April 4, 2025. Applicants who already have an active planning application on file and have already retained an environmental consultant can continue working with the same consultant.

The requirement to hire a consultant from the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants includes, but is not limited to, the following types of CEQA and NEPA documents:

- Environmental Impact Report (EIR)
- Initial Study to support a Negative Declaration/Mitigated Negative Declaration (ND/MND)
- Addendum to a previously adopted EIR or ND/MND
- Categorical Exemption for In-fill Development Projects pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15332
- Community Plan Exemption for projects consistent with an approved plan or policy with a previously adopted EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183
- Sustainable Communities Environmental Assessment (SCEA)
- Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Planning staff may also require an applicant to hire a consultant on the list for other types of CEQA or NEPA documents that require significant analysis to support the environmental review determination.

Exceptions

The requirement for an applicant to hire an environmental consultant from the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants does not apply to the following technical analyses:

- Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments
- Historic resource evaluations and preparation of Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Form 523s
- Tree surveys or arborist reports
- Stand-alone Local Transportation Analyses without a vehicle-miles traveled evaluation pursuant to the City's Transportation Analysis Policy (Council Policy 5-1)

- Stand-alone technical analysis, such as for noise or air quality, that is not associated with a larger CEQA or NEPA document listed above

For projects that could qualify for a CEQA Categorical Exemption, Planning staff may request one or more stand-alone technical studies to confirm that none of the exception findings in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply. The applicant is not required to use a consultant from the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants for any stand-alone technical study to support a Categorical Exemption. Examples include Categorical Exemptions pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities), 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction), 15303 (New Construction of Small Structures), 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), 15311 (Accessory Structures), or 15315 (Minor Land Division).

Background

The City Auditor's Office conducted a thorough review of the City's environmental review process in 2021 and early 2022 with a focus on reducing CEQA review times and improving consistency in the approach to analysis. On March 28, 2022, the City Auditor's Office presented their findings and recommendations in a report to the Community and Economic Development Committee (link to report [here](#)). This report includes 12 recommendations with the aim to improve the City's environmental review process and reduce review times by helping the City manage the performance and timeliness of work performed by consultants. These recommendations are aimed at saving applicants and the City time and money while increasing legal defensibility. Recommendation #8 includes an action to make the use of an environmental consultant on the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants mandatory for private planning applications.

The City selected consultants for the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants through a review of Request for Qualifications in 2019. The City based this selection on the thoroughness of environmental review documents, approach to analysis, strategies for quality control and maintaining timelines, and knowledge of the City of San José policies and processes. The City recommended, but didn't require, applicants for private planning applications to retain a consultant from this list at that time. However, on January 1, 2023, the City instituted a requirement that applicants for private projects that require CEQA analysis must hire a consultant from the approved list. This requirement implemented Recommendation #8 of the 2022 Audit. Implementation of this recommendation is contributing to the advancement of the City's goals of improving environmental review times while encouraging high quality and legally defensible environmental documents.

Updates to the City List of Approved Environmental Consultants

The City List of Approved Environmental Consultants will be valid for at least three years. However, the City retains the option to extend the validity of the list by up to an additional two years (for a total of five years). Consultant firms that wish to be notified of future Requests for Qualifications to update the list must e-mail their firm's contact information to the Principal Planner on the City's Environmental Review section.

Sincerely,



Christopher Burton, Director
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement