

Notice of Preparation Comment Letters

B

APPENDIX



NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE COMMISSION

December 31, 2025

Magda Gonzalez
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339 Fifth Street
Hollister CA 95023

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NAHC HEADQUARTERS
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West Sacramento,
California 95691
(916) 373-3710
nahc@nahc.ca.gov

**Re: 2025121246 Meridian Village (Subdivision and Multifamily Development) Project,
San Benito County**

Dear Ms. Gonzalez:

The Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) has received the Notice of Preparation (NOP), Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) or Early Consultation for the project referenced above. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Pub. Resources Code §21000 et seq.), specifically Public Resources Code §21084.1, states that a project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource, is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment. (Pub. Resources Code § 21084.1; Cal. Code Regs., tit.14, § 15064.5 (b) (CEQA Guidelines § 15064.5 (b)). If there is substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before a lead agency, that a project may have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) shall be prepared. (Pub. Resources Code §21080 (d); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 5064 subd.(a)(1) (CEQA Guidelines § 15064 (a)(1)). In order to determine whether a project will cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource, a lead agency will need to determine whether there are historical resources within the area of potential effect (APE).

CEQA was amended significantly in 2014. Assembly Bill 52 (Gatto, Chapter 532, Statutes of 2014) (AB 52) amended CEQA to create a separate category of cultural resources, "tribal cultural resources" (Pub. Resources Code §21074) and provides that a project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment. (Pub. Resources Code §21084.2). Public agencies shall, when feasible, avoid damaging effects to any tribal cultural resource. (Pub. Resources Code §21084.3 (a)). **AB 52 applies to any project for which a notice of preparation, a notice of negative declaration, or a mitigated negative declaration is filed on or after July 1, 2015.** If your project involves the adoption of or amendment to a general plan or a specific plan, or the designation or proposed designation of open space, on or after March 1, 2005, it may also be subject to Senate Bill 18 (Burton, Chapter 905, Statutes of 2004) (SB 18). **Both SB 18 and AB 52 have tribal consultation requirements.** If your project is also subject to the federal National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.) (NEPA), the tribal consultation requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (154 U.S.C. 300101, 36 C.F.R. §800 et seq.) may also apply.

The NAHC recommends consultation with California Native American tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of your proposed project as early as possible in order to avoid inadvertent discoveries of Native American human remains and best protect tribal cultural resources. Below is a brief summary of portions of AB 52 and SB 18 as well as the NAHC's recommendations for conducting cultural resources assessments.

Consult your legal counsel about compliance with AB 52 and SB 18 as well as compliance with any other applicable laws.

AB 52 has added to CEQA the additional requirements listed below, along with many other requirements:

- 1. Fourteen Day Period to Provide Notice of Completion of an Application/Decision to Undertake a Project:** Within fourteen (14) days of determining that an application for a project is complete or of a decision by a public agency to undertake a project, a lead agency shall provide formal notification to a designated contact of, or tribal representative of, traditionally and culturally affiliated California Native American tribes that have requested notice, to be accomplished by at least one written notice that includes:

 - a. A brief description of the project.
 - b. The lead agency contact information.
 - c. Notification that the California Native American tribe has 30 days to request consultation. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.1 (d)).
 - d. A "California Native American tribe" is defined as a Native American tribe located in California that is on the contact list maintained by the NAHC for the purposes of Chapter 905 of Statutes of 2004 (SB 18). (Pub. Resources Code §21073).

- 2. Begin Consultation Within 30 Days of Receiving a Tribe's Request for Consultation and Before Releasing a Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration, or Environmental Impact Report:** A lead agency shall begin the consultation process within 30 days of receiving a request for consultation from a California Native American tribe that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the proposed project. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.1, subds. (d) and (e)) and prior to the release of a negative declaration, mitigated negative declaration or Environmental Impact Report. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.1(b)).

 - a. For purposes of AB 52, "consultation shall have the same meaning as provided in Gov. Code §65352.4 (SB 18). (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.1 (b)).

- 3. Mandatory Topics of Consultation If Requested by a Tribe:** The following topics of consultation, if a tribe requests to discuss them, are mandatory topics of consultation:

 - a. Alternatives to the project.
 - b. Recommended mitigation measures.
 - c. Significant effects. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.2 (a)).

- 4. Discretionary Topics of Consultation:** The following topics are discretionary topics of consultation:

 - a. Type of environmental review necessary.
 - b. Significance of the tribal cultural resources.
 - c. Significance of the project's impacts on tribal cultural resources.
 - d. If necessary, project alternatives or appropriate measures for preservation or mitigation that the tribe may recommend to the lead agency. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.2 (a)).

- 5. Confidentiality of Information Submitted by a Tribe During the Environmental Review Process:** With some exceptions, any information, including but not limited to, the location, description, and use of tribal cultural resources submitted by a California Native American tribe during the environmental review process shall not be included in the environmental document or otherwise disclosed by the lead agency or any other public agency to the public, consistent with Government Code §6254 (r) and §6254.10. Any information submitted by a California Native American tribe during the consultation or environmental review process shall be published in a confidential appendix to the environmental document unless the tribe that provided the information consents, in writing, to the disclosure of some or all of the information to the public. (Pub. Resources Code §21082.3 (c)(1)).

- 6. Discussion of Impacts to Tribal Cultural Resources in the Environmental Document:** If a project may have a significant impact on a tribal cultural resource, the lead agency's environmental document shall discuss both of the following:

 - a. Whether the proposed project has a significant impact on an identified tribal cultural resource.
 - b. Whether feasible alternatives or mitigation measures, including those measures that may be agreed to pursuant to Public Resources Code §21082.3, subdivision (a), avoid or substantially lessen the impact on the identified tribal cultural resource. (Pub. Resources Code §21082.3 (b)).

- 7. Conclusion of Consultation:** Consultation with a tribe shall be considered concluded when either of the following occurs:
- a. The parties agree to measures to mitigate or avoid a significant effect, if a significant effect exists, on a tribal cultural resource; or
 - b. A party, acting in good faith and after reasonable effort, concludes that mutual agreement cannot be reached. (Pub. Resources Code §21080.3.2 (b)).
- 8. Recommending Mitigation Measures Agreed Upon in Consultation in the Environmental Document:** Any mitigation measures agreed upon in the consultation conducted pursuant to Public Resources Code §21080.3.2 shall be recommended for inclusion in the environmental document and in an adopted mitigation monitoring and reporting program, if determined to avoid or lessen the impact pursuant to Public Resources Code §21082.3, subdivision (b), paragraph 2, and shall be fully enforceable. (Pub. Resources Code §21082.3 (a)).
- 9. Required Consideration of Feasible Mitigation:** If mitigation measures recommended by the staff of the lead agency as a result of the consultation process are not included in the environmental document or if there are no agreed upon mitigation measures at the conclusion of consultation, or if consultation does not occur, and if substantial evidence demonstrates that a project will cause a significant effect to a tribal cultural resource, the lead agency shall consider feasible mitigation pursuant to Public Resources Code §21084.3 (b). (Pub. Resources Code §21082.3 (e)).
- 10. Examples of Mitigation Measures That, If Feasible, May Be Considered to Avoid or Minimize Significant Adverse Impacts to Tribal Cultural Resources:**
- a. Avoidance and preservation of the resources in place, including, but not limited to:
 - i. Planning and construction to avoid the resources and protect the cultural and natural context.
 - ii. Planning greenspace, parks, or other open space, to incorporate the resources with culturally appropriate protection and management criteria.
 - b. Treating the resource with culturally appropriate dignity, taking into account the tribal cultural values and meaning of the resource, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - i. Protecting the cultural character and integrity of the resource.
 - ii. Protecting the traditional use of the resource.
 - iii. Protecting the confidentiality of the resource.
 - c. Permanent conservation easements or other interests in real property, with culturally appropriate management criteria for the purposes of preserving or utilizing the resources or places.
 - d. Protecting the resource. (Pub. Resource Code §21084.3 (b)).
 - e. Please note that a federally recognized California Native American tribe or a non-federally recognized California Native American tribe that is on the contact list maintained by the NAHC to protect a California prehistoric, archaeological, cultural, spiritual, or ceremonial place may acquire and hold conservation easements if the conservation easement is voluntarily conveyed. (Civ. Code §815.3 (c)).
 - f. Please note that it is the policy of the state that Native American remains and associated grave artifacts shall be repatriated. (Pub. Resources Code §5097.991).
- 11. Prerequisites for Certifying an Environmental Impact Report or Adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration or Negative Declaration with a Significant Impact on an Identified Tribal Cultural Resource:** An Environmental Impact Report may not be certified, nor may a mitigated negative declaration or a negative declaration be adopted unless one of the following occurs:
- a. The consultation process between the tribes and the lead agency has occurred as provided in Public Resources Code §21080.3.1 and §21080.3.2 and concluded pursuant to Public Resources Code §21080.3.2.
 - b. The tribe that requested consultation failed to provide comments to the lead agency or otherwise failed to engage in the consultation process.
 - c. The lead agency provided notice of the project to the tribe in compliance with Public Resources Code §21080.3.1 (d) and the tribe failed to request consultation within 30 days. (Pub. Resources Code §21082.3 (d)).

The NAHC's PowerPoint presentation titled, "Tribal Consultation Under AB 52: Requirements and Best Practices" may be found online at: http://nahc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AB52TribalConsultation_CalEPAPDF.pdf

SB 18

SB 18 applies to local governments and requires local governments to contact, provide notice to, refer plans to, and consult with tribes prior to the adoption or amendment of a general plan or a specific plan, or the designation of open space. (Gov. Code §65352.3). Local governments should consult the Governor's Office of Planning and Research's "Tribal Consultation Guidelines," which can be found online at: https://www.opr.ca.gov/docs/09_14_05_Updated_Guidelines_922.pdf.

Some of SB 18's provisions include:

1. **Tribal Consultation:** If a local government considers a proposal to adopt or amend a general plan or a specific plan, or to designate open space it is required to contact the appropriate tribes identified by the NAHC by requesting a "Tribal Consultation List." If a tribe, once contacted, requests consultation the local government must consult with the tribe on the plan proposal. **A tribe has 90 days from the date of receipt of notification to request consultation unless a shorter timeframe has been agreed to by the tribe.** (Gov. Code §65352.3 (a)(2)).
2. **No Statutory Time Limit on SB 18 Tribal Consultation.** There is no statutory time limit on SB 18 tribal consultation.
3. **Confidentiality:** Consistent with the guidelines developed and adopted by the Office of Planning and Research pursuant to Gov. Code §65040.2, the city or county shall protect the confidentiality of the information concerning the specific identity, location, character, and use of places, features and objects described in Public Resources Code §5097.9 and §5097.993 that are within the city's or county's jurisdiction. (Gov. Code §65352.3 (b)).
4. **Conclusion of SB 18 Tribal Consultation:** Consultation should be concluded at the point in which:
 - a. The parties to the consultation come to a mutual agreement concerning the appropriate measures for preservation or mitigation; or
 - b. Either the local government or the tribe, acting in good faith and after reasonable effort, concludes that mutual agreement cannot be reached concerning the appropriate measures of preservation or mitigation. (Tribal Consultation Guidelines, Governor's Office of Planning and Research (2005) at p. 18).

Agencies should be aware that neither AB 52 nor SB 18 precludes agencies from initiating tribal consultation with tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with their jurisdictions before the timeframes provided in AB 52 and SB 18. For that reason, we urge you to continue to request Native American Tribal Contact Lists and "Sacred Lands File" searches from the NAHC. The request forms can be found online at: <http://nahc.ca.gov/resources/forms/>.

NAHC Recommendations for Cultural Resources Assessments

To adequately assess the existence and significance of tribal cultural resources and plan for avoidance, preservation in place, or barring both, mitigation of project-related impacts to tribal cultural resources, the NAHC recommends the following actions:

1. Contact the appropriate regional California Historical Research Information System (CHRIS) Center (https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30331) for an archaeological records search. The records search will determine:
 - a. If part or all of the APE has been previously surveyed for cultural resources.
 - b. If any known cultural resources have already been recorded on or adjacent to the APE.
 - c. If the probability is low, moderate, or high that cultural resources are located in the APE.
 - d. If a survey is required to determine whether previously unrecorded cultural resources are present.
2. If an archaeological inventory survey is required, the final stage is the preparation of a professional report detailing the findings and recommendations of the records search and field survey.
 - a. The final report containing site forms, site significance, and mitigation measures should be submitted immediately to the planning department. All information regarding site locations, Native American human remains, and associated funerary objects should be in a separate confidential addendum and not be made available for public disclosure.
 - b. The final written report should be submitted within 3 months after work has been completed to the appropriate regional CHRIS center.

3. Contact the NAHC for:
 - a. A Sacred Lands File search. Remember that tribes do not always record their sacred sites in the Sacred Lands File, nor are they required to do so. A Sacred Lands File search is not a substitute for consultation with tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the project's APE.
 - b. A Native American Tribal Consultation List of appropriate tribes for consultation concerning the project site and to assist in planning for avoidance, preservation in place, or, failing both, mitigation measures.

4. Remember that the lack of surface evidence of archaeological resources (including tribal cultural resources) does not preclude their subsurface existence.
 - a. Lead agencies should include in their mitigation and monitoring reporting program plan provisions for the identification and evaluation of inadvertently discovered archaeological resources per Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15064.5(f) (CEQA Guidelines § 15064.5(f)). In areas of identified archaeological sensitivity, a certified archaeologist and a culturally affiliated Native American with knowledge of cultural resources should monitor all ground-disturbing activities.
 - b. Lead agencies should include in their mitigation and monitoring reporting program plans provisions for the disposition of recovered cultural items that are not burial associated in consultation with culturally affiliated Native Americans.
 - c. Lead agencies should include in their mitigation and monitoring reporting program plans provisions for the treatment and disposition of inadvertently discovered Native American human remains. Health and Safety Code § 7050.5, Public Resources Code § 5097.98, and Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15064.5, subdivisions (d) and (e) (CEQA Guidelines § 15064.5, subds. (d) and (e)) address the processes to be followed in the event of an inadvertent discovery of any Native American human remains and associated grave goods in a location other than a dedicated cemetery.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at my email address:
Mathew.Lin@NAHC.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Mathew Lin

Mathew Lin
Cultural Resources Analyst

cc: State Clearinghouse



Yana Garcia
Secretary for
Environmental Protection



Department of Toxic Substances Control

Katherine M. Butler, MPH, Director
8800 Cal Center Drive
Sacramento, California 95826-3200
dtsc.ca.gov



Gavin Newsom
Governor

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

January 7, 2026

Magda Gonzalez
Senior Planner
City of Hollister
339 Fifth Street
Hollister, CA 95023
mgonzalez.4leaf@hollister.ca.gov

RE: NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE MERIDIAN VILLAGE (SUBDIVISION AND MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENT) DATED DECEMBER 31, 2025, STATE CLEARINGHOUSE NUMBER [2025121246](#)

Dear Magda Gonzalez,

The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) reviewed the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Meridian Village (Subdivision and Multifamily Development) (Project). The Project consists of a concurrent filing of Tentative Map 2022-2 and Site & Architectural Review 2022-15 which propose to subdivide the existing 12.75-acre parcel into 5 individual lots, with a total of 219 multifamily units proposed. Lot 1 is proposed to be 89,104 square feet (sq ft), and includes five proposed apartment buildings, each with 18 units for a total of 90 apartment units, as well as a recreation center and private park area. Lots 2, 3, 4, and 5 are proposed to be 40,058 sq ft, 85,861 sq ft, 89,205 sq ft, and 50,163 sq ft respectively, and are each proposed to be developed with three-bedroom and four-bedroom townhome style dwelling units, organized into 3-plex, 4-plex, 5-plex, and 6-plex buildings for a total of 129 townhome style multifamily (condominium) units. DTSC recommends and requests consideration of the following comments:

1. The IS/MND mentions that a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment was conducted by ENGEO and “concluded that the former presence of a railroad spur has not impacted the soil and no further action is required. However, two remedial alternatives were suggested in the Phase II ESA to address the arsenic levels in the soil: excavation and proper off-site disposal or encapsulation. ENGEO Incorporated discusses the opportunity for the project developer to engage with a regulatory agency to determine a site-specific arsenic remedial action objective”. Furthermore, the IS/MND Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 states “Prior to issuance of a grading permit, the project developer shall prepare a Site Management Plan, outlining how the health and safety risks will be managed during construction, for review and approval by the City of Hollister Building Division”.

DTSC does not recommend a Soil Management Plan (SMP) be used as a primary cleanup plan. DTSC recommends that any potential contamination be fully characterized and then remediated under the oversight of a [self-certified local agency](#), DTSC or Regional Water Quality Control Board. A SMP alone cannot sufficiently identify and document the potential contaminants that may pose a threat to human health and the environment. DTSC recommends that a cleanup plan, a Removal Action Workplan, or a Remedial Action Plan be prepared to adequately address all site impacts after complete characterization.

2. All imported soil/fill material should be tested to assess any contaminants of concern meet screening levels as outlined in [DTSC's Preliminary Endangerment Assessment \(PEA\) Guidance Manual](#). Additionally, DTSC advises referencing the [DTSC Information Advisory Clean Imported Fill Material Fact Sheet](#) if importing fill is necessary. To minimize the possibility of introducing contaminated soil/fill material there should be documentation of the origins of the soil/fill material and, if applicable, sampling be conducted to ensure that the imported soil/fill material are suitable for the intended land use. The soil sampling should include analysis based on the source of the fill

and knowledge of prior land use. Additional information can be found by visiting [DTSC's Human and Ecological Risk Office \(HERO\) webpage](#).

DTSC would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NOP of DEIR for the Meridian Village (Subdivision and Multifamily Development). Thank you for your assistance in protecting California's people and environment from the harmful effects of toxic substances. If you have any questions or would like clarification on DTSC's comments, please respond to this letter or via our [CEQA Review email](#) for additional guidance.

Sincerely,

Tamara Purvis

Tamara Purvis
Associate Environmental Planner
HWMP - Permitting Division – CEQA Unit
Department of Toxic Substances Control
Tamara.Purvis@dtsc.ca.gov

cc: (via email)

Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
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From: Sarah Moody <sahrmoody@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 18, 2026 2:21 PM
To: Magda Gonzalez (4Leaf) <mgonzalez.4leaf@hollister.ca.gov>
Subject: Meridian Village

You don't often get email from sahrmoody@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hello,

I recently read the BenitoLink article about the Meridian Village housing project and was disappointed that it's of course more housing, always hoping for a nice green space for the community. I am concerned that the proposed park is planned as a private amenity rather than a public space. The surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas currently lack a walkable public park, and access to green space will only become more important as new housing is added.

I also have concerns about traffic and safety. Additional turning lanes into and onto Meridian should be considered as the existing turning lane onto Highway 25 is already problematic, especially during flooding events. Increased traffic without meaningful improvements could worsen safety and congestion.

Lastly, I hope sidewalks and safe bike infrastructure are thoughtfully included. Walkable and bike-friendly connections to downtown would improve safety, reduce car dependency, and better integrate this development into the existing community.

As housing grows, infrastructure must keep pace. I highly urge the city and project planners to prioritize a public park, traffic improvements, and safe pedestrian and bicycle access as part of this project.

California Department of Transportation

CALTRANS DISTRICT 5
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February 5, 2026

SB†-25-R50.823
SCH # 2025121246

Magda Gonzalez, Senior Planner
City of Hollister
Community Development Department
339 Fifth Street
Hollister, CA 95023

Dear Ms. Gonzalez:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) appreciates the opportunity to review the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Meridian Village in the City of Hollister. The project proposes a total of 219 residential units, public and private streets, and 665 parking spaces and 16 bicycle parking spaces. Caltrans offers the following comments at this time:

Caltrans supports local development that is consistent with State planning priorities intended to promote equity, strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and promote public health and safety. We accomplish this by working with local jurisdictions to achieve a shared vision of how the transportation system should and can accommodate interregional and local travel and development.

Caltrans requests to review the transportation analysis and data which was not included in the NOP.

The NOP states in Section 17-Transportation-Paragraph B that VMT would be significant and unavoidable with no mitigation measures found to reduce impacts to less than significant. Caltrans would like to suggest the proposed project consider possible mitigations measures that include alternative modes of transport and a pathway towards quality transit services to job centers like Gilroy and San Jose.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed project. If you have any questions or need further clarification on the items discussed above, please contact me at (805) 835-6555 or email ingrid.mcroberts@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Ingrid McRoberts
Ingrid McRoberts
Caltrans District 5
Local Development Review Coordinator



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HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
Continuing Excellence

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Shawn Tennenbaum, Ed.D.
Superintendent

February 6, 2026

VIA EMAIL

Magda Gonzalez, Senior Planner
City of Hollister
Community Development Department
339 Fifth Street
Hollister, CA 95023
Email: mgonzalez.4leaf@hollister.ca.gov

Re: Comments on Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Meridian Village

Dear Ms. Gonzalez:

This letter is submitted to the City of Hollister (City) on behalf of the San Benito High School District (District) and its Board of Trustees with regard to our review and assessment of the City's *Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Meridian Village*, dated December 23, 2025 (NOP) and *Final Initial Study – Meridian Village Subdivision and Multifamily Development*, dated December 17, 2025 (FIS). The NOP and FIS anticipate Meridian Village, a 12.75-acre property located within the City of Hollister, will generate 219 residential units (Project). As the District is a California public school district serving children who reside and attend school within the City, the proposed Project will significantly impact the District's facilities and operations.

The District disagrees with the City's assessment that the impact of the Project on the District is "less than significant." (See FIS, page 68.) The FIS states the Project will generate approximately 77 students to the District. The FIS also cites to the District's 2023 Facilities Master Plan, finding the District was well overcapacity by 2023 and increasingly so each year. (See FIS, page 70.) The City, in the FIS, acknowledges the District's intent to construct a new high school to accommodate the growth in student population. Nonetheless, the City finds the impact of the Project on the District is "less than significant" due to the payment of school impact fees pursuant to Government Code section 65995. To the contrary, school impact fees alone cannot construct a new school—in addition to financial resources, the construction of a new school requires planning, coordination, and cooperation *with local agencies such as the City*. Without meaningful progress towards the construction of a new high school, the impact of residential developments such as this Project on the District remain significant.

Therefore, while the District welcomes new students and families to the Hollister community, we submit these comments to the City to register not only the District's concerns with the impact of the pace of residential development facilitated by the City on the District's existing issues with overcrowding, traffic, and safety at Hollister High School, but also the District's expectation of meaningful collaboration by the City to help the District address these issues, including support for the development of a new high school facility.

I. The Project will exacerbate the District's existing issues with overcrowding.

The pace of residential development facilitated by the City is negatively impacting the District's ability to provide quality school facilities and programs to the students that will be generated by the new development. The District operates Hollister High School, the only public high school in the City and serving the Hollister community. The Project is located approximately one mile northeast of Hollister High School and all high school students generated from the Project will be eligible for enrollment at Hollister High School. (See FIS, page 68.)

For the 2025-2026 school year, the District is serving 3,454 students at a school designed for 3,405 students. (See 2025 Facilities Master Plan.) By creating 219 residential units, including 90 apartments and 129 condominiums, calculating conservatively, this Project alone will generate at least 44 students to the District, or one and a half classrooms. (See 2025 School Facility Needs Analysis and Justification Study and 2025 Facilities Master Plan.) Clearly, the District is already over capacity, and residential development in the City is exacerbating the issue of overcrowding by dramatically increasing the high school student population at, around, and within the Hollister High School campus area.

Furthermore, on a longer-term basis over the next fifteen years, the District's enrollment is expected to increase to approximately 5,208 students and will continue to grow as new development continues within the District. (See 2025 Facilities Master Plan.) This does not account for unexpected residential development, nor does it account for the matriculation of the students attending Hollister Elementary School District schools, which are currently also experiencing increasing enrollment at their schools. Thus, the actual number of incoming students is likely much higher than our current models predict, and the District needs support from its local partners to accommodate the incoming students.

II. Overcrowding at Hollister High School negatively impacts traffic and safety conditions in the area.

Overcrowding not only impacts the school facilities and programs within the campus, but also traffic and safety issues around the campus. Students travel to a single high school from homes across the City and County of San Benito (County), including the Project area. Notably, even within the NOP and FIS, the City identifies Transportation and Circulation as the environmental impact where impacts are most likely to occur, specifically with regard to vehicle miles traveled (VMT). (See FIS, page 75.) The District is concerned that the substantial addition of vehicles on City streets will inevitably lead to increased congestion and automobile accidents in and around the Hollister High School campus.

The roadway infrastructure in and around the high school does not have sufficient capacity to serve existing levels of vehicular demand, and any additional traffic will further strain that infrastructure. Extreme levels of congestion occur around the school during the morning and afternoon peak hours which lead to

unacceptable levels of delay and risky driver behaviors that can create safety impacts during periods of heavy pedestrian and bicycle activity.

Specifically, in recent years, the District has seen an increase in automobile accidents at the H-Gate which protects the east and west sides of the Nash Road Closure Area. Currently, the District, in partnership with the City and County, operates a temporary gate closure of the Nash Road Closure Area during regular weekday school hours and for special events on a permit-basis, but the District has recorded at least eight hit-and-run incidents at this area since 2021. Repairs have cost the District almost \$100,000, representing the severity of many of these incidents. These challenges underscore the urgent need for comprehensive traffic management solutions, developed collaboratively by the City, County, and District together, to ensure the safety and well-being of students and the community. The Project's additional traffic will further strain this already dangerous situation.

III. The District needs the City's support to establish a new high school to meet the demands caused by unmitigated growth.

The solution to overcrowding at Hollister High School is simple: a new school. The public has entrusted the District with providing its students with a high-quality education, which includes ensuring the health and safety of our students and staff and the integrity of their learning environment. As noted in the FIS, the City is well aware that the District's campus is operating over capacity. (See FIS, page 65.) As residential projects continue to be approved, the demand placed on existing school facilities increases and the need for new school facilities and ancillary amenities continues to intensify.

Despite the City's awareness of the need for a new high school, the City has provided insufficient support for its development. In 2024, *in collaboration with the City*, the District acquired two parcels in the Buena Vista Corridor for the purpose of constructing and developing a new high school. Since the acquisition, the District has repeatedly requested that the City include the District's parcels within the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) as a necessary step toward developing the new school. However, the City has not acted on the District's request, and in the City's recent draft 2040 General Plan released in January of 2026, the City excluded the District's parcels from the City's SOI, despite the City's awareness and prior support for their acquisition and development. This decision is inconsistent with the City's continued approval of residential developments, including this Project, which will further burden the District's ability to provide adequate educational facilities for students. The District respectfully requests that the City reconsider its position and work collaboratively with the District to address the cumulative impacts of residential development on school facilities.

Instead of simply dismissing the City-imposed strain on the District's facilities as "less than significant," the City must consider Government Code section 65997 with respect to how the impacts of the proposed Project on the District's facilities could actually be mitigated. Specifically, subdivision (d) states that, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, **a public agency may deny or refuse to approve a legislative act involving, but not limited to, the planning, use, or development of real property, on the basis that school facilities are inadequate**, except that a public agency may not require the payment or satisfaction of a fee, charge, dedication, or other financial requirement in excess of that levied or imposed pursuant to Section 65995 and, if applicable, any amounts specified in Sections 65995.5 or 65995.7." (Emphasis added.) If the City is unwilling or unable to support the District's efforts to establish a new high school for Hollister's students, then the best proposal for mitigation not considered by the FIS would be for the City to exercise its authority under

Government Code section 65997 subdivision (d) to deny the development of real property on the basis that school facilities are inadequate.

IV. Conclusion.

The District supports residential development and welcomes new students to the District. However, we also recognize the strain that uncontrolled residential development places on the District’s resources and abilities to provide students the very best education we can. While school impact fees help mitigate the impacts of residential developments on school facilities, fees alone will not build a new school—for this, the City must act to support the District. For these reasons, we once again request that the City also work together with the District to meet the educational and safety needs of our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NOP and FIS for Meridian Village.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shawn Tennenbaum". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Shawn Tennenbaum, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Cc: Miguel Sahagun, SBHSD Board President

John Frusetta, SBHSD Chief Business Officer



DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Central Region
1234 East Shaw Avenue
Fresno, California 93710
(559) 243-4005
www.wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
VALERIE TERMINI, Acting Director



February 9, 2026

Magda Gonzalez, Senior Planner
City of Hollister
Community Development Department
339 Fifth Street
Hollister, California 95023
(925) 789-7160
mgonzalez.4leaf@hollister.ca.gov

**Subject: Meridian Village (Subdivision and Multifamily Development) (Project)
Notice of Preparation (NOP)
State Clearinghouse No.: 2025121246**

Dear Magda Gonzalez:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a NOP from the City of Hollister pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's **Trustee Agency** for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State (Fish and Game Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (*Id.*, § 1802).

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, activities evaluated in the Project may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish and Game Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California

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Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code may be required.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs and nests include sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession, or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession, or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

Unlisted Species: Species of plants and animals need not be officially listed as Endangered, Rare, or Threatened (E, R, or T) on any State or federal list to be considered E, R, or T under CEQA. If a species can be shown to meet the criteria for E, R, or T, as specified in the CEQA Guidelines section 15380, CDFW recommends it be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Colette Fahmy

Objective: The Project entails subdividing a 12.75-acre parcel into five lots and constructing a total of 219 residential units (90 apartments and 129 condominiums) with associated public and private streets. Lot 1 will be 89,104-square feet with five apartment buildings, each building consisting of 18 units for a total of 90-apartment units, as well as a 16,170-square foot recreation center and private park area. Lots 2 through 5 would be developed with 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-unit townhome-style buildings for a total of 129 condominium units. Lot 2 will be 40,058-square feet; Lot 3 will be 85,861-square feet; Lot 4 will be 89,205-square feet; and Lot 5 will be 50,163-square feet.

Location: The Project site is located within the City of Hollister on the south side of Meridian Street and west of State Route 25 at Hillcrest Rd. The Project is located within Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 054-600-005

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the following comments and recommendations to assist the City of Hollister in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) prepared for the Project.

Based on a review of aerial imagery, the Project site is comprised of previously cultivated wheat, that is regularly disked, and has a high density of non-native ruderal

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species, including several species of mustard (Brassicaceae family). The Project site may contain suitable habitat for several special-status species, including, but not limited to, the State candidate Crotch's bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*) and State species of special concern western red bat (*Lasiurus frantzii*).

Crotch's Bumble bee

The Project site is within the range of Crotch's bumblebee (CBB) (CDFW 2026). CBB are known to inhabit areas of grasslands, scrub habitat, and ruderal vegetation that contain requisite habitat elements for nesting, such as small mammal burrows and bunch/thatched grasses, and these habitat elements may be present within the Project site. As such, CDFW recommends a qualified biologist conduct a habitat assessment to determine if the Project site and the immediate surrounding vicinity contain habitat suitable to support CBB. Potential nesting sites, which include all small mammal burrows, perennial bunch grasses, thatched annual grasses, brush piles, old bird nests, and hollow logs would need to be documented as part of the assessment.

If it is determined that suitable CBB habitat is present within the Project site, CDFW recommends the DEIR include the following measures:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: CBB Surveys

If potentially suitable habitat is identified, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for CBB, and their requisite habitat features following the methodology outlined in the Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species (CDFW 2023), prior to the initiation of construction within the Project site.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: CBB Avoidance

If CBB is detected, then CDFW recommends that all small mammal burrows and thatched/bunch grasses be avoided by a minimum of 50 feet to avoid take and potentially significant impacts. If ground-disturbing activities will occur during the overwintering period (October through February), consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement Project activities and avoid take. Any detection of CBB prior to or during Project implementation within the Project site warrants consultation with CDFW to discuss how to avoid take.

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Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: CBB Take Authorization

If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Special-status Bats

The rescinded Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) that was originally prepared for the Project identified mitigation measures to address potential impacts to special-status bat species, including the western red bat, that may occur within the Project site. CDFW concurs with these measures and recommends their inclusion in the DEIR to mitigate for potential impacts to special-status bats.

EDITORIAL NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

Cumulative Impacts

CDFW recommends that a cumulative impact analysis be conducted for all biological resources that will either be significantly or potentially significantly impacted by implementation of the Project, including those whose impacts are determined to be less than significant with mitigation incorporated or for those resources that are rare or in poor or declining health and will be impacted by the Project, even if those impacts are relatively small (i.e., less than significant). Cumulative impacts are recommended to be analyzed using an acceptable methodology to evaluate the impacts of this Project's incremental contribution to habitat loss and past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects on resources and be focused specifically on the resource, not the Project. An appropriate resource study area should also be identified and mapped for each resource being analyzed and utilized for this analysis. CDFW staff are available for consultation in support of cumulative impacts analyses as a trustee and responsible agency under CEQA.

Nesting birds

The rescinded MND identified mitigation measures to address potential impacts on nesting birds that may occur within the Project site. CDFW concurs with these measures and recommends their inclusion with the DEIR.

California Natural Diversity Database

Please note that the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) is populated by and records voluntary submissions of species detections. As a result, species may be

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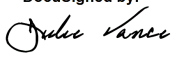
present in locations not depicted in the CNDDDB but where there is suitable habitat and features capable of supporting species. A lack of an occurrence record in the CNDDDB does not mean a species is not present. In order to adequately assess any potential Project-related impacts to biological resources, surveys conducted by a qualified biologist/botanist during the appropriate survey period(s) and using the appropriate protocol survey methodology are warranted in order to determine whether or not any special status species are present at or near the Project site.

CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the NOP to assist the City of Hollister in identifying and mitigating this Project's impacts on biological resources.

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>). Please see the enclosed, Attachment 1, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) table, which corresponds with recommended mitigation measures in this comment letter. Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Evelyn Barajas-Perez, Environmental Scientist, at (805) 503-5738 or evelyn.barajas-perez@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

FA83F09FE08945A...
Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

Attachments

Attachment 1 - MMRP

ec: State Clearinghouse
Governor's Office of Planning and Research
State.Clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov

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REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2023. Survey considerations for California Endangered Species Act (CESA) candidate bumble bee species. California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sacramento, California, USA.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2026. Biogeographic information and observation system. <<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/BIOS>>. Accessed January 23, 2026.

Attachment 1

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM
(MMRP)**

**PROJECT: Meridian Village (Subdivision and Multifamily
Development) (Project)**

SCH No.: 2025121246

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE	STATUS/DATE/INITIALS
<i>Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation</i>	
Crotch's Bumble bee	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: CBB Surveys	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: CBB Take Authorization	
<i>During Construction</i>	
Crotch's Bumble bee	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: CBB Avoidance	