

Seaside East: Climate Implications of Development

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1. Background

The Seaside East site is approximately 700 acres of undeveloped land, running along the east side of General Jim Moore Boulevard and on either side of Eucalyptus Road. The site is currently undergoing a community visioning process. While it was identified for low-density residential and commercial development in the 2007 General Plan, a conceptual master plan developed in 2010 was never adopted, and the site remains undeveloped.

2. Land Use Climate Analysis

Three potential land uses are likely to be considered: low-density residential, customer-facing commercial (i.e. not offices), and open space.

Residential

The General Plan expected much of the site to be low-density residential, at up to 8 units/acre, while the conceptual master plan developed in 2010 also considered mixed-use development with up to 25 units/acre of multifamily housing. At the acreage considered, these plans would have resulted in 2,600 - 3,000+ new homes being added to Seaside East.

Far-flung suburban development of this nature, regardless of density, has been found to increase automobile dependency, exacerbate traffic, increase road maintenance costs, and, of course, lead to greater greenhouse gas emissions. Seaside households have an average of 1.9 cars per household today; new homes built out even further from grocery stores, restaurants, and jobs would almost certainly have an average of 2+ cars per household.

At that rate, these original visions for Seaside would have resulted in over 6,000 more cars being added to the roads. According to EPA estimates¹, this would result in over 27,600 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year.

In contrast, mixed-use multifamily development in city centers more typically sees 0.5-1 cars per household. Already, nearly 37% of Seaside households have only 0 or 1 cars; if new homes were close to destinations and jobs, served by bike lanes and public transit, it would be far easier for those residents to go car-lite.

Placing those same 3,000 homes in mixed-use developments in the Seaside Downtown (along Fremont, Del Monte, and Broadway – areas currently filled with car dealerships) would likely result in roughly 2250 new cars added to Seaside roads, or about 1/3rd as many. Using the same assumptions, this would only generate about 10,350 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year – a savings of over 17,000 tons, literally the result of taking 3,750 cars off the road.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle>

Critically, the Downtown Seaside area is an area which could *potentially* accommodate low-vehicle lifestyles and destinations. Seaside East, at the densities and mix of land uses considered, is virtually certain to never be adequately walkable or transit-friendly to support alternative means of transportation.

Commercial

The commercial land uses considered include a “trade and exposition center,” “visitor-serving,” “recreational commercial,” and “business park / employment.” While these land uses are too general to provide emissions estimates directly resulting from potential activities, it is clear that in the Seaside East location, any commercial uses would result in substantial increases in vehicle activity, and associated emissions and traffic. While some of these land uses (such as “recreational commercial”, which was identified as outdoor recreation including golf courses, equestrian centers, and the like) could not be placed in more centrally accessible areas, any visitor-serving or employment uses could readily be placed in the Downtown area and supplemented with alternative transit options.

Open Space

Seaside East and the former Fort Ord site are unique in that they are *existing* open space, serving as native habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal species and providing a quick and easy getaway for the residents of Seaside. Undeveloped land is a limited and ever-diminishing resource – once developed, it is nearly impossible to change to open space again.

As open space or other low-intensity “recreational commercial” use, the Seaside East site would generate little traffic, while still providing substantial benefits to the residents of Seaside and surrounding communities.

3. Climate Impact Recommendations

Preserving Seaside East as undeveloped open space, or allowing certain low-impact “recreational commercial” uses, would have the fewest resulting greenhouse gas emissions both from construction and operation. Higher intensity uses, like residential and commercial development, should remain within Seaside’s existing urban footprint - ideally in Seaside’s existing city center, which will benefit from mixed-use developments and greater variety of activity.