

03 VISUAL AND AESTHETIC QUALITY

INTRODUCTION

The quality of the visual experience associated with a project is dependent on the character of the project site, as well as the individual perspective and values of the viewer. Typically, residents and recreational viewer groups are especially concerned about the appearance of their visual environment, because their viewing experience is more than merely transitory. Perceived adverse visual impacts associated with a project can be the source of concerned opposition, even to projects that may otherwise be well-received.

It should be emphasized that when a viewer group perceives a negative change in the viewshed, this is not necessarily because the new development is unattractive. If a viewer had never seen pre-project conditions, their perception of the visual quality of a given project might be quite high. Thus, the impact typically occurs not because of the quality of the project in question, but rather because of the substantial change in the nature of the view. Many viewers value undisturbed open space views much more highly than views of urbanized or developed property, regardless if a project is well designed and balanced.

Aesthetic impacts are subjective, and therefore often treated as an impact topic in which thorough objective analysis is not possible. Although visual impacts are subjective and may be viewed differently by various individuals, it is also true that residents of the United States agree on the high visual quality of many landscapes. These areas are often designated as national parks and scenic spots. These agreed-upon factors and concepts of natural beauty can be used to assess the visual impacts of a project.

This chapter addresses aesthetics and visual quality issues related to the development of the proposed project and its alternatives. Existing aesthetic and visual resources of the project area are documented. Standards to judge visual sensitivity are presented and relevant scenic resource issues are addressed.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

VISUAL CHARACTER OF REGION

Sacramento County lies near the center of California's Central Valley, at the southern end of the Sacramento Valley. Open space views within the valley region are generally characterized by broad sweeping panoramas of flat agricultural lands and open space dotted with trees, divided by numerous rivers and creeks. To the east, the Sierra Nevada and foothills form a background, and the Coast Range provides a backdrop on the western horizon.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT AREA

The approximately 128-acre project site is in northern Sacramento County in the Antelope community, north of the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Antelope Road and approximately 12 miles northwest of downtown Sacramento. The site fronts on the north side of Antelope Road and extends northward along both sides of Don Julio Boulevard from Antelope Road to approximately 320 feet south of the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Vista Sierra Drive. The project site is surrounded by suburban development on all four sides, including primarily single family residential homes ranging in density from five to ten homes per acre, with Antelope High School and Barrett Ranch Elementary School located directly west of the project site and a department store and associated parking lot located south of Antelope Road. The project site is one of the last remaining large undeveloped areas within the Antelope community.

Antelope is generally characterized by low and medium residential development, with a few large commercial areas surrounding intersections with lower densities and agricultural residential areas along the western, northern, and eastern edges, although each of these areas is in the process of transitioning to a more suburban development pattern consistent with that seen in Antelope. Areas further to the east consist of some industrial uses and a railroad and the southern portion of the Roseville Railyard. The visual character within Antelope is dominated by suburban development with some topography. Distant views are limited due to surrounding development. Residential neighborhoods and parks have trees, including some scattered stately oak trees.

The project site's topography is gently rolling and covered with annual grasses and other ruderal (weedy) vegetation. The project site is routinely disked, and the soil surface along the property perimeter is exposed, with furrows and shredded grasses. Several informal/unpaved pathways, accessed through breaks in the perimeter fencing, cross the site. The site's boundaries are characterized by linear features: streets, fencing and utility lines. Barbed-wire and chain-link fencing attached to steel "t-posts" lines both sides of Don Julio Boulevard. Residential fencing, generally wood or decorative concrete masonry block, further defines the site boundaries. See Plates AE-1 through AE-4 for photos that demonstrate the project site's visual character.

There are a few dozen trees, most of which are located along a low lying drainage located along the eastern boundary of the project site. A few trees are also located along Antelope Road and along the project site's northern boundary, adjacent to an existing subdivision. A few other trees are scattered throughout the site, including a particularly prominent Blue Oak tree located on one of the higher points of the site near the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Poker Lane. The Blue Oak is 119 inches in circumference and has a dripline radius of 41 feet. A larger Valley Oak tree is also located on the project site, but it is located along the northern edge of the site next to other trees adjacent to development in a lower lying portion of the site, so it is not particularly noticeable from most areas of the project site.

Plate AE-1: Representative Site Photos - Views to South



View toward southwest from eastern edge of project site.



View to south toward Antelope Road from southwestern portion of project site.

Plate AE-2: Representative Site Photos – Views to East



View to east from west side of intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Poker Lane.



View toward east from central west portion of project site.

Plate AE-3: Representative Site Photos – Views to West



View west toward Don Julio Boulevard from eastern edge of project site.



View west along Antelope Road at southern edge of project site.

Plate AE-4: Representative Site Photos – Views to North



View to northeast from southwest portion of project site.



View north along Don Julio Boulevard from south-central portion of project site.

The site is vacant and contains no structures. A 230 kilovolt (kV) Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) overhead electrical transmission line runs within a 100-foot easement along most of the site's eastern boundary; then it turns to the east near the low lying drainage. A 69 kV powerline runs along Don Julio Boulevard.

LIGHT AND GLARE SOURCES

The unincorporated urban areas of the County include existing sources of daytime glare and nighttime lighting and illumination. Sources of daytime glare include direct beam sunlight and reflections from windows, architectural coatings, glass and other shiny reflective surfaces. Such glare usually only impacts the immediate environment, except in cases where buildings are high-rise and can be seen from greater distances. Nighttime light illumination and associated glare can be divided into stationary and mobile sources. Stationary sources of nighttime light include structure illumination, decorative landscape lighting, and lighted parking lots. Mobile sources are the vehicles traveling on roadways.

The project site is surrounded by urban development with home lighting, street lights, and cars. Antelope. Antelope High School and Barrett Ranch Elementary School are located adjacent to the project site to the west, both of which would be a source of nighttime light due to security lighting, and in the case of the high school, stadium lighting for outdoor athletic facilities, including a football stadium, baseball fields, soccer fields, and tennis courts. Additionally, Antelope Road and Don Julio Boulevard are both sources of night time lighting and day time glare due to cars driving by and through the project site.

REGULATORY SETTING

STATE

TITLE 24 OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Beginning in 2005, and then updated in 2008, the Title 24 standards for outdoor lighting provided for different lighting standards based on outdoor lighting zones. Areas are classified as zones LZ1 through LZ4. The ambient illumination for LZ1 is "dark", generally found in parks and preserves; LZ2 is "low", found in rural areas; LZ3 is "medium", which characterizes most urban areas; and LZ4 is "high." The LZ4 designation is granted by the California Energy Commission for areas with high intensity nighttime use or areas with specialized security considerations. Lighting regulations for areas of lower ambient lighting are more strict – providing lower wattage allowances – in order to protect those areas from new sources of light pollution and light trespass. The Project is within zone LZ3.

LOCAL

COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO 2030 GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan includes the following goals and policies related to preservation of aesthetic/visual resources in the County of Sacramento (County of Sacramento).

LU-17: Support implementation of the design review program on a project-by-project basis to ensure that all development applications positively contribute to the immediate neighborhood and the surrounding community.

LU-18: Encourage development that complements the aesthetic style and character of existing development nearby to help build a cohesive identity for the area.

LU-20: Planning processes for existing communities, commercial corridors and new growth areas shall provide for distinct and identifying physical elements, which may include: gateways, signage, public art, common site or street layout, shared design qualities of buildings or infrastructure, or prominent landmarks or destinations.

LU 31: Strive to achieve a natural nighttime environment and uncompromised public view of the night sky by reducing light pollution.

LU 94: Use design review to ensure that new commercial and residential development projects are designed to be compatible with existing neighborhoods and improve quality of life.

LU-102: Ensure that the structural design, aesthetics and site layout of new development is compatible and interconnected with existing development.

COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO ZONING CODE, CHAPTER 5.4.2.C. LIGHTING FOR SUBDIVISION DEVELOPMENTS

The County Zoning Code regulates site and street lighting for new development, notably the following provisions:

Site and street lighting shall comply with Section 5, "Street Light Design" of the Sacramento County Improvement Standards and the following standards.

1. Lighting fixtures shall provide pedestrian safety and be adequately spaced and scaled without interference from landscaping, and directed away from adjacent areas to minimize light pollution caused by glare or spillage into neighboring properties.
2. Nighttime pollution of the sky is discouraged by following illumination levels required for safety per Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA).

COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO – TREE ORDINANCE (SACRAMENTO COUNTY CODE TITLE 19)

The Sacramento County Tree Ordinance (Chapter 19.12, Tree Preservation and Protection) requires the protection and preservation of trees, notably oak trees and landmark trees, for multiple purposes, including the preservation of scenic beauty, which sustains and increases property value and encourages high quality development. The project site contains oak trees, one of which is noted as being particularly prominent in the community, due to its location on a higher part of the project site in close proximity to Don Julio Boulevard.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The degree of impact of a project, either negative or beneficial, to the visual character of the area is largely subjective. Few objective or quantitative standards are available to analyze visual quality, and individual viewers respond differently to changes in the physical environment. Based on the CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, a project would have a significant impact on aesthetics if it would:

1. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
2. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
3. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
4. Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The project site is not located within or within the viewshed of a scenic vista, and therefore, the project would not have an adverse effect on a scenic vista. The site topography and surrounding areas are at similar elevations, where low hills and buildings are tall enough to block extensive views. Therefore, Significance Criteria 1 is not addressed further in this EIR.

Similar to above, the project site is not located along, near, or within view of a State designated scenic highway or County designated scenic route, so the proposed project could not adversely affect the view of or from a designated scenic highway or route. Therefore, Significance Criteria 2 is not further addressed in this EIR.

METHODOLOGY

The United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) developed a manual to aid in the preparation of visual assessments for highway projects (most recently updated in January 2015). Although the proposed Project is not for a highway or other roadway, the key concepts established by FHWA

apply to all visual settings and were used to help evaluate the visual character and quality of the region and the Project site. Many of these same key concepts are used to evaluate aesthetics in many contexts, including artistic compositions, architecture, and residential landscaping design. The FHWA manual utilizes the concepts of Visual Compatibility, Viewer Sensitivity and Visual Quality to analyze potential visual impacts of a project. Each is described in further detail below.

VISUAL COMPATIBILITY

For the purposes of landscapes, the concepts of natural harmony, cultural order and project coherence define visual compatibility. Definitions of key terms and the Project impacts to visual compatibility are:

- **Natural Harmony:** What a viewer likes and dislikes about the natural environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the natural environment as being either harmonious or inharmonious. Harmony is considered desirable; disharmony is undesirable.
- **Cultural Order:** What a viewer likes and dislikes about the cultural environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the cultural environment as being either orderly or disorderly. Orderly is considered desirable; disorderly is undesirable.
- **Project Coherence:** What a viewer likes and dislikes about the project environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the project environment as being either coherent or incoherent. Coherent is considered desirable; incoherent is undesirable.

VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Visual character is derived from visual pattern elements and their dominance, scale (apparent size relationship), diversity, and/or continuity (uninterrupted flow of patterns). Visual pattern elements include form (visual mass or shape), line (silhouette), color, and texture (apparent coarseness). Although visual character and quality can be described objectively, there is no established official process that will identify all areas of high visual quality. Therefore, in part visual quality is often defined by viewer sensitivity. Viewer sensitivity is defined by viewer exposure and awareness, which are summarized by the following measures:

- Proximity of viewers to the visual resource
- Frequency and duration of views
- Extent and number of viewers
- Attention and level of routine the viewer has with the visual resource
- Focus and level of apprehending details of the scene
- Protection provided by restrictions that authorities and the community place on changes to a particular view

VIEWER GROUPS

The visual experience is a combination of visual resources and viewer response. Different viewer groups respond differently to visual environments. The opinions or preferences of different groups depend on viewer activity and awareness, local values and the cultural significance of the visual resources. Viewer activity affects the viewers' ability to perceive the landscape. Depending on the activity, a viewer may be attracted or distracted from the landscape. For example, a person reclining in a backyard or sitting on a bench will be encouraged to view the landscape, whereas a person driving along a road on an errand will be distracted from the landscape and concentrate more on the road itself.

Viewer awareness also affects the viewer's receptivity to the landscape. Viewer awareness is affected by position, preconceptions, and recent visual experience. If viewer sensitivity is very high, any visible change in the area may be discouraged. The viewer groups most likely to have views of the project are people passing by on Antelope Road and people passing through the project site on Don Julio Boulevard. CEQA case law has established that only views from public spaces need to be analyzed.

VISUAL QUALITY

Visual quality impacts are a function of visual compatibility and viewer sensitivity. The degree of impacts to visual quality are defined as adverse, beneficial, or neutral. Plate AE-1 and Plate AE-2 below, are examples of high and low visual quality in Sacramento County. In the first image there are no encroachments (highly intact), the site is unified, and the clouds and landscape combine to provide diversity in the view. In the second image, the view is diverse, but the entire view is taken up by encroachments and the site contains multiple elements that are not cohesive.

Plate AE-5: Example of High Visual Quality



Deer Creek Hills Preserve, photo from the Sacramento Valley Open Space Conservancy

Plate AE-6: Example of Low Visual Quality



IMPACTS AND ANALYSIS

IMPACT: DEGRADATION OF EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER

LEVEL OF IMPACT: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The project site is currently undeveloped but entirely surrounded by urban development on all sides, including primarily single family residential development typical of suburbs, a department store to the south, and Barrett Ranch Elementary School and Antelope High School to the west.

The visual quality of the project site, depicted in Plates AE-1 through AE-4 above, is characterized as including some high quality features, including some open rolling topography with some dispersed trees, including one prominent tree located at a high point by Don Julio Boulevard. However, the project site is affected by some encroachments, including roads, steady flows of traffic, power lines, and chain link fencing. From high points of the project site, there are views to the west of the two schools and urban development. Views in all other directions are of development with no wide views beyond.

The proposed project would develop the project site with 498 single-family homes and up to 196 or more multiple-family residences in varying densities. A park would be built on the west side of the project site adjacent to the elementary school, and an open space area would be located on the east side of the site. The project also includes the development of a commercial center that would occupy the northwest corner of the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Antelope Road and a smaller commercial center located at the southeast corner of Don Julio Boulevard and Poker Lane. A small park containing the prominent oak tree mentioned above would be located adjacent to the smaller commercial center, which would provide a neighborhood gathering place.

The proposed project would be developed with landscaping throughout, including within a median within Don Julio Boulevard. The homes would be designed to incorporate a mixture of design elements and architectural styles intended to provide visual interest to the project while meeting the County's Design Guidelines standards encouraging high quality development design. A Design Handbook (see Appendix A) has been prepared for the proposed project to provide information on the various aesthetic characteristics and design of the community.

The proposed project is subject to Design Review by the County's Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC). This process is intended to ensure that new development conforms to County standards and is compatible with the existing neighborhoods surrounding the project site. This design review process includes evaluation of preliminary plans and consideration of public input. In addition, the DRAC provides feedback on project plans to ensure that they meet the County's Design Guidelines and fit in to the community.

Motorists traveling along Antelope Road would change from a large vacant property to a developed property, including a large commercial retail center at the intersection of

Antelope Road and Don Julio Boulevard. Views from Antelope Road beyond the project site are of the edges of the subdivisions surrounding the project site. The residential portions of the project site located along Antelope Road would have masonry walls, consistent with most of the development located along the roadway within the community of Antelope.

Views along Don Julio Boulevard would also change from a large vacant property to development. Views from Don Julio Boulevard to the east, north, and south are of surrounding development. Large power lines are highly visible to the east. As mentioned above, views to the west are a bit wider due to lower elevations to the west, but views beyond the project site are generally limited to the two adjacent schools and subdivisions. Visual encroachments are located throughout the site in all directions from both Antelope Road and Don Julio Boulevard.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The proposed project would result in the permanent conversion of approximately 128 acres of undeveloped land to fully developed suburban uses with single family homes and apartments, two commercial centers, including one large community-serving commercial center, parks, and open space. However, the project is an infill project that develops a currently underutilized area within the Antelope community. Development of the project site is consistent with the General Plan, Antelope Community Plan, both of which call for development of the project site. Furthermore, development of the proposed project would be in keeping with the general visual character and aesthetic quality of the community, including the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the project site. Design review and adherence to the Design Handbook, which is intended to supplement the Sacramento County Design Guidelines, would ensure high visual quality.

Furthermore, although the project site currently exhibits some high visual quality characteristics, it also contains several encroachments, which can be seen by motorists passing by and through the project site and by residents living directly adjacent to the project site. Views from residents of homes adjacent to the project site are generally very limited by other development, fences, walls, and trees. Therefore, although the proposed project would result in a change to the visual character of the project site, the change is consistent with the community's existing visual character. Design Review will ensure high quality design. This impact is ***less than significant***.

MITIGATION MEASURE

None required.

IMPACT: NEW SOURCES OF LIGHT AND GLARE

LEVEL OF IMPACT: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The proposed project would convert an undeveloped and underutilized property to residential and commercial uses, which would create new sources of light and glare in the project area, if not properly designed and built. For example, reflective building

materials, large expanses of building walls, or glass façades could create sources of glare and affect daytime views.

The Project would be subject to the County Zoning Code, Improvement Standards and Building Code as well as the Countywide Design Guidelines, which contain measures to reduce impacts related to light and glare. For example, the Design Guidelines discourage the use of reflective glass and reflective siding materials and call for the use of glare control in both single- and multi-family homes. Vast expanses of walls are discouraged in both residential and commercial development, which reduces the potential for glare. Compliance with the Design Guidelines would ensure that the potential for glare from new buildings within the proposed project is minimized.

During the nighttime, the project would result in the development of new sources of light, including street lighting, park safety lighting, and lighting associated with commercial uses and homes. Substantial new sources of light in rural or undeveloped areas can result in sky glow, which can reduce visibility of the nighttime sky. While the project site is currently undeveloped, it is surrounded on all sides by existing development, so the existing nighttime environment is already affected by some sky glow. Development of the proposed project could add to sky glow of the area. However, Section 5.4.2.C of the Zoning Code and the Design Guidelines regulate site and street lighting by requiring that lighting is shielded and points downward to avoid spillover onto adjacent properties and up toward the sky. Both the Zoning Code and the Design Guidelines also call for adherence to the lighting levels for safety recommended by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North American (IESNA), with the intent to provide adequate lighting for safety purposes, but to minimize light spillover.

Because existing regulations and design guidance would minimize light and glare from the project, associated impacts are ***less than significant***.

MITIGATION MEASURE

None required.

COMMERCIAL ALTERNATIVE

IMPACT: DEGRADATION OF EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER

LEVEL OF IMPACT: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The commercial alternative would result in the conversion of undeveloped land to developed land consistent with the preferred project as described above; however, the commercial development at the northwest corner of the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Antelope Road would be expanded and the multifamily portion would be eliminated.

Similar to the preferred project, the development would result in changes to views from an undeveloped and underutilized property to a developed property consistent with the

character of the community's existing and planned uses; and the view for motorists traveling along Antelope Road would change from a large vacant property to a developed property, including a large commercial retail center at the intersection of Antelope Road and Don Julio Boulevard.

The changes to the existing visual character would be substantially the same as with the proposed project. Development would be consistent with the General Plan, Antelope Community Plan and would keep with the general visual character and aesthetic quality of the surrounding community. The commercial development will be subject the project's Design Handbook and subject to review by the County's Design Review Administrator.

Although the commercial alternative would result in a change to the visual character of the project site, the change is consistent with the community's existing visual character and Design Review will ensure high quality design. This impact is ***less than significant***.

MITIGATION MEASURE

None required.

IMPACT: NEW SOURCES OF LIGHT AND GLARE

LEVEL OF IMPACT: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The commercial alternative would convert an undeveloped and underutilized property to residential and commercial uses. This would create new sources of light and glare in the project area similar to those described above for the preferred project.

The expansion of the commercial development at the northwest corner of the intersection of Don Julio Boulevard and Antelope Road might increase the amount of reflective building materials, large expanses of building walls, glass façades, and increase the need for parking lot lighting. Compliance with the requirements of the County Development Code, including the Countywide Design Guidelines will minimize impacts related to glare from new buildings, while the requirements of Section 5.4.2.C of the Zoning Code and the Design Guidelines will ensure that spillover onto adjacent properties and up toward the sky are minimized. Compliance with the requirements of the IESNA will further minimize light spillover.

Because existing regulations and design guidance would minimize light and glare from the project, associated impacts are ***less than significant***.

MITIGATION MEASURE

None required.