

This section provides an overview of the visual character, scenic resources, views, scenic highways, and sources of light and glare that are encountered on the Project site and the surrounding area. This section concludes with an evaluation of the impacts and recommendations for mitigating impacts. Information in this section is derived primarily from the following:

- *Rancho Cordova General Plan* (City of Rancho Cordova, Adopted June 26, 2006);
- *Rancho Cordova General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report* (City of Rancho Cordova, March 2006);
- *Rancho Cordova Municipal Code, Chapter 725* (current through February 4, 2019);
- *Cordova Recreation & Park District (CRPD) Design & Construction Standards Manual; and*
- *The Ranch Special Planning Area Handbook (SPA Handbook)* (K Hovnanian Homes, March 2019).

A comment was received during the public review period for the Notice of Preparation regarding this topic from the following: Cordova Recreation & Park District (CRPD) (August 3, 2018). The portion of the comment related to this topic is addressed within this section.

3.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

REGIONAL SETTING

In general, the dominant visual characteristics within the City's General Plan Planning Area are the open sections of the valley floor, urbanized land uses, agricultural land uses, rivers and creeks, and various species of trees. Because the entire Planning Area consists of relatively flat terrain, views of these resources are available from roadways throughout the City.

Oak trees, streams, creeks, and the American and Cosumnes Rivers are among the most significant natural visual features in the City's Planning Area. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coastal ranges can be visible under clear conditions.

There are several rivers, creeks, and waterways located within or adjacent to the General Plan Planning Area that serve as a visual transition from natural scenic corridors to the City's urbanized development areas. The most prominent waterways in the vicinity of the Planning Area include: the American River, Cosumnes River, Morrison Creek, Laguna Creek, and Elder Creek.

The American River makes up the Planning Area's northern boundary and flows westward from the crest of the Sierra Nevada above Lake Tahoe to its confluence with the Sacramento River near downtown Sacramento. The American River corridor through the planning area is a part of the American River Parkway, which is an open space greenbelt that extends approximately 29 miles from the Folsom Dam to its confluence with the Sacramento River. The Cosumnes River is located approximately two miles southeast of the Planning Area's southeastern boundary. The Cosumnes River corridor contains thousands of acres of wetlands and adjacent uplands that provide critical habitat to a diverse group of plants and animal species.

3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

Many portions of the Rancho Cordova Planning Area south of US 50 are currently being developed. The undeveloped areas of the City south of US 50 are characterized by large areas of grazing and pasture land, which reinforces the existing uniform rural visual character of the area. These areas provide panoramic views of open space and distant views of the Sierra Nevada range and the foothills of El Dorado County.

The Planning Area has no officially designated scenic highways, corridors, vistas, or viewing areas.

PROJECT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

The Project site consists of approximately 530 acres located in the city limits. The Project site is bound by existing single-family residential uses and Douglas Road to the north, vacant land and Grant Line Road to the east, vacant land and Kiefer Boulevard to the south, and Rancho Cordova Parkway, single family residential, and vacant land on the west.

The Project site is currently vacant and has been previously used for agricultural uses (cattle grazing). The topography of the site exhibits low relief topography with elevations ranging between 170 and 210 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The slopes throughout the site range from approximately zero to eight percent. The site is characterized by moderate rolling hills and areas of extensive flatlands, with wetlands, vernal pools, and seasonal drainage courses scattered throughout the site. A headwater tributary of Morrison Creek traverses the Project site, entering at the northeast corner and flowing generally to the southwest. A total of 21.53 acres of jurisdictional aquatic resources have been mapped with the Project site, including: 2.92 acres of depressional seasonal wetlands, 15.04 acres of vernal pools, 1.66 acres of riverine seasonal wetlands, 0.06 acres of riverine seasonal wet swales, 1.54 acres of intermittent drainages, and 0.30 acres of drainage basin outfalls.

The property is traversed by a 275-foot-wide utility easement occupied by a 230-kV Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) transmission line, one 230-kV Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) transmission line, and one 69-kV SMUD sub-transmission line. No other public utilities (water, sewer, drainage) are located on site.

The Project site is bound by the Sunridge Specific Plan to the north, east, and west, and by the SunCreek Specific Plan to the south and east. Land uses anticipated to the east and south of the Project site by the Sunridge Specific Plan and the SunCreek Specific Plan include low, medium, and high density residential uses, commercial mixed uses (retail, office, and retail professional), and neighborhood parks. Other land uses located nearby include new elementary, junior and senior high schools.

LIGHT AND GLARE

There are two typical types of light intrusion. First, light emanates from the interior of structures and passes out through windows. Secondly, light projects from exterior sources such as street lighting, security lighting, balcony lighting, and landscape lighting. "Light spill" is typically defined as the presence of unwanted and/or misdirected light on properties adjacent to the property being illuminated.

Glare is the sensation produced by luminance within the visual field that is significantly greater than the luminance to which the eyes are adapted, which causes annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance and visibility.

The Project site currently has minimal sources of light and glare. Street lighting exists on the west side of Rancho Cordova Parkway immediately west of the Project site. Street lighting is also provided along the local residential roadways in the development to the north of the Project site. Sources of daytime glare include direct beam sunlight and reflections from windows, architectural coatings, glass and other shiny reflective surfaces. 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, lighted signs, sports field lighting and streetlights. The source of mobile nighttime light is primarily headlights of motor vehicles. During winter nighttime hours, the ambient light in the Planning Area can be accentuated during periods of low cloudiness or fog, which reflects light, resulting in intensification of the amount of light.

Existing sources of light or glare are not currently located on the Project site, although existing parking lot lighting, building lighting, and street lighting are located in the vicinity of the site. Specifically, the existing residential developments to the north, west, and southwest result in significant light and glare. Additionally, street lighting currently exists along Rancho Cordova Parkway.

3.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

STATE

California Scenic Highway Program

The intent of the California Scenic Highway Program is “to protect and enhance California’s natural scenic beauty and to protect the social and economic values provided by the State’s scenic resources.” Caltrans administers the program, which was established in 1963 and is governed by the California Streets and Highways Code (§260 et seq.). The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the adjacent land. Caltrans has compiled a list of state highways that are designated as scenic and county highways that are eligible for designation as scenic.

As described above, there are no designated Scenic Highway Corridors in the vicinity of the Project site.

LOCAL

Rancho Cordova General Plan

The Rancho Cordova General Plan contains the following goals and policies that are relevant to aesthetics and visual resources:

3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

LAND USE ELEMENT

Goal LU.1: Achieve a balanced and integrated land use pattern throughout the community.

Policy LU.1.4: Promote high quality, efficient, and cohesive land utilization that minimizes negative impacts (e.g., traffic congestion and visual blight) and environmental hazards (e.g. flood, soil instability) on adjacent neighborhoods and infrastructure and preserve existing and future residential neighborhoods from encroachment of incompatible activities and land uses.

NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

Goal NR.3: Preserve and maintain creek corridors and wetland preserves with useable buffer zones throughout the new development areas as feasible.

Policy NR.3.1: Coordinate with groups such as the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council to restore, enhance, and preserve creeks in Rancho Cordova.

Policy NR.3.2: Create or retain the natural topographic relief and meandering alignment of natural creek corridors in the construction of new channels and the modification of existing channels, and discourage the placement of concrete within creeks and channels.

Policy NR.3.3: Encourage the creation of secondary flood control channels where the existing channel supports extensive riparian vegetation.

Policy NR.3.4: Encourage projects that contain wetland preserves or creeks, or are located adjacent to wetland preserves or creeks, to be designed for maximum visibility and, as appropriate, access.

Goal NR.4: Encourage the planting and preservation of high-quality trees throughout the City.

Policy NR.4.1: Conserve native oak and landmark tree resources for their historic, economic, aesthetic, and environmental value.

Policy NR.4.2: Improve overall landscaping quality and sustainability in all areas visible to the public.

Policy NR.4.3: Promote trees as economic and environmental resources for the use, education, and enjoyment of current and future generations.

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

Goal UD.1: Development in keeping with the building block concepts of neighborhoods, villages, and districts.

Policy UD.1.1: Promote the design of residential neighborhoods in accordance with the desired character of the village and district in which it is located. All City codes and

regulations shall be updated to reflect the City's vision for Urban Design neighborhoods, villages, and districts as the building blocks of the City.

Goal UD.2: Redefine the Identity for Rancho Cordova through community and district design.

Policy UD.2.3: Transition the density and intensity of uses from an urban to rural character with a clear City edge and establish a sense of entry and arrival to the City.

Goal UD.4: Ensure that projects are designed in keeping with the context of surrounding areas and overall community.

Policy UD.4.2: Design new development to be compatible with surrounding development in ways that contribute to the desired character of the City and District.

City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code

Chapter 23.716, Landscaping, of the Municipal Code establishes minimum landscape standards to enhance the appearance of developments, reduce heat and glare, control soil erosion, conserve water, ensure the ongoing maintenance of landscape areas, and ensure that landscape installations do not create hazards for motorists or pedestrians. This chapter of the code required a landscape plan and irrigation plan for new development (and existing development as identified in Section 23.716.020). This plan would conceptually show locations for trees, shrubs, ground cover, etc. Additionally, this would also include a list of tree species and size and the location of any required purple pipe system. Section 23.716.100 and 23.716.110 outline the landscape care, maintenance, and tree pruning requirements.

Chapter 23.725, Outdoor Lighting, of the Municipal Code regulates lighting to balance the safety and security needs for lighting with the City's desire to preserve dark skies and to ensure that light trespass and glare have negligible impact on surrounding property (especially residential) and roadways. This chapter of the code contains prohibited lighting types, as well as general lighting standards. The lighting standards include requirements to prevent nuisance lighting, through requiring lighting to be designed, installed, directed, shielded, and maintained to prevent glare, light trespass, and light pollution. With the exception of exempt lights, such as holiday, special event, and emergency lighting, outdoor lighting must be fully shielded or recessed to reduce light trespass from adjoining properties and generally must be designed to illuminate the minimum level necessary for safety and security.

CRPD Design and Construction Standards

The CRPD's Design & Construction Standards Manual contains the following general standards for lighting:

- A. All lighting design shall be compliant with 2013 Energy Efficiency standards set by the California Energy Commission.
- B. Park security lighting shall be provided in all park settings.
- C. Activity nodes such as playgrounds and picnic areas shall be lit at an average of 1/4 foot-candle.

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- D. City and County requirements for parking lot lighting shall prevail.
- E. Penetration of unwanted light into adjacent neighborhoods shall be mitigated as much as possible.
- F. Parking lot lighting shall comply with all applicable codes including the California Energy Commission Standards.
- G. When possible, lighting standards shall comply with the Model Lighting Ordinance (MLO).

3.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Consistent with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, the Project will have significant impact on aesthetics if it will:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; and/or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

As discussed in the Initial Study, the Project site is not located adjacent to or in the vicinity of a state scenic highway. The Project would have no impact related to the potential to substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, within a state scenic highway. Therefore, this impact would be *less than significant*. This issue will not be addressed further.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 3.1-1: Project implementation would result in substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas and resources or substantial degradation of visual character (Significant and Unavoidable)

Development of the Project would convert the site from its existing use as undeveloped land with a corridor of multiple power lines, poles and tall towers and previously used for agricultural uses to developed residential housing (age-restricted and unrestricted), a commercial mixed-use area, a residential mixed use area, a continuing care retirement community, protected natural areas, and park/trail areas.

The Project site is not designated as a scenic vista by the City of Rancho Cordova General Plan, nor does it contain any unique or distinguishing features that would qualify the site for designation as a scenic vista.

While the Project site is not designated as a scenic vista, it does provide public views of open grasslands and some public views across the site include the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the background. These rural, open views are generally considered to be visually pleasing. The Project site is highly visible from Rancho Cordova Parkway; views from Rancho Cordova Parkway are of the open grasslands of the site with the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the background. The site is visible in the background in views of the site from Douglas Road and lends to the open character of views from this vantage point. There are also limited public views of the site from the Sunridge development to the north, primarily from Big Meadow Way where it dead-ends at the Project site. Implementation of the Project would change the existing visual character of the site from an undeveloped, open grasslands to an urban residential neighborhood.

Impacts related to a change in visual character are largely subjective and very difficult to quantify. People have different reactions to the visual quality of a project or a project feature, and what is considered “attractive” to one viewer may be considered “unattractive” to other viewers. The Project site currently consists of undeveloped grassland previously used for agricultural purposes. Agricultural and vacant lands provide visual relief from urban and suburban developments, and help to define the character of a region.

Upon development of the Project site, views from Rancho Cordova Parkway for the northern portion of the site would include proposed landscaping and ornamental trees, proposed single-family homes, the proposed commercial mixed use area. Views from Rancho Cordova Parkway in the central and southern portions of the Project site would continue to have views of expansive open and aquatic areas; however, views in the background would be of the proposed residential communities. The proposed urban areas would be landscaped upon development of the Project site, and the Project includes approximately 225.87 acres of protected areas, including 199.5 acres of open space preserve that would remain in the existing condition, 10.39 acres of protected/drainage uses, and 15.98 acres of protected/landscape uses. In total, protected areas represent 43 percent of the total Project site.

In addition to the preservation of a substantial amount of open space, the Project would include visual components that would assist in enhancing the appearance of the site following site development. These improvements would include building design and site layout consistent with the City’s Design Guidelines and landscaping improvements such as new street trees and other vegetation landscaping, and multi-use trails.

The Project’s SPA Handbook includes Architectural + Site Design Guidelines for multi-family parcels and commercial parcels which create a framework within which developers, builders, and designers can have flexibility to create unique and desirable design opportunities. The Guidelines cover circulation, building placement and orientation, public spaces and pedestrian amenities, massing scale and form, and general style and design.

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While implementation of the Project would change the existing visual character of the site, it would not result in substantial adverse effects on a designated scenic vista. The Project would result in the conversion of undeveloped open grassland to urban uses, which would contribute to changes in the regional landscape and visual character of the area. In order to reduce visual impacts, development within the Project site is required to be consistent with the General Plan and the Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines which includes design standards in order to ensure quality and cohesive design of the Project site. The Rancho Cordova General Plan includes goals and policies designed to protect visual resources and promote quality design in urban areas. As noted previously, these provisions provide a framework to evaluate new development projects against the City's adopted vision and are intended to reflect the City's desires relative to land planning, as well as individual site design and architecture. The guidelines and standards set forth in Chapter 2, Community Design, are applicable to all project types and cover a wide range of topics from general circulation and project signage to landscaping and sustainable development. The subsequent chapters provide additional provisions that are applicable to unique project types, including commercial and commercial mixed use, office and office mixed use, residential (all types from single family detached to residential mixed use), community facilities, and industrial.

Various temporary visual impacts could occur as a result of construction activities as the Project develops, including grading, equipment and material storage, and staging. Though temporary, some of these impacts could last for several weeks or months during any single construction phase. These construction-related impacts would be temporary and viewer sensitivity in the majority of cases would be slight to moderate.

Nevertheless, the loss of the visual appearance of the existing views, primarily of open grassland, on the site will change the visual character of the Project site in perpetuity. Compliance with the City's General Plan and design review process, implemented through the SPA Handbook, would reduce visual impacts to the greatest extent feasible; however, the Project would permanently convert the undeveloped site to urbanized uses. This is considered a **significant and unavoidable** impact. There is no additional feasible mitigation available that would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Impact 3.1-2: Project implementation would not result in substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area (Less than Significant)

Implementation of the Project would introduce new sources of light and glare into the Project area.

GLARE

New sources of glare would occur primarily from the windshields of vehicles travelling to and from the Project site and from vehicles parked at the site. Glare associated with lighting is discussed under Lighting below. Parking areas would be provided for the commercial and high density residential parcels (Villages 22, 23, and 24), for the public park (Lot D), and for the age-restricted clubhouse (Lot A) and adjacent multifamily housing. The majority of the on-site residential parking

would be located throughout the northern, central, and southeastern portions of the Project site. Headlights and windshields would be shielded by the proposed residential and mixed use structures.

The Project includes plans for extensive landscaping and protected open space areas throughout the site, which would provide visual screening and block potential windshield glare to areas surrounding the Project site. The SPA Handbook also requires that use of reflective materials be avoided for the residential, commercial, and parks and recreation uses. Due to the distance between the sources of windshield glare and the nearest sensitive receptors and that use of reflective materials is not allowed for the residential, commercial, and parks uses, impacts from glare would be *less than significant*.

LIGHTING

The Project would introduce new sources of lighting, including sources which may result in increased nighttime lighting or glare in the Project vicinity. A detailed lighting plan has not been prepared for the Project, but for the purposes of this analysis, it has been conservatively assumed that exterior lighting would be located throughout most of the outdoor areas of the Project site, including in the commercial, residential, and parks lots, and along the landscaped sidewalks and trails, with the exception of the trails within the preserve and associated protected buffer areas which will not be lit or landscaped. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to: street lighting in the residential areas; exterior lighting on the buildings; lighting for the bicycle and pedestrian paths; courtyard lighting; parking lot lighting for guest parking in the multifamily areas, and lighting of park and recreation facilities. Lighting at the park and recreation facilities may include nighttime, stadium-style lighting associated with sports fields or other similar uses to allow for night games and activities. It is assumed that nighttime field lighting will be installed in association with potential sports fields and recreation uses at Lot D, for up to two sports fields or similar uses. It is also assumed that security lighting will be installed within the various parking areas and the exterior of restrooms within Lot D. Light sources from the proposed development may have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding areas, by introducing nuisance light into the area and decreasing the visibility of nighttime skies. Additionally, on-site light sources may create light spillover impacts on surrounding land uses in the absence of mitigation. However, the Project's residential, commercial, private parks, and landscaping uses will be required to comply with the City's Outdoor Lighting Ordinance and the public parks will be required to comply with the CRPD lighting requirements, identified in Chapter 6, Lighting, of the CRPD Design & Construction Standards Manual.

Compliance with the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance would ensure that all exterior lighting associated with the Project, including the residential, multi-family, commercial, and private parks and recreation components, is properly shielded and directed downward in order to eliminate light spillage onto adjacent properties and avoids excessive illumination, and reduces impacts to "dark skies" to the greatest extent feasible. While compliance with the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance and submittal of an outdoor lighting plan will ensure that potential impacts would be less than significant associated with the residential, commercial, landscaping, and private parks and recreation facilities, there is the potential for the public park and potential sports fields to result in

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excessive lighting. The CRPD's standards reduce the potential for impacts, but do not provide adequate detail to ensure that potential impacts associated with lighting at the public park and recreation facilities are less than significant. However, the SPA Handbook requires that lighting associated with the parks and recreation facilities facilities, including any sports field uses, would be designed to minimize light trespass off the Project site and requires that a lighting plan be prepared for each park site that demonstrates the lighting has been designed to minimize light spillage onto adjacent properties and to minimize light pollution that would affect the night sky. Implementation of the City's Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, the CRPD lighting requirements, and the SPA Handbook would reduce the impact to *less than significant*.