
4.12 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

This section of the EIR describes the existing aesthetic resources of the Project Area, summarizes the visual characteristics of the Project Area and surrounding vicinity, and discusses the impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project. This analysis relies on qualitative principles to assess how visual and scenic resources within the Redevelopment Project Area could be affected by the activities associated with redeveloping this area.

4.12.1 EXISTING SETTING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Redevelopment Project Area is located entirely within the existing city limits of Rancho Cordova and is generally built out with various urbanized land uses. The existing visual conditions of the Project Area are characterized by the Folsom Boulevard commercial corridor between Sunrise Boulevard and Bradshaw Road, the Trade Center commercial and industrial area, which is bounded by Sunrise Boulevard, Kilgore Road, and Sun Center Drive, the Coloma Boulevard commercial and residential corridor, the Zinfandel commercial and residential corridor between Sunrise Boulevard and Folsom Boulevard, the Lincoln Village residential and commercial area, and the area located between Bradshaw Road to the west, Old Placerville Road to the east, Lincoln Village Drive to the south, and US 50 to the north. Some of the adjacent parcels to these existing corridors are also included in the Project Area, some of which are vacant, undeveloped or abandoned. Commercial, industrial, and residential land uses make up the majority of the Redevelopment Project Area. However, the area also includes various neighborhood parks, open space, and portions of the American River Parkway, which is located south of the American River. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coastal ranges are available from various portions of the area under clear conditions.

SIGNIFICANT VISUAL FEATURES

Rivers and Waterways

The most prominent waterways in the vicinity of the Redevelopment Project Area are the American River and the Folsom South Canal. The American River makes up portions of the Project 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 Redevelopment Project 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 (further described under Parkways). Portions of the Folsom South Canal (FSC) are within the Redevelopment Project Area, which runs along the western side of Sunrise Boulevard. The FSC starts at the Nimbus dam and extends southward for approximately 27 miles, through the Project Area and past the community of Wilton. There is an existing bike and pedestrian path running along the FSC that provides views and scenic opportunities overlooking the central and southern portions of the Redevelopment Project Area. The visual value of the FSC is limited due to the fact that the canal is constructed of concrete and is devoid of any significant vegetation. Conversely, the riparian areas associated with the American River are considered some of the most biologically rich regions in California's Central Valley and greatly enhance the aesthetic and visual character of the Redevelopment Project Area. Visually based opportunities include, but are not limited to, bird watching, hiking, scenic tours, guided trips, and various seasonal outings.

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Parkways

The American River Parkway (Parkway), also referred to as the "Jewel of Sacramento", borders the American River on both the northern and southern sides. More than 5 million visitors enjoy this unique wildlife and recreation area annually. The Parkway is one of the County's most visited and distinct natural visual features and provides several scenic based activities (i.e, picnic sites, guided natural and historic tours, bird watching and hiking). There are several distinct areas of the Parkway, each having unique visual features, which contribute to their separate identities. The Lower American River (from the Folsom Dam to its confluence with the Sacramento River) is classified as a "Recreation" river, as defined by the Federal and State Wild and Scenic Rivers System due to its aesthetic qualities and wealth of recreational opportunities that it provides. There are also several neighborhood and community parks, including Goethe Park, which is a 444-acre regional park, which provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities, open space, and greatly enhance the aesthetic quality of the City and Project Area. Goethe Park is located along the Parkway and includes natural oak woodlands and provides scenic views of the American River. Approximately 79.2 acres of the Project Area is located within the American River Parkway area.

Nature Preserves, Landscape Corridors, and Greenbelts

Nature preserves, landscape corridors, and greenbelts keep natural terrain, drainages, and vegetation types intact. Several of the new developments proposed within the City have designated preserve areas to conserve wetlands, vernal pools and other valuable aesthetic resources. However, only the Anatolia developments, which are located southeast of the intersection of Sunrise Boulevard and Douglas Road outside the Project Area, have established on-site preservation areas. These developments were required to incorporate nature preserve areas to maintain the integrity of the existing watersheds, establish interconnected conservation areas to preserve vernal pool hydrology, and incorporate natural features in the design of the projects.

Tree Resources

The Redevelopment Project Area contains native and non-native tree species. Trees provide a visual break from the uniformity of urban development. The majority of the native trees are located along the American River Parkway and consist mostly of valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and willow. The Project Area also includes numerous non-native species, which are generally used for ornamental value, shade production, resistance to particular pests, or proven adaptation to the urban environment.

Because the majority Redevelopment Project Area is built out, there are several existing sources of daytime glare and nighttime lighting and illumination. Sources of daytime glare include, but are not limited to, 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 illumination from building and structures, decorative landscape lighting, lighted signs, and streetlights along all the commercial corridors. The source of mobile nighttime light is primarily headlights of motor vehicles.

4.12.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

LOCAL

City of Rancho Cordova General Plan

The proposed Rancho Cordova General Plan and Land Use Map Book provide conceptual land use patterns and a "vision" of how development within the City should occur. The proposed General Plan is intended to reflect the creation of livable neighborhoods in keeping with the City's Building Block Concept, and the promotion of Village Centers, Local Town Centers and Regional Town Centers. All provisions in the proposed Rancho Cordova General Plan would apply to future redevelopment activities within the Project Area.

City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code

The purpose of the Zoning Code is to regulate the use of buildings, structures and land between agriculture, industry, business, residential, open space, recreation and other land uses to ensure compatibility and to enhance the enjoyment of scenic beauty and other natural resources. The City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code also includes lighting standards for placement and use within each land use zone and tree standards.

Tree Ordinance

Title 19 of the Zoning Code is the Tree Preservation Ordinance ("Tree Ordinance." (Ord. 915 § 1, 1966). The Tree Ordinance was established to promote health, safety and to enhance the beauty and general welfare of the City of Rancho Cordova. The Ordinance requires the City to plant, maintain, protect, preserve and to regulate the planting, maintaining, protecting and preserving of public trees and landscaping; to eliminate dangerous conditions caused by trees and shrubs that may result in injuries to persons or property; to protect all trees within the City against the spread of disease or pests, and to provide for the special protection of heritage and landmark trees within the city limits.

City of Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines

The City of Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines) are intended to implement the City's vision for quality development projects that enhance the character of the community, as outlined in the City's proposed General Plan. They provide a framework to evaluate new development projects to ensure consistency with 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 Design Guidelines provide design professionals, property owners, residents, staff, and City decision makers with a clearly established process for the design, planning, and review of redevelopment and development proposals in Rancho Cordova. The Design Guidelines were created using input and direction from the Urban Design workshops held in the spring/summer of 2004, the visual preference survey and General Plan survey conducted in the summer of 2004, visioning workshops and land use map discussions for the City's proposed General Plan, and the City's the guiding principles of the City's Design Review Ordinance.

The Design Guidelines reflect the City's desire for quality development, which apply to all land uses, all redevelopment, proposed development, as well as qualifying modifications to existing developments. The guidelines include design provisions for site planning, architecture, lighting, and landscaping.

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Adopted guidelines also include provisions regarding the preservation of significant natural features and compatibility with surrounding property.

4.12.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following significance thresholds are based on Appendix G, from the State CEQA Guidelines. A project is considered to have a significant visual effect on the environment if it will:

- Substantially damage scenic resources within a State scenic highway including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings;
- Have a substantial adverse affect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character of quality of the site and its surroundings or introduce a feature that is out of character that dominates the view;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource/light and glare analysis is based on field review of the Redevelopment Project Area. The visual quality policies of the proposed City of Rancho Cordova General Plan were used for guidance for this visual analysis. In addition, staff performed a visual field study from several vantage points and public view areas within the boundaries of the Redevelopment Project Area. This analysis evaluates the anticipated changes resulting from implementation of the Redevelopment Plan and designation of the Project Area.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Alteration of Scenic Resources within a Scenic Highway

Impact 4.12.1 Implementation of the proposed project may not result in substantial damage to scenic resources within a State scenic highway. There is **no impact**.

There are no State or locally designated scenic highways within or proximate to the Redevelopment Project Area. The portion of US-50 located within the vicinity of the Project Area is not designated as a scenic highway. Therefore, implementation of the Redevelopment Plan and associated activities would not have the potential to affect scenic resources within a scenic highway and there is **no impact**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Degradation of a Scenic Vista

Impact 4.12.2 Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan will facilitate redevelopment activities that could potentially degrade existing scenic vistas. This is considered a **less than significant** impact.

The Redevelopment Project Area includes important scenic vistas of the American River, the American River Parkway, and the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Numerous scenic vistas of the American River are provided within the Redevelopment Project Area at various public accesses within the American River Parkway and at river crossings at Sunrise Boulevard, and Folsom Boulevard. Development within the American River Parkway is regulated via the provisions of the American River Parkway Plan, which includes numerous criteria for evaluating the potential to impact the viewshed. The City of Rancho Cordova is a participant in the current update of the American River Bikeway Plan, the first update in almost twenty years. However, the City's involvement is purely advisory at this point as the American River Parkway is under the jurisdiction of the State Senate and the current legislation does not identify Rancho Cordova as one of the local agency signatories to the Parkway Plan. To date, the local agency signatories have stated that Rancho Cordova will remain as a non-voting, advisory agency through the planning horizon of the current update.

From various viewpoints throughout the Redevelopment Project Area, during clear weather conditions, there are distant scattered and diffused views of the El Dorado County foothills and the Sierra Nevada. Diffused or scattered views are those views that are partially obstructed by distance, trees, existing structures, intervening topography or vegetation, and in this case, weather conditions. Although new public facilities (parks) may provide additional public access to the area and thus more opportunities for distant views of the Sierra Nevada, that same development and associated landscaping will further obstruct and scatter opportunities for diffused views of the Sierras. Due to the distance from the Sierras and the existing diffused and scattered nature of the available views, opportunities to view this scenic vista are currently limited and the implementation of the Redevelopment Plan would result in a less than significant effect on this scenic vista.

Redevelopment activities associated with implementation of the Redevelopment Plan in areas adjacent to the Parkway must comply with the City's Design Guidelines, which ensure no significant degradation of scenic viewsheds. Views of the Sierra afforded in the Redevelopment Project Area are too distant and diffused to be considered an important scenic vista.

For these reasons, implementation of the Redevelopment Plan will not significantly affect an important scenic vista and this is a **less than significant impact**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Alteration of Visual Character

Impact 4.12.3 Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan will encourage new development and redevelopment activities that could degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

The proposed project evaluated in this analysis would not result in a substantial change to the visual character of the Project Area, as the area is characterized by existing urbanized uses. The proposed project assumes land uses of the proposed General Plan which provide the opportunity for mixed land use designations that combine residential, commercial, and office uses on a single site, thus permitting both horizontal and vertical mixing.

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The proposed General Plan establishes land use development standards for all land use categories associated with the General Plan Land Use Map. The standards include minimum parcel sizes, minimum and maximum densities, and maximum height or building allowable within a particular land use designation

Views onto the City and across the City could change as a result of high-rise development in the Project Area, which would be allowed in the Downtown Planning Area under the proposed General Plan. The construction of high rises in this area would alter the existing distant views of the Project Area for travelers using US 50 as the City's skyline's characteristics change from smaller lower profile office and commercial complexes of generally one or two stories in height to a more dense and vertical appearance. Additionally, ground level views, line of site characteristics and lighting and glare levels would also change for pedestrians, motorists, residents, and workers in the area. The proposed General Plan does not contain height limitations for development in this area; however, the development of high- rises/structures in this area are required to comply with FAR Part 77 height limitations and are subject to City discretionary review and approval and additional environmental review, as applicable. FAR Part 77 height restrictions are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.4 of this EIR.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measure will be adopted by the City Council in connection with the adoption of the Redevelopment Plan as measures that will apply to all development in the Project Area until the proposed General Plan is adopted:

MM 4.12.3 The Agency shall require that projects under the Redevelopment Plan be designed to be compatible with surrounding development in ways that contribute to the desired character of the City. This shall be accomplished through application of the City of Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines on project design and shall specifically address the compatibility of high-rise development in the Downtown Planning Area with consideration of those issues unique to high-rise development (visual intrusion, distant viewshed, shadowing of adjacent properties, glare, wind tunnel effects, emergency service, interruption of electronic transmissions, traffic and parking, noise and vibration).

Even with implementation of this mitigation measure, the introduction of high-rise structures associated with potential land uses under the proposed General Plan and potentially facilitated by the proposed Redevelopment Plan will substantially alter the skyline and visual character of the City of Rancho Cordova. In the event that high-rise structures are introduced in the Downtown Planning Area, implementation of the Redevelopment Plan will result in a **significant and unavoidable** change in visual character.

Daytime Glare and Nighttime Lighting

Impact 4.12.4 Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan may create new sources of daytime glare and nighttime lighting associated with redevelopment activities. This is considered a **less than significant** impact.

Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan would facilitate development, which may introduce new sources of daytime glare and nighttime lighting, which could intensify glare and illumination over existing levels. Lighting nuisances typically are categorized by the following:

- 1) *Glare* – Intense light that shines directly, or is reflected off of a surface, into a person's eyes; and
- 2) *Skyglow/Nighttime Illumination* – Artificial lighting from urbanized sources that alters the rural landscape and in sufficient quantity, causes a lighting of the nighttime sky and reduces visibility of stars and other astronomical features; and
- 3) *Spillover Lighting* – Artificial lighting that spills over onto adjacent properties, which could interrupt sleeping patterns or other nuisances to neighboring residents;

The main sources of daytime glare in the Redevelopment Area are from sunlight reflecting from existing structures and other reflective surfaces and windows.

Redevelopment activities would include various densities of commercial, office, recreation and other public uses containing structures and other potential sources of glare. Building materials (i.e., reflective glass and polished surfaces) are the most substantial sources of glare. The amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight, which is more acute at sunrise and sunset because the angle of the sun is lower during these times. Artificial light can also be a source of glare during the nighttime hours. Daytime glare impacts would not be substantial in the Redevelopment Project Area when compared with existing levels, as the area is generally built out with urbanized uses.

Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan would facilitate development, which may introduce new sources of nighttime lighting and illumination, which may increase levels over existing conditions in portions of the Project Area. The sources of new and increased nighttime lighting and illumination include, but are not limited to, new residential developments, street lighting, parking lot lights, and security related lighting for non-residential uses. Increased nighttime lighting and illumination could result in adverse affects to adjacent land uses through the “spilling over” of light into these areas and “sky glow” conditions, described above.

Daytime glare can be reduced or eliminated by using a roof overhangs, proper structural design and appropriate building materials and architectural coatings, as identified in the City's adopted Design Guidelines. Judicious use of shades can also block direct sunlight and other sources of daytime glare during times of peak glare while still admitting natural daylight from the sky and surrounding scenery and objects.

Subsequent projects within the Redevelopment Project Area are subject to the lighting and design requirements identified in the adopted City of Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines, which are intended to reduce visual impacts related to light and glare. The implementation of City Design Guidelines on development activities within the Project Area would ensure that this impact will be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

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4.12.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for visual resources includes the existing, proposed, approved and reasonably foreseeable developments in the city limits of Rancho Cordova and southeastern Sacramento. Development proposed in association with the Redevelopment Plan would result in substantial aesthetic changes in the area, increase daytime glare and nighttime lighting over existing levels, and contribute to the cumulative alteration of visual character in the vicinity of the Project Area.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Visual Resources Impacts

Impact 4.12.5 Implementation of the Redevelopment Plan would include residential, commercial, and other land uses, which would contribute to the alteration of the existing visual resources in the City of Rancho Cordova. This impact is **cumulatively considerable**.

The redevelopment activities associated with the Redevelopment Plan would further the goals and policies of the proposed Rancho Cordova General Plan. The proposed General Plan allows for high-rise structures in the Downtown Planning Area, which would alter the exiting visual character of the downtown area. This is a **cumulatively considerable** visual impact.

Mitigation Measures

Implementation of Mitigation Measure **MM 4.12.3** would assist in reducing the Redevelopment Plan's contribution to cumulative visual impacts. However, potential introduction of tall buildings in the City would still be considered a **cumulatively considerable** impact to visual resources and is considered a **significant and unavoidable** impact.

REFERENCES

County of Sacramento Department of Planning and Community Development. *American River Parkway Plan*. 1985

County of Sacramento Planning Department. *Sacramento County General Plan*. 1993