

4.7

AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

The Aesthetics section of the EIR describes existing visual and aesthetic resources for the project site and the region, and evaluates potential impacts of the proposed project with respect to urbanization of the area. In addition, the Davis General Plan goals and policies pertaining to aesthetics are described. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) describes the concept of aesthetic resources in terms of scenic vistas, scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway), the existing visual character or quality of the project site, and light and glare impacts. The following impact analysis is based on information drawn from the *City of Davis General Plan*¹ and the *Program EIR for the City of Davis General Plan Update and Program EIR for Establishment of a New Junior High School* (General Plan Update EIR).²

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following setting information provides an overview of the existing condition of visual resources in the Wildhorse Ranch project area, located within the northern Davis city limits approximately at the intersection of East Covell Boulevard and Monarch Lane (please refer to Figure 3-1, Regional Location Map and Figure 3-2, Project Location Map).

Regional Local Setting

The City of Davis is located 11 miles west of Sacramento and approximately 79 miles northeast of San Francisco. The Davis Planning Area consists of approximately 160 square miles, and is characterized by agricultural/open space landscapes to the north, west, and south; developed urban landscapes within the City limits; and open space lands, including the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area to the east. Views from agricultural fields are enclosed on the west by the Coast Range hills. Views to other directions are open to the horizon, although the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Sutter Buttes, and Mount Diablo can be seen on clear days. The UC Davis campus is located adjacent to the southwest corner of the City and occupies a total of 2,900 unincorporated acres. General Plan land uses within the planning area include Residential (low, medium, and high density); Neighborhood Retail; Community Retail; General Commercial; Business Park; Industrial; Public/Semi-Public; Parks and Recreation; Urban Agriculture Transition Areas; Agriculture; and Natural Habitat.

The Planning Area does not have officially designated scenic highways, corridors, vistas, or viewing areas (Davis General Plan Update EIR, p. 5A-1). Landscapes in and near the City are predominantly urban, with the core area of the community having more established neighborhoods and urban landscaping. Newer developed areas on the edges of the community are more noticeable from a distance due to the immaturity of the landscaping. The City's

Planning Area buffers the City on all sides by extending into areas that are dominated by agricultural uses, and views in this area are open and rural in nature.

Project Area Setting

The project site consists of approximately 25.79 acres of land within the City of Davis. The site consists of a 25.79-acre parcel identified by Yolo County Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 071-140-11. The current City of Davis General Plan (adopted May 2001) designation for the site is Agriculture.

The proposed site is located in the southeast corner of the Wildhorse subdivision. The east boundary of the site consists of an agricultural buffer, to the south is the Davis Manor neighborhood, and to west and north are established residential portions of the Wildhorse subdivision (See Figures 4.7-1, 4.7-2, and 4.7-3 for views looking across the project site). The residences directly west and north of the project site consist of 5,000 square foot lots with single-family residences.

The 135-foot City of Davis agricultural/habitat buffer establishes the eastern boundary of the project site. Land directly beyond the buffer consists of an existing farm road and open agricultural lands. The buffer currently is composed of a 35-foot greenbelt/buffer that includes a gravel pedestrian path/trail (See Figure 4.7-4), and a 100-foot fenced natural habitat area, including numerous trees, shrubs, and grasses of various species (See Figure 4.7-5). The trees within the buffer act as a visual barrier reducing views of the Sierra Nevada Foothills, which may be seen through small breaks in the trees on a clear day, from the residences to the west. In addition, vehicles traveling east on East Covell Boulevard would be able to see the Sierra Nevada Foothills and open agricultural lands after passing the site and on a clear day.

**Figure 4.7-1
View Looking East across the Project Site**



Figure 4.7-2
View Looking South across the Project Site



Figure 4.7-3
View Looking North across the Project Site



**Figure 4.7-4
35-Foot Greenbelt/Buffer**



**Figure 4.7-5
100-Foot Greenbelt/Buffer (Fenced Habitat Area)**



In addition, the proposed project site includes a 50-foot greenstreet corridor along East Covell Boulevard. The green street corridor includes a row of walnut trees and various shrubs, which act as a visual barrier, reducing the views looking across the site from the south to the north and northeast (See Figure 4.7-6).

Figure 4.7-6
View Looking Northeast across East Covell Boulevard



Unique Visual Features

The project site slopes gently to the north and is characterized by open, productive and non-productive agricultural land consisting of grasses and ruderal vegetation. Several trees are located on the project site leading up to the on-site residence. The residence and related horse boarding buildings are located in the mid-northern portion of the site.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

Specific federal or State regulations do not directly pertain to the visual quality of an area.

Local Regulations

The following applicable goals and policies related to aesthetics are taken from the Urban Design and Neighborhood Preservation Element of the *City of Davis General Plan Update*.

- Goal UD 1 Encourage community design throughout the City that helps to build community, encourage human interaction, and support non-automobile transportation.
- Policy UD 1.1 Promote urban/community design which is human-scaled, comfortable, safe, and conducive to pedestrian use.
- Goal UD 2 Maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment and manage a sustainable community forest to optimize environmental, aesthetic, social, and economic benefits.
- Policy UD 2.1 Preserve and protect scenic resources and elements in and around Davis, including natural habitat and scenery and resources reflective of place and history.
- Policy UD 2.2 Maintain and increase the amount of greenery, especially street trees, in Davis, both for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitat, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.
- Policy UD 2.3 Require an architectural “fit” with Davis’ existing scale for new development projects.
- Policy UD 2.4 Create affordable and multi-family residential areas that include innovative designs and on-site open space amenities that are linked with public bicycle/pedestrian ways, neighborhood centers, and transit stops.
- Policy UD 2.5 Ensure attractive functional signs.
- Goal UD 3 Use good design as a means to promote human safety.
- Policy UD 3.2 Provide exterior lighting that enhances safety and night use in public spaces, but minimizes impacts on surrounding land uses.
- Goal UD 4 Create an urban design framework that would strengthen the physical form of the city.
- Policy UD 4.1 Develop an urban design framework plan to consolidate and clarify the relevant design concepts in this chapter and other chapters to promote a positive and memorable image for the city and to

reinforce the functional systems of the city such as land use, circulation, and open space.

Goal UD 5 Create and enforce clear and reasonable design guidelines that operationalize the relevant goals, policies, and actions of this general plan.

Policy UD 5.1 Develop and implement new design guidelines, which are reviewed periodically.

Goal UD 6 Strengthen the city's neighborhoods to retain desirable characteristics while allowing for change and evolution, promoting public and private investments, and encouraging citizen involvement in neighborhood planning.

Policy UD 6.1 Recognize the existence of individual neighborhoods with general boundaries and facilitate the development of neighborhood strategies in partnership with residents and property owners. The strategies should recognize the unique characteristics of the individual neighborhood and the potential for change, within the context of a well-planned city. The strategies should be directed toward solving unique neighborhood problems and implementing neighborhood priorities and enhancing livability.

Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance

The City enacted the Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance in 1998. The ordinance, commonly referred to as the City's "Dark Sky Ordinance," provides standards for outdoor lighting in an effort to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass caused by inappropriate or misaligned light fixtures, while improving nighttime public safety, utility, security, and preserving the night sky as a natural resource and thus facilitating people's enjoyment of stargazing. This ordinance does not apply to interior lighting, including lighting at greenhouse facilities. Single-family and duplex properties are exempted.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Standards of Significance

An impact to the aesthetic values of the proposed project area would be considered significant if any of the following conditions would potentially result from implementation of the proposed project:

- Degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and surroundings;

- Creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area;
- Substantially damage trees, rocks, and outcroppings and historic buildings within a state scenic highway; or
- Individual residents with a current open vista of open space would have this view completely obstructed by placement of structures in the immediate foreground.

Method of Analysis

The section below gives full consideration to the development of the project site and acknowledges the physical changes to the existing setting. Impacts to the existing environment of the project site are to be determined by the contrast between the site's visual setting before and after proposed development. In this analysis, emphasis has been placed on the transformation of the existing rural setting into a landscape characterized by proposed surface grading and residential buildout. Although few standards exist to singularly define the various individual perceptions of aesthetic value from person to person, the degree of visual change can be measured and described in a reasonably objective manner in terms of visibility and visual contrast, dominance, and magnitude. Current residents adjacent to the project site and travelers along Covell Boulevard would be considered sensitive to the visual and aesthetic alteration of the Wildhorse Ranch area.

Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.7-1 Impacts related to altering the existing character of the project site and obstructing views from existing homes.

The proposed project involves the development of an approximately 25.79 acre residential community. The project involves the development of up to 191 residential units, including the following mix of residential uses and densities:

- 73 detached single-family residences;
- 78 two- to three-story attached single-family units (including 36 middle-income units) on 11.95 acres; and
- 1.92 acres of attached affordable housing for a maximum of 40 units at 21 dwelling units per acre (du/ac).

The project site currently has the appearance of being rural in nature, which is consistent with the current Agriculture General Plan land use designation for the project site. Implementation of the proposed project would replace the rural horse ranch character of the project site with an urban residential setting. The change of the site from a rural to urban environment would constitute a permanent alteration of the existing visual character, impacting surrounding properties.

Existing Views from Residences to the West

The applicant has proposed a 20-foot land dedication to each residential property adjacent to the west and northwest boundary of the site, which would serve to increase the privacy and open area between the two subdivisions. Beyond the 20-foot dedication, the project includes development of a main access roadway and open space area where trees would be planted in an orchard style, providing additional buffer space to the existing neighborhood and a passive open space area (see Figure 4.7-7). Currently, existing residences along Caravaggio Drive adjacent to the project site's western and northwestern boundary are afforded partial views through the project site of the agricultural lands to the east and Sierra Foothills further beyond. These views are partial because the large trees that line the eastern edge of the Davis Greenbelt/Ag buffer, which is immediately east of the project site, block full visibility.

The project includes up to 78 two- to three-story attached townhomes located throughout the development, which would partially impede any existing views to the east afforded to current residents along the project's western and northwestern boundary (see Figure 4.7-8). However, the project would provide limited view corridors for existing residences to the west. The view corridors would consist of roadways which traverse the site in an east-west direction, paseos, and the greenbelt extension. It should be noted that although the proposed project includes the conversion of the project site from an agricultural setting to an urban setting, the project does include the dedication of an additional 65 feet to the existing Davis agricultural/habitat buffer, resulting in a total buffer width of 200 feet.

Existing Views from the South

Residences located south of the project site in the Mace Ranch development currently do not have open views of the project site. As illustrated in Figure 4.7-6 above, views of the site are currently impeded by the line of trees located along the north edge of East Covell Boulevard, at the southern boundary of the project site. In addition, because of the line of trees, vehicles driving east on East Covell Boulevard currently do not have views through the project site of the agricultural lands and Sierras to the east.

Conclusion

The project would result in the change in character of the project site from an agricultural horse ranch setting to an urban setting. Although the character of the project site would be permanently altered, the project would include a central greenbelt, which would connect to the existing Wildhorse Subdivision greenbelt. The project also includes the dedication of 1) an additional 65 feet to the existing Davis agricultural/habitat buffer, resulting in a total buffer width of 200 feet; 2) an additional 20 feet of backyard area to the homes along the western and northwestern boundary of the project site; and 3) an open space area beyond the 20-foot dedication. The landscaping and open space areas of the project would increase the aesthetic quality of the project, and would thereby reduce the impacts the project would have on the conversion of the site from an agricultural setting to an urban setting.

**Figure 4.7-7
Open Space**



**Figure 4.7-8
Proposed Two- and Three-Story Locations**



However, because the proposed Wildhorse Ranch project would permanently alter the character of the project site and block significant views to the east of the site, which are currently afforded to some of the existing residents west of the project site, a **significant** aesthetic impact would occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Development of the site would result in an irreversible change in the character from agricultural/horse ranch to urban development and would obstruct existing views of Sierra Foothills to the east afforded to residents west of the project boundaries. Because feasible mitigation measures are not available, this impact would be considered *significant and unavoidable*.

4.7-2 Impacts related to light and glare.

The project site consists predominantly of agricultural land, a single residence and associated horse boarding and breeding structures; therefore, very little light or glare is currently emitted from the structures on the project site. The development of residential units would generate new sources of light and glare such as residential lighting, streetlights, and lighting associated with the greenbelt amenity. While the types of lighting and their specific locations are not specified, the proposed project would increase the amount of light and glare. In order to reduce impacts from light and glare, as well as increase neighborhood cohesion, the applicant has proposed the dedication of an additional 20 feet to each property owner adjacent to the north and west boundary of the project. In addition, the project includes an orchard and open space area between the residences to the west and proposed residences. The greenbelt dedication and open space area would help to reduce light and glare impacts resulting from the project. In addition, the exterior lighting for the project would be appropriately shielded and would therefore be consistent with General Plan Policy UD 3.2, Action c. However, without details regarding proper shielding and placement of all on-site lighting, a **significant** impact could occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Implementation of the following mitigation measure would reduce the above impact to a *less-than-significant* level.

4.7-2(a) *Prior to issuance of the first building permit, the developer shall submit a street lighting plan for review and approval by the City Engineer. Street lightning shall be limited to reduced height low-profile fixtures. The Plan shall comply with Chapter 6 of the Davis Municipal Code- Article VIII: Outdoor Lighting Control.*

4.7-2(b) *Prior to the issuance of building permits, the developer shall submit a lighting plan for the review and approval of the Chief Building Official of the City of Davis. The lighting plan shall include shielding on all light fixtures and shall address-limiting light trespass and glare through the use of shielding and directional lighting methods, including but not limited to,*

fixture location and height. The Plan shall comply with Chapter 6 of the Davis Municipal Code- Article VIII: Outdoor Lighting Control.

4.7-3 Impacts to scenic resources.

The project site is not designated as a scenic resource. Additionally, several trees exist on-site; however, rock outcroppings, historic buildings or State scenic highways are not in the project vicinity. Development of the site would require removal of trees, see section 4.6, Biological Resources, for further detail regarding impacts to on-site trees. Therefore, as the site is not designated as a scenic resource or near the vicinity of a scenic highway a *less-than-significant* impact would occur to scenic resources.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.7-4 Long-term impacts to the visual character of the region from the proposed project in combination with existing and future developments in the Davis area.

The proposed project would contribute to the cumulative change in visual character of an agricultural area within the City of Davis. The properties in the immediate vicinity of the project site are currently developed for residential uses with the exception of the land east of the project site, which is used for agricultural purposes. Therefore, in terms of the change to the visual character of the project area, development on the project site would be typical of what currently exists north, west, and south of the project site. Should development be allowed, the character of the area would change from flat fields and roadways to residences with trees and a greenbelt area. Development in the City, in addition to the development on the project site, would contribute to a change in the visual character of the area.

The Davis General Plan designates the project site as Agriculture. Conversion of agricultural land to residential development would result in permanent viewshed changes for properties to the west and would be considered significant and unavoidable. Although the conversion of rural lands is anticipated in the General Plan, the impact is still considered significant. Therefore, the conversion of the project site, in addition to other lands in the project area, from a rural to an urban setting would be considered *significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Because feasible mitigation measures are not available, this impact would be considered *significant and unavoidable*.

Endnotes

¹ City of Davis, *City of Davis General Plan*, May 2001.

² City of Davis, *Program EIR for the City of Davis General Plan Update and Project EIR for Establishment of a New Junior High School*, January 2000.