
4.4 VISUAL RESOURCES

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4.4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the existing visual characteristics of the Specific Plan area and addresses potential changes in the visual quality of the area and the effects of the project on nearby sensitive receptors. The potential for increases in light and glare created by the Proposed Project is also evaluated.

Information contained in this section is based on a review of existing documentation, including the Vacaville General Plan, Volume One: Plan Policies (Adopted August 1990; Amended November 1999), and a site visit conducted in July 2003.

Comments received in response to the NOP (see Appendix B) raised concerns associated with altering existing views and changes in the visual character in and adjacent to the Specific Plan area.

4.4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Specific Plan area consists of approximately 2,354-acres located in the southwest corner of the City of Vacaville. Separated by I-80 from the northern portion of Lagoon Valley, Lower Lagoon Valley represents a transition zone between the City of Vacaville and the City of Fairfield to the south. The main access to the area is by way of the Lagoon Valley Road/Cherry Glen interchange with I-80. Secondary access is by the Peña Adobe Road interchange and by Lyons Road, a frontage road to I-80 that connects Lower Lagoon Valley to Fairfield.

Although Lower Lagoon Valley is characterized as open or undeveloped in character, portions of the valley adjacent to I-80 include limited development. The Hines Nursery occupies 168 acres in the eastern portion of the valley. Existing agricultural or vacant land uses dominate the majority of the flat valley floor, as well as the sloping hills framing the valley.

The Specific Plan area has two main topographic characteristics: the fairly flat valley floor which is slightly tilted to the northeast and the rolling hills that frame the eastern and southern edges of Lower Lagoon Valley, as well as the northern and western edges of Upper Lagoon Valley. Elevations vary from about 210 feet on the valley floor to approximately 980 feet along the eastern ridgeline of the City's open space. The flat area of the valley is predominantly used for grazing or vacant land purposes, with the exception of the Hines Nursery and the Lagoon Valley Regional Park. The hilly areas around the valley floor are also grassland with scattered mature trees. Some isolated wetland areas are located near Lagoon Lake. Drainage ditches, lined with riparian vegetation such as cottonwoods and cattails, extend through the middle of the valley draining to the lake and to Laguna Creek at the north end of the planning area. Numerous drainage ways and seasonal streams extend from the hills to the valley floor.

Lagoon Valley Regional Park occupies approximately 388-acres in the north end of the Specific Plan area. Lagoon Valley Lake accounts for approximately 106 acres of the overall park.

Views and vistas are available from I-80 into Lower Lagoon Valley and from parts of the Valley floor and hill areas to Upper Lagoon Valley to the north and west.

Views

Photographs from different viewpoints were taken during a site visit in July 2003. The locations of photographs appearing in this section are presented in Figure 4.4-1, Viewpoint Location Map.

Views to the Specific Plan Area

Long range views of the Specific Plan area are visible from I-80, Lagoon Valley Road, Rivera Road and Nelson Road, Lagoon Valley Regional Park, and from residences and businesses located northwest of the plan area. In general, medium-range views from all directions into the plan area are of expansive grassland areas. Long-range views include the rolling hillsides to the east and the Vaca Mountain range to the west. Telecommunications antennae are visible at the top of the highest peaks in the background. Views of the site from the south and east are blocked by the Los Puntos mountain range to the east and south the Vaca Mountain range to the west. Views of the plan area include large areas of grasslands, trees, and rolling hillsides (see Figures 4.4-2 through 4.4-9). The Specific Plan area is not visible from any designated State scenic highways.

Views from the Specific Plan Area

Views from the Specific Plan area include I-80 to the northwest, rolling hills across I-80 to the north, and rolling hillsides to the east and south, and southwest of the plan area. A small ranch is visible off Cherry Glen Road, north of I-80. The area surrounding the specific plan area is largely undeveloped.

Views from the Lagoon Valley Road/Rivera Road intersection facing southeast consist primarily of undeveloped grasslands, the Hines Nursery facility, and rolling hills – some topped with telecommunications antennae, in the background (see Figure 4.4-2A). Wooden electrical poles are visible along Rivera Road and Lagoon Valley Road. I-80, a small auto yard, and portions of some residential structures are visible to the northeast of the Lagoon Valley Road/Rivera Road intersection (see Figure 4.4-2B). Looking southward across Lagoon Valley Lake from an elevated slope shows the lake, some portions of I-80, some small structures, the relatively flat grasslands that characterize a majority of the plan area, and rolling hills in the background (see Figure 4.4-3C). The most prominent visual feature is I-80 and the surrounding hillsides.

Looking from the northern boundary to the southern boundary, the existing terrain includes rolling grasslands and a mix of trees on the valley floor with the hillsides rising out of the valley floor along the southwest and eastern perimeter of the site. Wooden electrical and telecommunication poles and wire fencing are visible, as is the Hines Nursery facility and other structures (see Figures 4.4-7 and 4.4-8).

Generally, the terrain within the project site is primarily flat with some areas of gradual rolling grasslands with hillsides rising out of the valley floor at the south, east, and west perimeters of the site where the valley floor meets the surrounding hillsides (see Figures 4.4-4 through 4.4-9).

Existing On-Site Visual Resources

Structures and visual features within the Specific Plan area include the Hines Nursery, the Lagoon Valley Regional Park, the Ranchotel and equestrian facility along with a few small commercial establishments and residences. The existing visual resources present in the plan area, and their prominent characteristics, are described below. Figures 4.4-2 through 4.4-9 illustrate some of these existing resources. The most prominent visual resources are described below.

Hines Nursery

The Hines Nursery is a prominent visual feature within the Specific Plan area (see Figure 4.4-7K). The nursery includes large fields containing a variety of plants. A dark colored landscape fabric shelters a portion of the fields during the hot summer months. A few small buildings, including a residence are also present. The residence is a non-descript single-story structure painted white. Flower beds surround the front of the house. The fields are enclosed with wire fencing.

Lagoon Valley Regional Park

The Lagoon Valley Regional Park is located north of Lagoon Valley Road, in the northern portion of the Specific Plan area. Lagoon Lake is located in the southern portion of the park, just north of Lagoon Valley Road. The park includes small, paved parking lots, a few small structures that include restroom facilities, a variety of trees, and rolling hillsides to the east. In the summer months the grass covered hillsides and flat grassy areas throughout the park are primarily brown (see Figure 4.4-9O). There are a few areas that are irrigated and stay green year round. During the spring and into the early summer the hillsides are green and appear very lush. A road provides access throughout the park and, in some areas, is lined with trees.

Ranchotel

The Ranchotel is located along Rivera Road and is visible from I-80. The structure is set back from Rivera Road is partially shielded by large, mature trees and mature landscaping and shrubs. A low rock wall fence topped with a wooden split rail fence identifies the boundaries of the property. The building is single story with a distinctive ivy covered trellis in the front.

4.4.3 REGULATORY SETTING

Federal and State

There are no specific federal or state regulations pertaining to visual resources.

Local**City of Vacaville****General Plan**

Consistency of the Proposed Project with relevant City of Vacaville General Plan goals and policies is presented in Appendix C. As shown in Appendix C, the Proposed Project is consistent with applicable visual resource goals and policies.

4.4.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**Method of Analysis**

A description of the Specific Plan area was constructed from site visits, aerial photographs, site photographs, and topographic maps. The City of Vacaville General Plan, as well as other applicable planning documents, was reviewed to determine what visual elements have been deemed valuable by the community. The analysis focuses on the manner in which development could alter the visual elements or features that exist in or near the Proposed Project area.

The positive or negative value attached to changes in visual character is largely subjective. This EIR does not seek to assign a judgment of “good” or “bad” change; rather, it identifies any substantive change as significant.

Standards of Significance

The CEQA Guidelines state that significant effects on the environment include substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effects, as well as conflicts with adopted environmental plans and goals of the community.

For the purpose of this EIR, impacts to visual resources are considered significant if the Proposed Project would:

- substantially alter a scenic vista;
- substantially damage any scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway;
- substantially alter the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Effects Determined to Have No Impact

The following discussion describes impacts that would not occur as a result of the Proposed Project.

According to the California State Scenic Highway Program, this stretch of I-80 is not designated a State scenic highway. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Project would not result in altering scenic resources within an area designated as a State scenic highway and there would be no impact.

Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.4-1 Implementation of the Proposed Project would alter scenic vistas and the visual character of scenic resources.

The Specific Plan area is visible to travelers on I-80. Presently, approximately 50,000 vehicles per day travel along this section of I-80, adjacent to the plan area. By 2020 this number could exceed 100,000 vehicles. Therefore, most people viewing the Specific Plan area do so from I-80.

It is estimated that vehicles traveling westbound on I-80 have a view of the Specific Plan area for approximately 30 to 40 seconds. Vehicles traveling eastbound can view the plan area for slightly longer than 40 seconds (assuming vehicles are traveling the speed limit of 65 miles per hour).

The project proposes to construct a landscaped berm along the western edge of proposed residential (Village 1) and golf course uses adjacent to I-80, shown in Figure 4.4-10. The proposed golf course would 'wrap' Village 1 on three sides (west, east, and south). Village 1 would be located approximately 1,700 feet east of I-80 at the closest point. The berm would be located adjacent to the proposed golf course. The berm would occupy approximately 56 acres and would be 112-feet wide, and would be approximately 35 to 50 feet at its highest point. The berm would be designed to connect with the existing topography and would be contoured to resemble an extension of the existing natural land form. The berm would be planted with native materials and trees that include a high canopy to allow views of the surrounding hills to the east and south. The berm would also be located to screen views of the residences and to hide a small golf course maintenance area. As shown on figure 4.4-10, a 750-foot-wide view corridor would be maintained for travelers eastbound on I-80. The berm would help to limit short and middle range views of the plan area, but buildings would likely be visible in longer range views of the valley along with roadways and buildings on the slight rise out of the valley at the base of the hills. Undeveloped open space areas would surround the Specific Plan on the south, east, and southwest.

Views from westbound I-80 would include the berm as well as the potential to see some residences in mostly Villages II and III.

In addition to the berm, a landscape corridor would be developed between I-80 and Rivera Road adjacent to the proposed business village. The landscape corridor would be 112 feet wide along the I-80 frontage of the Business Village and would include intermittent trees, planted in an "orchard" style, some with a high canopy, with smaller trees lining the parking areas and roadways. Filtered views of the hills in the background would be maintained through the tree canopy. Proposed view corridors are shown in Figure 4.4-10. Buildings would be required to be set back from the freeway a minimum of 250 feet. The landscape corridor would help to preserve views from the freeway to the surrounding hills, and to maintain the visual image of the valley along the freeway edge. The proposed business village would be located adjacent to I-80 and would not be shielded by the berm. As shown in Figure 4.4-11a and 4.4-11b, the visual simulation shows the proposed landscape berm from I-80 with views of the

hills in the background. However, because of the major view corridor from I-80 into Lower Lagoon Valley and from parts of the valley floor and hill areas to Upper Lagoon Valley, there would be height restrictions on the buildings in the business village. In general, buildings would be limited to two and three stories tall and would not exceed 60 feet in height, measured from the average first floor elevation. This includes 42 feet to the top of the structural roof and 15 feet for mechanical equipment or roof treatment. Taller buildings would be sited to areas where they would be visually buffered by the hillside backdrop. The maximum height for buildings within 100 feet of residential property would be 35 feet.

Building design and materials in the business village would be of high quality and of similar, compatible design and materials to create a strong visual relationship among buildings. No highly reflective finishes would be used on surfaces other than hardware. Prefabricated metal buildings would not be allowed. Code-required elements such as parapet walls and screen walls would be treated as an integral part of the architecture. Screening would be provided for both ground- and roof-mounted equipment. Building elevations facing I-80, major streets, and adjacent properties would be designed to minimize the appearance of a rear elevation. Loading doors and other service areas would be screened by architectural and landscape elements. Architectural designs would be reviewed by the City prior to the issuance of building permits.

The Lower Lagoon Valley Specific Plan includes policies to preserve the scenic quality of the valley with open space and view corridors to the hills along with the establishment of a permanent view corridor to protect views of Lagoon Valley Lake and the hills. Specifically, the Specific Plan would not allow for alterations within the Lagoon Valley Regional Park, except in conformance with an adopted Park Master Plan. There would be no change to Lagoon Valley Lake as a part of the Proposed Project. Figures 4.4-12a and 4.4-12b present the view of the proposed residential development from Lower Lagoon Regional Park. Finally, development of urban uses would not be permitted on hillside open space areas. The Specific Plan also calls for a primary view corridor for travelers eastbound on I-80 over the berm to Lagoon Valley Regional park and Lagoon Lake to the hills in the background.¹ Smaller view corridors are also proposed from I-80 over the proposed business village to views of the hills in the background. Buildings are to be limited in location and height in order to provide a view of a substantial portion of the rolling hills and ridgelines lying to the east.² Undergrounding of utilities along the I-80 frontage would also aid in enhancing this view corridor.

Overall, future residential and commercial development within the Specific Plan area would alter the existing, unobstructed scenic vista of the Lower Lagoon Valley that travelers along I-80 currently see. A view corridor would be maintained for eastbound travelers; however, even with the proposed view corridor, the unobstructed view of the valley would be permanently changed due to the project. Existing views for both east and westbound travelers on I-80 would no longer include the open vistas of Lower Lagoon Valley. Therefore, because the project would result in a permanent change to the existing scenic vista, this is considered a ***significant impact***.

Mitigation Measure

Although the Specific Plan includes measures to maintain attractive views, there are no feasible mitigation measures available to mitigate the alteration of a scenic vista, or the visual character of a scenic resource; therefore, the impact remains *significant and unavoidable*.

4.4-1 *None available.*

4.4-2 Implementation of the Proposed Project would alter the existing visual character of the Lower Lagoon Valley.

Implementation of the Proposed Project would introduce approximately 1,325 homes, an eighteen-hole golf course, open space, neighborhood commercial uses, and a business village in an area that is essentially undeveloped. A total of 879 acres would be developed leaving the 388-acre Lagoon Valley Regional Park and 1,066 acres of undeveloped open space.

The visual character of the Specific Plan area is dominated by open, rolling grasslands with areas of native trees and other vegetation surrounded by rolling hills. The plan area is visible from I-80 and a variety of short-and long-range viewpoints. Existing development within the Specific Plan area includes the Hine's Nursery, a cluster of small commercial businesses, the 388-acre Lagoon Valley Regional Park, and a few rural residences. Development of the Proposed Project would substantially and permanently alter the existing visual character of the project site by introducing developed uses into an area that is essentially undeveloped.

The Proposed Project would convert approximately 826 acres of the approximately 2,354-acre Specific Plan area into urban uses, including parks. Of the 826 acres slated for development, approximately 213 acres would be developed as a golf course. The Specific Plan area also includes the 388-acre Lagoon Valley Regional Park. A total of 1,066 acres would remain as open space/agricultural hillside areas. Therefore, approximately 70 percent of the Specific Plan area would be park, open space, agricultural hillside or golf course. However, conversion of the privately-owned valley floor from essentially an undeveloped area, with scattered residential and commercial uses, to a more urban developed environment would result in changes to the natural topography and natural landscaping.

As shown in Figure 4.4-12b, views of the Specific Plan area would be visible the hillside and hiking trails within Lagoon Valley Regional Park. The plan area is currently within water pressure zones 2 and 3 and would require the development of additional water storage tanks and related infrastructure which would be visible. Zones 2 and 3 are located near the southern boundaries of the project site. The Zone 2 system would consist of a looped system of 12- to 18-inch main lines connecting the Butcher Reservoirs to a new proposed 2.8 million-gallon (mg) water tank near the southwest corner of the residential development at an elevation of approximately 395 feet (see Figure 3-5 in Chapter 3, Project Description). The water tank would be approximately 30 feet high and 100 feet in diameter and partially buried as typically required by the City.

Three options for the Zone 3 area are currently being considered. A 0.25 mg water tank, which would be smaller in size than the tank being proposed for Zone 2, could be constructed in an open space area the project applicant is dedicating to the City at the south end of the site between Village I and Village II. As an alternative to the additional tank, a pneumatic booster pump could be installed. The pneumatic booster pump would be located within the dedicated open space between Village II and Village III. The third alternative would be to construct one water tank at the higher elevation to serve the entire development. Construction of the landscaped berm along I-80 would serve as a visual buffer from some portion of I-80 to these water tanks, or possible pneumatic booster pump station. However, the water tanks or pump station would still likely be seen from various other locations both on- and off-site.

Grading would also be required within the hillside areas to repair slide hazard areas. The Specific Plan includes policies requiring that grading within the hillside areas be finished in a

naturalized or contoured format that would result in a naturalized appearance to hillside open space area. The golf course would include grading in portions of existing hillsides and would be designed to incorporate landscape features as part of golf course design.

The Proposed Project would require the undergrounding of all electrical lines which would help to reduce the visual impact of the project. In addition, General Plan policy 2.2-G9 requires that scenic features and view corridors to the hills and other significant natural areas be preserved. Policy 8.2-G1 requires that natural environments be preserved in recognition of their importance as visual amenities. The Lower Lagoon Valley Specific Plan also includes specific policies that address the need to preserve the scenic quality of the valley with areas of open space and views of the surrounding hills. These Specific Plan policies along with the Lower Lagoon Valley Design Guidelines help minimize the visual impacts associated with the project. However, the change in visual character associated with the project would remain a **significant impact**.

Mitigation Measure

Although the Specific Plan includes measures to maintain an attractive view, there are no feasible mitigation measures available to mitigate the alteration of the existing visual character of Lower Lagoon Valley; therefore, the impact remains *significant and unavoidable*.

4.4-2 *None available.*

4.4-3 The Proposed Project would create new sources of light which could adversely affect nighttime views of the Specific Plan area.

The introduction of artificial light into a rural area contributes to the change in that area's character. Development of the Proposed Project would result in light from urban development such as residences and commercial uses, as well as recreational facilities, streetlights, and vehicles, thus increasing the ambient nighttime illumination level and resulting in a substantial change in the amount of light generated in the plan area. This would also alter nighttime views to the site, which are currently uninterrupted by light pollution from the area and would become views of a developed, lit environment.

A majority of the plan area is currently undeveloped and contains very few light sources (primarily a few residences and commercial facilities (e.g., Hines Nursery). Development of the Proposed Project would result in a substantial change in the amount of light generated on the site and would alter nighttime views of the site. There would be light from residences, businesses, streetlights, and vehicles, all which would increase the ambient nighttime illumination level. With development of the Proposed Project, views of the Specific Plan area that are currently uninterrupted by light pollution from the site would change to views of a developed, lit environment. The berm along I-80 would help to shield portions of the golf course and Village 1. However, light from the entire project as well as the business village would contribute to an increase in night lighting over existing conditions.

The best way to reduce impacts associated with lights is to use light fixtures that are screened to direct light into specific areas and prevent light from spilling over into areas where it is not required.

Glare occurs when light reflects off of pavement, vehicles and building materials such as reflective glass and polished surfaces. During daylight hours, the amount of existing glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight. At night, artificial light can create glare.

Glare can be distracting and interfere with vision, which could be considered a safety hazard for motorists. Particularly in commercial and business/professional areas, windows comprise a large proportion of building surfaces, creating a potential for glare that would increase with the use of reflective coatings and reflective building materials. The problem is most noticeable with large buildings that have reflective surfaces. Residential buildings are not generally considered sources of substantial glare. Daytime glare could result from the proposed business village uses adjacent to I-80. Although buildings associated with the business village uses would be no taller than 2 to 3 stories there is the potential for glare to occur.

The increase in nighttime lighting as well as the potential for lights to disturb residents within the project site and the potential for glare to occur would be considered a ***potentially significant impact***.

Mitigation Measure

Implementation of the following mitigation measures would reduce impacts associated with glare and light disturbance to residents to a less-than-significant level. However, impacts associated with the increase in night lighting and changes in the existing night environment would be *significant and unavoidable*.

- 4.4-3 (a) *The use of reflective materials shall be limited and when feasible, exterior-building surfaces in the business village shall include the installation of low-glare materials.*
- (b) *Any outdoor incandescent lighting fixture or more than 160 watts shall be constructed so that no more than 10 percent of the light rays from the fixture shall be emitted at angles above the horizontal plane.*
- (c) *Streetlights with any high-intensity discharge lamp, including, but not limited to, mercury, metal halide and high-pressure sodium lamps, are prohibited on private roads.*
- (d) *Streetlights shall use low-pressure sodium lamps, so that no light rays are emitted from the fixture at angles above the horizontal plan. Streetlights shall use "cut off" fixtures.*
- (e) *Outdoor metal halide and high-pressure sodium lighting shall be permitted only for the purpose of illuminating recreational facilities and all figures shall be fully shielded.*
- (f) *Outdoor lighting with any mercury vapor, quartz-halogen or fluorescent fixture is prohibited. Except as permitted by Mitigation Measure 4.4-3(e), outdoor lighting with any high-intensity discharge lamp, including but not limited to, mercury vapor, metal halide or high-pressure sodium lamp, is prohibited.*

ENDNOTES

1. Lower Lagoon Valley Specific Plan, Figure 13: Primary Views.
2. Lagoon Valley Design Guidelines, An Amendment to the Policy Plan for Lagoon Valley, p. 16, Adopted March 1992.