3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

This section examines the potential for the proposed Project to create aesthetic and visual impacts as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as well as by the City’s regulations, policies, and design guidelines that are used to strengthen and protect its visual quality.

Adopted City General Plan policies require that the potential development and design of the proposed East Cherry Avenue Specific Plan (Project) must consider potential loss of open space, aesthetic impacts, and remain compatible with nearby visual resources. Much of the Project site is in an area of agriculture, and all of it is adjacent to residential and mixed-use development. The site contains scenic resources, including open undeveloped agricultural land and scenic\(^1\) views of the Santa Lucia Mountains to the east and southeast. Illustrations of the site and the surrounding visual context are provided later in this section.

3.1.1 Environmental Setting

3.1.1.1 Regional Visual Character

The Project site is located in the southwestern portion of the City adjacent to an urban residential area. The westernmost portion of the site is as close as 570 feet from U.S. Highway 101. The City is the southernmost portion of a continuous urban area within the County of San Luis Obispo made up of the nearby communities of Grover Beach, Oceano, Pismo Beach, and Shell Beach, known collectively as the Five Cities. Being adjacent to an arterial roadway and located on generally level ground, the Project site can easily be seen

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\(^1\) As identified by Policy C/OS1-1.1 of the General Plan, a scenic resources may refer to agricultural land, open space, hillsides, ridgelines, woodlands, wetlands, and other important resources identified by this policy.
from both public viewsheds (roadways), such as East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way, and private residences such as those looking over the Project site from the hillside mesa to the south along Trinity Avenue. Vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists traveling along Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue experience the highest exposure to public views of the site. Passing views from the U.S. Highway 101 northbound corridor exist but the site is not visible from southbound lanes due to topography, mature highway landscaping, and highway/bridge infrastructure.

The southeast portion of the City is characterized by rural residential development and cultivated agriculture uses, while more urban development envelops the northern, western, and central portions of the City. The Project site is a part of a fragmented chain of agriculturally-oriented lands in the southeastern portion of the City. The hillside adjacent to the southeastern boundary of the site provides an overlook of the City to the north, transitioning to mid- and long-range hillsides and mountain views to the east and south. Areas to the east and south of the site just beyond the City’s limits consists of minimally developed land, while areas to the north and west have been largely developed, particularly along the coastal region.

3.1.1.2 Visual Character of the Project Site and Surroundings

The Project site is situated within the southern portion of the City east of, and adjacent to, the southeast corner of Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue. The site is located on level ground bordered to the south by the foot of a north-facing hillside vegetated by oak trees and native shrubs. This landscape is framed to the west by mid-range views of the Santa Lucia Mountain Range. Adjacent lands are mainly developed with residential and mixed uses; the Project site contrasts with adjacent residential uses as undeveloped land that includes agricultural production. Along Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue, the flat undeveloped Subarea 1 and agricultural field Subarea 2 are fully visible. Along East Cherry Avenue, the full north facing oak woodland hillside with views of the St. Barnabas’ Episcopal Church and Trinity Avenue homes are visible. The under-developed Subarea 3, with remnant structures (e.g., a small storage
structure, a mobile home, and storage for a few boats) is partially hidden behind a thick tree line along its northern, southern, and partially along its western boundaries, as well as the wooden fences of adjacent residences along its eastern boundary.

Traffic Way

The Project site is bordered to the west by Traffic Way. Traffic Way is a north-south oriented three-lane road (one lane in each direction with a shared center turn lane) with marked bicycle lanes and street parking on both sides of the road. In total, the width of Traffic Way is approximately 60 feet. This roadway serves as the entry to the City and as a primary southern collection street and is designated as Highway-Arterial in the City’s Circulation Element. At its southernmost terminus, the roadway conveys traffic exiting northbound from U.S. Highway 101, and serves as a gateway to the City of Arroyo Grande, which leads directly to the business and residential neighborhood collector roads transected by Traffic Way. The Project site is highly visible from this location and can be viewed by motorists exiting the U.S. Highway 101 as well as those traveling northbound along the highway.

Adjacent to the southwest border of the Project site along Traffic Way is the Vagabond Mobile Home Park. The 3.75-acre mobile home park consists of 35 unit spaces for small mobile homes and recreational vehicle (RV) parking. The mobile home park is located elevated above the Project site to the southwest, affording views to the Project area as well as scenic views of the Santa Lucia Range across the Project site.

East Cherry Avenue

East Cherry Avenue is an approximately 20-foot wide, east-west running two-lane street that provides access to and from residential suburbs, as well as the Project site. On the north side of the street are small town businesses, the Five Cities Swim School, and single-family residences. The single-family residential lots located on the north side of East Cherry Avenue range between 6,000 square feet (sf) to 11,000 sf in lot size. The homes
located on these parcels tend to range from 900 sf to 2,400 sf in size, are one to two stories in height, and are somewhat eclectic in architectural character; many contain bungalow, contemporary, and ranch styles. These homes were primarily built between the 1940s and 1990s and are in varying conditions of maintenance.

The Project site is adjacent to, and south of, the southern boundary of East Cherry Avenue, which spans an approximate 1,378-foot distance from Traffic Way to the adjacent residential neighborhood along the eastern border of the site. Looking east, one can see mid-range defined views of the peaks of the Santa Lucia Range. East Cherry Avenue continues past the Project site to provide access to more residential areas before turning into a level unpaved road used to access agricultural lands farther to the east.

Trinity Avenue

Trinity Avenue is located to the south of the Project site, along the ridge of the adjacent hillside, and serves as a two-lane street which provides access to the residential Village Court cul-de-sac and St. Barnabas’ Episcopal Church. The church and several residences located on the north side of Trinity Avenue and Village Court have generally medium-to-high quality, elevated views, overlooking the City and downtown areas, including the Project site. These residential lot sizes range between approximately 10,500 sf to 35,300 sf and are developed with single-family residences, with customized interpretations of craftsman and Victorian architectural styles, consisting of primarily of two-story residences between approximately 2,000 to 3,000 sf in size.

3.1.1.3 Vistas and Scenic Highways

A scenic vista is a view of natural environmental, historic, and/or architectural features possessing visual and aesthetic qualities of value to the community. The term “vista” generally implies an expansive view, usually from an elevated point or open area. No designated scenic vistas occur in the Project area or its vicinity.
3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The California Scenic Highway Program, maintained by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) protects state scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. According to the California State Scenic Highway Program, no state-designated scenic highways occur within or adjacent to the City (California Department of Transportation 2015). The 2001 Integrated Program EIR identified the segment of the U.S. Highway 101 near the site as scenic (City of Arroyo Grande 2001); however, this segment has not been designated as such by the City, County, nor State.

3.1.1.4 Light and Glare, and Nighttime Lighting

Nighttime lighting conditions vary throughout the City, from heavily lit areas of commercial development to more rural areas with little night lighting. Lighting and glare levels in the Project vicinity are typical for that of urban and residential areas. The majority of light and glare in the Project site vicinity is generated by nearby residential and commercial uses. Vehicle headlights, street lighting at intersections and along East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way, and building lighting contribute to the existing light setting. Given phased development of along East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way over time, street lighting along both corridors do not follow any set standards regulating space between light fixtures; street lighting ranges anywhere from approximately 200-500 feet apart and are between 25-35 feet in height. Sources of nighttime lighting or glare on the Project site include lighting from vehicle headlights, two streetlights adjacent to the site on the north side of East Cherry Avenue, and street lighting along Traffic Way.

3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

3.1.2.1 Federal

No federal policies or regulations related to aesthetics and visual resources would apply to the Project.

3.1.2.2 State

Caltrans Scenic Highway Program

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) defines a scenic highway as any freeway, highway, road, or other public rights-of-way that traverses an area of exceptional scenic quality. Suitability for designation as a State Scenic Highway is based on vividness, intactness, and unity. U.S. Highway 101, located less than a quarter of a mile to the west of the Project site, is eligible for State Scenic Highway designation; however, it is not
3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

currently designated as scenic by the State, the County of San Luis Obispo, or the City of Arroyo Grande.

Senate Bill (SB) 743

Governor Brown signed SB 743 in September 2013 (Steinberg, 2013), which made several changes to CEQA for projects located in areas served by transit (Public Resources Code Section 21099). Under SB 743, a project’s aesthetic impacts are not considered significant impacts on the environment if: 1) the project is a residential, mixed use residential, or employment center project, and 2) the project is located on an infill site within a transit priority area. This provision for aesthetic impacts does not include impacts to historic or cultural resources. The proposed Project is a residential and mixed use development project, part of which is located on currently zoned agricultural land in the City, but is not considered to be a transit priority area and therefore is not exempt from consideration for aesthetic impacts under the CEQA process.

3.1.2.3 Local

City of Arroyo Grande General Plan

As the overarching policy document guiding development in the City, the Arroyo Grande General Plan contains policies to regulate all aspects of physical growth and conservation in the community. Relative to this analysis, the Fringe and Urban Area Land Use Element of the General Plan contains policies to ensure that new development is compatible with existing visual context. Additionally, the Agriculture, Conservation and Open Space Element includes policies to protect open space and minimize visual impacts on surrounding natural landscape and to protect scenic views. Pertinent policies from both Elements are listed below.

General Plan, Fringe and Urban Area Land Use Element

Goal LU 11 – To promote a pattern of land use that protects the integrity of existing land uses, area resources and infrastructure and involves logical jurisdictional boundaries with adjacent communities and the County.

Policy LU11-2 – Require that new development should be designed to create pleasing transitions to surrounding development.

Policy LU11-2.4 – Require that new developments be designated so as to respect the views from existing developments; provide view corridors which are oriented toward existing or proposed community amenities, such as a park, open space, or natural features.
Goal LU12 – To protect components of ‘rural settings’ and ‘small town character.’

Policy LU12-3 – Preserve the scenic vistas and retain a feeling of “openness” in new developments.

Policy LU12-3.5 – Require the provision of open space and recreation areas within the urban residential portions of the City. Within the rural residential portions of the planning area, emphasize the preservation of natural landforms and vegetation.

Policy LU12-6 – Require that residential street design be sensitive to existing landforms, and minimize traffic volumes on local residential streets.

Policy LU12-8 - Emphasize the incorporation of landscape themes and extensive landscaped areas into new development; provide landscaping and open spaces as an integral part of project design to enhance building design, public views, and interior spaces; provide buffers and transitions as needed; and facilitate energy conservation.

Policy LU12-9 – Encourage the provision of custom homes or homes that simulate a rural, small town, custom home atmosphere.

Policy LU12-14 – Development Code property development standards Design Guidelines revisions shall consider refinement to outdoor lighting design, height, placement and intensity levels to minimize unnecessary glare, energy use, intrusion onto adjacent properties or public spaces. Facilities such as night sky visibility, safety, security/motion and light sensor, controls, timers and aesthetic compatibility should be part of outdoor lighting design considerations.

General Plan, Agriculture, Conservation and Open Space Element

Goal C/OS1 – to protect visually accessible scenic resources.

Policy C/OS1-1 – Identify and protect scenic resources and view sheds associated with them.

C/OS1-1.1 – For purposes of this policy, a ‘scenic resource’ may refer to agricultural land, open spaces, hillsides, ridgelines, canyons, valleys, landmark trees, woodlands, wetlands, streambeds, and banks, as well as aspects of the built environment that are of a historic nature, unique to the City, or contribute to the rural, small town character of the City.

Goal C/OS2 – To safeguard important environmental and sensitive biological resources contributing to healthy, functioning ecosystems.

Policy C/OS2-3 – Identify and designate Conservation/Open Space (C/OS) other public or private properties containing scenic resources or public vistas of scenic importance.
Chapter 16.48.090 of the City Municipal Code addresses general development standards for the installation of new light sources. It is the primary goal of this ordinance to reduce the disruption of light cause by outdoor lighting, and to reduce glare and nighttime lighting to better preserve the visual properties of the night sky.

Design Guidelines and Standards for Design Overlay District (D-2.11) – Traffic Way and Station Way

The City contains specific design guidelines and development standards that apply to new development within the D-2.11 Design Overlay District. Subarea 1 is currently within this district. Development within this district would be subject to all site development standards within the Development Code. Building design is limited to three stories in height and must have a horizontal massing, including both pedestrian and vehicle-oriented features evident from public streets. Construction materials should be compatible with those used on adjacent developments.

3.1.3 Environmental Impact Analysis

3.1.3.1 Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with Appendix G of the 2016 State CEQA Guidelines, the Project would result in a significant impact to aesthetics and visual resources if it would:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, open space and historic buildings within a local or state scenic highway;

c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

3.1.3.2 Impact Assessment Methodology

Impacts to visual resources and overall Project aesthetics were assessed through field observation, notes, and site photography of existing resources; analysis of the site’s relationship to the surrounding community; review of the City’s existing policy framework.
for protection visual resources; and review of the East Cherry Avenue Specific Plan Design Guidelines (Appendix M). Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were chosen for the site based on their location within high viewer exposure locations near sensitive receptors along East Cherry Avenue. A simulation of KVAs 2 and 3 were conducted by the applicant’s technical consultant to give a visual representation of what implementation of the development of Subarea 2 would look like from these locations. Simulations for KVAs 1 and 4 are unavailable, but impacts to views are discussed.

To evaluate potential visual impacts, two primary factors were considered, *visual impact susceptibility* and *visual impact severity*, both of which are described below.

**Visual Impact Susceptibility**

Visual impact susceptibility is the degree to which existing visual resources could be impacted by development of a project. Three factors are considered in the evaluation of visual impact susceptibility: visual quality, viewer exposure, and viewer sensitivity. Together, these factors combine to create a statement of the likelihood that the existing landscape/site will be impacted by the project. Each of these factors is used to rate visual impact susceptibility. As a general guideline, a visual impact susceptibility rating of *low* is achieved if two or more of the three contributing factors are rated *low*. A visual impact susceptibility rating of *high* is achieved if two or more of the three contributing factors are rated *high*. A visual impact susceptibility rating of *moderate* is achieved for all other combinations of the three contributing factors.

- **Visual Quality** is a measure of the overall impression or appeal of an area, as determined by the particular landscape characteristics. In this case, the quality is judged by the views of the Santa Lucia Range and natural hillsides to the east and south of the Project site. Variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony, and pattern contribute to three visual quality classifications, *indistinctive* (low), *common* (moderate), and *distinctive* (high). Visual quality is studied as a point of reference to assess how compatible a given project would appear in relation to the established features of the setting.

- **Viewer Exposure** describes the degree to which viewers are exposed to views of the landscape. Viewer exposure considers the number of viewers, the duration of the view, and the proximity of viewers to the subject landscape.

- **Viewer Sensitivity** is a measure of the level of interest or concern of viewers regarding an area’s visual resources. It is closely associated with viewers’
3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

expectations for the area. Viewer sensitivity reflects the importance placed on a given landscape or urban area based on the human perceptions of the intrinsic beauty or aesthetic quality of the existing landforms and adjacent structures.

Visual Impact Severity

Visual impact severity refers to the degree of the negative effect of pertinent project characteristics on the existing landscape. In some cases this may include loss of onsite visual features and landmark structures. A determination of visual impact severity is made through evaluation of the visual contrast, project dominance, and view impairment resulting from a proposed project.

- **Visual Contrast** refers to a potential project’s consistency with the visual elements of form, line, color, and texture already established in the landscape. Other elements that are considered in evaluating visual contrast include the degree of natural screening by vegetation and landforms, placement of structures relative to existing vegetation and landforms, distance from the point of observation, and relative size or scale.

- **Project Dominance** refers to the project's relationship to other visible landscape components in terms of vertical and horizontal extent. A project's scale and spatial relationship to the existing landscape can be categorized as subordinate, co-dominant, or dominant.

- **View Impairment** refers to the extent to which a project's scale and position result in the blockage of higher quality visual elements by lower quality elements.

**Key Viewing Areas**

The potential impacts of the proposed Project on the visual quality of the Project site and surrounding area, including those arising from the loss of open space and disruption of view corridors. Four KVAs are selected for analysis in the Project vicinity (see Figure 3.1-1). Oasis Associates prepared simulations of KVAs 2 and 3 for the proposed Project (refer to Figures 3.1-2 and 3.1-3) which are used to illustrate how the development of Subarea 2 may affect views and/or visual resources. The KVAs described below.
Key Viewing Area 1: Subarea 1 from Intersection of Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue

This KVA represents views of Subarea 1 of the Project site from the sidewalk at the intersection of Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue. Uninterrupted views of the Santa Lucia Range, natural hillsides, and the St. Barnabas’ Episcopal Church are especially prominent. Motorists, pedestrians, visitors, and shoppers along Traffic Way have full view of these visual resources, as well as of the entire Project site (see Figure 3.1-2).

Key Viewing Area 2: Subarea 2 Looking East along East Cherry Avenue

This KVA represents views of the Project site from the adjacent sidewalk on East Cherry Avenue near its intersection with Traffic Way. This location shows the quality of the views of the Santa Lucia Range and natural hillsides for the adjacent residences and travelers of Traffic Way. With development of the Project, it is anticipated that this location would experience substantial increases in pedestrian traffic and loss of the views of the natural hillside with the development of two-story residential units (see Figure 3.1-3).
KVA 1 – Looking East from the Intersection of Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue

Source: RRM Design.

FIGURE 3.1-2
While simulation depicts residences up to two stories, the Project will contain only one-story residences along East Cherry Avenue.
Key Viewing Area 3: Subarea 2 Looking West along East Cherry Avenue

This KVA represents views of the Subarea 2 site from the sidewalk along East Cherry Avenue across from Subarea 3. Residencies located across from the site have full view of the adjacent natural hillside and the St. Barnabas’ Episcopal Church. Much like Key Viewing Area 2, this location would experience increased pedestrian traffic with implementation of the Project and loss the natural hillside views (refer to Figure 3.1-4).

Key Viewing Area 4: Subarea 3 from East Cherry Avenue

This KVA represents the view of Subarea 3 from the sidewalk along East Cherry Avenue adjacent from the property towards the eastern-most extent of the Project site. Currently, the vacant Subarea 3 lot is partially screened by trees which interrupt views of the southern hillsides. Proposed development of Subarea 3 would replace some of the existing trees and other vegetation located along the northern, eastern, and western sides of the subarea. However, new landscaping including gardens would be installed as well as a senior housing and community center and a parking area on the north most side of the subarea. Development of the proposed Project are expected to similarly limit offsite views from this KVA.

KVA 4: Subarea 3 of the site remains mostly hidden behind trees and scenic views to the south are blocked by trees. Source: Google Earth 2016.
*While simulation depicts residences up to two stories, the Project will contain only one-story residences along East Cherry Avenue.

KVA 3 – Looking West Along East Cherry Avenue

FIGURE 3.1-4
Short-Term Construction Impacts

Evaluation of construction impacts focuses on the short-term visual impacts resulting from Project construction, the presence of equipment and material storage, as well as alteration of the existing landscape by excavation and earthmoving. In a visual sense, short-duration construction impacts from the proposed Project would be obtrusive and out of character with the surrounding natural landscape.

Long-Term Visual Impacts

Long-term Project impacts focus on the visual impacts resulting from Project operation and the permanent presence of new structures and development. It should be noted that existing views can change over time. For example, trees that currently screen a project site could be burned during wildfire events or die from old age or disease. However, new landscaping would be installed and maintained to be part of the long-term landscape character of the area.

Analysis of Visual Impact Susceptibility

**Visual Quality** – The proposed Project would alter the existing scenic views of the Santa Lucia range and the natural hillsides eastward from East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way. While no designated scenic corridors exist near the Project site, existing views of the Santa Lucia Range and natural hillsides mixed with views of a variety of developed residential and mix uses result in a *moderate to high* visual quality rating.

**Viewer Exposure** – The Project site is highly visible to residents along East Cherry Avenue, the St. Barnabas’ Episcopal Church, residents of the adjacent Vagabond Mobile Home Park, and travelers along East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way. Traffic Way serves as one of the primary arterial roadways of the City and experiences high volumes of motorized and pedestrian traffic. Based on the number of viewers and the close proximity of viewing points to the project site, viewer exposure is given a *high* rating. Viewer exposure would remain high after project implementation, with multiple elements of the project, including trees, landscaping, and buildings directly visible to travelers moving in both directions on both East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way.

**Viewer Sensitivity** – The Project site is located directly adjacent to residential homes along East Cherry Avenue that have an uninterrupted view of the natural hillsides located to the south. Additionally, current views of the site from Traffic Way are of moderate to high quality; development of the site has the potential to disrupt these views. However, higher
travel speeds on the busy arterial, obstructions from existing urban developments and commercial buildings and signs viewed from Traffic Way limit travelers along these scenic resources. These factors result in a viewer sensitivity rating of moderate.

Based on consideration of visual quality, viewer exposure, and viewer sensitivity, a visual impact susceptibility rating of moderate to high has been concluded.

Analysis of Visual Impact Severity

**Visual Contrast** – Currently, most of the Project site consists of open agricultural land bounded to the north by residential and urban development. With the development of the Project, the visual character associated with the Project site would change from rural to urban-suburban. However, a transition to a residential and urban development would be consistent with adjacent land designations and development within the City. The Project Design Guidelines indicate that the development of the Project would be of superior design, seeking to be consistent with surrounding visual character. Nevertheless, the Project would introduce new residences on land that is currently free of visual obstructions from travelers on East Cherry Avenue, as well as from private locations associated with existing homes on the north side of that street. In addition, the Project would locate a hotel and restaurant along the urban commercial section of Traffic Way, which would result in the obstruction or loss of views of the San Lucia Range from Traffic Way.

Considering its relationship to both built and natural visual resources, the Project would result in a moderate level of overall visual contrast.

**Project Dominance** – Due to the existing adjacent land uses, the Project would result in the co-dominance of the surrounding land uses. The proposed Project would result in the development and loss of open agricultural land, a land use not characteristic of the immediate vicinity. However, Project development would create a transitional zone of residential and mixed-use land uses compatible with existing residential and commercial uses.

Considering the proposed designations and the development of the sites, the Project would result in a low level of Project dominance.

**View Impairment** – Although the Project would be compatible with the types of urban development in the vicinity, Project development would nonetheless displace open scenic agricultural land and impair high quality scenic resources available across the site. Existing, agricultural views of the natural hillsides to the south for East Cherry Avenue
residents would be replaced by new residential structures and landscaping. Project Design Guidelines establish a maximum height standard for all residential units to 30 feet, a height that would obstruct views of the southern hillside. Existing views of the Santa Lucia Range to motorists and pedestrians along East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way would be partially interrupted by new structures and landscaping.

With regards to proposed building and landscape design, the Project would result in a high level of view impairment.

3.1.4 Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The proposed Project would result in the following impacts to aesthetics and visual resources. Measures to mitigate impact, are provided.

Table 3.1-1. Summary of Project Impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aesthetic Impacts</th>
<th>Mitigation Measures</th>
<th>Residual Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact VIS-1. Implementation of the Project would result in adverse effects to</td>
<td>MM VIS-1a</td>
<td>Less than Significant with Mitigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>the existing scenic resources present at the site and surrounding areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact VIS-2. The proposed Project would result in a significant change in the</td>
<td>None required</td>
<td>Less than Significant</td>
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<td>existing visual characteristics of the site.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact VIS-3. Construction of the Project would create short-term disruption of</td>
<td>None required</td>
<td>Less than Significant (Short-term)</td>
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<td>scenic resources for the residents and travelers along East Cherry Avenue and</td>
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<td>Traffic Way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact VIS-4. The proposed Project would introduce new sources of nighttime light,</td>
<td>MM VIS-4a</td>
<td>Less than Significant with Mitigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>impacting the quality of the nighttime sky and increasing ambient light.</td>
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</table>

Impact

VIS-1 Implementation of the Project would result in impacts to the existing scenic resources present at the site and surrounding areas, particularly the adjacent hillside and distant views of the San Lucia Range (Less than Significant with Mitigation).

The proposed Project landscaping and development would modify existing views of the onsite agricultural lands, adjacent hillsides and views of the Santa Lucia Range that are currently available to the east. Consistent with the City General Plan, the generally moderate to high quality of these agricultural lands, mountains, and hillsides can be defined
as scenic resources under Policy C/OS1-1.1. The Project site does not lie within close proximity to a designated scenic highway and development of the site would not result in any impacts to scenic resources within such roadways. Implementation of the proposed Project, could disrupt views of these scenic resources, most noticeably along East Cherry Avenue, for passersby and residents of the area. Despite the Project being divided into separate aspects associated with each subarea, the Project as a whole is subject to review by the City staff, as well as the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) to ensure compliance with the City’s applicable design guidelines (City of Arroyo Grande 2001), and conclude that the Project would result in minimal impacts to scenic resources.

The impact assessment is organized by subarea, and is further discussed below.

**Subarea 1 Impacts:**

Subarea 1 of the Project site proposes the development of a three-story, 90- to 100-room key branded hotel totaling approximately 46,800 sf and a detached single-story 4,000 sf restaurant. Based on development plans for the site, implementation of the hotel and restaurant on Subarea 1 would disrupt distant mountain views present from Traffic Way and East Cherry Avenue, as seen in KVA 1. Development within Subarea 1 would require compliance with the Design Guidelines and Standards for Design Overlay District (D-2.11) – Traffic Way and Station Way and would therefore be limited to three stories in height. Further, due to the requirement of review by the City staff and Architectural Review Committee, and implementation of MM VIS-1a, impacts to scenic resources from the development of Subarea 1 would be *less than significant with mitigation.*

**Subarea 2 Impacts:**

Development of the single-family residential units on Subarea 2 would block views of the natural coast live oak woodland hillside and southern hills for residents and travelers along East Cherry Avenue. In addition, of the Project would result in the loss of the agricultural lands present on Subarea 2 of the Project site. These agricultural lands are considered a scenic resource under City General Plan Policy C/OS1-1.1, and the loss of this scenic resource would result in potentially adverse impacts to the visual character and quality of the area.

Design guidelines for the Subarea 2 development state that residential units would consist of both one- and two-story homes with maximum heights of 20 and 30 feet respectively (Appendix M). Project simulations for KVA 2 and 3 (present in Figures 3.1-3 and 3.1-4) illustrate how development of homes within Subarea 2 site would fully block views of the...
natural hillsides located to the south for sensitive receptors along East Cherry Avenue, and existing partial views of the Santa Lucia Range would likely be further interrupted by the proposed Project from East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way. While the Santa Lucia Range would be considered a scenic resource as defined by Policy C/OS1-1.1, viewer exposure of this resource from KVAs 2 and 3 is lower moderate to moderate as views of Santa Lucia Range are distant, current views area already partially obscured by existing vegetation and development, and proposed development would not fully obscure offsite views by providing some visual breaks between structures and uses.

As the Project and its design guidelines for the Subarea 2 property would require review by City staff and the Architectural Review Committee under the General Plan Integrated Program EIR (City of Arroyo Grande 2001), MM VIS-1a would ensure adequate review by the Architectural Review Committee to ensure that the Project adheres to goals and standards established by the City to adequately mitigate impacts to scenic resources. Therefore, impacts to scenic resources from the development of Subarea 2 would be less than significant with mitigation.

Subarea 3 Impacts:

The Subarea 3 site offers little in terms of scenic views from East Cherry Avenue, as much of the site is covered by large trees which disrupt views of the adjacent natural hillside, southerly natural slopes, and distant Santa Lucia Vistas. Development of the site would result in the removal of several larger trees from the property and the addition of several structures whose designs have not been specified. With the development of this subarea, views of scenic resources from East Cherry Avenue are anticipated to remain the same and visual impacts to these resources would be minimal. By following Project design guidelines, review of the development by City staff and the Architectural Review Committee under the General Plan Integrated Program EIR (City of Arroyo Grande 2001), and implementation of MM VIS-1a, impacts to scenic resources caused by the development of Subarea 3 would be less than significant with mitigation.

Mitigation Measure for All Subareas

**MM VIS-1a**  The Architectural Review Committee shall review Project design and consider impacts to the scenic resources available on or adjacent to the Project site, with particular consideration to the Santa Lucia Mountains. This

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2 While visual simulations depict two-story residences along East Cherry Avenue, residences along East Cherry Avenue are proposed to only be one story in height. See Section 2.6.3.2.
includes the review of building siting, height, massing, design, and setbacks. The Architectural Review Committee shall determine whether structures obstruct important views of scenic resources, and/or propose design alterations to reduce impacts to important views of scenic resources.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The City shall ensure design of the Project does not obstruct important views of scenic resources. The Applicants shall incorporate recommendations to protect scenic resources and/or views into the Project design prior to permit approval.

**Monitoring.** The City shall ensure adequate protection of scenic resources present onsite, from the Project site, or from adjacent viewing areas/corridors during planning and design review.

**Residual Impact**

Implementation of the above mitigation measure and review by City staff and the Architectural Review Committee would result in a less than significant impact to scenic resources.

**Impact**

**VIS-2** The proposed Project would result in a change in the existing visual character of the site with the change of the rural or semi-rural character to a mixed use and residential neighborhood (Less than Significant).

Current land uses and agricultural operations characterize the visual nature of the site and contribute to scenic values of the urban-rural boundary of this region in the City. The current undeveloped agricultural nature of the site may provide desired visual character and agricultural views for adjacent residential developments, particularly those located along East Cherry Avenue, Village Court, and Trinity Avenue. Development of a hotel, restaurant, and residential housing units on the site would substantially alter the visual character of the site, moving from a rural-agricultural character to one associated with urban development. Although this would be considered a major transformation to the site, visual character of the Project would be consistent with the visual character of the surrounding area.

The impact assessment is organized by subarea, and is further discussed below.
Subarea 1 Impacts:

Subarea 1 of the Project site currently consists of fallow land that would be developed for commercial use by a three-story 90- to 100-unit hotel and separate single-story 4,000 sf restaurant. Land use along Traffic Way is characterized by Traffic Way Mixed-Use designation which primarily allows for the sale and servicing of vehicles, as well as other accessory use. Additional developments along Traffic Way include the Cherry Lane Nursery, Log Cabin Market, and several hotel/motels. Currently, the fallow area of Subarea 1 does not fit within the current and planned character of Traffic Way, and does little to contribute to the overall visual character of the region. Development of the site for hotel and restaurant use however, would comply with City design guidelines for Traffic Way, and result in a more visually consistent urban landscape. Therefore, impacts to the visual character of the Project site caused by the development of Subarea 1 would be less than significant.

Subarea 2 Impacts:

The current visual character of Subarea 2 is considered agricultural in character due to the small agricultural operations conducted within the urban-fringe region of the city, near urban neighborhoods. The Project site consists of agricultural lands that have been disconnected from the dominant agricultural areas of the City, and lie within a portion of the City now characterized by more urban neighborhoods. While the development of the site would result in the change of character from rural-agriculture to urban development, this change in character would be more consistent with the overlying visual character of adjacent areas within the City. Additionally, development of the site would adhere to City General Plan Policy LU11-2 as the proposed development would result in a transition of uses consistent with existing character of surrounding development. Subarea 1 proposes commercial uses consistent with uses along Traffic Way. The Project transitions to the east with residential and mixed uses consistent with surrounding residential densities and scales of use. Further, adherence to the City’s Design Guidelines and Standards and review by the Architectural Review Committee would ensure that the Project would not degrade the visual character of the vicinity. Therefore, the change in visual character of Subarea 2 to be more uniform consistent with surrounding land uses would result in impacts which would be less than significant.
Subarea 3 Impacts:

Subarea 3 of the site consists of vacant land shrouded by large trees which present a more rural visual character than the surrounding properties. Development of this subarea would result in a change in visual character to one more dominantly characterized by urban development. Design of the site would consists of construction of buildings which follow traditional Japanese styles, multiple gardens of both cultural and native significance, and installation of grassy areas and a parking lot. The development of the site would result in the overall visual character being more consistent with the urban developed neighborhoods adjacent to the site and in the creation of the more uniform visual character of the southern Arroyo Grande region. Despite the change from a rural character, development of Subarea 3 would be much more consistent with the existing visual character of the region, and impacts associated with this would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures required.

Impact

VIS-3 Construction of the Project would create short-term disruption of the visual appearance of the site for the residents and travelers along East Cherry Avenue and Traffic Way (Less than Significant).

Construction operations of the proposed Project would result in unpleasant aesthetics of the site. Operation and parking of large machinery, grading and filling of the site, soil excavations, construction lighting, and other operational activities create disruptive scenes and may affect existing visual resources. Throughout construction of the Project, these activities may result in the deterrence of individuals looking upon the existing scenic resources. Despite these potential impacts, construction operations of the site are temporary, and visual resources would be impacted for the duration of construction.

The visual changes created by the presence of construction equipment, disruption of site landscape, and unfinished structures would alter the visual character of the site during the construction period. While this impact would be adverse, it would be short-term, and is thus determined to be less than significant. Further, existing vegetation in some portions of Subarea 3 would partially screen construction activities and project landscaping would begin to screen some development from public viewing areas. Should site landscaping and
existing vegetation be subject to fire-related disturbance from future wildfires, impacts would be short-term and similar to those for construction.

Due to the short-term duration of construction activities for all subareas, impacts to aesthetic resources associated with construction operations during Project development are considered temporarily adverse but less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measurements required.

Impact

**VIS-4** The proposed Project would introduce new sources of nighttime light, impacting the quality of the nighttime sky and increasing ambient light (Less than Significant with Mitigation).

The Project would result in the development of agricultural and vacant lands which do not possess any sources of artificial light, currently creating no additional impact to nighttime light. Development of the site would alter current lighting conditions, significantly increasing the amount of exterior lighting fixtures and light produced on the Project site. However, the site is located in an already urbanized portion of the City, adjacent to residential neighborhoods and the Traffic Way arterial, which consists of large amount of exterior light fixtures (e.g. street lighting, Mobil Gas Station, vehicular lighting, etc.). Significant sources of nighttime light would be generated by the Project, and despite the already impacted visual quality of the nighttime sky by surrounding developments, the Project area consists of open space land with no existing sources of light, and development of the Project would introduce new light sources which would contribute to decreased visual quality of the nighttime sky in the area.

Several homes located along the northern sides Trinity Avenue and Village Court have prominent views of the Project site, and experience reduced levels of ambient light and glare due to the undeveloped agricultural character of the Project site. Development of the site would introduce new sources of nighttime light, ambient light, and potential glare that would potentially affect these homes more than adjacent land uses.

In order to prevent additional adverse effects to residential properties, Project Design Guidelines state that exterior light fixtures would be shielded and directed downward to avoid light spill and glare, adhering with General Plan Policy Ag/C/OS.23 Additionally, all developments under the Project will be required to adhere to lighting ordinances...
established in Chapter 16.48.090 of the City Municipal Code, which establishes standards for outdoor lighting.

Despite these standards, the Project would introduce a potentially adverse amount of new light sources which would disrupt nighttime views from surrounding land uses. To ensure compatibility with City regulations and standards regarding Project design, the Project would be subject to review by the Architectural Review Committee. During this review, Project Design Guidelines for Project lighting and other architectural features would be reviewed for consistency with City policies and regulations, and the Architectural Review Committee may make adjustments to Project designs to ensure consistency with these policies. During this period, implementation of MM VIS-4a would require the Architectural Review Committee to consider aesthetic and visual impacts associated with lighting, which would reduce potential impacts to nighttime views presented by the Project. Due to required review of the Project by the Architectural Review Committee and implementation of the proposed mitigation measure, impacts associated with the creation of new sources of exterior lighting would be less than significant with mitigation.

Mitigation Measures

MM VIS-4a Upon review of the Project, the Architectural Review Committee shall consider the minimization of the number streetlights along East Cherry Avenue to reduce lighting effects upon the visual quality nighttime sky. However, the Architectural Review Committee shall allow adequate streetlights and security lighting for public safety.

Plan Requirements and Timing. The Architectural Review Committee shall ensure the Project does not introduce sources of lighting that would unnecessarily or excessively disrupt the quality of nighttime sky, while continuing to allow lighting for public safety and security. The Applicants shall incorporate recommendations to reduce nighttime lighting impacts into the Project design prior to development plan or permit approval.

Monitoring. The City shall ensure street lighting proposed by the Project does not unnecessarily obstruct the quality of the nighttime sky while continuing to provide a sufficient amount of lighting to ensure public safety.
Residual Impact

When combined with the proposed mitigation measure, review by the Architectural Review Committee would reduce residual impacts to nighttime views to less than significant levels.

3.1.5 Cumulative Impacts

The proposed Project, in combination with approved, pending, and proposed development in Arroyo Grande, especially those within the Historic Overlay District, would contribute toward creating a more defined urban environment in the City. Consistent with the General Plan Integrated Program EIR and with long-term buildout under the General Plan, the Project would be required to adhere to the design standards of the City General Plan and City Building Standards and would be subject to discretionary review by the Planning Commission and/or City Council, as well as final design review by the Architectural Review Committee. Therefore, although the visual character could incrementally change as development intensity increases, such change is consistent with the General Plan vision for urban environment and impacts to visual quality would not be considered cumulatively considerable. The overall aesthetic impact of cumulative development in the Project vicinity would be less than significant.