

4.11 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.11.1 Setting

San Luis Obispo County is a popular destination for visitors, in part due to its scenic variety and rural character. The county contains a variety of scenery and vegetation. Stands of pines in the north coastal portion of the county give way to oak-dotted grasslands, chaparral, and sand dunes along the southern coast. Inland, livestock populates grass-covered rolling hills, oak savannah, and chaparral. The diverse geologic features which characterize the county include forms of volcanic rock (most notable are the Morros extending from San Luis Obispo to Morro Bay), alluvial material washed into fertile valleys and sand dunes.

The steep Santa Lucia mountain range is the major physical barrier dividing the County into coastal and inland portions. The dark tones of the chaparral and oak woodlands that cover the slopes of the Santa Lucia Mountains provide contrast to the grasslands of the range's lower slopes. This area is sparsely developed, as the steep slopes, dense vegetative cover, and lack of extensive transportation, infrastructure, and public service networks have historically limited urbanization and agricultural activity.

The project area consists of varied topography, vegetation and land uses. As described in Section 4.5, Geologic Hazards, topographic conditions range from nearly level valley floors to moderate and steeply sloping hills (on average, however, topography in the project area is less steep than countywide topography). Natural vegetation patterns throughout the project area include oak woodlands and native grasses with riparian plant communities in creeks and drainages. Non-native species, including stands of eucalyptus, are also common throughout the project area. Agriculture, primarily vineyards and cattle grazing, is the most common land use throughout the project area. Ranch houses and farm-support buildings can be seen throughout the project area. Within the past ten to fifteen years, residential development has increased substantially in the project area, with a tendency toward large-size structures visible on the surrounding hillsides.

a. View Corridors and Scenic Drives. View corridors are human-made or natural features that afford line-of-sight views of distant visual resources such as peaks, ridgelines, and valleys. These include valleys and major roadways.

Scenic drives are roadways that afford views of important features to travelers. Highway 1 is the only state-designated scenic highway in the County. Highway 1 (Pacific Coast Highway / Cabrillo Highway) is one of the most important transportation and travel routes within the County. Highway 1 is designated within the California Coastal Plan as a visually scenic corridor to be protected and is designated a State Scenic Highway. Highway 1 offers many views of both ocean and hillsides to the traveler. Eligible state facilities include Highways 33 and 166, located in the southern portion of the County; and Highways 41 and 46, located in the northern portion of the County.



The County identifies in its various planning documents a number of additional view corridors and roadways and corridors that have scenic value. These areas (refer to Figure 4.11-1) are specifically designated in the following planning areas:

- Adelaida
- El Pomar – Estrella
- Estero
- Huasna – Lopez
- Nacimiento
- North Coast
- Salinas River
- San Luis Obispo
- South County (Inland)

b. Light, Glare, and Sky Glow. During the day, sunlight reflecting from structures is a primary source of glare, while nighttime light and glare can be divided into both stationary and mobile sources. Stationary sources of nighttime light include structure illumination, interior lighting, sports field illumination, decorative landscape lighting, and streetlights. The principal mobile source of nighttime lighting and glare is vehicle headlamp illumination. During nighttime hours, this ambient light environment can be accentuated during periods of low clouds or fog, which can increase the amount of light and reflective glare.

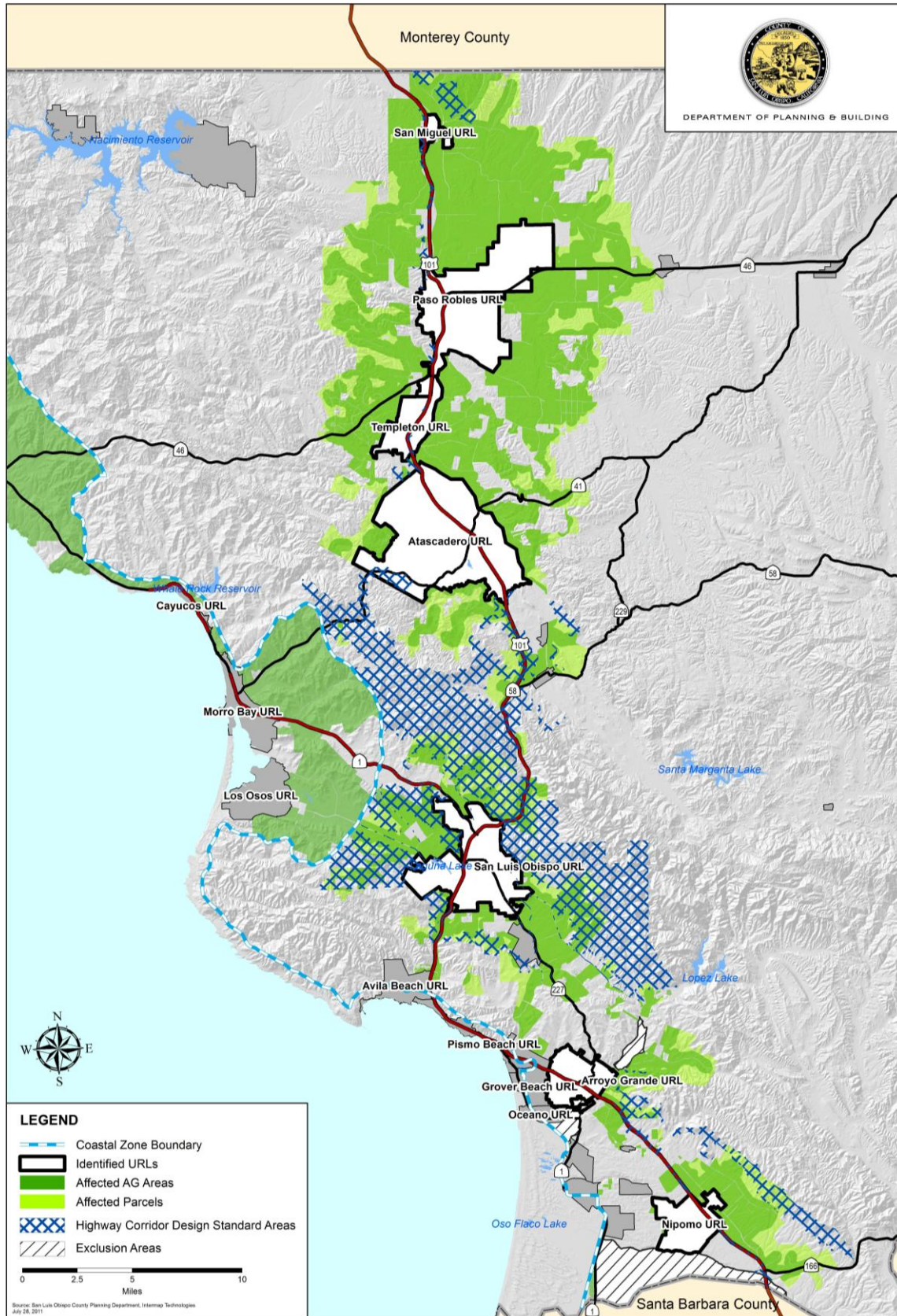
Sky glow is the effect created by light reflecting into the night sky. Sky glow is of particular concern in areas surrounding observatories, where darker night sky conditions are necessary, but is also of concern in more rural or natural areas where a darker night sky is either the norm or is important to wildlife.

c. Built Environment and Community Separators. Existing urban areas often have an established character, based on existing development patterns, infrastructure (e.g. street grid), architectural design, and landscaping. In many communities, design guidelines have been adopted to ensure that future development fits appropriately in context with the surrounding built environment. The built environment in the rural areas is less cohesive, with scattered development occurring amongst natural features and agricultural uses. In these areas, structural development often contrasts against surrounding landscapes and natural features.

A characteristic that distinguishes San Luis Obispo County from metropolitan areas is the continued existence of rural-appearing land, called *community separators*, between separate, identifiable communities. These separators are a crucial part of maintaining separate and distinct identities for each community, and for defining the boundary between urban and rural uses.



Figure 4.11-1: Highway Corridor Design Standard Area Overlay



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d. Regulatory Framework.

California Coastal Act of 1976. The California Coastal Act of 1976 was intended to protect a range of coastal resources. Section 30251 of the act specifically addresses the preservation of scenic and visual qualities:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas.

The Coastal Act emphasizes the protection of ocean and coastal views from public areas such as highways, roads, beaches, parks, coastal trails and access ways, vista points, and other public vistas. The Act designates Highway 1 as the most important coastal scenic highway in the state, requiring that the highway remain a two lane road in rural areas. Turn-outs, coastal access, and other improvements designed to increase travelers' opportunities to enjoy the shoreline are also recommended for inclusion in the Local Coastal Program. The special status of Highway 1 within the state's plan and its designation as a scenic highway mandates that the County protect the views from Highway 1.

Coastal Plan Policies Document. The Coastal Plan Policies Document is part of the Land Use Element / Local Coastal Program (LUE/LCP). It contains policies that have been incorporated into the LUE/LCP as standards or policies. The Coastal Plan Policies Document sets forth a number of policies related to the preservation of visual and scenic resources in the Coastal Zone. The following visual and scenic resource Coastal Plan policies would apply to new development within the project area:

- **Policy 2: Site Selection for New Development.** *Permitted development shall be sited so as to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas. Wherever possible, site selection for new development is to emphasize locations not visible from major public view corridors. In particular, new development should utilize slope created "pockets" to shield development and minimize visual intrusion.*
- **Policy 4: New Development in Rural Areas.** *New development shall be sited to minimize its visibility from public view corridors. Structures shall be designed (height, bulk, style) to be subordinate to, and blend with, the rural character of the area. New development which cannot be sited outside of public view corridors is to be screened utilizing native vegetation; however, such vegetation, when mature, must also be selected and sited in such a manner as to not obstruct major public views. New land divisions whose only building site would be on a highly visible slope or ridgetop shall be prohibited.*
- **Policy 5: Landform Alterations.** *Grading, earthmoving, major vegetation removal and other landform alterations within public view corridors are to be minimized. Where feasible, contours of the finished surface are to blend with adjacent natural terrain to achieve a consistent grade and natural appearance.*



Coastal Zone Framework for Planning. The Framework for Planning document of the Land Use Element / Local Coastal Program contains baseline information and policies that are further refined and applied through the area plans. The Framework for Planning also contains information pertaining to visual and scenic resources, including circulation design consideration, allowable uses within land use categories, and the combining designations program description and definitions.

North Coast Area Plan – Site Selection. The rural North Coast is a highly scenic area with impressive views of the ocean to the west as well undeveloped rolling hills to the east. In recognition of these scenic qualities, the section of Highway 1 in the rural North Coast is a designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway. Projects in the rural North Coast are subject to a planning area standard that requires building sites to be located in areas that are not visible from Highway 1.

Conservation and Open Space Element of County General Plan. The Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE) contains a Visual Resources chapter. This chapter guides the appropriate placement of development so that the natural landscape continues to be the dominant view in rural parts of the County and to ensure that visual character contributes a robust sense of place in urban areas. The Visual Resources chapter of the COSE contains the following goals:

- The natural and agricultural landscape will continue to be the dominant view in rural parts of the County;
- The natural and historic character and identity of rural areas will be preserved;
- The visual identities of communities will be preserved by maintaining rural separation between them;
- Protect visual resources within visual sensitive resource areas (SRAs) for scenic corridors;
- Views from scenic vistas and vista points will be protected;
- A cohesive visual character will be maintained in urban areas;
- Views of the night sky and its constellations of stars will be maintained;
- Visual intrusions of signs will be minimized within public view corridors; and
- The visual effects of utility lines will be minimized.

The COSE contains policies and implementation strategies to achieve these goals. For example, Policy VR 1.1 recommends the adoption of scenic protection standards, and Policy VR 3.1 recommends the identification and establishment of “community separators” as well as land use strategies and development standards to maintain separate, identifiable cities and communities with intervening rural land. Other policies apply to the County’s review of individual development projects:

- **Policy VR2.1 Development in a matter compatible with Historic and Visual Resources.** *Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that are compatible with the natural landscape and with recognized historical character, and discourage designs that are clearly out of place within rural areas.*



- **Policy VR2.2 Site Development and Landscaping Sensitivity.** *Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms. Encourage abundant native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape...*

Inland Framework for Planning. The Inland Framework for Planning, a component of the General Plan's Land Use Element, was recently modified to incorporate strategic growth policies. These policies encourage location of new development in existing urban areas, and reduction of growth in the rural areas.

Land Use Ordinance. The Land Use Ordinance (LUO), Title 22 of the County Code, applies only to the portions of the County that are located outside of the Coastal Zone. Planning Area Standards from the Inland area plans have been incorporated into Article 9 of the LUO. Highway corridor design standards and standards for specifically designated Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs) have been incorporated into these Planning Area Standards.

Real Property Division Ordinance. The Real Property Division Ordinance (RPDO), Title 21 of the County Code, contains parcel and site design standards for new subdivisions. RPDO Section 21.03.010(C)(8) states that proposed building sites shall be in locations that are least visible from public roads and shall not be located on ridge-tops such that future structures will silhouette against the skyline as viewed from public roads unless an adjustment is approved. Individual cluster projects would require subdivision approval and would therefore be subject to this standard.

Area Plans. Within the Coastal Zone, Planning Area Standards remain located in the four individual Area Plans. Standards pertaining to scenic resources exist in the Estero and North Coast Area Plans.

Highway Corridor Design Standards. The Land Use Ordinance identifies areas adjacent to (i.e. within 100 feet of) several roadway corridors (i.e. U.S. 101, SR 227, Los Osos Valley Road) as Highway Corridor Design Areas. These areas are close enough to the viewing public to reveal individual trees, rock outcrops, creeks, hillsides and historic structures such as farm houses and barns. The Highway Corridor Design Standards, which involve special permit requirements for residential structures, access roads, accessory storage and certain agricultural structures within the design areas, are intended to protect views of scenic backdrops and background vistas, and foreground views from scenic roads and highways. The following standards apply to new development within a Highway Corridor Design Area¹:

- *100 foot setback.* 100 foot setback from the identified roadway, when possible.
- *Ridgetop development.* Structures shall be located so they are not silhouetted against the sky as viewed from the identified roadway.

¹ These standards are intended to apply to ministerial development within the San Luis Obispo, South County, and Salinas River planning areas. Agricultural cluster projects would require Conditional Use Permit approval and therefore would not be required to strictly adhere to these standards; rather, a cluster project would be required to submit a visual analysis to determine compliance with the intent of these standards.



- *Slope limitation.* Grading for structures and roads shall occur on slopes that are 20 percent or less.
- *Rock outcrops.* Grading and placement of structures shall occur at least 150 feet from any significant rock outcrop or geologic feature that is visible from any of the scenic highway or railroad corridors designated.
- *Building features.* Maximum building height is 25 feet. Building architecture shall include hip roofs with a minimum pitch of 3:12. Building colors shall be similar to surrounding natural colors that are no brighter than 6 in chroma and value on the Munsell color scale on file in the Department.
- *Landscaping.* A landscaping plan is required adjacent to the applicable structure to obtain at least 50 percent view screening of the structure at plant maturity.

County Design Guidelines. The Design Guidelines consist of design objectives, guidelines and examples that will help retain and enhance the unique character of the unincorporated communities and rural areas of San Luis Obispo County. The Design Guidelines are intended to serve as an information resource for project designers and other interested people and is not intended to be a regulatory document. The guidelines encourage creativity and flexibility rather than a rigid “one-size-fits-all” approach. The Design Guidelines do not address agricultural processing structures, except for those that emphasize public serving activities, such as wine tasting rooms.

4.11.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. To satisfy CEQA requirements, conclusions are made regarding the significance of each identified impact that would result from the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program. Appropriate criteria have been identified and used to make these significance conclusions. The following significance criteria for visual resources were derived from the San Luis Obispo County Environmental Checklist, previous environmental analyses and from the CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G, Environmental Checklist Form, Section IX). Impacts of the Proposed Project would be considered significant and would require mitigation if the project would:

- *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.* Refer to Impacts VR-1, below.
- *Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.* Refer to Impact VR-2, below.
- *Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.* Refer to Impacts VR-1 and VR-3, below.
- *Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.* Refer to Impact VR-4.
- *Create an aesthetically incompatible site open to public view.* Refer to Impacts VR-1 and VR-3, below.



b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

Impact VR-1 Development resulting from the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program may alter scenic vistas in rural/agricultural areas of the county. The proposed amendments would include restrictive provisions to minimize the visibility of cluster development in the Coastal Zone, and would substantially reduce the amount of cluster development which could occur in the Inland portion of the county. Impacts compared to the existing ordinance would therefore be Class III, *less than significant*. However, compared to existing conditions, the program would allow cluster development in rural/agricultural areas of the county. Impacts compared to existing baseline conditions would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Compared to Development Potential under the Existing Ordinance

When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, the proposed amendments would reduce the number of residential cluster parcels that could potentially be created in the county from 4,582 to 418, a 91 percent reduction. The program would also introduce the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program into the Coastal Zone; however, the Coastal version of the program would only authorize the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots into residential cluster lots, essentially replacing current lot line adjustment procedures with more restrictive agricultural clustering standards.

The proposed program contains various restrictive provisions which would reduce the visual impact of cluster development. For example, the proposed ordinance amendments would increase the minimum cluster parcel size from 10,000 square feet to between 2.5 and 5 acres. As a result, new residences developed under the proposed amendments would be spaced further apart, which is more consistent with the historical development patterns in rural and agricultural areas of the county. Therefore, compared to the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*.

Compared to Existing Conditions

Compared to existing conditions, the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program would allow for the development of up to 418 new single family residences in agricultural areas within five miles of the URLs of Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, San Luis Obispo, San Miguel, Nipomo, Templeton, and Paso Robles. Based on a minimum lot size of 2.5 acres and a maximum lot size of 5 acres, the proposed program could result in the disturbance of between 1,045 and 2,090 acres of undeveloped land (less than one percent of the 261,851 acre project area) for construction, grading, and site preparation activities.

The Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program would also allow for the reconfiguration of legally established underlying lots in eligible areas of the Coastal Zone (rural North Coast and Estero planning areas, excluding Hearst Ranch) to accommodate residential development. To date, 320 legal underlying lots have been identified in these areas. However, since many of these lots could already be developed in their current configuration with fewer restrictions than



would be required under the proposed amendments, only a small percentage of the eligible lots would be likely to participate in the program. Nonetheless, any future reconfiguration would result in the construction of new single family residences in the Coastal Zone.

Future development under the program could affect scenic coastal vistas. However, the proposed amendments in the Coastal Zone include restrictive provisions that require cluster lots and related infrastructure to be sited in areas that are not visible from public roads or other public viewing locations unless no other option is available, or other sites would affect sensitive resources or productive agricultural lands. When development must be located in areas visible from public roads or other public viewpoints in order to avoid impacts to environmentally sensitive areas or agricultural resources, the standards require the new development to provide for protection of the rural/agricultural character of the surrounding landscape. This could be accomplished through the use of vegetative screening and architectural colors and materials that blend with the existing visual setting.

In the Inland portion of the county, the program would impact scenic vistas if it resulted in new residential development in a Sensitive Resource Area, due to visual resources, important community separators, or areas visible from a roadway identified in the COSE as a suggested scenic corridor. Cluster development within a Sensitive Resource Area would be subject to existing ordinance standards which require new development to minimize grading and site disturbance, screen structures with landscaping, use building materials and colors that blend with the surrounding landscape, and to locate structures on slopes that are 20 percent or less. Implementation of these existing ordinance standards in conjunction with the mitigation measures outlined below would reduce impacts on scenic vistas to less than significant levels. Impacts are therefore Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigation Measures. The proposed restrictive provisions will ensure that new cluster development in the Coastal Zone is screened from public view to the maximum extent feasible. In the Inland portion of the county, existing ordinance standards would minimize the visibility of new residential structures from public roadways. In addition to existing ordinance requirements, the following mitigation measures would be applied to individual cluster projects to reduce impacts on scenic vistas:

- VR-1(a) Project-Specific Consideration of Scenic Resources.** Individual agricultural cluster subdivision projects would require conditional use permit/development plan and tentative map approval, and would be subject to individual environmental determinations. During environmental review, agricultural cluster subdivision applications shall be considered for consistency with thresholds of significance for aesthetics and visual resources in accordance with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Review of agricultural cluster subdivision projects shall consider the following:
- Removal of trees or visually dominant vegetation shall be avoided to the extent feasible. When possible, development shall be sited to use existing mature vegetation as visual screening.



- Proposed structures and retaining walls shall be constructed using colors and materials that blend with the existing natural terrain and visual setting of the project site and surrounding landscape.
- Driveways or access roads and their associated cut and fill slopes shall be located to minimize visibility from major public roadways.
- Water tanks, propane tanks, and other infrastructure shall not be placed in visually prominent locations.
- Graded slopes shall be blended with surrounding natural contours.
- Proposed landscaping shall be blended with surrounding natural vegetation.

Appropriate mitigation measures shall be discussed in the Initial Study for projects which have the potential to impact scenic resources.

VR-1(b) Architectural and Landscape Guidelines. Applications for agricultural cluster subdivisions shall include draft architectural and landscape guidelines, which include the following components:

- Tract landscaping shall consist of native drought-tolerant species and shall emulate and be compatible with the surrounding natural environment.
- Individual house landscape plans shall be prepared by a qualified landscape architect or other qualified professional and shall be designed to screen and blend the development into the surrounding area while preserving identified viewsheds. Individual lot landscaping plans shall incorporate plants consistent with the San Luis Obispo County Approved Plant List.
- Development plans shall include earth-tone colors on structure roofing and other on-site features to reduce potential visual contrast between the structures and natural terrain and backdrop. Natural building materials and colors compatible with surrounding terrain (earth-tones and non-reflective paints) shall be used on exterior surfaces of all structures, including fences.
- Understories and retaining walls higher than six feet shall be in tones compatible with surrounding terrain using textured materials or construction methods which create a textured effect.

VR-1(c) Site Work in Scenic Areas. Grading, vegetation removal, and other landform alterations shall be minimized on sites located within areas determined by the Director to be a major public viewing corridor from collector or arterial roads.

VR-1(d) Grading. Grading should preserve hillsides and natural topography to the maximum extent feasible. Grading transitions should be gentle rather than abrupt.



Residual Impacts. When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*. When compared to existing conditions, impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Impact VR-2 Development resulting from the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program may adversely affect scenic resources within the viewshed of Highway 1, a state scenic highway. The proposed amendments would include restrictive provisions to minimize the visibility of cluster development in the Coastal Zone, and would substantially reduce the amount of cluster development which could occur in the Inland portion of the county. Impacts compared to the existing ordinance would therefore be Class III, *less than significant*. However, compared to existing conditions, the program would allow cluster development in areas visible from Highway 1. Impacts compared to existing baseline conditions would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Compared to Development Potential under the Existing Ordinance

When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, the proposed amendments would reduce the number of residential cluster parcels that could potentially be created in the county from 4,582 to 418, a 91 percent reduction. The program would also introduce the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program into the Coastal Zone; however, the Coastal version of the program would only authorize the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots into residential cluster lots, essentially replacing current lot line adjustment procedures with more restrictive agricultural clustering standards. One such restriction would be a requirement for all development resulting from an agricultural cluster subdivision to be completely screened from views along Highway 1. If a property does not contain sites that are naturally screened from Highway 1, development projects on such sites must include landscaping or other measures to completely screen the development from public views. Impacts compared to the existing ordinance would therefore be Class III, *less than significant*.

Compared to Existing Conditions

As described under Impact VR-1, the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program could lead to between 1,045 and 2,090 acres of site disturbance for the construction of up to 418 new single family residences within five miles of identified URLs in the Inland portion of the county and additional residential development resulting from the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots in the Coastal Zone. This development may be visible from the section of Highway 1 between the city of San Luis Obispo and Monterey County. This section of Highway 1 is considered a state scenic highway. Although this section of Highway 1 is mostly located in the Coastal Zone, it also includes a five mile segment in the Inland portion of the county, between the city of San Luis Obispo and Cuesta College.

The Coastal version of the program includes restrictive provisions requiring cluster lots and related infrastructure to be sited in areas that are not visible from public roads or other public viewing locations. When development must be located in publically visible areas in order to avoid impacts to environmentally sensitive areas or agricultural resources, the proposed



standards require the new development to provide for protection of the rural, agricultural character of surrounding landscapes. This could be accomplished through the use of vegetative screening and architectural colors and materials that blend with the existing visual setting.

Cluster development in the Coastal Zone would also be subject to existing Visual and Scenic Resource Coastal Plan Policies. In particular, Visual and Scenic Resource Policies 2 and 4 require new development to be sited so as to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, and require development in rural areas to be designed (height, bulk, style) to be subordinate to, and blend with, the rural character of the area. Furthermore, residential development in the rural North Coast would be subject to a planning area standard that requires new structures to be located on sites not visible from Highway 1. If a property does not contain sites that are screened from Highway 1, development projects on such sites must include landscaping or other measures to completely screen the development from public views.

Cluster development could also occur on agricultural land visible from Highway 1 between San Luis Obispo's northerly city-limit and Cuesta College. Such development would be located in the Inland portion of the county and therefore would not be subject to the referenced Coastal Plan policies or the visual standards in the Coastal version of the ordinance. However, as shown in Figure 4.11-1, this area is largely covered by existing Highway Corridor Design Standards. Development in these areas would also be subject to the mitigation measures outlined under Impact VR-1. Therefore, with implementation of existing ordinance standards and identified mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels. Impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigation Measures. The proposed restrictive provisions will ensure that new cluster projects in the Coastal Zone are screened from public view to the maximum extent feasible. With implementation of these standards in addition to the proposed mitigation measures under Impact VR-1, future residential development approved under the proposed amendments will have less than significant visual impacts.

Residual Impacts. When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*. When compared to existing conditions, impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Impact VR-3 Development resulting from the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program may conflict with the existing visual character or quality of rural and agricultural areas of the county, including community separators. Compared to existing ordinance standards, the program would reduce the extent of cluster development in the county. Impacts compared to the existing ordinance would therefore be Class III, *less than significant*. However, compared to existing conditions, the program would allow cluster development in rural/agricultural areas of the county. Impacts compared to existing baseline conditions would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.



Compared to Development Potential under the Existing Ordinance

When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, the proposed amendments would reduce the number of residential cluster parcels that could potentially be created in the county from 4,582 to 418, a 91 percent reduction. The program would also introduce the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program into certain areas of the Coastal Zone; however, the Coastal version of the program would only authorize the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots into residential cluster lots, essentially replacing current lot line adjustment procedures with more restrictive agricultural clustering standards.

The proposed program also contains various restrictive provisions which would reduce the visual impact of cluster development. For example, the proposed ordinance amendments would increase the minimum cluster parcel size from 10,000 square feet to between 2.5 and 5 acres. As a result, new residences developed under the proposed amendments would be spaced further apart, which is more consistent with the historical development patterns in rural and agricultural areas of the county. Therefore, compared to the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*.

Compared to Existing Conditions

As described under Impact VR-1, the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program could lead to between 1,045 and 2,090 acres of site disturbance for the construction of up to 418 new single family residences within five miles of the identified URLs in the Inland portion of the county and additional residential development resulting from the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots in the Coastal Zone. These residences would be located on smaller (2.5 - 5 acre) rural residential sized parcels in areas where historic subdivision patterns have produced significantly larger parcels. Previous experience has shown that agricultural cluster parcels are typically developed with large estate homes. Such development tends to incorporate an architectural style, including building materials, colors, and landscaping, which conflicts with the rustic agrarian character of the project area.

The proposed amendments require residential development and associated infrastructure to be located on sites that do not contain prime agricultural soils. In order to comply with this requirement, individual agricultural cluster subdivisions may establish building sites on steep slopes where development is more likely to alter the contours of ridgelines and to silhouette against the sky. In addition, the grading for access roads and building pads for development on steep slopes could be visible from public viewing corridors. However, cluster development would be reviewed for compliance with Section 21.03.010(C)(8) of the Real Property Division Ordinance, which states that proposed building sites shall be in locations that are least visible from public roads and shall not be located on ridge-tops such that future structures will silhouette against the skyline as viewed from public roads.

As a reasonable worst case scenario for visual impacts, structures may be constructed up to a maximum allowable height of 25 feet and may be located on slopes that face major transportation corridors. Particularly on sites with sparse natural vegetation and without intervening topography, development, grading and landscaping, under the proposed



amendments may be visible from major transportation corridors and would alter the rural and natural visual character of the areas within five miles of identified URLs.

In addition to existing ordinance standards, the mitigation measures described under Impact VR-1 would be required to integrate agricultural cluster development into the existing visual setting of the project area. Impacts would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigation Measures. With implementation of existing ordinance standards and the mitigation measures described under Impact VR-1, cluster development would be adequately assimilated into the existing rural/agricultural character of the project area.

Residual Impacts. When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*. When compared to existing conditions, impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Impact VR-4 Development resulting from the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program may affect existing levels of ambient lighting and glare. Compared to the existing ordinance, the program would reduce development potential in rural/agricultural areas. Impacts compared to the existing ordinance are therefore Class III, *less than significant*. Compared to existing conditions, however, the program would continue to allow for residential development in rural/agricultural areas, resulting in potential night lighting and glare. Impacts compared to existing baseline conditions would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Compared to Development Potential under the Existing Ordinance

When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, the proposed amendments would reduce the number of residential cluster parcels that could potentially be created in the county from 4,582 to 418, a 91 percent reduction. The program would also introduce the Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program into certain areas of the Coastal Zone; however, the Coastal version of the program would only authorize the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots into residential cluster lots, essentially replacing current lot line adjustment procedures with more restrictive agricultural clustering standards.

As discussed above, the proposed amendments substantially reduce the potential for agricultural cluster subdivisions throughout the county. This would result in less residential development in rural/agricultural areas and a commensurate reduction in impacts related to night lighting and glare. Therefore, compared to the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*.

Compared to Existing Conditions

As described under Impact VR-1, the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program could lead to between 1,045 and 2,090 acres of site disturbance for the construction of up to 418 new single family residences within five miles of the identified URLs in the Inland portion of the



county and additional residential development resulting from the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots in the Coastal Zone.

The Land Use Ordinance (Section 22.10.060) and Coastal Zone Ordinance (Section 23.04.320) currently have standards in place to address exterior lighting. These standards require that lighting sources and reflective surfaces be shielded from off-site view. Additionally, individual agricultural cluster subdivision projects would require conditional use permit/development plan and tentative map approval, and would be subject to environmental review under CEQA. During the project-specific environmental review, agricultural cluster subdivision applications would be considered for consistency with County thresholds of significance for aesthetics and visual resources. Review of proposals would consider potential glare as a result of roofing color and material, as well as potential impacts related to nighttime light pollution.

Although project-specific environmental review criteria and existing ordinance standards would minimize potential night lighting and glare impacts associated with the development of individual residences, the cumulative lighting and glare from clustered residences could increase ambient nighttime lighting and glare in rural and agricultural areas. Increased lighting from streetlights, entry lights, interior lights, and parking lot lights may impact residences and motorists on area roadways. Increased glare could potentially occur as a result of building materials, roofing materials and windows reflecting sunlight. However, potential impacts related to night lighting and glare would be identified and mitigated on a case by case basis during the review of individual projects. Impacts would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigation Measures: The following mitigation measure is required:

VR-4(a) Lighting Standards. In addition to standard ordinance requirements, individual agricultural cluster subdivision projects shall comply with the following requirements:

- All exterior lighting shall be designed as part of the overall architectural concept. Fixtures, standards and all exposed accessories shall be harmonious with the building design, the lighting design and hardware of the public spaces, and the overall visual environment of the County.
- Light fixtures with exposed light bulbs shall generally be avoided, but in no case shall be visible from off-site locations.
- All light fixtures shall be shielded to confine the spread of light within the 5 percent residential development area.
- Upward directed lighting for landscaping shall not be allowed.

Residual Impacts. When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*. When compared to existing conditions, impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.



c. Cumulative Impacts. This section describes the cumulative impacts of the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program compared to development potential under both the existing ordinance and existing conditions. The geographic scope for the visual resources cumulative analysis includes agricultural and rural areas within five miles of the identified URLs and eligible areas of the Coastal Zone (the rural North Coast and Estero planning areas, not including Hearst Ranch).

Compared to Development Potential under the Existing Ordinance

When compared to development potential under the existing ordinance, the proposed amendments would reduce the number of residential cluster parcels that could potentially be created in the county from 4,582 to 418, a 91 percent reduction. Although the program would introduce agricultural clustering provisions into the Coastal Zone, it would only allow for the reconfiguration of existing underlying lots, essentially replacing current lot line adjustment procedures with more restrictive agricultural clustering standards. As a result, the proposed amendments would introduce fewer residences into rural/agricultural areas of the county, thereby reducing the potential for visual impacts. Cumulative impacts would therefore be Class III, *less than significant*, when compared to the existing ordinance.

Compared to Existing Conditions

Future development in accordance with the proposed Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Program, together with the cumulative projects listed in Table 3.3-1 would introduce residential and other non-agricultural land uses into a predominately rural/agricultural area. Such development could impact scenic views throughout the county, including along Highway 1, a designated scenic highway, and could use architectural colors and materials which would conflict with the rural agrarian character of the project vicinity. However, with the incorporation of the mitigation measures provided above, the contribution of individual projects towards a cumulative impact would be reduced on a project-by-project basis. Each individual project, under the proposed amendments, would be subject to project-specific environmental review. Appropriate mitigation measures will be incorporated into the individual projects as part of the environmental review process. Cumulative impacts would therefore be Class II, *significant but mitigable*, when compared to existing conditions.



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