4.10 Aesthetics and Visual Resources

This section assesses visual impacts that may result from the proposed Project. It assesses if a change in the visual environment would occur, whether that change would be perceived as a positive or negative one, and the significance of any change relative to the existing setting. The focus of this section is on the potential for the Project to result in impacts to sensitive visual resources, primarily as seen from public roadways and public viewing areas.

This section provides a photographic and written inventory of existing area conditions in the Project area and establishes the baseline visual character. The analysis identifies the visual resources in the area and any related landforms, vegetative groupings, and other features which enhance the visual quality of key viewing areas. Photographs from selected, key viewing areas provide the basis for analyzing the potential effects of the proposed Project.

Realistic photo simulations document the Project impacts and show the effectiveness of recommended mitigation measures. The photo simulations identify changes to the Project Site and to the area's visual character as a result of the proposed Project. Project impacts are determined by evaluating the physical changes proposed by the Project in the context of the existing and surrounding landscape, as seen from key viewing locations. Project impact determinations are consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and community scenic values as identified in San Luis Obispo County (County) and City of San Luis Obispo (City) planning policies, ordinances, and goals.

4.10.1 Environmental Setting

The Project Site is on approximately 332 acres of gently sloped topography, altered by creation of berms, pads, and remnant oil reservoirs east of U.S. Highway 101 and south of the City of San Luis Obispo (the City). The City lies along the flatlands of San Luis Obispo Creek. Situated in the central region of San Luis Obispo County, the Project Site is generally in the valley within the coastal range with the Irish Hills, San Miguelito, and the Corral de Piedra Mountains to the west and south, and the Los Padres National Forest to the north and east.

The Project Site is just south of a set of 600-foot-high hills called the South Street Hills, which are a southern continuation of the "Sisters" or the "Morros," including Cerro Romualdo, Chumash Peak, Bishop Peak, and Cerro San Luis Obispo. The South Street Hills are home to a water tank and a radio station tower and to the South Higuera Street webcam (SLOWeather.com), which partially looks over the Project Site in the distance. The chain of "Morros" forms the dominant scenic backdrop to nearly all parts of the City and the South Street Hills just north of the Project Site are clearly visible from all areas of the site, forming backdrops to many views.

Views from the Project Site to the north are set against the coastal mountains and the South Street Hills extensions with undeveloped, rolling grasslands.

Views to the east are set against the coastal ranges in the far-field with some continuation of the "Morros," including Islay Hill and Mine Hill. This area is populated by residences and businesses along Broad Street (State Route 227), all of which can be seen in the distance intermittently from different locations. Some pronounced night lighting is also visible at the Damon-Garcia sports fields.

Views to the west are set against the coastal ranges with industry, businesses, roadways, and U.S. Highway 101.

Views to the south are also set against the coastal mountains with the San Luis Obispo County Regional Airport (SLOCRA) and some sparsely placed residential locations, along with predominant agricultural and rural lands.

The Project Site is bisected by Tank Farm Road and has a number of existing tank berms which rise approximately 20 to 30 feet and are visible from Tank Farm Road. The majority of the Project Site is uncultivated grasslands and open space.

There are currently a few buildings on the Project Site; all of the buildings are located along the western edge of the site, north of Tank Farm Road (see Chapter 2.0, Project Description). Other visible development on the Project Site includes utility poles located along the north side of Tank Farm Road and along the north of the site. Several airport runway lights are located on the Project Site on the south side of Tank Farm Road and west of Hoover Avenue. Unpaved roads cross the site, associated with site maintenance activities, and post-and-wire or chain-link fencing surrounds the perimeter of the majority of the site and along both sides of Tank Farm Road.

Figure 4.10-1 shows where photographs were taken of the Project Site from key viewing areas. The key viewing areas include:

- From Tank Farm Road west of the Project Site looking northeast (No. 1);
- From Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site looking northeast (No. 2);
- From Tank Farm Road at the east end of the Project Site looking northwest (No. 3);
- From Broad Street (State Route 227) north of the Project Site looking southwest (No. 4); and
- From Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site looking southwest (No. 5).

Figures 4.10-2 through 4.10-6 document the existing visual setting and visual quality of the Project Site from the selected key viewing areas and are cross-referenced using the above numbering. These same viewing areas are used in the impact section with the simulated views that include the proposed Project.

Figure 4.10-1 Key Viewing Locations

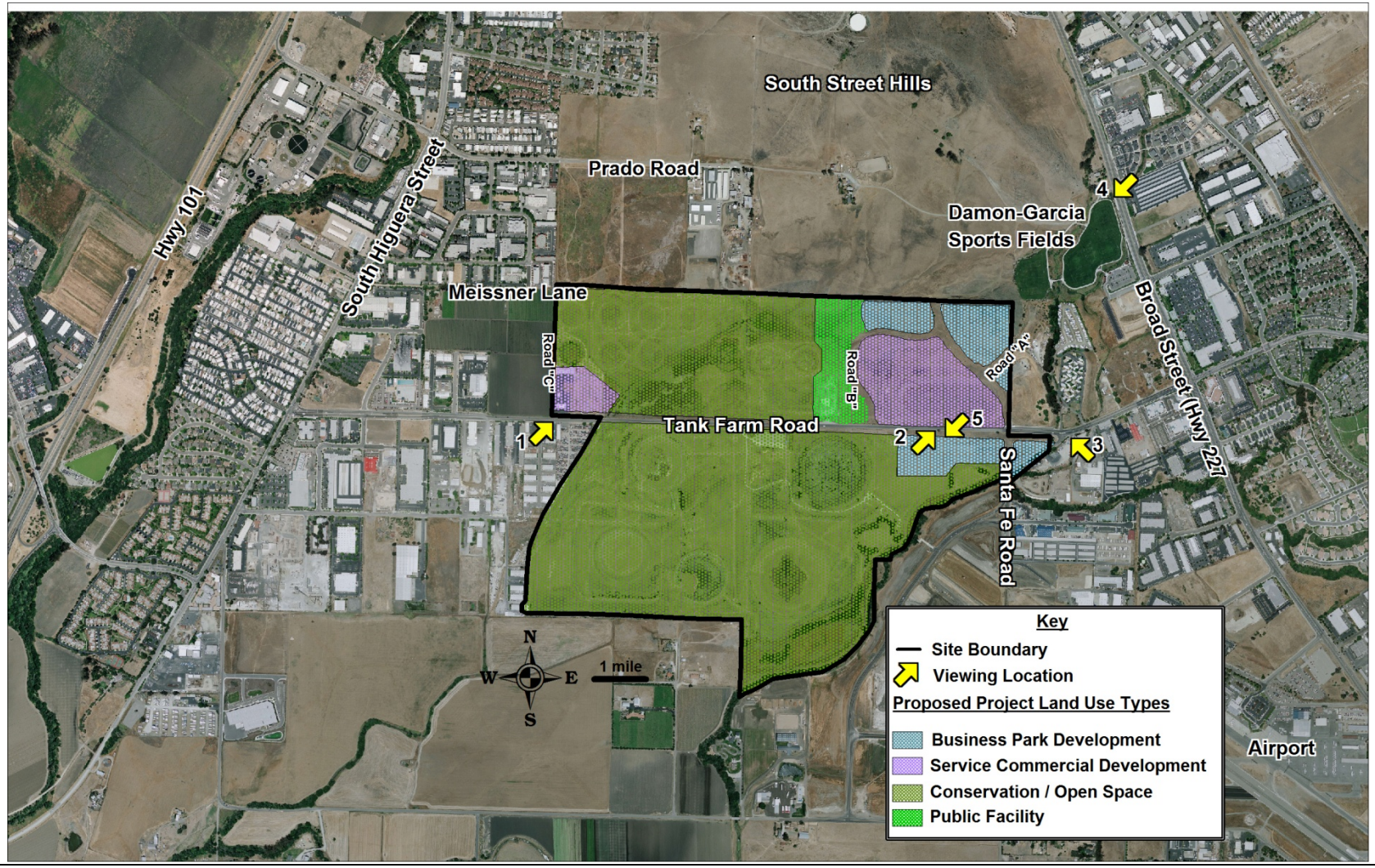

Figure 4.10-2 Key Viewing Location No. 1 from Tank Farm Road west of the Project Site - Current

Figure 4.10-3 Key Viewing Location No. 2 from Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site - Current

Figure 4.10-4 Key Viewing Location No. 3 from Tank Farm Road at the east end of the Project Site - Current

Figure 4.10-5 Key Viewing Location No. 4 from Broad Street (State Route 227) north of the Project Site – Current

Figure 4.10-6 Key Viewing Location No. 5 from Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site – Current

Source: Google Earth

Photo simulations are generated by developing a series of baseline pictures from critical viewing areas and then inserting Project components into the baseline pictures to "simulate" how the area will appear for the proposed Project. The individual characteristics of the simulations are defined by utilizing GIS software along with Project-component heights to define the perspectives used in the photo simulations.

Section 4.10.2.1 describes different methodologies used to determine impacts of scenic views.

4.10.2 Regulatory Setting

Regulatory issues related to visual impacts are included in both the County and the City's General Plans and corresponding ordinances. The following sections describe each of these as well as federal methodologies related to scenic view assessment.

4.10.2.1 Federal

Different federal agencies responsible for scenic views have developed a number of different methodologies to determine the impact of projects. The agencies include the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Each of these approaches is briefly discussed below.

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM has developed a system called Visual Resource Management system that provides a way to identify and evaluate scenic values to determine the appropriate levels of management. It consists of two stages: Inventory (Visual Resource Inventory) and Analysis (Visual Resource Contrast Rating). The inventory stage involves identifying the visual resources of an area and assigning them to inventory classes using BLM's visual resource inventory process. The process involves rating the visual appeal of a tract of land, measuring public concern for scenic quality, and determining whether the tract of land is visible from travel routes or observation points. The process is described in detail in *BLM Handbook H-8410-1, Visual Resource Inventory* (BLM 1986). The inventory consists of a scenic quality evaluation, sensitivity level analysis, and a delineation of distance zones. Based on these three factors, BLM-administered lands are placed into one of four visual resource inventory classes. These inventory classes represent the relative value of the visual resources. Class I (preserve the existing character of the landscape) being the most valued, Class II (preserve the existing character of the landscape with low level of changes), Class III allowing moderate changes to the landscape, and Class IV allowing major changes to the landscape. See Figure 4.10-7.

Figure 4.10-7 BLM Visual Inventory Class Determination

Visual Senstivity Levels

		High			Medium			Low
Special Areas		I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Scenic Quality	**A**	II	II	II	II	II	II	II
	B	II	III	III* IV*	III	IV	IV	IV
	C	III	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV
		f/m	**b**	**s/s**	**f/m**	**b**	**s/s**	**s/s**
		DISTANCE ZONES						

* If adjacent area is Class III/IV, assign Class III/IV.
Source: BLM Manual H-8410-1

USDA Forest Service

The USDA has developed a system called the Scenery Management System (SMS) for managing scenery and ensuring a systematic approach for determining the value and importance of scenery in national forests. This approach is detailed in the Forest Service Agricultural handbook Number 701 (USDA 1995). The SMS assessment is based on a combination of "scenic attractiveness," "scenic integrity," "landscape concern level," and "landscape visibility" to produce a scenic class rating from 1 to 7.

Scenic Attractiveness is categorized into three classes: Class A – distinctive; Class B – typical, and Class C – indistinctive. Scenic Integrity is a measure of the degree of intactness and wholeness of the landscape; or the degree of visible disruption of the landscape character. Landscape Visibility is composed of two parts: human values as they relate to the relative importance to the public of various scenes (concern level) and the relative sensitivity of scenes based on distance from an observer (distance zones).

The determination of the scenic class is made from the figure below (Figure 4.10-8). Note that for all areas that have a high concern level, the scenic class is the highest rating of a 1 for high scenic attractiveness and only in the foreground for areas that have lower scenic attractiveness.

Figure 4.10-8 USDA Scenic Class Determination

		Distance Zones/Seldom-Seen & Concern Levels											
		fg1	mg1	bg1	fg2	mg2	bg2	fg3	mg3	bg3	ss1	ss2	ss3
Scenic Attractiveness	A	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	1	2	3
	B	1	2	2	2	3	4	3	5	5	2	3	5
	C	1	2	3	2	4	5	5	6	7	3	5	7

Source: USDA Agriculture Handbook Number 701.

USDOT Federal Highway Administration

The USDOT approach is defined also as Visual Resource Management (VRM) and is similar to the BLM methodology. It utilizes a combination of the visual character, the visual quality with the viewer sensitivity, and exposure to determine the visual impact.

The impacts of a project are defined by a combination of the changes to the visual quality and the level of viewer sensitivity. The higher the sensitivity of an area, the less tolerant it is to changes or degradation in the viewshed. Areas of high visual quality would include wilderness areas, rivers in the National Wild and Scenic River System, parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic districts, sites, and buildings. Adverse impacts would be considered to be ones that are "out of character with the property or would alter its setting." See Table 4.10-1.

Table 4.10-1 Indicators of Visual Sensitivity

High Sensitivity/Concern
• Views of and from areas the aesthetic values of which are protected in laws, public regulations and policies, and public planning documents. • Views of and from designated areas of aesthetic, recreational, cultural, or scientific interest, including national, state, county, and community parks, reserves, memorials, scenic roads, trails, interpretive sites of scientific value, scenic overlooks, recreation areas, and historic structures, sites, and districts. • Views from resort areas or urban residential subdivisions. • Views from national- or state-designated scenic highways or roads, or designated scenic highways or roads of regional importance and from segments of travel routes, such as roads, rail lines, pedestrian and equestrian trails, and bicycle paths near designated areas of aesthetic, recreational, cultural, or scientific interest leading directly to them. Views seen while approaching an area of interest may be closely related to the appreciation of the aesthetic, cultural, scientific, or recreational significance of that destination.
Moderate Sensitivity/Concern
• Views from segments of travel routes near highly sensitive use areas of interest, serving as a secondary access route to those areas. • Views from rural residential areas and segments of roads near them, which serve as their primary access route. • Views of and from undesignated but protected or popularly used or appreciated areas of aesthetic, recreational, cultural or scientific significance at the local, county, or state level. • Views from highways or roads locally designated as scenic routes and of importance only to the local population, or informally designated as such in literature, road maps and road atlases. • Views from travel routes, such as roads, trails, bicycle paths, and equestrian trails leading directly to protected

Table 4.10-1 Indicators of Visual Sensitivity

or popularly used undesignated areas important for their aesthetic, recreational, cultural, or scientific interest. • Views of and from religious facilities and cemeteries.
Low Sensitivity/Concern
• Views from travel routes serving as secondary access to moderately sensitive areas. • Views from farmsteads, groupings of fewer than four residences, industrial, research/development, commercial, and agricultural use areas.

4.10.2.2 San Luis Obispo County

The Project Site is currently within the jurisdiction of the County. The regulatory setting pertaining to visual resources includes review of the Project's consistency with various elements of the County of San Luis Obispo General Plan and the County of San Luis Obispo Land Use Ordinance, Title 22, in addition to the review of findings made in this document per CEQA Guidelines.

County Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE)
The State of California mandates that every jurisdiction have an Open Space Element in their General Plan. As noted in the COSE, one of the purposes of the open space section is to identify open space lands that are worthy of protection for their intrinsic value, and establish goals, policies and implementation measures that will enable the long-term protection of those resources.

Visual Resources Policy VR 4.1 identifies potentially scenic corridors (in Table VR-2) that warrant further study to determine whether or not portions of these corridors should be officially designated a scenic resource by the County. None of the listed corridors are within the vicinity of the Project Site.

County General Plan Land Use Element – San Luis Obispo Area Plan
The Project is within the San Luis Obispo Inland planning area. The San Luis Obispo Area Plan includes the following vision statement:

This plan's vision for the future includes continued opportunities for economic vitality and growth, along with the opportunity to maintain the environmental attributes that have themselves contributed to the area's historically healthy economy. The community's excellent living environment and educational opportunities can act to attract or retain businesses providing high quality job opportunities for local residents, enabling them to afford housing within the area, while also enhancing local tax revenues needed for public services.

The planning area should maintain a rural character in harmony with agriculture, business, recreational, environmental and residential opportunities.

These San Luis Obispo Area Plan Goals relate to visual aspects:

- Protect and, where it has been degraded, enhance wildlife habitat areas;
- Protect the scenic values of natural landforms;
- Protect important historic or archaeological resources;
- Focus urban development within established urban and village areas;
- Devote the remainder of the planning area to a "greenbelt" consisting of production agriculture and low-density development (also see Framework for Planning); and
- Encourage economic development balanced with the natural resources that enhance the natural beauty and character, and supports the social and environmental health of the planning area.

Section 5A, Scenic Roads and Highways, defines the area within 100 feet of State Route 227 as a Highway Corridor Design Area subject to the standards of development described in Section 22.108-2 of the County Land Use Ordinance, Title 22, for Sensitive Resource Areas. The Land Use Element states that "foreground views along highways and railroads are identified in a highway corridor design area." These areas are close enough to the viewing public to reveal individual trees, rock outcrops, creeks, hillsides, and historic structures such as farmhouses and barns. These elements of the scenic corridors have their own scenic values, while they also serve to frame and enhance views of the more distant scenic backdrops.

County General Plan Land Use Ordinance

State Route 227, near the Project Site, is subject to the Highway Corridor Design Standards as defined in the San Luis County General Plan Land Use Element and Land Use Ordinance. The Highway Corridor Design Standards are intended to protect views of scenic backdrops and background vistas and foreground views from scenic roads and highways, and other environmental resources that provide habitat and watershed drainage.

The County Design Guidelines document prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building consists 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." These design guidelines should be considered in Project design:

- RC-7a. Where possible, large cuts and graded pads should be avoided to minimize the alteration of natural contours.
- RC-7b. Building masses should generally follow contours.
- RC-7e. Artificial slopes that are visible to the public should match the natural contours in the immediate vicinity.

4.10.2.3 City of San Luis Obispo

The regulatory setting pertaining to visual resources for the City includes review of the proposed development's consistency with various elements of the City's General Plan, Community Design Guidelines, the Municipal Code, and the Airport Area Specific Plan (AASP).

Chapter 1 of the City General Plan addresses land use. The following Community Goals relate to visual aspects:

- Protect and enhance the natural environment, including the quality of air, water, soil, and open space (Goal 2).
- Protect public views of the surrounding hills and mountains (Goal 4).
- Develop buildings and places which complement the natural landscape and the fabric of neighborhoods (Goal 34).

Section 1.7.5 Building Design and Siting is a growth management policy related to visual aspects. All new buildings and structures should be subordinate to and in harmony with the surrounding landscape. The City should encourage County adoption of regulations prohibiting new structures on ridge lines or in other visually prominent or environmentally sensitive locations, and allowing transfer of development rights from one parcel to another in order to facilitate this policy.

Chapter 2 of the City General Plan addresses circulation. Figure 11 in the conservation and open space element identifies areas of Broad Street (State Route 227) as either High Scenic Value or High or Moderate Scenic Value, while Tank Farm Road in the Project area is designated as High or Moderate Scenic Value. The following Chapter 2 policies apply:

- 15.0.1 Views: The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources from streets and roads. In particular, the rout segments shown in Figure 6 and the Conservation and Open Space Element are designated as scenic roadways.
  - Development projects shall not wall off scenic roadways and block views.
  - Development projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway shall be considered “sensitive” and require architectural review.
- 15.0.2 Scenic Routes: The route segments on Figure 6 and in Figure 11 of the Conservation and Open Space Element – Scenic Roadways Map – are designated as scenic roadways.
- 15.0.3 Development Along Scenic Routes: Development along scenic roadways should not block views or detract from the quality of views.
  - Projects in the viewshed of a scenic roadway should be considered as “sensitive” and require architectural review.
  - Development projects should not wall off scenic roadways and block views.
  - As part of the city’s environmental review process, blocking of views along scenic roadways should be considered a significant environmental impact.
  - Signs along scenic roadways should not clutter vistas or views.
  - Street lights should be low scale and focus light at intersections where it is most needed. Tall light standards should be avoided. Street lighting should be integrated with other street furniture at locations where views are least disturbed. However, safety priorities should remain superior to scenic concerns.

The City General plan conservation and open space element specifically addresses views in Chapter 6. These policies relate to visual aspects:

- Any development that is permitted in natural or agricultural landscapes shall be visually subordinate to and compatible with the landscape features. Development includes, but is not limited to buildings, signs (including billboard signs), roads, utility and telecommunication lines, and structures. Such development shall: (1) avoid visually prominent locations such as ridgelines and slopes exceeding 20 percent; (2) avoid unnecessary grading, vegetation removal, and site lighting; (3) incorporate building forms, architectural materials, and landscaping that respect the setting, including the historical pattern of development in similar settings, and avoid stark contrasts with its setting; (4) preserve scenic or unique landforms; significant trees in terms of size, age, species, or rarity; and rock outcroppings (Policy 9.1.1).
- The City will promote the creation of "streetscapes" and linear scenic parkways or corridors that promote the City's visual quality and character, enhance adjacent uses, and integrate roadways with surrounding districts (Policy 9.1.4).
- The City will include in all environmental review and carefully consider effects of new development, streets, and road construction on views and visual quality by applying the Community Design Guidelines, height restrictions, hillside standards, Historical Preservation Program Guidelines, and the CEQA Guidelines (Policy 9.1.5).
- The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources from public places, and encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do so. Public places include parks, plazas, the grounds of civic buildings, streets and roads, and publicly accessible open space.
  - Development projects shall not wall off scenic roadways and block views.
  - Utilities, traffic signals, and public and private signs and lights shall not intrude on or clutter views, consistent with safety needs.
  - Where important vistas of distant landscape features occur along streets, street trees shall be clustered to facilitate viewing of the distant features.
  - Development projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway shall be considered "sensitive" and require architectural review (Policy 9.2.1).
- Outdoor lighting shall avoid: operating at unnecessary locations, levels, and times; spillage to areas not needing or wanting illumination; glare (intense line-of-site contrast); and frequencies (colors) that interfere with astronomical viewing (Policy 9.2.3).

The City Community Design Guidelines include numerous references to techniques that should be included in a development to reduce visual impacts.

- The visual impact of parking lots should be minimized by locating these facilities near the portion of the site least visible from the street and by providing adequate screening and parking lot landscaping (Guideline 3.1.C.2.i).
- Trees shall be used in parking lots to help visually break up large expanses of paving and to provide some shading (Guideline 3.1.C.3.c).

- Structures more than 20 feet in height (typical for structures of two stories or more) should step back the building mass at least 5 feet for the portions of the structure above 14 feet (or the height where an actual second story begins) to provide visual variation (Guideline 3.2.D.4.a).
- Loading docks, trash collection areas, outdoor storage, and similar facilities should be incorporated into the overall design of the building and landscaped, so that the visual and acoustic impacts of these functions are fully contained, and out of view from adjacent properties and streets (Guideline 3.2.E).
- Metal buildings should employ a variety of building forms, shapes, colors, materials, and other architectural treatments to add visual interest and variety to the building (Guideline 3.3.I.2).
- Appropriate techniques should be used to assure that tall buildings respect the context of their setting and provide an appropriate visual transition to adjacent structures (Guideline 4.2.B.2).
- Roof penetrations (such as plumbing and exhaust vents, air conditioner units, and transformer boxes) should be grouped together where feasible to minimize their visual impact. The roof design should help to screen or camouflage rooftop protrusions (Guideline 6.1.D.3).
- Planting areas should be integrated with the building design, enhance the appearance and enjoyment of the Project, and soften the visual impact of buildings and paving (Guideline 6.2.B.1).
- Each structure shall be located in the most accessible, least visually prominent, most geologically stable, portion of the site and at the lowest feasible elevation (Guideline 7.2.A.3).

The City Municipal Code addresses visual impacts through a number of ordinances mostly addressing building height and density, including the following:

- Size limits on large-scale retail establishments (Chapter 17.16.035);
- Property development standards for conservation and open space zones with a building height of 35 feet (Chapter 17.32.020);
- Property development standards for office zones with a building height of 35 to 45 feet (Chapter 17.34.020);
- Property development standards for neighborhood commercial zones with a building height of 35 feet (Chapter 17.38.020);
- Property development standards for retail commercial zones with a building height of 45 feet (Chapter 17.40.020);
- Property development standards for downtown commercial zones with a building height of 50 to 75 feet (Chapter 17.42.020);
- Property development standards for tourist commercial zones with a building height of 45 feet (Chapter 17.44.020);

- Property development standards for service commercial zones with a building height of 35 feet (Chapter 17.46.020); and
- Property development standards for manufacturing zones with a building height of 35 feet with 75 percent coverage and a maximum of 25 units per acre (Chapter 17.48.020).

The Airport Area Specific Plan (AASP) discusses the preservation of views and scenic resources. Tank Farm Road from the western Project boundary heading east is considered a gateway to and from the City, as identified in Table 5.4 of the AASP. The following goals in the AASP apply to the Project:

- Goal 5.7: Unobstructed public view of key scenic features from major planning area roadways.
- Goal 5.8: Attractive gateways that provide a positive announcement of entry into the City and the Airport Area.

4.10.3 Significance Criteria

In accordance with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and the thresholds of significance used in several recently prepared City and County EIRs, impacts would be significant if development would:

- Create a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area; or
- Result in an inconsistency with plans, goals, laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards applicable to the protection of visual resources.

The County and City planning documents do not contain specific criteria for determining thresholds of significance regarding aesthetic resources. However, in comparing the Project to the CEQA Guideline thresholds, substantial consideration was given to the Project's consistency with public policies, plans, goals, and regulations concerning scenic vistas, scenic roadways, visual character, and night lighting. The goals, policies, and guidelines listed in the Regulatory Setting Section, including the BLM, USDA Forest Service and USDOT, provide a basis for determining levels of potential impact as well as an indication of aesthetic values and sensitivity to visual change.

4.10.4 Remediation Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Remediation of the area would alter the existing visual character of the Project Site and create a new short-term source of light and glare caused by storage areas, vehicles and the temporary

signalized intersection not currently found on the Project Site. Remediation of the area would require the import and export of soils and materials as well as the use of construction equipment at the various staging areas, borrow areas and work areas. Grading, cut, and fill activities on the Project Site would take place along with re-vegetation/restoration. Impacts of these activities and changes on the scenic quality of the area are discussed below.

Impact #	Impact Description	Phase	Residual Impact
AE.1	The Project remediation activities could degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.	Remediation	Class II

The remediation component of the proposed Project would take approximately 2.5 years and would involve short-term remediation in advance of the development phases. As a result, the remediation phase could degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Project Site and its surroundings.

The remediation phase would involve the following five elements that could produce short-term visual impacts: staging areas, borrow areas, material stockpiles, work areas, traffic, and traffic control measures.

As identified in Figure 2-12, three main and four auxiliary staging areas are proposed at the Project Site. Mobilization activities would occur at these staging areas and would include fueling and minor maintenance work on vehicles and equipment, stockpiling clean and impacted excavated soils, moving equipment and construction support facilities/trailers on-site, installing storm water and dust control best management practices, and creating habitat protection measures.

Figure 2-12 also identifies four borrow areas to include the Flower Mound at the northeastern portion of the Project Site and the berms adjacent to Reservoirs 5 and 7. The Flower Mound excavation (approximately 17.3 acres) will require blasting after which, blasted materials would be crushed with a rock crushing machine and may be sorted with loaders and/or stationary sorting screens and then washed. This process will reduce the elevation of the Flower Mound to allow for the Santa Fe Road extension, which will alter the existing visual character of the area.

Multiple work areas are shown in Figure 2-12 as well. Work area activities include demolition, pipeline decommissioning, Reservoir 2 reconfiguration, and miscellaneous clean-up. Demolition includes the removal of existing infrastructure, such as concrete walls, barb-wire fencing, utilities, and concrete foundations. Pipeline decommissioning involves excavating and removing pipe segments that could not be adequately cleaned. This would include cutting the segments into manageable pieces, wrapping them in plastic, removing them from the trench, and backfilling the trench. Scrap pipe would be temporarily stored in bins and transported off-site for recycling. Reservoir 2 reconfiguration involves cutting the wall and grading the berm to a smoother topography, which means lowering the berm height between four and eight feet. Miscellaneous clean-up involves crushing the two debris piles along the north property line for reuse as gravel on-site, removing the concrete vault wall and hand rail adjacent to Reservoir 6,

and using a backhoe to expose three historic water well areas. Further, fencing and signs would be installed throughout the Project Site in order to implement institutional controls for management of the area for wildlife habitat.

Project Site traffic would include employee vehicles, construction equipment transport, and on- and off-site trucks used for water and fill transport. Project Site traffic control would include installation of a temporary signalized intersection at the main access point to the site to provide safe ingress and egress for Project-related traffic.

In short, these activities would involve demolition of existing infrastructure, stockpiling of grading and removed material, establishment of a nursery, equipment staging, and removal of natural features from the site such as the Flower Mound. These activities would present a change from the existing visual character; that is, a shift from a non-active, serene environment to one that is active and contains artificial objects (i.e., trucks and water tanks) with varying heights and masses. These activities would also generate light and glare impacts; that is, storage areas, vehicles and the temporary signalized intersection would produce light not currently found on the Project Site.

As stated above, these remediation activities would be short-term and take place over approximately 2.5 years. Although graded areas during these construction activities would be visible from Tank Farm Road and Prado Road, these graded areas would be re-vegetated (and potentially developed during later phases of the proposed Project) and would not produce long-term visual impacts. However, the removal of the Flower Mound would produce a long-term visual impact as the topographic feature would no longer exist and would at some point, over the life of the Project, be replaced with physical development, such as the Santa Fe Road extension, parking lot(s), and commercial services building(s).

Moreover, there would be between 54 and 69 acres of development pads throughout the life of the Project, but less than half of those pads would be physically developed after ten years (five years per phase). Graded areas on not-yet-developed pads could become unsightly due to uncontrolled weed growth, thereby causing both short-term and long-term visual impacts. In order to mitigate this impact, graded areas for development pads that would not be built on within two years of Project initiation, would be naturally re-vegetated. Natural re-vegetation does not include unchecked weed growth. Rather, natural re-vegetation includes temporary landscaping or other measures used to cover exposed soils, while maintaining weed growth. Impacts would therefore be considered potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures

AE-1a *The Applicant shall ensure that graded areas for development pads that are not built on within two years of creation of the development pads, are temporarily landscaped or otherwise maintained as needed to cover exposed soils and maintain growth of weeds. Weeds shall be controlled to not be unsightly.*

AE-1b *The Applicant shall ensure that fencing installed throughout the Project Site in order to implement institutional controls for management of the area for wildlife habitat shall contribute to the aesthetic character of the site and vicinity. Prior to issuance of grading permits for sites where fencing is required, the applicant shall submit to the*

County Department of Planning and Building for review and approval, in consultation with the City of San Luis Obispo, site fencing plans. The plans shall include: fencing types that meet the functional requirements for the intuitional controls; fencing locations; materials and color palette consistent with City of San Luis Obispo design guidelines; and, as needed, complementary landscape to break-up the public view of the fencing.

Residual Impacts

Ensuring the development pads that will not be built on within two years of creation of the pads would be landscaped or maintained to manage weed growth would reduce the visual impacts of the proposed Project. Impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

4.10.5 City Development Plan Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Photo simulations were prepared in order to better understand and communicate the potential visual changes associated with the City Development Plan. Photo simulation locations were selected to best show critical views, how the Project would compare to applicable planning policy, or from viewpoints that would provide a good representation of the overall Project character. See Figures 4.10-9 through 4.10-12.

No specific architectural styles are proposed for the commercial or recreational development in the City Development Plan portion of the Project. The specific types of commercial and industrial units shown in the photo simulations are not proposed by the Applicant. The structure images are representative only and are based on the appearance of typical buildings found on similar developments on the Central Coast. The structures shown in the simulations are a representation of the maximum height allowed for each lot, or the self-imposed height restrictions proposed by the Project, and depict a reasonable building scale and form. The photo simulations show the development approximately five to ten years after construction. Impacts associated with the City Development Plan are discussed below.

As previously stated, photo simulations are generated by developing a series of baseline pictures from critical viewing areas and then inserting Project components into the baseline pictures to "simulate" how the area will appear for the proposed Project. The individual characteristics of the simulations are defined by utilizing GIS software along with Project component heights to define the perspectives used in the photo simulations.

Impact #	Impact Description	Phase	Residual Impact
AE.2	The City Development Plan component of the Project would degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.	Development	Class II

Although the transition would take approximately 25 years to complete, the Project would change the character of the site from a rural setting to a semi-urban developed setting.

Figure 4.10-9 Key Viewing Location No. 1 from Tank Farm Road west of the Project Site - Proposed

Figure 4.10-10 Key Viewing Location No. 2 from Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site – Proposed

Figure 4.10-11 Key Viewing Location No. 3 from Tank Farm Road at the east end of the Project Site – Proposed

Figure 4.10-12 Key Viewing Location No. 4 from Broad Street (State Route 227) north of the Project Site - Proposed

The City Development Plan proposes development of the Project Site with approximately 803,000 square feet of commercial and industrial floor area with associated parking, landscaping, open space, recreational playing fields, bicycle and pedestrian trails.

The City development could also include land for the City to construct public facilities, such as a transit maintenance yard and storage facility, or a fire station and training facility.

With the removal of the Flower Mound in the northeastern portion of the Project Site, subsequent grading and ultimate development of the Santa Fe Road extension and commercial services buildings, landscaping, and parking lots, the visual character of that portion of the Project Site would change from one of vacant, natural topography to one with physical development and intense use. This increasing change to the existing visual character would extend to other portions of the Project Site (west end, Tank Farm Road, and north and south sides of Tank Farm Road on the east end) as all five phases of the Project are built out over the course of 25 years. The quiet, serene environment currently enjoyed at the Project Site would give way to sustained increases in vehicle and truck traffic, construction equipment, earthwork stockpiles, man-made structures, and associated lighting and glare.

With respect to the area in which the Project Site is located, the issue of aesthetic impacts was reviewed during the adoption of the City's General Plan and adoption of the AASP. The conclusion was reached within Section 9.0 of the Land Use Element/Circulation Element Update FEIR that urbanization would irreversibly change the visual character of the south end of the City from that of a low density semi-rural area to a more intensely developed, suburban area (City 1994). This was classified as a significant, unavoidable impact in the Airport Margarita Area EIR (Page 3A-21). The City Development Plan, however, does include features aimed at reducing impacts to the existing visual character and quality of the Project Site and its surroundings. In general, restoration planting would be conducted throughout the Project Site to maintain consistency with the native plant community structure and composition of the Project Site.

More specifically, the removal of the power lines and power poles adjacent to project development frontage along Tank Farm Road and the removal of chain link fencing would serve to enhance the visual quality of the views along Tank Farm Road. A 14-foot wide landscaped median and the installation of a multi-use pathway/bikeway would also serve as enhancements along Tank Farm Road.

Santa Fe Road, south of Tank Farm Road, would be re-aligned and tied into Tank Farm Road and include the following elements:

- The re-aligned segment of Santa Fe Road from San Luis Obispo Creek north to Tank Farm Road would be four lanes with sidewalks on both sides;
- An arched culvert would be constructed over San Luis Obispo Creek;
- A multi-use off-street bike path would be constructed along the west side of Santa Fe Road realignment; and
- An on-street bike path would be installed on both sides of Santa Fe Road.

New roads would be constructed north of Tank Farm Road, including a one-quarter mile extension of Santa Fe Road continuing north of Tank Farm Road as a two lane road with on-street bike lanes on each side and a 14-foot landscaped median.

Over the years, the rural character of the surrounding area has been gradually encroached upon by residential, commercial and industrial development. While the Project would continue this trend, the above features would provide relief to the visual impacts generated by the Project, in addition to the substantial design standards contained in the AASP and the City and County General Plans. Implementation of these design standards would reduce the impact to the existing visually rural character of the Project Site and its surroundings. Therefore, the impact is considered *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

Mitigation Measures

AE-2 *Prior to issuance of applicable construction permits, the Applicant shall ensure that all development projects are reviewed for consistency with the San Luis Obispo County Airport Land Use Plan, the Airport Area Specific Plan design guidelines outlined in Section 5.0 Community Design, and the City's Community Design Guidelines as part of the City Architectural Review process.*

Residual Impacts

The application of design standards, including those listed in the City's Community Design Guidelines and the County's General Plan Land Use Ordinance, addressing issues such as building heights, building colors, the use of landscaping and parking lot arrangements, would all serve to minimize the visual character impacts of the City Development Plan. Therefore, the proposed development would be considered *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

Impact #	Impact Description	Phase	Residual Impact
AE.3	The Project would generate a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.	Development	Class II

The use of the Project Site for the City Development Plan for urban uses would result in an increase in daytime/nighttime light and glare within the area, including the residences off of Prado Road and Margarita Avenue northwest of the Project Site and residences in the Hidden Hills Mobile Lodge east of the Project Site. These increases would be the result of new lighting at service commercial, business park, and public facility uses, such as a ball field, over the course of the 25-year development schedule on approximately 803,000 square feet of commercial and industrial development.

Further, while the types of lighting and their exact locations are not specified at this point, the proposed development would increase the amount of light into adjacent areas, including airport lands, as well as those residential areas identified above.

Over the years, the surrounding area has been gradually encroached upon by residential, commercial and industrial development. The proposed development would add to the existing

lighting currently generated from these adjacent areas, such as the industrial subdivision to the west of the Project Site and the recreational area (Damon-Garcia Sports Fields) to the northeast. However, certain lighting design features, such as shielding and a restrictive lighting schedule, could be implemented to reduce the lighting and glare impact.

Therefore, the potential impact from increased light and glare is considered to be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

Mitigation Measures

AE-3 *Prior to issuance of applicable construction permits, the Applicant shall submit a lighting plan and lighting operation schedule for review and approval. The lighting plan shall demonstrate that direct views of light sources are shielded from nearby residences. The lighting schedule shall describe the number, location and amounts of lights, and the proposed hours of operation for the entire property. The lighting schedule shall propose the minimum number of lights, level of illumination, and hours of operation allowed by City codes and ordinances, including the City's Night Sky Ordinance. The approved lighting schedule shall become a required condition of the lease between the property owner and any tenant on the Project Site.*

Residual Impacts

The application of a lighting plan and lighting operation schedule in accordance with City codes and ordinances, including the Night Sky Ordinance, would serve to minimize the adverse affects of new sources of substantial light and glare. Therefore, the proposed development would be considered *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

4.10.6 County Development Plan Impacts and Mitigation Measures

All of the impacts described above for the City Development Plan would be the same for the County Development Plan. Specifically, the County Development Plan would address degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings (Impact AE.2) in much the same way as the City Development Plan; that is, the County Development Plan includes features aimed at reducing impacts, such as restoration planting, removal of chain link fencing, power lines and power poles along Tank Farm Road, Santa Fe Road realignment and extension, on-street bike lanes, and a landscaped median on Tank Farm Road. Mitigation measure AE-2 would be the same except under the County Development Plan, consistency should be ensured with the County Airport Land Use Plan, the County Conservation and Open Space Element, the County San Luis Obispo Area Plan, and the County Design Guidelines.

Additionally, the application of a lighting plan and lighting operation schedule in accordance with County codes and ordinances would serve to minimize the adverse affects of new sources of substantial light and glare (Impact AE.3) related to the County Development Plan.

One of the main differences between the City and County plans is that the County Development Plan includes a wastewater treatment facility (WWTF). A photo simulation was prepared in order to better understand and communicate the potential visual changes associated with the County Development Plan. The photo simulation location was selected to best show a critical viewing point, how the Project would compare to applicable planning policy, and from a

viewpoint that would provide a good representation of the overall Project character. See Figure 4.10-13.

Impact #	Impact Description	Phase	Residual Impact
AE.4	The wastewater treatment facility would degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.	Development	Class II

The County Development Plan includes the installation and operation of a wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) on approximately one acre south of Tank Farm Road. Construction of a WWTF would change the visual character of that portion of the Project Site from one of vacant, natural topography to one with physical development and the quiet, serene environment currently enjoyed would give way to increases in vehicle and truck traffic and associated lighting and glare.

However, the County Development Plan includes features aimed at reducing impacts in that area of the Project Site, such as restoration planting, removal of chain link fencing, power lines and power poles along Tank Farm Road, on-street bike lanes, and a landscaped median.

Over the years, the rural character of the surrounding area has been gradually encroached upon by residential, commercial and industrial development. While the construction of a WWTF would continue this trend, the above features would provide relief to the visual impacts generated by the Project, in addition to the design standards and guidelines contained in the Airport Land Use Plan and the County General Plan. Implementation of these design standards and guidelines would reduce the impact to the existing visually rural character of the Project Site and its surroundings. Therefore, the impact is considered *less than significant with mitigation (Class II).*

Mitigation Measures

Implement mitigation measure AE-2 following the County design guidelines.

Residual Impacts

The application of design standards and guidelines, including those listed in the Airport Land Use Plan and the County's General Plan Land Use Ordinance, addressing issues such as building heights, building colors, the use of landscaping and parking lot arrangements, would all serve to minimize the visual character impacts of the County Development Plan. Therefore, the proposed development would be considered *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

4.10.7 Cumulative Analysis

The cumulative section addresses how this Project may contribute to a change in visual quality when viewed with other existing and reasonable future development in the area (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130).

Figure 4.10-13 Key Viewing Location No. 5 from Tank Farm Road near the middle of the Project Site looking southwest - Proposed

Source: Google Earth

Note: The WWTF is part of the County Development Plan, not the City Development Plan.

As identified in Chapter 3, Cumulative Scenario and Methodology, projects 2, 3, and 4 (see Table 3-1) are within the same viewshed as the Project. All three cumulative projects are residential projects with two of the projects containing a mixed-use element of commercial and/or office.

As with the Project, each of the cumulative projects would contribute to the continuing degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the area, including generating a new source of light or glare that could adversely affect day or nighttime views. However, it should be noted that these three projects would be located in close proximity to existing residential and industrial developments. Further, mitigation measure AE-3 would be implemented to reduce these cumulative impacts. Similar mitigation measures would likely be required for the cumulative projects. As such, the cumulative impacts in aesthetics and visual resources would not be significant.

4.10.8 Mitigation Monitoring Plan

4.10.8.1 Remediation Project Mitigation Monitoring Plan

Mitigation Measure	Plan Requirements and Timing	Compliance Verification		
		Method	Timing	Responsible Party
AE-1a	The Applicant shall ensure that graded areas for development pads that are not built on within two years of creation of the development pads, are temporarily landscaped or otherwise maintained as needed to cover exposed soils and maintain growth of weeds. Weeds shall be controlled to not be unsightly.	Check plans	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit	County Planning and Building Department
AE-1b	The Applicant shall ensure that fencing installed throughout the Project Site in order to implement institutional controls for management of the area for wildlife habitat shall contribute to the aesthetic character of the site and vicinity. Prior to issuance of grading permits for sites where fencing is required, the applicant shall submit to the County Department of Planning and Building for review and approval, in consultation with the City of San Luis Obispo, site fencing plans. The plans shall include: fencing types that meet the functional requirements for the intuitional controls; fencing locations; materials and color palette consistent with City of San Luis Obispo design guidelines; and, as needed, complementary landscape to break-up the public view of the fencing.	Review and approval of Fencing Plans	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit	County Planning and Building Department City Community Development Department

4.10.8.2 City Development Plan Mitigation Monitoring Plan

Mitigation Measure	Plan Requirements and Timing	Compliance Verification		
		Method	Timing	Responsible Party
AE-2	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit, the Applicant shall ensure that all development projects are reviewed for consistency with the San Luis Obispo County Airport Land Use Plan, the Airport Area Specific Plan design guidelines outlined in Section 5.0 Community Design, and the City's Community Design Guidelines as part of the City Architectural Review process.	Check plans	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit	City Community Development Department
AE-3	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit, the Applicant shall submit a lighting plan and lighting operation schedule for review and approval. The lighting plan shall demonstrate that direct views of light sources are shielded from nearby residences. The lighting schedule shall describe the number, location and amounts of lights, and the proposed hours of operation for the entire property. The lighting schedule shall propose the minimum number of lights, level of illumination, and hours of operation allowed by City codes and ordinances, including the City's Night Sky Ordinance. The approved lighting schedule shall become a required condition of the lease between the property owner and any tenant on the Project Site.	Check plan	Prior to issuance of applicable construction permit	City Community Development Department

4.10.8.3 County Development Plan Mitigation Monitoring Plan

No specific mitigation measures were identified for the County Development Plan. Impact AE.1 associated with the remediation project would apply. Impacts AE.2 and AE.3 associated with the City Development Plan would be applicable to the County Development Plan except the County standards would apply and the County would be the responsible agency.

4.10.9 References

Sierra Club Website on the Nine Sisters, http://www.santalucia.sierraclub.org/ninesis.html#intro

San Luis Obispo County (SLOC). 2008a. Santa Margarita Ranch Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision Project and Future Development Program Environmental Impact Report. State Clearinghouse No. 2004111112. Prepared by Rincon Consultants, Inc.

___. 2009. San Miguel Ranch General Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Report. Prepared by LSA Associates.

___. 2010. General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element. May 2010.

___. 2011. Cold Canyon Landfill Expansion Draft Environmental Impact Report.

City of San Luis Obispo (City). 1994. FEIR - Land Use Element/Circulation Element Updates.

___. 2003a. Costco/Froom Ranch Environmental Impact Report. State Clearinghouse No. 2002051036. Prepared by Morro Group, Inc.

___ 2003b. Airport Area and Margarita Area Specific Plans and Related Facilities Master Plans Final Program Environmental Impact Report, Volume II. State Clearinghouse No. 2000051062. Prepared by Jones & Stokes.

___. 2007a. General Plan.

___. 2007b. Community Design Guidelines [amended].

___. 2009a. Prefumo Creek Commons Project Environmental Impact Report. State Clearinghouse No. 2008021028. Prepared by AMEC Earth & Environmental, Inc.

___. 2009b. Garden Street Terraces Project Environmental Impact Report, Volume I. State Clearinghouse No. 2007071062. Prepared by AMEC Earth & Environmental, Inc.

___. 2013. Municipal Code.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USDA). 1995. Landscape Aesthetics. Agriculture Handbook No. 701. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington, D.C.

U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1986. USDI Manual 8410, Visual Resource Inventory and Evaluation. Washington, D.C.

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). 1980. Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects. American Society of Landscape Architects, Washington, D.C.