

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section evaluates potential impacts to views, visual conditions, and light and glare resulting from facilitated development by implementation of the Parklands Specific Plan.

4.1.1 Setting

a. Visual Character of Ventura. Ventura is located on the edge of the Pacific Ocean adjacent to the north of the City of Oxnard. The City has a wide variety of landscapes and seascapes, including natural, agricultural, and urban components. The northern portion of the City consists of rolling hills and steep mountains of the coastal range and transitions into the coastline. The Ventura coastline is a combination of both sandy beaches and man-made rocky structures. The Santa Clara River forms the southeastern boundary of the City and serves as an important visual element of the City. Agricultural activity is prevalent in portions of both East and West Ventura. The large parcels of farmland in East Ventura interspersed with suburban residential developments provide a visual break from the suburban land use pattern.

U.S. 101 and the SR 126 function as the arteries of movement in the City. Community shopping centers and highway-oriented uses are concentrated along these corridors. The U.S. 101 affords views of hillsides, mountains, and the coast. SR 126 provides the City with regional access from the east. Views of green fields and ridgelines of mountains to both the north and south are available this highway. Views from these highways within the City consist primarily of commercial and residential development, although some agricultural lands remain and are visible as one travels through the City.

b. Visual Character of the Plan Area. The plan area is visible from SR 126, Wells Road, and Telegraph Road, all of which are identified in the City of Ventura's 2005 General Plan as view corridors having scenic value, offering background views of the hillsides behind the City.

The plan area encompasses approximately 66.7 acres. Topography within the plan area is mostly flat, but trends gently upwards from Brown Barranca to which the plan area drains. The plan area is currently developed with row crop agriculture and hoops or temporary greenhouses under which additional row crops are grown. Depending on the vantage and the season, one may view attractive cultivated fields, or weeds and other visually unattractive elements, including rusting farm equipment, storage areas with discarded containers, garbage, encampments and other similar items associated with a lack of maintenance.

Existing uses adjacent to the plan area include residential development to the west and north, commercial to the east, and Blackburn Road and the SR 126 to the south. Agricultural uses are present northeast of the plan area north and east of the Foothill Road/Wells Road intersection and about 450 feet west of the plan area at the intersection of Telegraph Road and Saticoy Avenue.

c. Existing Views of the Plan Area. Typical views of the plan area are shown in Figure 4.1-1. Principal travel corridors are important to an analysis of aesthetic features because they define the vantage point for the largest number of viewers. Included in these are the SR 126, Wells Road, and Telegraph Road. Existing views from each of these roadways are shown on Figures 4.1-2 and 4.1-3. A description of each view corridor follows.





Photo 1 - Plan Area interior looking south from Telegraph Road.



Photo 2 - Typical existing view of Plan Area looking north.





Photo 1 - Plan Area looking north from SR 126 eastbound.



Photo 2 - Plan Area looking north from SR 126 westbound.



Photo 3 - Wells Road Corridor looking north including Plan Area to left.

SR 126 and Wells Road View Corridors



Photo 1 - Telegraph Road corridor looking east.



Photo 2 - Telegraph Road corridor looking north.



State Route 126 (SR 126). SR 126 is the primary regional highway serving the area. SR 126 offers panoramic views of agriculture, and mountains. The plan area is nearly level with SR 126 and viewers traveling westbound on SR 126 have a short uninterrupted view of the plan area with foothills and mountains in the background (see Photo 2, Figure 4.1-2). Obstructions for the westbound viewer include shrubs along SR 126 and the off- and on-ramp at the SR 126/Wells Road intersection (see Photo 1, Figure 4.1-2). Eastbound viewers have interrupted views of the plan area due to a vegetated median that separates eastbound and westbound travelers on the SR 126. The ridgelines to the north are located at elevations approximately 800 feet higher than the freeway elevation at a distance of approximately one mile from the freeway.

Wells Road. Traveling north along the eastern boundary of the plan area, Wells Road has a short decline after crossing the SR 126. This provides views of the plan area, views of the hills, and views of agricultural areas on the east side of the road at the base of the hills as one travels farther up the roadway away from SR 126. Views of the plan area along Wells Road are uninterrupted and include views of the row crops and Brown Barranca. Commercial and residential development are visible along the Wells Road and Telegraph Road frontages (see Photo 3, Figure 4.1-2).

Telegraph Road. Telegraph Road is generally level with the plan area and no obstructions are present between the road and plan area. Telegraph Road crosses through a mix of agricultural and residential suburban areas. Portions of this road offer views of the foothills and mountains to the north and east (see Photos 1 and 2 on Figure 4.1-3). However, development obstructs portions of these views (see Photo 2, Figure 4.1-3).

d. Light and Glare. Nighttime lighting in the plan area vicinity results from several sources of artificial light, including lights along Highway 126, other streetlights, automobile lights, and residential and commercial building lights. Sources of glare in the vicinity consist predominantly of vehicles in parking lots and on roadways as well as the windows of buildings, which reflect the sunlight. Nighttime lighting sources in the plan area are limited as the area includes agricultural production. Some relatively low-level night lighting is associated with commercial uses to the east and north of the plan area. Land uses in the vicinity of the plan area that are most sensitive to nighttime lighting and glare are the adjacent residences to the north and west, as well as motorists traveling along SR 126.

e. Regulatory Setting. Development in the City is subject to the following regulatory programs aimed in part at the preservation of the community's visual character.

2005 General Plan. The City of Ventura's General Plan has designated SR 126, Wells Road, and Telegraph Road (east of Victoria Avenue) as view corridors having scenic value. Policy 4D of the General Plan requires the protection of views along scenic routes, and Action 4.36 requires development along these roadways - including noise mitigation, landscaping, and advertising - to respect and preserve views of the community and its natural context. In addition, Action 4.37 requests that SR 126 be designated as a State Scenic Highway.

Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance establishes setback, parking and sign standards, building height limits, hillside development restrictions, and building densities. However, if

approved and implemented, the Parklands Specific Plan itself would supersede the zoning ordinance with respect to design guidelines and development standards for the plan area.

4.1.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. Consequently, the assessment of aesthetic impacts is inherently subjective in nature. This evaluation measures existing plan area visual resources against development facilitated by the proposed Specific Plan, analyzing the nature of the anticipated change. The design guidelines of the Specific Plan were reviewed for policy instruction relative to visual resources and community design to determine compatibility with adjacent land uses.

Wells Road, Telegraph Road and SR 126 are designated in the 2005 General Plan as corridors having scenic value. As a result, the proposed development is evaluated from these public viewing corridors to determine whether it affects views of the community and its natural context pursuant to Action 4.36.

To determine the impacts of the proposed project related to light and glare, uses sensitive to light and glare in the vicinity of the proposed project were identified. These sensitive uses include residences to the north and west of the plan area. The existing sources and amounts of light and glare within the plan area were compared with the amount of light and glare that would occur permanently through development of the plan area.

The IS/MND previously prepared for the proposed specific plan concluded that impacts relating to light and glare would not be significant and the City received no comments on the draft IS/MND providing evidence that significant light or glare impacts would occur. Therefore, aesthetic impacts are considered significant if plan area development would:

- *Affect a scenic route or approach or vista open to public view*
- *Result in an aesthetically offensive site or condition open to public view*

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

Impact AES-1 Plan area development would alter the visual character of the plan area, but would not block views of ridgelines to the north of the plan area from SR 126. However, a freeway sound wall proposed in Section 4.8, *Noise*, would partially block views from the freeway and would potentially create a monolithic structure as viewed from the freeway. Impacts associated with the sound wall would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Travel corridors provide views of the plan area for the greatest quantity of viewers. As identified in the *Setting*, SR 126, Wells Road, and Telegraph Road (east of Victoria Ave) are documented in the 2005 General Plan as offering high quality views of the community and its natural context. Implementation of the proposed specific plan has the potential to affect views from these roadways.

The specific impacts to affected view corridors associated with this change in land use are described below.

SR 126. Following development, the most noticeable change to viewers traveling along SR 126, would be the presence of a 14-21 foot tall sound wall along the south side of Blackburn Road in addition to second story development that would be visible above the wall. Figure 4.8-2 in Section 4.8, *Noise*, shows the location of the wall, which would transition from 14 feet tall opposite the southern boundary of lot 263 (triangle shaped pocket park), to 18 feet tall at the western boundary of Road "I" (see Figure 4.8-2). The wall would continue from the western boundary of Lot "I" at 19 feet tall, transitioning to 21 feet tall and continue at this height to about 75 feet past the western boundary of the plan area (see Figure 4.8-2). It is noted that other wall scenarios, such as a garden wall or a combination garden wall and sound wall would result in a shorter wall adjacent SR 126 (see figures 1 and 2 in the Barrier Analysis contained in Appendix G). However, these other combination walls would also separate the residences from Blackburn Road, creating a walled-in community. Moreover, the only option offering full protection for the existing residence at the southern edge of the plan area is a sound wall that would be constructed along the southern edge of Blackburn Road.

Photos 1-2 on Figure 4.1-2 show views of the plan area and mountains in the background from SR 126. Photo 2 on Figure 4.1-2 shows a chain link fence in the foreground along the SR 126 frontage looking towards Blackburn Road and the project site. Given the distance across the road and the proposed 14-21 foot wall on the south side of Blackburn Road, views of the mountains in the background would be partially obstructed.

The freeway is approximately level with the eastern portion of the plan area; however, the western portion of the plan area is about seven feet higher than the freeway. Eastbound viewers are separated from the proposed wall by approximately 130 feet, including a median with two lanes of traffic a westbound freeway entrance lane, and right of way. Westbound viewers would be approximately 60 feet from the sound wall. The ridgelines to the north are located at elevations approximately 800 feet higher than the freeway elevation at a distance of approximately one mile from the freeway.

Based on the wall height, distance from the viewers to the wall, and distance to the hillsides behind the wall, views of the hillsides from the portion of SR 126 adjacent the plan area would be obstructed by a continuous and potentially monolithic wall. The creation of a monolithic structure along the freeway edge would potentially create an aesthetically offensive condition and is therefore a potentially significant impact.

Wells Road. Following development, viewers along Wells Road would see primarily multi-family residential structures if looking to the west. The visually sensitive designation for Wells Road is intended to preserve views of the hillsides, which are visible when traveling northbound toward the hillsides at the terminus of Wells Road. The proposed development would not interfere with views of the hillsides, as the Wells Corridor leads straight to the hillsides, while the proposed development would occur adjacent the western boundary of Wells Road. Thus, the project's effects with respect to the Wells Road visual corridor and obstruction of hillside views would be less than significant.

Telegraph Road. With respect to Telegraph Road, the proposed development would occur south of Telegraph Road, whereas the closest hillsides lie to the north. The distant hillsides to the south and east would be partially obscured by plan area development; however, the hillsides to the southeast are more than two miles away and, therefore, are not prominent visual features from Telegraph Road. Thus, although the proposed development would alter the character of views to the south by converting agricultural land to residential use, it would not obstruct views of the hillsides to the north. Consequently, the visual effect of plan area development along the Telegraph Road corridor would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measure would offset the visual impact associated with construction of the proposed sound wall.

AES-1 Soundwall Aesthetics. Views of the proposed sound wall abutting SR 126 shall be softened through installation of landscaping such as trees, shrubs and climbing vines, resulting in a variety of textures and colors. Prior to Final Map approval, the Design Review Committee shall review and approve landscaping and irrigation plans. Prior to occupancy of any dwelling unit within the plan area, the sound wall, landscaping and irrigation shall be installed.

Significance After Mitigation. Measure AES-1 would soften the effect of the proposed freeway sound wall and eliminate the potential for an offensive aesthetic condition along the freeway corridor. Thus, impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-2 **Development facilitated by the proposed Specific Plan would alter the visual character of the plan area by replacing existing agricultural land with residential and commercial uses. Although some individuals may view this change as adverse, the change for this area was envisioned in the Ventura General Plan and the proposed development would not create an aesthetically offensive condition. Thus, the impact to the plan area's visual character is considered Class III, less than significant.**

The Parklands Specific Plan would facilitate the development of up to 499 residences, a community center, and a retail pocket that includes live/work opportunities. Implementation of the proposed specific plan would alter the aesthetic character of the plan area by transforming it from rural agricultural and to a more urbanized environment. The specific plan would accommodate infill development in an area that is surrounded by urban/suburban development on all four sides.

The 2005 General Plan FEIR identified aesthetic impacts associated with the alteration of views from major public view corridors, including SR 126, as significant. Under Scenario 1 (Intensification/Reuse Only) of the 2005 General Plan FEIR, the plan area was included as one of a number of properties already designated for non-agricultural use under the previous Comprehensive Plan. In conjunction with adoption of the 2005 General Plan, the City Council considered the impacts to public views due to the conversion of agricultural lands within the City's sphere of influence, including the plan area, and determined that the public benefits of

the General Plan outweigh certain unavoidable adverse environmental effects, including aesthetic impacts associated with the conversion of agricultural land. A Statement of Overriding Consideration was adopted. Therefore, the project would not have a significant aesthetic impact associated with the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use beyond that already been identified in a prior impact assessment and documented in the certified 2005 General Plan FEIR.

The neighborhood is designed to be aesthetically interesting, offering small scale pedestrian friendly streets, bikeways, park spaces, and a variety of architectural styles and housing sizes (see Figure 2-4 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). Development facilitated by the specific plan would alter the visual character of the existing environment, but proposed development would not create any visually offensive condition. Development under the specific plan would create a more continuous neighborhood environment, scaling back the vehicular travel lanes along Wells Road and Telegraph Road in the vicinity of the plan area to create a single travel lane in each direction, bike paths, landscaped medians and parkways.

All development accommodated under the specific plan would be reviewed by the City's Design Review Committee to further ensure that the development would be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and consistent with the Parklands Specific Plan design guidelines. Therefore, although change in visual character would be substantial as residences and commercial development would replace the existing row crops, specific plan implementation would not create an offensive aesthetic condition. This impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. None required as the proposed specific plan would not create an offensive aesthetic condition.

Significance after Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

c. Cumulative Impacts. As discussed in Section 3.0, *Environmental Setting*, planned cumulative development associated with buildout of the 2005 General Plan in the City of Ventura would add more than 8,300 dwelling units, as well as about 1.2 million square feet of retail development, 1.2 million square feet of office development, 2.2 million square feet of industrial development, and more than 500,000 square feet of hotel development. The aesthetic impacts of individual projects can often be mitigated through careful site design, avoidance of significant visual features, and appropriate building and landscape standards.

Development facilitated by the proposed Specific Plan, in conjunction with other development in the area, most notably the UC Hansen Trust property located adjacent to the west of the mobile home park, could have potentially significant impacts. Both of these projects would develop existing agricultural uses to residential uses. This loss would contribute to the overall cumulative change in the aesthetic character of Ventura.

Development of walls, including the UC Hansen Trust sound wall in association with this sound wall, would alter views from SR 126, incrementally increasing the amount of time in which views of the hills to the north would be blocked for SR 126 motorists. The wall proposed for this project would extend for about 1,000 feet, while the wall for the UC Hansen Trust project would extend about 1,000 feet. These walls as preliminarily configured are separated by

a gap of about 130 feet, and could become connected to form one continuous barrier that would also provide complete coverage for the existing mobile home park. The aesthetic effect of cumulative wall construction would be mitigated on a case-by case basis through landscaping or artwork. The construction of walls along the SR 126 frontage was considered during the 2005 General Plan update and was recommended along SR 126 to protect existing residences such as the residence located at the southern boundary of the Parklands plan area and the existing Country Estates Mobile Home park. Therefore, the cumulative impact of this project in association with the UC Hansen Trust project relative to wall massing along the SR 126 would be less than significant.

Cumulative development along SR 126 would result in significant cumulative visual impacts to that freeway corridor. However, as discussed under Impact AES-2, this cumulative impact was already identified in the 2005 General Plan FEIR and the City Council adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations for that impact. Currently planned and pending development would not create any cumulative impact beyond that identified in the 2005 General Plan FEIR.