
XI VISUAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

Adopted September 2018



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XI Visual Resources Element

The Peninsula is graced with views and vistas of the surrounding Los Angeles basin and coastal region. Because of its unique geographic form and coastal resources, these views and vistas are a significant resource to residents and the many visitors, as they provide a rare means of experiencing the beauty of the Peninsula and the Los Angeles region. Views of the ocean, islands, distant mountains, and urban lights are not only important from public spaces, such as arterials, trails, parks, and open spaces, but also from private property. Additionally, views of open space areas, such as canyons, pastoral environment, ridges, and bluffs, are vital from both public and private spaces, as these areas contribute to the unique character of the City.

City residents have long identified the preservation of views and the harmonious development of its neighborhoods among their top priorities for the City. When the City first incorporated it was at risk of losing views and the unique visual character of the City due to unmanaged development and vegetation growth.

Upon incorporation, the City developed policies in its General Plan to preserve visual resources. Later, the City adopted and implemented various Ordinances and Guidelines to protect visual resources as seen from both private and public property. The purpose of the Visual Resources Element is to provide continued guidance through establishment of goals and policies to ensure the continued preservation, restoration, and enhancement of significant visual resources within the City.



1 Goal

1. Preserve views and vistas for the public benefit and, where appropriate, the City should strive to enhance and restore these resources and the visual character of the City, and provide and maintain access for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.

The Visual Resources Element begins by introducing the three main types of visual resources: views, vistas, and urban design. Following is a discussion of the specific visual resources within and outside of the City. The next section provides a framework for how visual resources are viewed from “viewing stations,” which include viewing sites, viewing points, and visual corridors. The next section focuses on areas within the City that should have views preserved or restored, including undeveloped areas. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the various implementation tools, including Visual Resource Policies that the City has used and will continue to use to preserve, restore, and enhance visual resources.

The associated visual resources, viewing stations, and areas to be preserved, restored, or enhanced are denoted on the accompanying map (Figure 1), which provides a graphic understanding of the descriptions provided.

2 Policies

1. Develop controls to preserve existing significant visual aspects from future disruption or degradation.
2. Enhance views and vistas where appropriate through various visual accents.
3. Preserve and enhance existing positive visual elements and restore those that have been lost.
4. Consider the visual character of neighborhoods consistent with the General Plan and Neighborhood Compatibility Guidelines.
5. Develop and post signs regarding vista points to provide safe off-road areas to enjoy views.
6. Develop and maintain, in conjunction with appropriate agencies, public access to paths and trails for the enjoyment of views.
7. For developments that are proposed within areas that impact the visual character of a corridor, require developers to incorporate treatments into their projects that enhance a corridor’s imagery.
8. Require developments that will impact corridor-related views to mitigate their impacts.
9. Develop a program for the restoration of existing areas that negatively impact view corridors.
10. Require residents and developers to mitigate light pollution associated with developments.
11. Maintain strict sign standards to ensure that signs are harmonious with the buildings, neighborhood, and other signs in the area.
12. Work with adjoining jurisdictions to preserve and restore the view corridors from major thoroughfares, taking into account traffic safety.

3 Types of Visual Resources

Visual resources (see Figure 1) are divided into three categories: views, vistas, and urban design. This section describes the types of views, vistas, and urban design to be preserved, restored, and enhanced within the City.

3.1 Views

A view is a scene or panorama observed from a given vantage point. Views represent a panoramic visual aspect that extends to the horizon of a distant focal point (Catalina Island, rather than the lighthouse), and has an unlimited arc and depth. These views can be either continuous (as views from along a public corridor) or localized (as viewed from a specific site).

3.2 Vistas

A vista is a confined view that is usually directed toward a dominant element or landmark (e.g. lighthouse). A vista, unlike a view, may be created by features that visually frame the vista. Each vista has, in simplest terms, a viewing station, an object or objects to be seen, and intermediate features that frame the vista. If one or more of the elements already exist and are allowed to remain, then the others must be designed in harmony.

3.3 Urban Design

Urban design recognizes that the visual form of the City’s neighborhoods and commercial areas can also provide a pleasing visual palette to residents and visitors. With urban design, the City is concerned with ensuring that the development of each parcel or additions to existing structures occurs in a manner that is harmonious with the land and also maintains an architectural aesthetic and character representative of the neighborhood and the City.

Properly planned and designed street landscape also adds to a neighborhood’s aesthetics and character. Since incorporation, the City’s street tree and landscape management practice has largely been one that involves the uniform installation of landscape along street frontages and medians. In recognition that streetscape is a more significant component of urban design, a broader vision to the City’s management of street landscape is necessary to add and preserve this visual accent to neighborhood aesthetics and character.

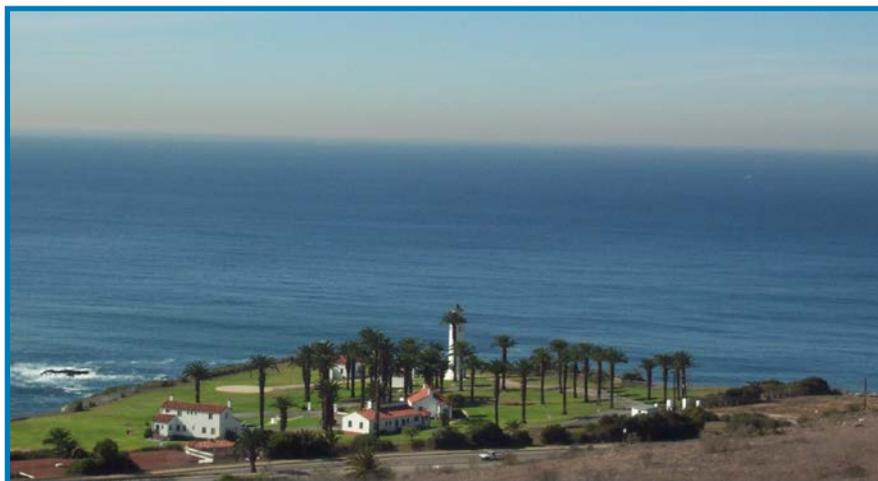
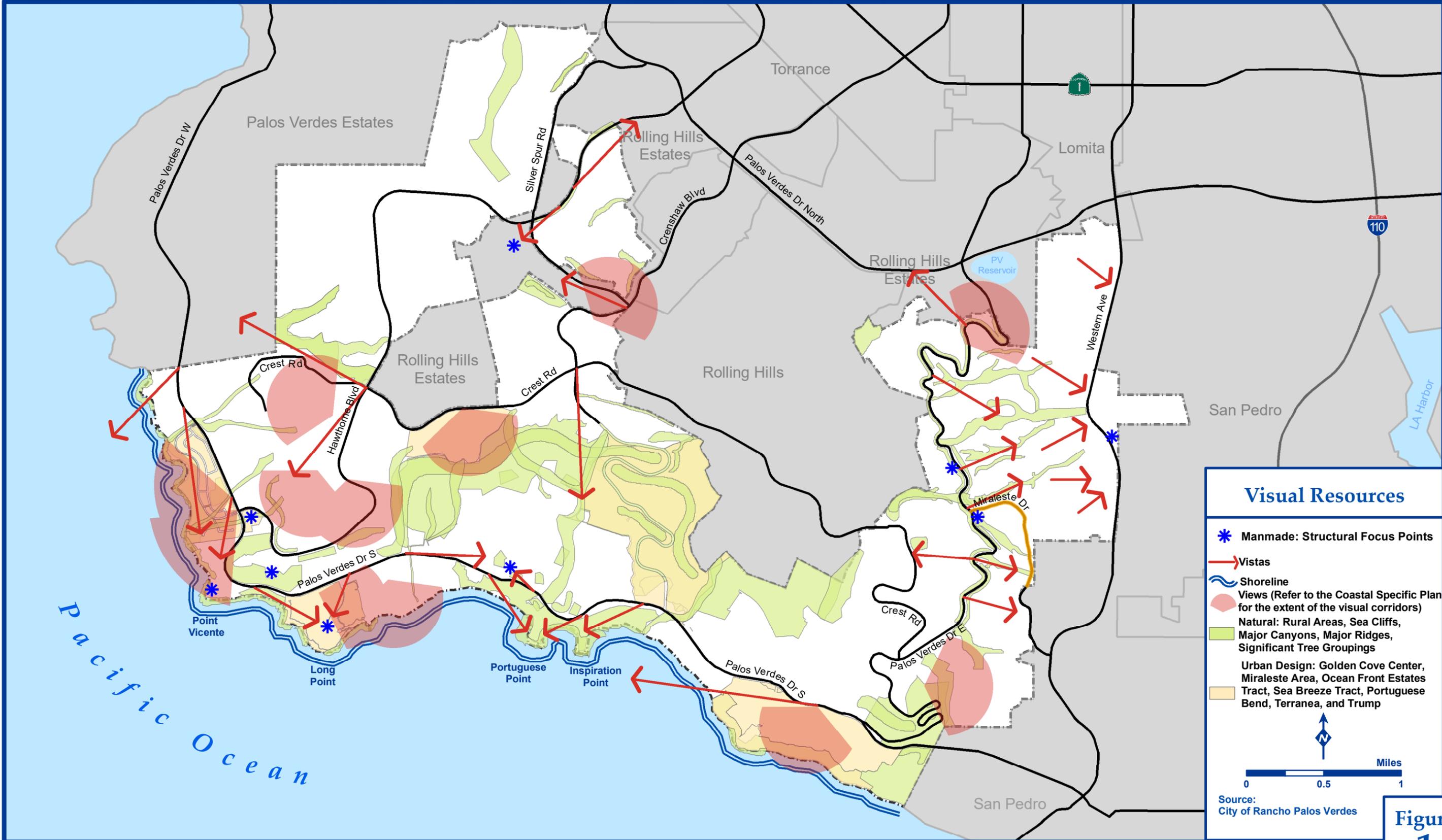


Figure 1: Visual Resources



Visual Resources

- Manmade: Structural Focus Points
- Vistas
- Shoreline
- Views (Refer to the Coastal Specific Plan for the extent of the visual corridors)
- Natural: Rural Areas, Sea Cliffs, Major Canyons, Major Ridges, Significant Tree Groupings
- Urban Design: Golden Cove Center, Miraleste Area, Ocean Front Estates, Tract, Sea Breeze Tract, Portuguese Bend, Terranea, and Trump

0 0.5 1 Miles

Source: City of Rancho Palos Verdes

Figure 1

4 Visual Resources

The following are visual resources within and surrounding the City. They fall within three general categories: natural, built, and urban design.

4.1 Natural Visual Resources

Natural visual resources include the following:

Natural Areas: Natural features that provide viewers with a feeling for the rural atmosphere of the City. The best examples are the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, major canyon systems, and open spaces adjacent to view corridors.

Shoreline: The irregular shoreline configuration is a prominent feature along the Peninsula, including Portuguese Point, Inspiration Point, Long Point, and Point Vicente. Distant shorelines can also be enjoyed from multiple locations throughout the Peninsula that are visually accessible to the public.

Sea Cliff: The Peninsula shoreline is characterized by vertical cliffs forming rocky, narrow beaches and coves. Sea cliffs are observed from the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve and other open space areas that are located close to the sea cliff, locations at higher hillside elevations, and positions offshore. Offshore observation locations offer the maximum viewing orientation of the total sea cliff landscape.

Major Canyons: These represent the location of additional vegetation, shadows, and other visual focal elements in the dominant topography of the City.

Major Ridges: Ridges complement the canyon element of the topography, with the major ridge systems, spines, and spurs representing outstanding visual features of the Peninsula area.

Significant Tree Groupings (mass, linear): Because of the random presence of tree groupings within the City, significant masses or lines of trees represent a natural focal point of interest, and set a theme for some areas. Examples include tree groupings found in the Portuguese Bend area and along Palos Verdes Drive East.

Night Sky: The semi-rural residential development and large areas of open space provide a low level of background lighting and associated glare that can obstruct views of the night sky. As a result, the City has some of the best night sky views within the greater Los Angeles basin. The southerly portion of the City, sheltered by the light glare of the Los Angeles basin, offers the best night sky viewing.

4.2 Built Visual Resources

Built visual resources tend to be major architectural elements that focus a viewer's attention along major corridors and on major public lands. Examples of noteworthy focal points include Wayfarers Chapel, Point Vicente Lighthouse, and the Vincent Thomas Bridge. This category also includes views of the surrounding cityscape and urban lights at night.

4.3 Urban Design Visual Resources

Visual resources are not only views of scenic areas, but also include the style and character of structures, landscaping, and signage (residential and non-residential) through urban design. Since incorporation, the City has developed different policies to manage growth and to enhance and protect the visual character of its neighborhoods. The City has review guidelines for new construction and additions to existing structures to enhance urban design. Such design standards and guidelines are used to review residential development; they are discussed in Section 7, Implementation Tools. A good example of a commercial urban design focal point is the Golden Cove Shopping Center. Some of the more visible residential urban design examples include the Enclave at Oceanfront Estates, Seabreeze and Tramonto Residential Tracts, Portuguese Bend, Terranea’s casitas and villas, and the Trump National Residential Tracts. Additionally, within some neighborhoods are public and private landscaping design characteristics worth noting: the ecologically based streetscapes of Oceanfront Estates, the mature trees of Miraleste, and the semi-rural streetscapes of the Portuguese Bend neighborhood.



5 Viewing Stations

Viewing stations (see Figure 2) are places where people can enjoy the visual resources of the City. They include both public and private spaces. Viewing stations are described in three categories: viewing points, viewing sites, and view corridors.

5.1 Viewing Points

Viewing points are locations at private residences and roadway turnouts along vehicular corridors that afford viewing of visual resources. Significant turnout improvements along Palos Verdes Drive South and West, have been made since the City's incorporation, and include turnouts at the Terranea Resort, Abalone Cove, along Hawthorne Boulevard, and at Trump National Golf Club.

5.2 Viewing Sites

Viewing sites are larger areas that, due to their physical locations on the Peninsula, provide a significant viewing vantage. Since the City's incorporation, several viewing sites have been established, including Del Cerro Park, Hesse Park, Lower and Upper Point Vicente, Oceanfront Estates public trails, the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, Trump National's public trails, Founder's Park, and Terranea's public trails.

5.3 View Corridors

View corridors are major circulation roads and trail networks within the City that afford views of visual resources. It is along these routes that the majority of residents and nonresidents view the City.

Vehicular Corridors: Vehicular view corridors should take into account two elements: the visual quality of a corridor and safety problems associated with visual distractions. The interruption created by vehicles slowing for view enjoyment introduces potential hazards and reflects possible lack of adequate vista points for enjoying a specific vista. As indicated in the accompanying Visual Resources Map (Figure 14), the primary vehicular corridors are along Palos Drive West, East, and South. Other vehicular corridors are along Western Avenue, Hawthorne and Crenshaw Boulevards, Crest and Highridge Roads, and Miraleste Drive.

Path and Trail Corridors: Major paths and trails in the City primarily run along borders of significant natural features (ridge route coastal bluff). Therefore, visual impacts from existing/proposed developments along these routes occur mainly on one side, with some occurrences on both sides. This condition, where development exists or is proposed on one side or both sides of paths or trails, generates concern over how developments appear from path and trail networks. In the past, tract developments on the Peninsula have been concerned with street-side appearance. Incorporation of path and trail routes introduces a need for visual appearance considerations to occur on both street and path or trail frontages. Areas where both sides are fronted by development appear more structured in their visual treatment and could provide transitional areas prior to paths or trails entering into areas with large, open vistas.

Figure 2: Viewing Stations

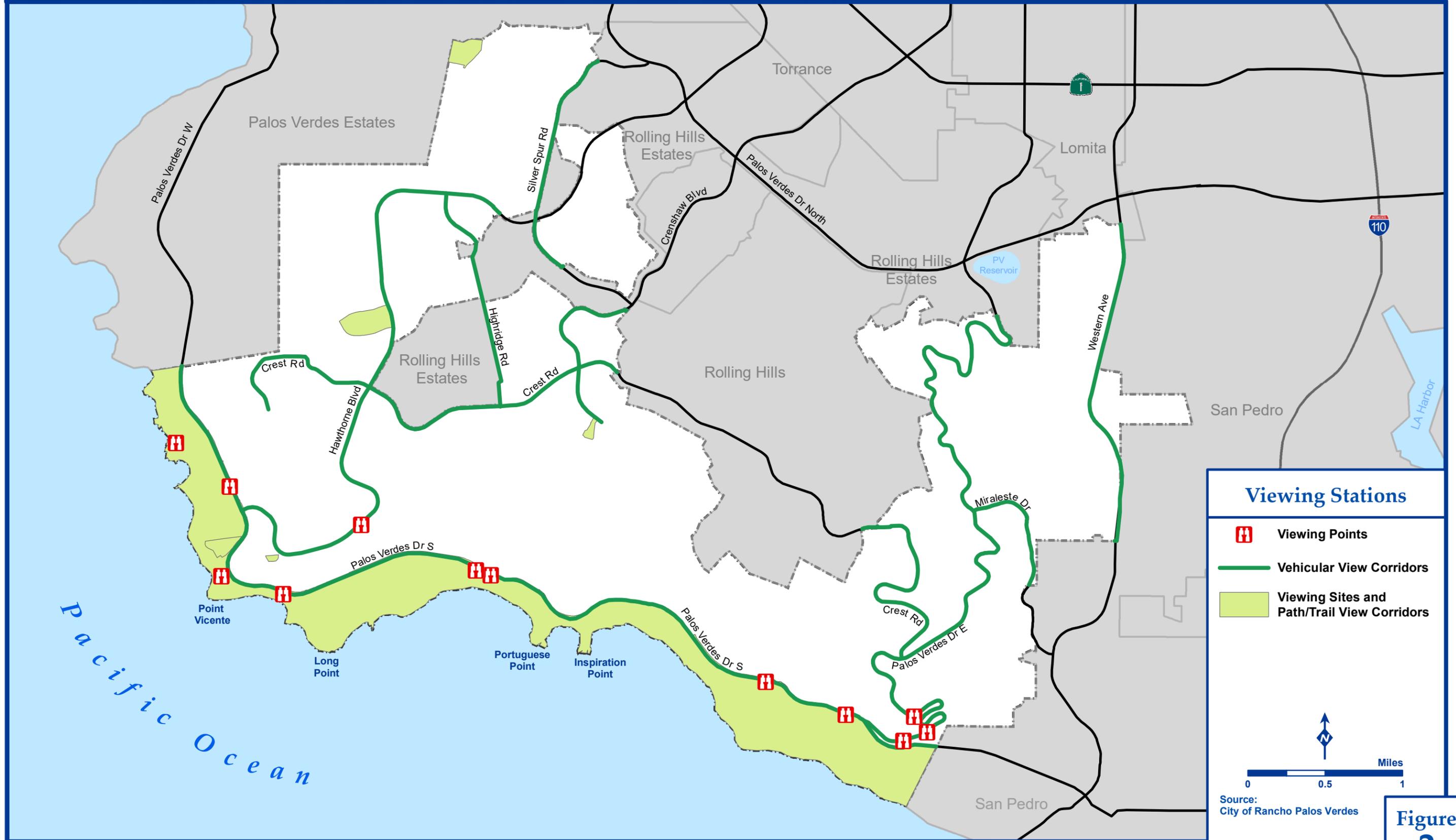


Figure 2

6 Preservation and Enhancement of Visual Resources

6.1 Natural Areas to be Preserved

Most large areas of natural land are protected from development by the Coastal Specific Plan and the City's Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, but some areas of natural land, especially the City's right-of-way along Palos Verdes Drive West, East, and South, are vulnerable to alteration due to view clearance needs, roadway improvements, and/or trail enhancements (see Figure 3).

6.2 Developed Areas to be Preserved

Developed areas of particular visual interest are mainly located along Palos Verdes Drive South. From this corridor, specific developed areas should be preserved: Point Vicente Lighthouse, Terranea Resort, Trump National Golf Course, and Wayfarers Chapel. Other notable developed areas that are to be preserved are Green Hills Cemetery along Western Avenue and the median landscape along Miraleste Drive.

6.3 Developed Areas to be Restored

Since the adoption of the initial General Plan in 1975, certain corridors (e.g., Crest Road between Hawthorne Boulevard and Crenshaw Boulevard) have been restored to enhance and preserve views and vistas. Roadway and median improvements along Palos Verdes Drive South and West have also been completed. However, due to past grading and Los Angeles County's Street Design Standards, which caused visually negative site and road patterns to impact major view corridors, there still exists a need to restore certain view corridor segments. Two corridors in need of major restoration are Western Avenue and Hawthorne Boulevard. More specifically, the Western Avenue corridor needs additional median and roadway enhancements and Hawthorne Boulevard needs median and parkway enhancements to preserve the aesthetic value of the roadway and its views and vistas.

6.4 Visual Corridors to be Preserved

The concern over these areas is how a proposed development will visually impact a corridor. The chances for blocking, altering, and degrading existing significant views and vistas within the City could be at the mercy of potential developments. Since the time of the City's incorporation, large underdeveloped areas adjacent to Crest Road and Palos Verdes Drive South/West have been developed with residential tracts that are designed to protect views and vistas. There is also a continuing need to manage foliage bordering visual corridors to keep it from obstructing views. Smaller, contiguous and non-contiguous underdeveloped parcels still exist throughout the City and should be designed to consider impacts to visual resources.

6.5 Night Sky to be Preserved

A nighttime sky in which stars are readily visible is a valuable scenic/visual resource. In urban areas, views of the nighttime sky can be diminished by light pollution. Light pollution refers to excessive use of artificial light. Excessive

light can be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animals, and is also indicative of a high level of energy consumption. Examples of light sources that commonly cause light pollution are residential outdoor lights, streetlights, parking lot lights, and field lighting. Projects should be designed to mitigate light pollution.

Figure 3: Preservation & Enhancement

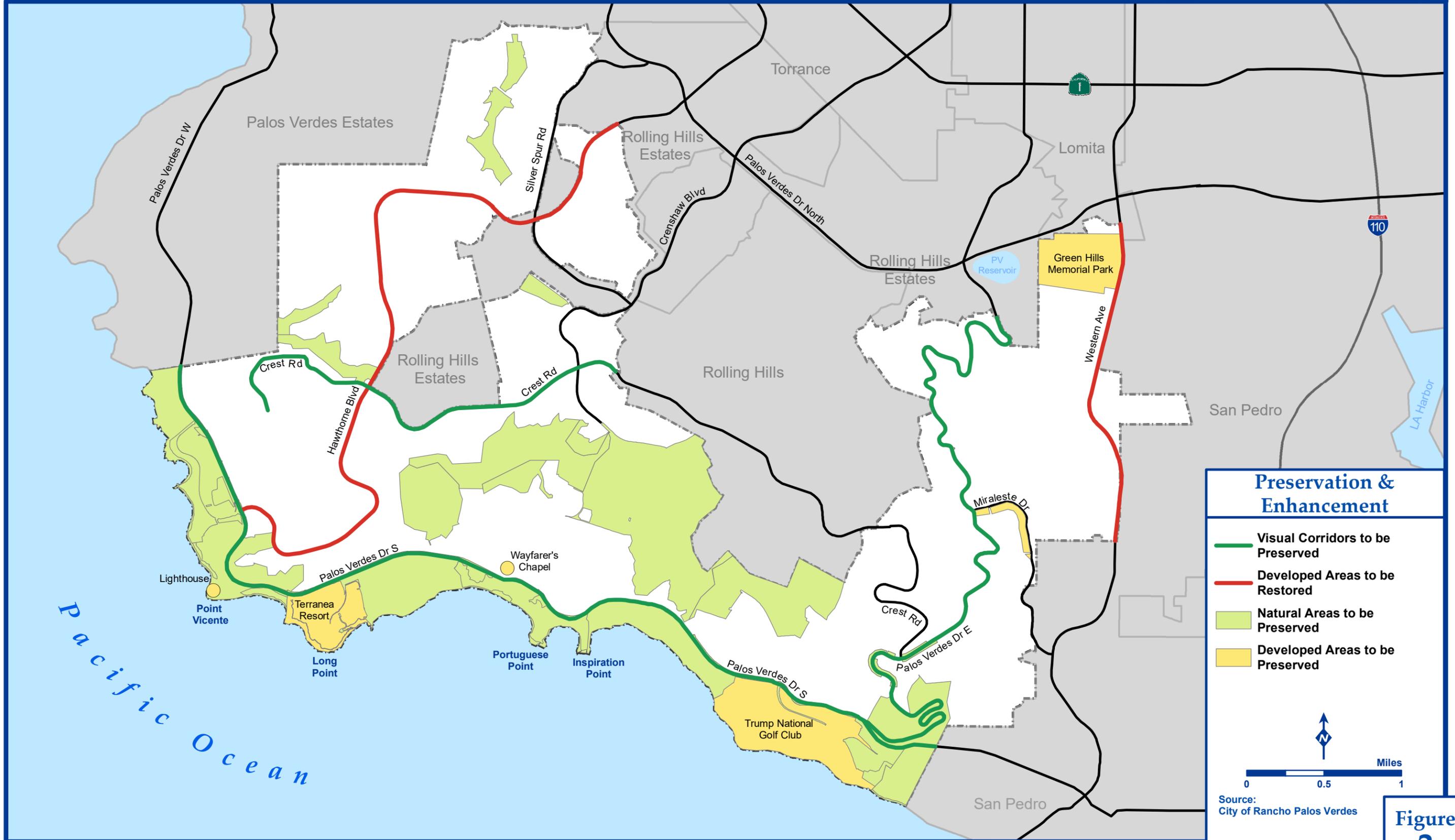


Figure 3

7 Implementation Tools

Since the City's incorporation, the City Council has adopted various documents to assist the public in proposing and reviewing developments in accordance with the General Plan and Municipal Code. This section describes the different ordinances, documents, and methods by which the City manages and preserves views, vistas, and urban design within the City. The following are implementation tools that work toward achieving the preservation and enhancement of visual resources. All of these documents are available for viewing at the City's Community Development Department.

7.1 View Restoration and Preservation Ordinance and Guidelines

In November 1989, City voters passed an initiative to protect views by establishing height restrictions for residential structures and foliage. This view ordinance was codified into the City's Municipal Code. Subsequently, guidelines and review procedures were adopted by the City Council to implement the ordinance and codes related to building structure heights and view impairment caused by foliage. These guidelines are known as the Height Variation Guidelines and the View Restoration and Preservation Guidelines and Procedures.

To be consistent with the intent to protect views and vistas, the City Council also adopted a policy to protect views impaired by foliage located on City-owned property including City street foliage. View restoration requests involving City-owned trees are processed by the City pursuant to the City's Municipal Code.

7.2 Guidelines and Procedures for Neighborhood Compatibility

The General Plan contains policies on many aspects of residential development, including neighborhood compatibility. Neighborhood compatibility is an urban design concept that attempts to balance new residential development with the preservation of the rural and semi-rural character of the City. To this end, in 2003, the City adopted neighborhood compatibility guidelines for property development in the City as a means to further the objectives of the General Plan to preserve and enhance the character of established neighborhoods. The City Council-adopted Neighborhood Compatibility Handbook consists of suggested guidelines meant to assist residents and developers in the preparation and design of residential projects through project scale, architecture, and setbacks within the context of the immediate neighborhood within the same zoning district.

7.3 Coastal Specific Plan

A Coastal Specific Plan was prepared in 1978 to further study and assess resources along the City's coastline. One of the goals of the Coastal Specific Plan is to provide additional guidance beyond the General Plan and further define policy for visual resources and development along the coastline. Accordingly, the Coastal Specific Plan further defines the General Plan's concepts of visual corridors and viewing focal points as they pertain to the City's coastline. The Coastal Specific Plan also contains community design guidelines to ensure that public and private development conforms to the principles set forth in the General Plan.

7.4 Western Avenue Specific Plans

The intent and purpose of the Western Avenue Specific Plans are to establish a guide for the comprehensive redevelopment or renovation of the existing commercial development located along Western Avenue. The Specific Plans include design and regulatory standards that are tailored to the unique features and characteristics of the area. In addition, the Specific Plans are designed to protect adjacent residential properties from the impacts of commercial development and to encourage revitalization. The plans identify themes that are designed to create an identity and distinguish the area from neighboring Los Angeles. The plans integrate the unique aspects of the Eastview area into the overall character of the City, assist in preserving views, and improve the urban design for this area.

