4.1 AESTHETICS

This section evaluates impacts to aesthetic conditions on and around the project site. Impacts to view corridors, the aesthetic character of the site and surrounding area, and light and glare conditions are addressed.

4.1.1 Setting

a. Visual Character and Viewsheds of the Project Site and Surrounding Area. The Crestridge Senior Housing project site is in the central portion of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, in an area of with highly variable topography including gentle inclines and steep slopes. The project site comprises 9.76 acres of undeveloped, vacant land with frontage on the north side of Crestridge Road just west of its intersection with Crenshaw Boulevard. The property slopes from south to north from Crestridge Road up to the ridgeline above, including the ridge and a portion of the slope beyond as it descends towards Indian Peak Road. The site has maximum elevation gain of approximately 100 feet from the lowest point in the southeast corner to the highest point on the ridge. Slopes range from approximately 10% to 40%.

The site is most visible to the public from Crestridge Road and Crenshaw Boulevard. The northernmost edge of the site, as it crests the ridgeline, is also visible from Hawthorne Boulevard and Indian Peak and Silver Spur roads to the north. The project site is surrounded by residential and institutional development to its west, south and east. To the north of the site is an undeveloped hillside covered with native and non-native vegetation that slopes down from the project site towards Indian Peak Road. This undeveloped area is the City-owned Vista Del Norte Ecological Preserve, which is designated as reserve open space under the Rancho Palos Verdes Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) Subarea Plan.

The site's visual character as experienced from Crestridge Road and Crenshaw Boulevard is defined primarily by its undeveloped character in contrast to the abutting and surrounding development, and by its slope and ridgeline. Figures 2-3a and 2-3b in Section 2.0 *Project Description* illustrate the existing views from Crestridge Road and of the interior of the site. The ridgeline on the northern portion of the project site is also visible from points north, including Crenshaw Boulevard and Indian Peak and Silver Spur roads. From these vantage points, the northern edge of the project site is visible at the ridgeline at the top of the sloped Vista Del Norte Ecological Preserve property.

Private views of the site are available from a number of single family residences on the hillsides to the south on such streets as Mistridge Drive, Seaside Heights Drive and Oceanridge Drive, which are at higher elevations than the project site. From some houses on these streets the site is in the foreground of views northward across the Los Angeles Basin.

b. Light and Glare. There is no existing lighting on the site, and very limited street lighting on Crestridge Road near the site. The sources of lighting are primarily safety and accent lighting and parking lot lighting at the abutting developed properties to the west and east. Land uses in the vicinity that would be most sensitive to night lighting are the residences located on the hillsides to the south and the senior apartments and assisted living units to the east and west. Figure 2-2 in Section 2.0 *Project Description* shows an aerial view of adjacent land uses.

c. Regulatory Setting. The City of Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan, Coastal Specific Plan and Zoning Code include a number of goals, policies and regulations intended to protect and enhance the aesthetic resources and visual character of the City. Selected policies and regulations that are applicable to the project's potential visual and aesthetic impacts are discussed below.

General Plan. The "Visual Aspects of the Plan" section of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan (1975) generally describes visual and aesthetic resources in the City and sets forth policies calling for the "preservation, restoration, and enhancement of significant visual aspects related to Rancho Palos Verdes" (General Plan Page 188). The Visual Aspects Map (General Plan Figure 41) identifies the project site, together with the adjacent Vista del Norte Preserve, as "Canyons and Ridges" and as "Undeveloped Lands Impacting Visual Character." It also identifies a Vista looking toward the Preserve and the northern portion of the site (the part at the top of the ridge) from Crenshaw Boulevard adjacent to its intersection with Silver Spur Road. Finally, General Plan Figure 41 also shows a View to the southwest extending from this intersection, with the project site potentially within the western extreme of the viewshed. Figure 4.1-1 shows these designations as illustrated in the General Plan.

The General Plan defines a vista as "a confined view, which is usually directed toward a terminal or dominant element or feature. A vista, unlike a view, may be created in its entirety and is therefore subject to close control through visual enframements. Each vista generally has a viewing station, objects to be seen, and an intermediate ground. The three together make a unit and are usually conceived as an entity. If one or more of the elements already exist and are allowed to remain, then the others must, of course be designed in harmony."

The following selected policies related to aesthetics and visual resources may be considered applicable to the project site and the proposed project:

Policy 2. *Enhance views and vistas where appropriate through various visual accents.*

Policy 3. *Preserve and enhance existing positive visual elements while restoring those which are lacking in their present visual quality.*

Policy 5. *Develop well-located vista points to provide off-road areas where views may be enjoyed. These should have safe ingress and egress and be adequately posted.*

Policy 6. *Develop and maintain, in conjunction with appropriate agencies, public access to paths and trail networks for the enjoyment of related views.*

Policy 7. *Require developers, as developments are proposed within areas which impact the visual character of a corridor, to address treatments to be incorporated into their projects, which enhance a corridor's imagery.*

Policy 8. *Require developments within areas which will impact corridor-related views to fully analyze project impacts in relation to corridors in order to mitigate their impact.*

Basemap Source: Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan.

Approximate Location of General Plan "Visual Aspects" for the Project Area

Figure 4.1-1

Policy 9. *Require developments which lie between natural areas to be maintained and viewing corridors to show how they intend to mitigate view disruption.*

Policy 10. *Develop a program for the restoration of existing areas, which negatively impact view corridors through the urban design element (e.g., landscaping and under grounding).*

Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code. Among other provisions of the Municipal Code related to land development, the project would be required to adhere to zoning regulations that restrict the allowed height and lot coverage of structural development within the Institutional District, including the following from Municipal Code Section 17.34.050:

A. Setbacks.

1. Front and Street Side. On lots which abut a dedicated street, the front and street side setbacks shall be twenty-five feet. On lots which abut a private or nondedicated street, the front and street side setbacks shall be fifty-five feet.

2. Interior Side and Rear. The interior side and rear setbacks shall be twenty feet.

B. Building height. Institutional buildings erected in the city shall have a building height not greater than sixteen feet and shall not exceed one story, except with the approval of a conditional use permit by the planning commission, pursuant to Chapter 17.60 (Conditional Use Permits).

C. Roof Equipment. All roof equipment shall conform to the height limits specified in Section 17.48.050 (Lots, Setbacks, Open Space Area and Building Height) of this title and shall be adequately screened from adjacent private properties and the public right-of-way….

…I. Lighting. All exterior lighting in institutional zoning districts shall conform to the performance standards of Section 17.56.040 (Environmental Protection). Before any development is approved, a plan showing the locations and specifications of all exterior lighting shall be submitted for review and approval by the director.

Section 17.56.40 of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code provides standards for outdoor lighting:

No outdoor lighting shall hereafter be installed in any nonresidential district, except in accordance with the provisions of this section.

A. Prior to the issuance of the first certificate of occupancy, a lighting plan prepared by a lighting contractor, which shall include the location, height, number of lights, wattage, estimates of maximum illumination on site and spill/glare at property lines, and in conformance with the following standards and criteria, shall be submitted for approval by the director.

1. No one fixture shall exceed one thousand two hundred watts and the light source shall not be directed toward or result in direct illumination of a parcel

of property or properties other than that upon which such light source is physically located. Wattage for nonincandescent lighting shall be calculated using the multiplier values described in Section 17.56.030(A) of this chapter.

2. *No outdoor lighting shall be permitted where the light source or fixture, if located on a building, is above the line of the eaves. If the light source or fixture is located on a building with no eaves, or if located on a standard or pole, the light source or fixture shall not be more than ten feet above existing grade, adjacent to the building or pole.*
3. *All estimates or testing shall be done with the entire facility illuminated.*
4. *Testing equipment shall be a calibrated Gossen Panalux Electronic 2 or an equal approved by the director.*

B. *The director may approve deviations which exceed the standards set forth in Section 17.56.040(A)(1) through (A)(3) of this chapter, when the director finds that such deviations are required for public safety.*

Section 17.54 of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code sets forth standards for undergrounding of utilities, screening of mechanical equipment, and trash receptacle enclosures. The purpose of the regulations are to ensure "that, in conjunction with new developments, all utility service lines are placed underground and that certain areas and types of equipment are screened from public view. The provisions of this chapter are deemed necessary for the protection of property values and the general welfare."

4.1.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. Different viewers react to views and aesthetic conditions differently. Consequently, the assessment of aesthetic impacts is inherently subjective in nature. This evaluation measures the existing visual resource against the proposed actions, analyzing the nature of the anticipated change.

Photo simulations were prepared to assist with the visual analysis. Four view points were selected based on the location of public viewpoints with direct visual access to the site and the potential for these views to be affected by the project. Renderings of approximated future visual conditions were then developed based on architectural and grading plans using computer modeling and the changes in topography that would occur with implementation of the proposed grading plan.

The assessment of potential lighting and glare impacts is based on an evaluation of the proposed project in comparison with existing light and glare conditions.

An aesthetic impact is considered significant if the project would:

- *Have 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; or*

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

As discussed in the Initial Study (see Appendix A to this EIR), impacts related to damage to scenic resources would be less than significant. Therefore the discussion below focuses on the first, third and fourth items in the above list of impact categories.

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact AES-1 The proposed Crestridge Senior Housing project is located in an area with rolling topography allowing views of developed and undeveloped hillsides in several directions from public and private viewpoints. The proposed project would alter the view of the project site from several of these viewpoints, but would not block or otherwise have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view or vista, including those identified in the General Plan. This is a Class III, *adverse, but less than significant* impact.

The proposed project would involve construction of a senior housing project on an undeveloped hillside and ridge between Crestridge and Indian Peak roads. The project would change the visual character of the site from undeveloped to developed, and the proposed grading plan would alter the topography of the site substantially by changing the existing slope to stepped, relatively flat pads. While the proposed structures would be two-stories up to 27′ high, the proposed project also involves lowering the existing grade of the site by up to 35′. Furthermore, the grading would also allow for a series of structures that would step with the site as they will step down from west to east across the project site. (Changes to the visual character of the site are discussed under Impact AES-2 below.)

Public Views and General Plan Views and Vistas. As noted above under *Regulatory Setting* and illustrated in Figure 4.1-1 above, the project site is in the general area of a Vista and a View identified in the General Plan. The identified Vista is shown as extending west toward the site from the vicinity of the intersection of Crenshaw Boulevard and Silver Spur Road. The identified View extends to the southwest from this intersection, with the project site theoretically within the western extreme of the viewshed. However, a review of current conditions shows that development that has occurred along Silver Spur Road since the General Plan was adopted has altered the views from that area and has completely blocked views toward the project site. Although the site is visible from a number of other public streets, no scenic views are available through the project site that would be blocked by the proposed project. The project would continue the pattern of development on either side of the project site, where formerly sloped areas have been graded and institutional development introduced. The proposed grading plan would bring most of the proposed buildings to similar heights as the existing grade, with several exceptions, as shown in figures 2-4 and 2-8 in Section 2.0 *Project Description*. The exceptions would be several buildings extending from one to approximately 20 feet above existing ground (including above the 16-foot height limit set forth in Section 17.26.040 of the City's Municipal Code, requiring a Conditional Use Permit for the project). Nevertheless, although these buildings would break the ridgeline from most viewpoints, they would not block scenic views of visual resources beyond the site.

Private Views. As noted above, the primary private viewpoints offering views of and over the project site are the residences on the hillsides to the south on such streets as Mistridge Drive, Seaside Heights Drive and Oceanridge Drive. As shown in figures 4.1-2 to 4.1-5, from some houses on these streets the site is in the foreground of views northward across the Los Angeles Basin and to the mountains beyond. These views are generally not available from the streets themselves, because they are blocked by the houses on the north sides of the streets. As discussed above, the proposed project would involve extensive grading and modification of the existing slope and ridge, and several buildings would be higher than the existing grade by between approximately 3 to 20 feet. These buildings would intrude into the existing view from these residences, incrementally reducing the view of the basin. In addition, there is the potential for landscaping at the site to intrude into views from these residences if trees at the site are allowed to grow above the height of the proposed buildings. However, the view frames from these residences are expansive and offer nearly 150-degree wide views, taking in a wide swath of the Santa Monica Bay towards the north, the Los Angeles basin and mountains to the east, and the Long Beach area to the south. The proposed project's structures and landscaping would be located along the lower part of the view frames and would impair only a small portion of the view of the developed basin, and little if any of the wide mountain views. In most cases the proposed project would primarily block views of the retail and commercial development to the north of the site along Silver Spur Road and would not impair views of the developed basin beyond. None of these private views would be fully impaired by the proposed project. Full or nearly full views of the basin and mountains would remain, so that a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista would not occur.

It should also be noted that CEQA does not typically consider impacts to private views as significant unless the number of properties significantly affected is relatively high. As noted by the California Court of Appeal in *Ocean View Homeowners Assn., Inc. v. Montecito Water District (*116 Cal. App. 4th 396), "[t]hat a project affects only a few private views may be a factor in determining whether the impact is significant." Therefore, although the City acknowledges that some homeowners may experience incrementally adverse interference with a portion of their private views, the impact is not significant for purposes of the CEQA analysis due to the limited number of affected properties and due to the expansive amounts of views that would remain.

Mitigation Measures**.** As impacts would be less than significant, no mitigation is required. However, the following mitigation measure is *recommended* to further reduce this less than significant impact minimizing the growth of landscape trees into the views.

AES-1 **Tree Maintenance.** Prior to issuance of building permits, the applicant shall prepare and submit for City review and approval a landscape maintenance plan for the project that includes a requirement to undertake tree trimming at regular intervals, or as necessary, to prevent trees at the site from extending beyond one foot above the roof of the adjacent or closest structure (to the tree/foliage). Trees shall be of a species that can be maintained at such heights.

Significance After Mitigation**.** Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AES-2 **The proposed project would introduce structural development, new landscaping, and hardscape to an open**

and undeveloped site, and project grading would substantially alter the site's slope and ridgeline topography. In addition, the site is identified on the Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan Visual Aspects Map as a "canyon and ridge" feature and as "Undeveloped Lands Impacting Visual Character;" grading for and construction of the proposed project would eliminate both of these attributes. Impacts to the existing visual character and quality of the site and its surroundings would therefore be Class I, *significant and unavoidable*.

The existing visual character of the project site is defined by both its undeveloped, open condition and its topography, which consists of a moderate to steep slope and a ridgeline. As discussed in the *Setting* section above, the site is visible from a number of public and private viewpoints. The General Plan's Visual Aspects Map (General Plan Figure 41) identifies the project site, together with the adjacent Vista del Norte Preserve, as "Canyons and Ridges" and as "Undeveloped Lands Impacting Visual Character." Existing conditions are shown in figures 2-2 and 2-3 (a and b) in Section 2.0 *Project Description.* There are no specific scenic features such as major rock outcroppings, heritage trees or historic buildings within the project area.

Visual simulations of site conditions after project implementation from four viewpoints are shown in figures 4.1-6 and 4.1-7. Visual simulations of the approximate visibility of the project from additional representative viewpoints are shown on Figure 4.1-8. The impact discussion below is based partially on these simulations.

The proposed project would substantially alter the visual character of the site related to its topography by grading the existing slopes into stepped, relatively flat pad areas, and by removing the site's natural ridgeline, as shown in figures 2-4 and 2-8 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*. The existing open, undeveloped visual character, which is accentuated and made more visible to the public by the site's sloping topography, would be completely altered to a fully developed condition. These changes would be most directly experienced from viewpoints to the south and east of the site, including Crestridge Road and Crenshaw Boulevard, as well as the residential areas on the north-facing hillsides across Crestridge Road. However, as shown in Figure 4.1-8, the project would also alter the ridgeline as seen from points north and west, including Indian Peak and Silver Spur roads and Hawthorne Boulevard, although the changes would be more distant from those vantage points and the open space of the Vista del Norte Preserve in the foreground would reduce the impact of the project breaking a portion of the ridgeline.

In summary, the substantial alteration of the visual character of the project site and proposed removal of the visual aspects as identified in the General Plan would result in a significant impact related to the visual character and quality of the site.

Mitigation Measures. Mitigation measures are not available to reduce the impact to the visual character of the site, short of a substantial reduction in proposed development and landscape/hardscape. Please see Section 6.0 *Alternatives* for an analysis of the potential impacts of a reduced and reconfigured project alternative.

Significance After Mitigation. The proposed project would substantially alter the visual character of the site. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Existing

Viewpoint Location Map

Proposed

Visual Simulation From 5623 Mistridge
Looking Northeast

Figure 4.1-2

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, August 2012.

Existing

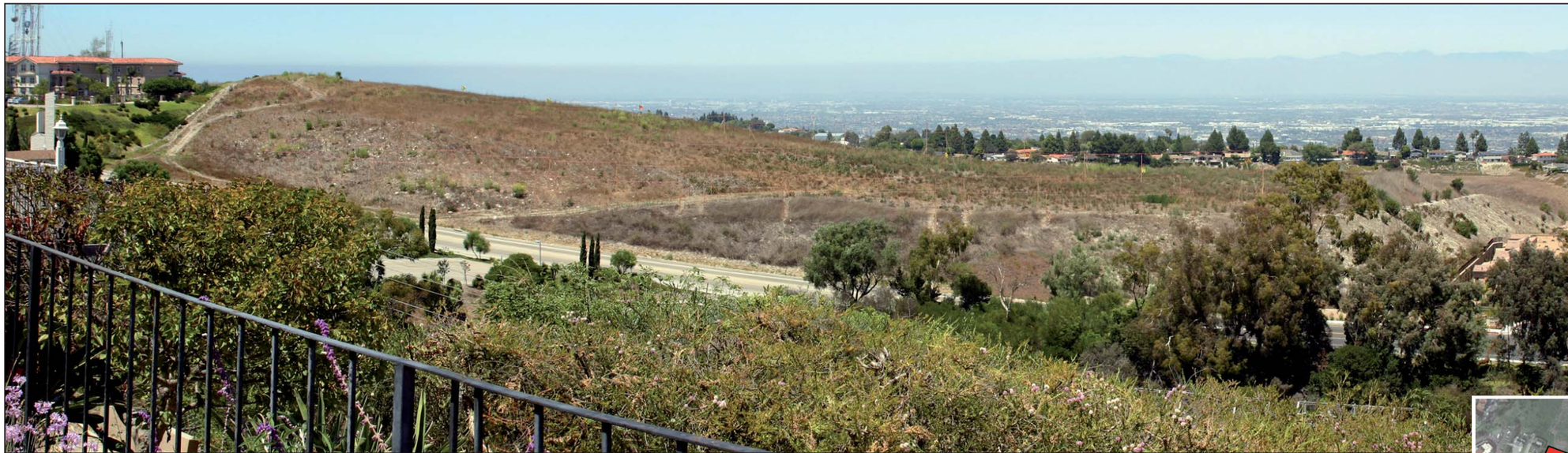
Proposed

Viewpoint Location Map

Visual Simulation From 5649 Mistridge Looking Northeast

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, August 2012.

Figure 4.1-3



Existing

Proposed

Viewpoint Location Map

Visual Simulation From 5575 Mistridge
Looking North

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, August 2012.

Figure 4.1-4

Existing

Proposed

Viewpoint Location Map

Visual Simulation From
5525 Seaside Heights - Looking North

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, August 2012.

Figure 4.1-5

Existing

Viewpoint Location Map

Proposed

Visual Simulation From
Crestridge Road Looking Northeast

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, June 2012.

Figure 4.1-6

Existing

Viewpoint Location Map

Proposed

Visual Simulation From
Silver Spur Road Looking Southwest

Figure 4.1-7

Source: Robert Carr Landscape Architect, June 2012.

Photo 1 - Approximate visibility of proposed structures from Hawthorne Boulevard between Silver Spur and Indian Peak roads, looking south

Photo 2 - Approximate visibility of proposed structures from Indian Peak Road adjacent to the project site, looking south.

Project Visibility from Hawthorne Boulevard and Indian Peak Boulevards

Figure 4.1-8

Impact AES-3 **The proposed project would result in new sources of light and glare on and around the project site due to introduction of new buildings, hardscape and associated lighting. Some of the new light and glare would be visible from public and private viewpoints. However, with required adherence to the lighting restrictions in City's zoning ordinance, impacts related to light and glare would be Class III, *less than significant.***

The proposed project would introduce new lighting on the currently undeveloped, unlit project site. This lighting would be in the form of outdoor fixtures illuminating parking areas and walkways and providing safety and accent lighting around buildings. This lighting would be visible from the public and private viewpoints discussed above. No street lights are proposed for the internal private street of the project.

As discussed above under *Regulatory Setting*, Section 17.56.40 of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code provides standards for outdoor lighting in non-residential zoning districts. Key standards that must be adhered to include the following requirements:

- *[N]o one fixture shall exceed one thousand two hundred watts and the light source shall not be directed toward or result in direct illumination of a parcel of property or properties other than that upon which such light source is physically located.*
- *No outdoor lighting shall be permitted where the light source or fixture, if located on a building, is above the line of the eaves. If the light source or fixture is located on a standard or pole, the light source or fixture shall not be more than ten feet above existing grade, adjacent to the building or pole.*

Given the nature of the proposed project, nighttime lighting is anticipated to be generally similar to that of the existing institutional and residential development that abut the project site. Therefore, although the project would introduce new lighting to the vacant site, it would continue the pattern of development and associated lighting that is present on both sides of the project site along Crestridge Road. From private viewpoints at higher elevations to the south of the site, the new lighting would blend to some extent with that of the Los Angeles Basin visible in the background. Required adherence to the lighting restrictions in City's zoning ordinance as cited above would further ensure that lighting would not be out of character with the site's Institutional zoning or the existing surrounding development. As such, impacts would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures**.** As impacts would be less than significant, no mitigation is required.

Significance After Mitigation**.** Impacts would be less than significant with required adherence to the City's Municipal Code.

c. Cumulative Impacts. Cumulative development in the City and surrounding areas would include approximately 89,436 square feet of commercial/retail, 53,617 square feet of office uses, 1,778 residential dwelling units, and 187,666 square feet of institutional uses, as shown in Table 3-1 and 3-2 in Section 3.0, *Environmental Setting*. A number of these projects are

in the general vicinity of the Crestridge site, including the Highridge Condominium Project at 28220 Highridge Road and several projects in the City of Rolling Hills Estates on or just off of Silver Spur and Indian Peak roads. In general, the proposed Crestridge Senior Housing project combined with these and other pending projects in Rancho Palos Verdes and neighboring cities would contribute toward creating an incrementally more built-out, developed aesthetic. However, no projects on the cumulative projects list are near enough to the proposed project site to contribute to a significant cumulative visual impact in a common viewshed. Cumulative impacts related to light and glare and scenic views would be less than significant with adherence to the City's Municipal Code, based on the discussion in Section 4.1.2.b *Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures*, above.

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