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Visual Resources

VR.1 Introduction and Goals

The City's location on the Palos Verdes Peninsula affords views that are one of the most valuable natural resources on the Peninsula. Views of the ocean, off-shore islands, distant mountains, and city 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, ridges, and bluffs themselves 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 from private and public property. The purpose of this Element is to provide continued guidance through the establishment of goals and policies to ensure the continued preservation, restoration, and enhancement of significant visual resources within the City.

To set the context for preserving, restoring and enhancing the visual resources within the City, the following goals have been established:

1. *Palos Verdes 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 to many visitors, as they provide a rare means of experiencing the beauty of the Peninsula and the Los Angeles region. It is the responsibility of the City It shall be the goal of the City to preserve these views and vistas for the public benefit and, where appropriate, the City should strive to enhance and restore these resources, the visual character of the City, and provide and maintain access for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.*

(PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CHANGE TO THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE STEERING COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDED GOAL)

VR.2 Format of the Visual Resources Element

The Visual Resources Element begins by introducing the reader to the three main types of Visual Resources within the City – 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 the Visual Resources are viewed utilizing Viewing Stations, which include Viewing Sites, Viewing Points and Visual Corridors. The following section of the Element focuses on areas within the City to have views Preserved or Restored including Undeveloped Areas that upon their development may have an affect upon existing Visual Resources. The Element then concludes with a discussion of the various Implementation Tools, including Visual Resources 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 which provides the reader a graphic understanding of the descriptions provided within the text of the Element.

VR.3 Types of Visual Resources

Visual Resources are divided into three categories: Views, Vistas and Urban Design. This section of the Element describes the types of views, vistas and urban design to be preserved, restored and enhanced within the City.

Views

A view is a scene or panorama observed from a given vantage point. Views represent a panoramic visual aspect which extends to the horizon of a distant focal point (Catalina Island, rather than a lighthouse oriented focused view), 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).



Vistas

A vista is a confined view, which is usually directed toward a dominant element or landmark. 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. 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.

Urban Design

Urban design is different from the above resources as this visual resource 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 insuring that the development of each parcel of land or additions to existing structures not only occurs in a manner which is harmonious with the land, but also maintains an architectural aesthetic and character representative of neighborhoods 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 the visual accent to neighborhood aesthetics and character

VR.4 Visual Resources of Rancho Palos Verdes

The following are visual resources within and surrounding the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. They are described in three general categories: natural, man-made and urban design

Natural Visual Resources

Natural visual resources include the following:

Natural Areas. Natural features that provide viewers with a feeling for the rural atmosphere in the City. The best examples are the Portuguese Bend Preserve and open spaces.

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Shoreline. The irregular shoreline configuration is a prominent feature along the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Distant shorelines can also be enjoyed from multiple locations throughout the Peninsula which are visually accessible to the public.

Sea Cliff. The Palos Verdes Peninsula shoreline is characterized by vertical cliffs forming rocky, narrow beaches and coves. Sea cliffs are observed from open land 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 Rancho Palos Verdes.

Major Ridges. The complement to the canyon element of the topography, with the major ridge systems, spines, and spurs represents one of the most outstanding features of the Peninsula Area.

Significant Tree Groupings (mass, linear). Because of the random presence of mature tree groupings within the City, significant masses or lines of trees represent a generalized natural focal point of interest and set a theme for some areas of the community. 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 which can obstruct vision of the night sky. As a result, Rancho Palos Verdes 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.

Man-made Visual Resources

Man-made 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 points include Wayfarers Chapel, Point Vicente Lighthouse, and the Vincent Thomas Bridge. This category also includes views of the surrounding cityscape and city lights at night.



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 a process of 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 established review guidelines for new construction to enhance Urban Design during the development review process. Such design standards and guidelines are used to review new residential developments and are further discussed in the Implementation Tools section of this Element. 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 Residential Tract, Portuguese Bend, Terranea Casitas, and the Trump National Residential Tract. Additionally, within some neighborhoods are public and private landscaping design characteristics worth noting: ecologically-based streetscapes of Oceanfront Estates tract, the mature trees of Miraleste, non-view obstructing vegetation in the Seabreeze residential tract and the semi-rural streetscapes of the Portuguese Bend neighborhood.

VR.5 Viewing Stations

Viewing Stations are places where people can enjoy the visual resources of Rancho Palos Verdes. They include both public and private spaces. The viewing stations are described in three categories: Viewing Points, Viewing Sites, and View Corridors.

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 have been made since the founding of the City, which includes turnouts at the Terranea Resort, Abalone Cove, along Hawthorne Boulevard and Trump National Golf Club.

Viewing Sites

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

View Corridors

View Corridors are major circulation roads, and trail networks within the City that afford views of the visual resources. It is along these routes that a majority of the 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, the primary vehicular corridors are along Palos Drive West, East, and South. Other vehicular corridors are along Hawthorne & Crenshaw Boulevards, Crest & 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 minor occurrences on both. This condition 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 path or trail intruding into areas with large open vistas.

VR.6 Preservation and Enhancement of Visual Resources

Natural Areas to be Preserved

Most large areas of natural land are protected from development by the Coastal Specific Plan and the City's habitat preserve areas but some areas of natural land, especially City right-of-way areas along Palos Verdes Drive East are vulnerable to alteration due to view clearance, roadway improvements, and/or trail enhancements.



Developed Areas to be Preserved

Developed areas of particular visual interest are mainly located along Palos Verdes Drive South. From this corridor, the 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.

Developed Areas to be Restored

Since the adoption of the initial General Plan in 1975, certain corridors, i.e. Crest Road between Hawthorne Boulevard and Crenshaw Boulevard, have been restored to enhance and preserve the views and vistas. Also, major improvements along Palos Verdes Drive West have also been restored. However, many of the conditions in certain areas, generated through land grading and County Street Design Standards, allowed visually negative site and road patterns to impact major corridors still exist. The two corridors in need of major restoration are Western Avenue and Hawthorne Boulevard.

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 on Crest Road and Palos Verdes Drive South/West have been developed as residential tracts that have been designed to protect the views and vistas. There is a continuing need to manage the maturing foliage bordering the Visual Corridors to keep it from obstructing views. Smaller, contiguous and non-contiguous underdeveloped parcels of land still exist throughout the City and should be designed to consider impacts to visual resources.

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 all forms of unwanted light caused by the use of artificial light. Excessive light can be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species 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 stadium lighting. Projects should be designed to mitigate light pollution.

VR.7 Implementation Tools

Since City incorporation, the City Council has adopted various documents to assist the public in proposing and reviewing developments in accordance to the General Plan and Municipal Code. This section describes the different ordinances, documents and methods in which the City manages and preserves views, vistas and urban design within the City. The following are implementation tools that work towards achieving the preservation and enhancement of the different visual resources.

View Restoration and Preservation Ordinance and Guidelines

In November 1989 the voters of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes passed an initiative to protect views by establishing height limits 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 for view impairment caused by foliage. These guidelines are known as the Height Variation Guidelines and the View Restoration and Preservation Guidelines and Procedures, respectively.

To be consistent with the intent to protect views and vistas from residential properties, the City Council also adopted a policy to protect views impaired by foliage located on City-owned property. View restoration requests involving City-owned trees are processed by Staff through the issuance of a City Tree Review Permit application pursuant to the City's Municipal Code.

Guidelines and Procedures for Neighborhood Compatibility

The City of Rancho Palos Verdes' 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 recommended 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 suggested neighborhood compatibility guidelines are meant to assist residents and developers in the preparation and design of residential development projects by review of a project's scale, architecture and setbacks within the context of the immediate, surrounding neighborhood.



Coastal Specific Plan

A Coastal Specific Plan was prepared in 1978 to further study and assess resources along the Rancho Palos Verdes coastline. One of the goals of the Coastal Specific Plan was 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 defined 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 public and private development conforms to the principles set forth in the General Plan.

Western Avenue Specific Plans

The intent and purpose of the Western Avenue Specific Plans were 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 were prepared to protect adjacent residential property from the impacts of commercial development and to encourage the revitalization of the area. The plans identify themes that both create a Rancho Palos Verdes identity and distinguish the area from neighboring Los Angeles. The plans integrate the unique aspects of the Eastview area into the overall character of Rancho Palos Verdes, assist in preserving views, and improve the urban design for this area.

VR.8 Visual Resources Element Policies

It is the policy of the City to:

1. Develop controls to preserve existing significant visual aspects from future disruption or degradation.
2. Enhance views and vistas where appropriate.
3. Preserve and enhance existing positive visual elements, while restoring those that have been lost.
4. Consider the visual character of neighborhoods consistent with the General Plan and Neighborhood Compatibility Guidelines.

City of Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan

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GENERAL PLAN UPDATE STEERING COMMITTEE'S
RECOMMENDED POLICY)**

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

**(PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CHANGE TO THE
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE STEERING COMMITTEE'S
RECOMMENDED POLICY)**

6. Develop and maintain, in conjunction with appropriate agencies, public access to paths and trail networks for the enjoyment of related views.
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.
8. Require developments which will impact corridor-related views to mitigate their impact.
9. Develop a program for the restoration of existing areas which negatively impact view corridors.
10. Require residents and developers to mitigate light pollution associated with developments.
(PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED NEW POLICY)
11. Maintain strict sign standards so as to ensure that signs are harmonious with the building, the neighborhood and other signs in the area.
(PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED NEW POLICY)