

4.3 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing aesthetic environment (both onsite and in the vicinity), and analyzes potential impacts on the aesthetic character of the site and surrounding area. A key focus is the effects of the proposed project as viewed from adjacent sensitive viewers to the project sites. Public scenic vistas, impacts on scenic resources from scenic highways, and the introduction of new sources of light and glare are also considered. The potential impacts associated with the proposed project are evaluated on a qualitative basis through an analysis of the project's physical effect on the scenic environment. The evaluation of project impacts is based on professional judgment, analysis of Nevada County's and City of Grass Valley's policies pertaining to aesthetics, light and glare, and the significance criteria established by Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*. Where necessary, mitigation measures are recommended to reduce the significance of potential impacts.

This analysis is based upon applicable reference data from the Nevada County General Plan, adopted 1996, subsequently amended in 2008 and 2010; City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan (2020 General Plan); the Nevada County Land Use Development Code; the City of Grass Valley Municipal Code; and, available U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps.

4.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources that characterize Nevada County include the rolling vistas of foothills, valleys, mountains, meadows, forests, wetlands and habitats unique to the Sierras. Scenic views within the County include mountain peaks such as Castle Peak, vistas of Donner Lake, and the gorge of the South Fork of the Yuba River. The County is predominantly rural in character, with development concentrated in Nevada City, Grass Valley and Truckee. The scenic values and aggregate appearance of all the cities, towns and suburban areas define the aesthetic quality of Nevada County. Outside of these communities, residences are scattered throughout the County. Many of these residents are screened from views by vegetation and topography, adding to the County's overall rural character. The proposed project is located within three distinct areas within Nevada County: Grass Valley Sphere of Influence; Penn Valley; and, Lake of the Pines. East of Nevada City, a portion of State Route 20 (SR-20), from Skillman Flat Campground to one-half mile east of Lowell Hill Road, approximately six miles in length, is an "Officially Designated State Scenic Highway" by the State of California. Although the majority of the remaining sections of SR-20, from near Grass Valley to Interstate 80 including the section near Penn Valley, are not "officially designated" as scenic highways, those sections are listed as "Eligible State Scenic Highways" by the State of California. The existing environmental setting of the three distinct areas are described below.

Grass Valley Sphere of Influence

Sites 1 through 9 are located adjacent to the northeastern boundary of the City of Grass Valley, within the City of Grass Valley Sphere of Influence. Aesthetic values associated with the City include trees, various other natural amenities, views, architectural features and the historical look and feel of the downtown area. Grass Valley and vicinity have a wide variety of landscapes and scenic resources which provide passive recreational opportunities for

residents and visitors alike. Chief among these scenic resources are the views available from many roadways to surrounding open areas as well as to vistas of the foothills and mountains. High on the list of aesthetic priorities are the entryways to and highway corridors through town. The 1972 Grass Valley General Plan established SR-20 and State Route 49 (SR-49) as scenic highways, and their routes near and through Grass Valley were designated scenic corridors.

Roadways in the areas near Sites 1 through 9 include McCourtney Road, La Barr Meadows Road, SR-49 (Site 2 only), McKnight Way and Brunswick Road. The sites are generally visible from nearby roadways as well as some surrounding areas.

Penn Valley

The four sites, Sites 10 through 13, comprising the proposed project in the Penn Valley area are located within the western portion of unincorporated Nevada County. This area is characterized by its abundance of native trees, perennial grasses and pasture lands. Sites 10, 11, 12 and 13 are relatively flat with elevations ranging from 1,380 to 1,400 feet above mean sea level (msl) and are generally visible from nearby roadways as well as some surrounding areas. Roadways in the area include Penn Valley Drive, Broken Oak Court, and SR-20.

Lake of the Pines

Lake of the Pines is located in the southeastern portion of unincorporated Nevada County. Lake of the Pines is a gated residential community surrounding a lake and several smaller ponds, as well as Ragsdale Creek. The area is characterized by native trees and vegetation, consisting of a large single-family residential development complete with a private golf course. Roadways in the area include SR-49 (Site 14 only), Higgins Road, Combie Road, and Armstrong Road. Site 14 ranges from approximately 1,440 to 1,540 feet above msl; Sites 15 and 16 range from approximately 1,440 to 1,580 feet above msl; Site 17 is relatively flat with elevations ranging from approximately 1,440 to 1,480 feet above msl; and, Site 18 ranges from approximately 1,570 to 1,650 feet above msl. All sites are generally visible from nearby roadways as well as some surrounding areas.

SCENIC RESOURCES

Scenic resources include open spaces, hillsides, valleys, ridgelines, forested views and notable buildings. Most of the proposed project sites are generally flat, containing open grasslands and forested areas. The Nevada County General Plan and the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan identify the aesthetic importance of natural and architectural features to residents and their quality of life. Therefore, the proposed project sites are considered visually important resources.

SR-20, SR-49 and SR-174 all traverse the County of Nevada and the City of Grass Valley. Within the City of Grass Valley Sphere of Influence, SR-49 is located just west of Site 2. Within the jurisdiction of Nevada County, SR-20 is located adjacent to and north of Site 13 while SR-49 is located to the east of Site 14. The State scenic highways in the County (designated by the State Department of Transportation) are also an important scenic program within Nevada County. SR-49 is a County designated scenic corridor, and SR-20, SR-49 and SR-174 have been determined as being “Eligible for Listing” as an “Officially Designated Route” in the California Scenic Highway System. In order to protect the scenic resources associated with the SR-49 corridor and SR-174, the County has established a Scenic Corridor Combining District for areas along the highway. Within the Lake of the

Pines area, Sites 14 through 17 are located within the Scenic Corridor Combining District. However, none of the proposed project sites within the City of Grass Valley Sphere of Influence or Penn Valley are within the Scenic Corridor Combining District. Views afforded from these roadways to the project sites are noted above.

VISUAL SETTING AND CHARACTER

The proposed project areas are situated within generally undeveloped, semi-rural and rural areas located in the western portion of Nevada County. The majority of the proposed project sites consist of undeveloped land uses, with only a few sites containing existing residential structures. Vacant land includes open grassland, shrubs and forested areas. The surrounding community areas consist of the following:

- Site 1: Commercial and vacant land uses to the north and east; residential uses to the south; commercial and rural residential uses to the west.
- Site 2: Commercial and residential uses to the north; vacant land uses to the east; semi-rural residential to the south; commercial land uses to the west across SR-49.
- Site 3 through Site 9: Residential uses to the north, south, and east; commercial and residential uses to the west; Nevada County Air Park approximately one-half mile to the east.
- Site 10 and Site 11: Commercial uses to the east and west; Site 13 and residential uses to the north/northeast; residential uses to the south.
- Site 12: Residential uses surround the property in all directions.
- Site 13: SR-20 to the north; Sites 10 and 11 to the south; vacant land to the west; residential uses to the east.
- Site 14: Residential uses to the north and south; SR-49 and the Cross Roads Church to the west; industrial uses to the east.
- Site 15 and Site 16: Vacant forested land to the north; residential uses to the south and east; commercial uses to the west.
- Site 17: Commercial uses to the north; residential use to the south; vacant land to the east and west.
- Site 18: Golf course to the north and west; residential and vacant land to the south; residential uses to the west.

Onsite Views

Grass Valley Sphere of Influence

Sites 1 through 9 are mainly forested/undeveloped land, although two single onsite structures are present on Sites 5 and 8, respectively. Views are afforded by those traveling along McCourtney Road (Site 1), Highway 49 and La Barr Meadows Road (Site 2) and Bubbling Wells Road and Brunswick Road (Sites 3 through 8). Other viewers may include uses situated on hillsides and ridgelines facing the sites, as well as scattered offsite commercial, industrial and residential uses to the north, east and west. These views include the onsite rural vacant/forested land and grassland.

Penn Valley

The majority of Sites 10 through 12 currently consist of grassland/undeveloped land with Site 12 consisting of some forested land as well. Views are afforded by those traveling along Penn Valley Drive (Sites 10 and 11), Broken Oak Court and Pheasant Lane (Site 12) and Highway 20 (Site 13). Other viewers may include uses situated on hillsides and ridgelines facing the project site, as well as scattered offsite commercial and residential uses surrounding all sides. These views include the onsite rural vacant/forested land, open grassland, creek adjacent to Site 10, and percolation ponds associated with the adjacent mobile home park.

Lake of the Pines

Sites 14 through 18, located in the Lake of the Pines area, are currently forested/undeveloped land. Views are afforded by those traveling along Highway 49 and Cameo Drive (Site 14), Higgins Road and Woodridge Drive (Sites 15 and 16), Rosewood Road (Site 17) and Combie Road (Sites 17 and 18). Other viewers may include uses situated on hillsides and ridgelines facing the project site, as well as scattered offsite commercial and residential uses. These views include the onsite rural vacant/forested land and open grassland.

Offsite Views

Grass Valley Sphere of Influence

The proposed project Sites 1 through 9 located within the Grass Valley Sphere of Influence are located in a predominantly rural setting, adjacent to and along the outskirts of the City. The majority of views to the project site from surrounding areas are currently screened by dense vegetation with some views including large areas of grassland. Views are also afforded by adjacent residential, commercial and industrial land uses and those traveling along surrounding roadways. The following is a description of views toward the proposed project Sites 1 through 9 from surrounding land uses:

Site 1

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite commercial uses to the south include open grassland and forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential uses and along McCourtney Road include foreground views toward open grassland and shrubs and middleground and background views toward dense trees.
- Southward Views. Views southward from commercial uses to the north include McCourtney Road, adjacent commercial structures and forested land.
- Westward Views. Commercial uses to the east of the project site do not have westward views due to dense trees.

Site 2

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite commercial and rural residents to the south include forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite commercial and institutional uses include SR-49 and foreground views toward open grassland and forested land.

- Southward Views. Views southward from commercial uses to the north are not afforded due to dense trees.
- Westward Views. The nearest uses to the east of the project site are located approximately one-half mile away and do not have westward views due to dense trees.

Sites 3 through 9

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite vacant land, rural residential and commercial uses, and Idaho Maryland Road to the south include open grassland, shrubs, and forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential and institutional uses along Sutton Way include foreground views toward dense trees.
- Southward Views. Views southward from commercial and residential uses to the north include foreground views toward dense trees.
- Westward Views. Rural residential uses to the east of the project site do not have westward views due to dense trees. Views westward from the Nevada County Airport include dense trees and vegetation.

Penn Valley

The proposed project Sites 10 through 13 are located in Penn Valley. The majority of views to the project site from surrounding areas are open, consisting of grasslands with some dense forested areas separating Sites 10 and 11 from Site 13. Adjacent residential, commercial and recreational land uses and those traveling along SR-20, Penn Valley Road, and Broken Oak Court also have clear views to the site. The following is a description of views toward the proposed project Sites 10 through 13 from surrounding land uses:

Sites 10 and 11

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite commercial and residential uses and Penn Valley Drive to the south include foreground views toward open grassland, trees, shrubs and commercial residential uses adjacent to these sites.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential and commercial uses and along Penn Valley Drive include foreground, middleground, and background views toward open grassland, shrubs, and trees.
- Southward Views. Views southward from commercial uses across SR-20 to the north are not afforded due to the separation of the site by SR-20, Site 13, and dense trees.
- Westward Views. Views from commercial and residential uses to the east of the project site include grassland, shrubs and patches of larger trees.

Site 12

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite residents to the south include open grassland with some trees and adjacent residential uses.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential uses include open grassland with some trees and adjacent residential uses.
- Southward Views. Views southward from residential uses to the north include open grassland with some trees and adjacent residential uses.

- Westward Views. Views westward from residential uses to the east include open grassland with some trees and adjacent residential uses.

Site 13

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite commercial, residential, and vacant land uses to the south are not afforded due to the dense forested land associated with the creek separating the site.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential, commercial and recreational uses and along SR-20 include foreground middleground and background views toward open grassland, shrubs, and trees.
- Southward Views. Views southward from vacant land and commercial uses to the north include foreground and middleground views toward open grassland and trees and background views toward dense trees. Views from Sites 10 and 11 are not afforded due to the dense trees associated with the creek separating the sites.
- Westward Views. Westward views from commercial and residential uses to the east of are largely obstructed by a linear grouping of trees along the eastern boundary of the site.

Lake of the Pines

The project sites located in the Lake of the Pines region of the County of Nevada are located in a predominantly rural/semi-rural setting, along the outskirts of the Lake of the Pines gated community. The majority of views to the project site from surrounding areas are through open grassland or screened by dense vegetation. Adjacent residential, commercial and industrial land uses and those traveling along surrounding roadways have views to the site. The following is a description of views toward the proposed project Sites 14 through 18 from surrounding land uses:

Site 14

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite commercial uses to the south include forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential and commercial uses and along SR-49 include foreground, middleground, and background views toward dense trees.
- Southward Views. Views southward from rural residential uses to the north are not afforded due to dense trees.
- Westward Views. Commercial, residential and industrial uses to the east of the project site do not have westward views due to dense trees.

Site 15 and 16

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite rural residents to the south include forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite vacant land and commercial uses include SR-49, include offsite foreground views toward open grassland and shrubs and project site middleground and background views toward dense trees.

- Southward Views. Views southward from residential uses to the north are not afforded due to dense trees. Views southeast from commercial uses to the north west include open grass land and project site dense forested areas.
- Westward Views. Views from residential uses to the east of the project site include dense trees.

Site 17

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite rural residents to the south include forested land.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential uses to the west are not afforded due to dense forested areas.
- Southward Views. Views southward from commercial uses to the north include Combie Road and dense trees onsite.
- Westward Views. Views westward from offsite residential uses to the east do not have westward views due to dense trees.

Site 18

- Northward Views. Views northward from offsite rural residents to the south include forested land and Combie Road.
- Eastward Views. Views eastward from offsite residential and commercial uses, and Combie Road are not afforded due to the dense forest surrounding the site.
- Southward Views. Views southward from residential and recreational uses to the north include foreground views of onsite dense forested areas.
- Westward Views. Views from recreational uses associated with the adjacent golf Course to the east of the project site include dense trees.

Light and Glare

There are two typical types of light intrusion. First, light emanates from the interior of structures and passes out through windows. Second, light projects from exterior sources, such as street lighting, security lighting and landscape lighting. “Light spill” is typically defined as the presence of unwanted and/or misdirected light on properties adjacent to the property being illuminated. Light introduction can be a nuisance to adjacent residential areas and diminish the view of the clear night sky. In addition, if the light is uncontrolled, it can disturb wildlife in natural habitat areas.

Perceived glare is the unwanted and potentially objectionable sensation as observed by a person when looking directly into the light source of a luminaire. Glare also results from sunlight reflection off flat building surfaces, with glass typically contributing the highest degree of reflectivity.

Currently, there are no significant light or glare sources within the project sites, as the project sites currently consist of primarily undeveloped land. Minimal light and glare do emanate from the security lighting associated with the surrounding existing commercial and residential uses. These surrounding uses do not create substantial or unusual amounts of light or glare onto the project site. The primary sources of nighttime lighting are from vehicle headlights on area roadways, such as SR-20, SR-49, Brunswick Road, McCourtney Road,

Penn Valley Drive and Combie Road. Additionally, dense trees on and surrounding the project site limit the amount of visible light on the proposed project sites.

4.3.2 REGULATORY SETTING

LOCAL FRAMEWORK

Nevada County General Plan

The Nevada County General Plan identifies the County as an area of extraordinary scenic quality. Scenic resources in the County include a wide variety of landscapes, scenic views/vistas and visual resources. Scenic views include those from roadways, surrounding open areas, as well as scenic vistas of lakes, rivers, valleys, the foothills and mountains and various other natural amenities.

The Open Space and Aesthetics Elements of the Nevada County General Plan include several goals, objectives and policies with respect to aesthetics, as identified below.

Open Space Element

Goal 6.1 Encourage that land use patterns and site development reflect open space values.

Objective 6.2 Implement development standards that incorporate open space values.

Aesthetics Element

Goal 18.1 Promote and provide for aesthetic design in new development which reflects existing character.

Objective 18.1 Develop appropriate community design guidelines to ensure aesthetic design in new development.

Goal 18.2 Protect and preserve important scenic resources.

Objective 18.2 Develop standards to protect scenic resources and viewsheds.

Policy 18.6 Discretionary development in Rural Regions and in Community Regions near the Community Boundary shall, wherever possible, preserve natural landmarks and avoid ridge-line placement of structures.

Policy 18.7A The County shall promote a compact development pattern to protect open space buffers between communities and to maintain a geographic distinction between communities.

Objective 18.3 Promote the conservation of scenic roads and highways.

Policy 18.8 The County shall amend the "SC" Scenic Corridor Combining District Regulations to require design review of all proposed development within the district.

Policy 18.8A The County will designate scenic corridors along the following routes: Interstate 80 and Highways 49, 89, 174, and 267 for their entire length in the County; all of Highway 20, Donner Pass Road (Old Highway 40), from the Interstate 80 intersection at Soda Springs to the town limits of Truckee. These corridors

should be placed within the SC "Scenic Corridor" Combining District, with boundaries based upon adopted studies.

Nevada County Land Use Development Code

The County recognizes the importance of trees to the character of the community as well as the role that trees have in advancing the public health, safety and welfare of its residents. Therefore, Section L-II 4.3.15 Trees of the Nevada County Land Use Development Code contains standards for tree preservation and protection. Procedures are identified for the removal of trees, including biological inventories, permits and approvals, and mitigation that may be necessary following tree removal. Also, Section L-II 4.2.8 Lighting addresses outdoor lighting within the County and specifies requirements for lighting in new development, street lights, street light placement and design standards. Section L-II 5.3 Design Review provides the procedures and standards by which new development can be reviewed for compatibility with surrounding development, natural resources and/or historic features within the project area. Section L-II 4.3.16 Visually Important Ridgelines and Viewsheds also sets standards to protect the natural appearance and aesthetic quality of visually prominent ridgelines and large-scale viewsheds.

Western Nevada County Design Guidelines

The Western Nevada County Design Guidelines are applicable to all Development Permits and Use Permits for all public, commercial, industrial and multi-family projects in Western Nevada County. All of the proposed project sites are located within the Western Nevada County planning boundary and would therefore be subject to the guidelines. The guidelines encourage the highest level of design quality while at the same time provide flexibility necessary to promote economic viability. The guidelines seek to:

- Protect and preserve the scenic resources of Nevada County;
- Maintain the rural, small-town character of the County reflecting the distinctions between Rural Regions and Community Regions;
- Maintain community identity by promoting compact, mixed-use development;
- Establish a consistent set of criteria that allows flexibility for demonstrating compliance with the purpose of these guidelines;
- Complement the rich historic fabric of the County.

The Western Nevada County Design Guidelines discuss general development guidelines for land use and site planning, pedestrian and alternative transportation modes, circulation, parking, lighting, street furniture, signage, landscaping, architectural design and energy conservation. The objective of the high-density residential design guidelines is to “incorporate a wide range of high density housing types to provide housing choices and opportunities within Rural Centers or Community Regions.”

Some examples of guidelines for high-density residential developments include:

- Orient doorways toward the street
- Conceal parking behind the building and provide alley entrances where possible
- Minimize curb cuts for entrances
- Incorporate ancillary units above garages where appropriate

- Minimize front set backs to help define street as an outdoor room

Regional Housing Need (RH) Combining District

When required by state law, sites within a Regional Housing Need (RH) Combining District shall be developed by right, in that the use and density shall not require a Use Permit, Planned Unit Development Plan or other discretionary action for the use of that site. However, all development proposals shall undergo a Design Review process and public hearing at the Planning Commission limited to design issues only. No discretionary permit is necessary for the density or use of the site.

Higgins Area Plan Design Guidelines

The Higgins Area Plan establishes the goals, policies and implementation measures that will guide development in the portion of southwest Nevada County known as the Higgins Corner – Lake of the Pines Village Center (“Higgins Area”). Sites 14-17 fall within the location of the Higgins Area Plan planning boundary, and would therefore be subject to the design guidelines outlined in the plan. The plan supplements the County’s Zoning Ordinance, including the Comprehensive Site Development Standards contained in Chapter II of the Nevada County Land Use and Development Code.

The Higgins Area Plan design policies provide direction for a positive, cohesive community image while maintaining the quality of the physical environment of the Higgins Area. Chapter three of the area plan discusses the design goals, policies and guidelines that are applicable to all discretionary and ministerial project permits and provide direction for new development. The design policies include site preparation and treatment, site design, lighting, signage, fire prevention, sewage, drainage, circulation and setbacks. The design guidelines include preserving scenic resources, enhancing and preserving Ragsdale Creek, structural design, lighting, signage, public place and pedestrian amenities and landscaping.

Penn Valley Village Center Area Plan Design Guidelines

The purpose of the Penn Valley Village Center Area Plan is to develop design guidelines that provide consistent design review criteria that encourages development that is compatible with the rural character of the Penn Valley Village Center; to identify public facilities and services that will serve new development; to identify and encourage natural resources; to advocate the development of paths and trails; and, to sustain the rural environment and encourage patronage of village center business. All sites located in the Penn Valley area (Sites 10-13) fall within the Penn Valley Village Center planning boundary, and would therefore be subject to the design guidelines outlined in the plan. The Penn Valley Village Center Area Plan Guidelines shall be considered in the review of all discretionary and ministerial permit projects, and administrative permits that require design review within the boundaries of the Penn Valley Village Center as mapped on the 1995 Nevada County General Plan land use maps.

Chapter three of the Penn Valley Area Plan discusses the design guidelines for development within the Village Center. The design guidelines chapter includes sections on site planning, building design, signage, multi-family residential, lighting, landscape design and circulation and pedestrian trails. Sites within the Penn Valley Village Center will be required to adhere to the design guidelines outlined in the Area Plan.

City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan

The 2020 General Plan identifies the City and surrounding areas as having a wide variety of landscapes, scenic views/vistas and visual resources. Scenic views include those from roadways surrounding open areas, as well as scenic vistas of the foothills and mountains. City-valued scenic resources include trees, open space, valleys, ridgelines, hillsides and various other natural amenities. The 2020 General Plan specifies that open space is also an aesthetically valued resource in the City which can be incorporated into and complement development.

The Conservation/Open Space and Community Design Elements of the 2020 General Plan include several goals, objectives and policies with respect to aesthetics, as identified below.

Goal 1-COSG	Provide a balance between development and the natural environment, protecting and properly utilizing Grass Valley's sensitive environmental areas/features, natural resources, and open space lands
Objective 2-COSO	Multi-purpose open space lands, accommodating the needs and requirements of open space/conservation, habitat, recreation, and aesthetics.
Goal 4-COSG	Protect and enhance town entryways, visual corridors, and important viewsheds including ridgelines.
Objective 12-COSO	Identification of specific aesthetic considerations important to the protection/enhancement of particular corridors and views.
Goal 1-CDG	Preserve and enhance the existing community.
Goal 2-CDG	Conserve community attributes that provide a sense of the natural setting and continuity with the past.
Goal 3-CDG	Assure that new development is sensitive to and strengthens the existing built and natural environment.
Objective 3-CDO	Recognition and protection of major views in the planning area, with particular attention to notable buildings, open space, hillsides, valleys, ridgelines, and forested views.
Objective 12-CDO	Creation of new development areas that are unique and interesting.
Objective 13-CDO	High quality streetscape and building design in all new development.
Policy 3-COSP	Encourage clustering, density averaging, and other techniques in larger-scale new developments, as means of preserving open space and natural systems.
Policy 5-COSP	Carefully regulate development on steep slopes.
Policy 6-COSP	Prevent excessive alteration of the natural topography.
Policy 12-COSP	Enhance the City's tree ordinance addressing tree maintenance and protection both within new developments and elsewhere in the City.

City of Grass Valley Municipal Code

The City recognizes the importance of trees to the character of the community as well as the role that trees have in advancing the public health, safety and welfare of its residents. Therefore, Chapter 12.36 of the City's Municipal Code contains standards for tree preservation and protection. Procedures are identified for the removal of trees, including permits and approvals, and mitigation that may be necessary following tree removal. Also, Chapter 12.20 addresses street lights within the City and specifies requirements for street lights in new development, street light placement and design standards. The City's Development Review procedures are set forth in Section 17.72.030 of the Development Code. The Development Review Committee serves in an advisory capacity to the Planning Commission for larger projects and provides comments and direction on a variety of design issues including site planning, aesthetics, architecture and circulation and landscaping, among others. The primary purpose of the Design Review Committee is to ensure that proposed projects maintain the aesthetic quality of the City.

4.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would have a significant aesthetic impact if it 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
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

The evaluation of aesthetic impacts is a subjective exercise because of widely varying personal perceptions. Nevertheless, replacement of undeveloped land with land uses anticipated by the proposed project would permanently alter the appearance of the project area.

AREAS OF NO PROJECT IMPACT

The following impact is either not applicable to the project or not reasonably foreseeable:

- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. SR-20, SR-49 and SR-174 all traverse the County of Nevada and the City of Grass Valley. Within the City of Grass Valley Sphere of Influence, SR-49 is located just west from Site 2. Within Nevada County, SR-20 is located adjacent to and north of Site 13, and SR-49 is located to the east of Site 14. Although these County scenic corridors have been determined "Eligible for Listing" as an "Officially Designated State Scenic Highway" in the California Scenic Highway System, these corridors are not "officially designated" as State Scenic Highways. Also, the portion of the proposed

project nearest to an eligible scenic highway would be Sites 7 and 8 which are approximately 15 miles away. Additionally, intervening structures and dense trees and vegetation shield any potential views to the project site from these eligible scenic highways. Also, views to the nearby Tahoe National Forest and Plumas National Forest are not afforded from highways in the vicinity of the project site due to distance, as they are located approximately six miles east of SR-49 and 11 miles north of SR-174, respectively.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Short-Term (Construction)

4.3-1 GRADING AND CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT WOULD ALTER THE VISUAL APPEARANCE OF THE PROJECT AREA.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Potentially Significant Impact

Impact Analysis

Implementation of the proposed project would facilitate future development that would have short-term aesthetic impacts as a result of construction debris and construction-related activities. Future traffic from construction equipment would also adversely impact views along local roadways in the vicinity of the project site. Surrounding rural residents, commercial, industrial and institutional uses would have views of construction activities. However, these views would be limited as the project would minimize development of the sensitive portions of the project area (i.e., forested land, open space and riparian corridors). The timing of the construction will vary by project site depending on market conditions and the type of development ultimately selected by the property owner. During construction, trucks would be required for the delivery of heavy equipment and construction materials. As with onsite activities, the visual aspect of trucks loaded with debris would be interesting to some viewers and unsightly to others.

Scenic Vistas

Scenic vistas are defined as expansive views of highly valued landscapes from publicly accessible viewpoints and include views of natural features such as topography, watercourses, rock outcroppings, and natural vegetation, and man-made scenic structures. The proposed project would be located within some areas that are heavily vegetated with native trees, shrubs and grasses. Both the Nevada County General Plan and the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan identify natural resources such as these as important scenic resources. Currently, views to onsite natural features are afforded from nearby roadways and surrounding uses. Additionally, sites within the “SC” Scenic Corridor Combining District (Site 14) will have the potential to impact scenic vistas which are adjacent to highway and roads that have been identified as having high scenic quality and require protection for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Upon construction of future projects facilitated by implementation of the proposed project, these views may be altered. However, the majority of expansive views to the project area, including ridgelines and hillsides, would be preserved. To the maximum extent possible, existing primary vegetation and open space (which include areas of densely forested land) would remain and would provide a buffer between viewers and proposed development.

As buildout of the proposed project would occur, surrounding uses would have long duration, direct views to construction activities at the various project sites, resulting in a significant impact. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.3-1 would require construction equipment staging areas to use appropriate screening (i.e., temporary fencing with opaque material) to buffer views of construction equipment and material, when feasible. Specific staging locations would be indicated on a project-by-project basis. Mitigation Measure 4.3-3 would require design review by the Planning Commission to ensure a development proposal is consistent with the applicable design guidelines for each general plan and area plan in order to minimize the impact of development to scenic vistas. With implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.3-1 and 4.3-3, impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Degradation of Existing Character/Quality

Construction activities would be visible from adjacent rural residential, commercial, industrial and institutional uses in the project vicinity. Grading plans would be submitted to the County or City for review and approval prior to the commencement of site disturbing activities and would be subject to the County's or City's Development Code. Also, all future development would be subject to the County's or City's Development Review process, which would include evaluation of site development and grading plans. All grading and earthwork would be conducted in accordance with approved construction grading permits issued by the County or City Engineer. Additionally, as stated above, with implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.3-1, equipment staging areas would provide appropriate screening (i.e., temporary fencing with opaque material).

Views to haul trucks (traveling to and from the project site from offsite locations) along the highway and local roadways may result in short-term visual impacts to adjacent residents. In accordance with County and City grading permit procedures, hauling plans, prepared on a project-by-project basis, would be subject to approval by the County or City Engineer. Impacts in this regard would be reduced to a less than significant level upon compliance with the County's or City's grading permit process.

Light and Glare

Short-term light and glare impacts associated with construction activities facilitated by implementation of the proposed project would likely be limited to nighttime lighting (for security purposes) in the evening/nighttime hours. In accordance with Chapter 8 (Noise) of the City of Grass Valley Municipal Code, construction activities are permitted only between the hours of 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM, and not permitted on Sundays or holidays. Therefore, future construction activities may require minimal hours of evening/nighttime construction lighting, which would cease by 7:00 PM. The County of Nevada Zoning Ordinance, Section L-II 4.1.7 Noise does not provide specific construction noise regulations and Section D.8 exempts construction activities from established noise standards for other land uses. However, it is anticipated that nighttime construction activities within the County's jurisdiction would be minimal. In the event that project construction lighting becomes a nuisance to surrounding uses, the County and City would ensure construction-related lighting would be oriented away from adjacent residential areas, if necessary, and consist of the minimal wattage necessary to provide safety at the construction site. Construction-related lighting impacts would be short-term and would cease generally by 7:00 PM. Therefore, short-term light and glare impacts associated with future construction activities would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measure

The following mitigation measure applies to all sites:

- 4.3-1 Construction equipment staging areas shall use appropriate screening (i.e., temporary fencing with opaque material) to buffer views of construction equipment and material, when feasible. Staging locations shall be approved by the County or City Engineer prior to the commencement of construction of each phase of the project.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

Scenic Vistas

4.3-2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT MAY HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact

Impact Analysis

Scenic vistas are defined as expansive views of highly valued landscapes from publicly accessible viewpoints. Scenic vistas include views of natural features such as topography, watercourses, rock outcroppings and natural vegetation, as well as man-made scenic structures. The proposed project sites are located on generally undeveloped portions of the County and City, characterized by natural features such as forested land, creeks and open grassland. Surrounding rural residential, commercial, industrial and institutional uses may have views of scenic vistas toward the project sites. Upon construction of the proposed project, these views may be altered.

Currently, excluding Sites 1, 10, 11, and 12, the sites comprising the proposed project are heavily vegetated with native trees, shrubs, and grasses. The existing onsite heavy vegetation, as well as vegetation in the surrounding areas, significantly limits public views to scenic resources. The proposed project would require the removal and/or thinning of vegetation within portions of the project sites. This tree thinning/removal may alter existing views to onsite natural features; however, these features would be conserved to the maximum extent possible. The project would be required to adhere to the County's Land Use Development Code Section L-II 4.13.15 Trees or the City's Municipal Code Chapter 12.36 regarding tree preservation and protection.

Project planting plans would be developed using a landscape plant matrix that devises different plant species and evaluates the appropriateness of each species for each of the development sites. The landscape plant matrix would list plants appropriate for areas adjacent to creeks, waterways and other natural areas. Therefore, the existing natural environment within the proposed project areas would be maintained to the maximum extent possible with implementation of specific landscape provisions for each of the proposed project sites as they are developed.

Publicly accessible views toward the proposed project areas and onsite natural features would be altered by the development of the project. However, the majority of proposed development sites are located in areas where the surrounding natural environment has been disturbed from the construction of existing commercial, residential, industrial and institutional developments. Therefore, many views to onsite natural features are obstructed due to inclusion of surrounding land uses within the viewshed. As such, due to the existing developments surrounding the proposed project sites and with implementation of landscape standards and compliance with the Nevada County General Plan, Nevada County Land Use Development Code, City of Grass Valley General Plan and City of Grass Valley Municipal

Code (see Section 4.3.2 [Regulatory Setting]), as applicable, visual impacts resulting from removed mature vegetation and trees would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

Degradation of Character/Quality

4.3-3 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MAY PERMANENTLY DEGRADE THE EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER/ QUALITY OF THE PROJECT SITE.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Potentially Significant Impact.

Impact Analysis

The visual analysis of any project must consider the existing visual character and quality of the area. Another factor to consider in the analysis would be the existing visual sensitivity in the project area, which is defined by the available public views of the project, the number of viewers, and the duration of those views. Therefore, a project located on a site that has both high visual quality and high visual sensitivity would have the most significant visual impact.

The landscape in the project area is defined by the existing forested/open grassland features and the County's overall rural characteristic. The proposed project sites range from areas of generally flat grasslands to gently sloping forested. Most sites are currently vacant land. Many of the project sites are considered to have high visual quality due to their undeveloped and rural character and the presence of scenic resources, such as dense trees, open grasslands and creek features. The surrounding area is generally rural in nature, with more dense development located adjacent to the sites within the City of Grass Valley Sphere of Influence. Surrounding structures are one to two stories in height and vary in age and condition.

Implementation of the proposed project would facilitate development that would permanently alter the nature and appearance of the project site. Although design plans would be drafted as each site is developed, it can be assumed that project structures would be at a minimum partially visible from surrounding residents, as well as surrounding commercial, industrial and institutional uses and those traveling along local roadways. These viewers would have moderate to long duration views of the project. However, viewsheds in these areas currently include views of those surrounding developments. As such, concentrating new higher density residential development adjacent to existing commercial, residential, industrial and institutional uses would result in development that is better suited than compared to the same development placed in rural areas where existing residential development is sparsely located and the natural environment, including forested and open grassland habitats, is pristine and minimally disturbed.

Some views from surrounding uses would be buffered by retaining existing onsite dense trees and in some cases newly planted trees and vegetation. However, should these projects propose to remove existing trees currently buffering these views, these projects may be visible with implementation of the proposed project. Therefore, as development occurs throughout the project area, residents and visitors in the area would notice the visual effects of urbanization. Potential changes that degrade the character or quality of the existing site would be considered significant.

To address the visual and aesthetics issues associated with new development, each development proposal associated with the proposed project must be designed consistent with the applicable policies established in the Nevada County General Plan, the Western Nevada County Development Guidelines, the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan and Community Design Guidelines, the Higgins Area Plan Design Guidelines, the Penn Valley Area Plan Design Guidelines and the RH Combining District Design Review process. The design guidelines in each plan have been adopted for the specific purpose of reviewing development proposals to ensure that proposed development projects are designed in ways that are in harmony and compatible with the existing landscape and surrounding development.

The guidelines provide design considerations that project developers are encouraged to incorporate in the project planning process. Examples of design considerations from the guidelines include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Site design and layout;
- Building materials (including colors);
- Environmentally sensitive design;
- Landscaping;
- Common areas;
- Parking lot design and placement; and,
- Lighting.

All future developments associated with the proposed project should be designed according to specific design principles and standards that respect the goals, objectives and policies of the Nevada County General Plan (all sites), the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan (Sites 1-9 if annexed), the Western Nevada County Development Guidelines (all sites), the Higgins Area Plan Design Guidelines (Sites 14-17), the Penn Valley Area Plan Design Guidelines (Sites 10-13) and the RH Combining District (all sites) for the design review process. However, since the enforcement of such design principles and standards would require subsequent approval, impacts to the existing visual character of the sites are considered potentially significant and mitigation would be required.

In compliance with Mitigation Measure 4.3-3, projects within the unincorporated area of Nevada County and also those that would be annexed to the City would require design review by the Planning Commission to ensure a development proposal is consistent with the applicable design guidelines for each general plan and area plan. Projects within the County of Nevada that would not be annexed into the City of Grass Valley would require approval of the Nevada County Planning Commission. Similarly, projects within the City of Grass Valley SOI would be reviewed by the City's Design Review Committee and Planning Commission.

As previously mentioned, proposed project development would be buffered by techniques, including landscaping and open space preservation, and would require compliance with the applicable development codes and design review requirements enforced by the Design Review Committee and Planning Commission. These techniques would preserve the existing rural and semi-rural character of the surrounding areas by minimizing the developed appearance of the project sites. With assurance that these design measures are incorporated into the project design through formal design review, potential impacts are considered less than significant with mitigation.

Mitigation Measures:

The following mitigation measure pertains to all sites:

- 4.3-3 Prior to approval of a development proposal for a property within the RH Combining District (or as part of the annexation request for Sites 1-9), the project shall require design review approval by the Planning Commission to ensure landscaping, lighting, parking, layout and building design are compatible with the surrounding development, natural resources and/or historic features within the project area. However, since the density of development is determined at the time the site is rezoned to add the RH Combining District, design review will not include a review of the density of the project. The density shall be based on the state-mandated 16 units minimum per acre but will allow for a maximum of 20 units per acre on sites within the Grass Valley Sphere of Influence.

All future developments associated with the proposed project would be required to follow the specific design principles and standards that respect the goals, objectives and policies of the Nevada County General Plan and the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan, as well as any area plan design guidelines that each site may be located within. Such design guidelines will ensure each development is providing a balance between development and the natural environment.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

Light and Glare

4.3-4 THE PROPOSED PROJECT MAY GENERATE ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF LIGHT AND GLARE BEYOND EXISTING CONDITIONS FROM URBAN LIGHTING AND VEHICULAR TRAFFIC.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Potentially Significant Impact

Impact Analysis

Implementation of the proposed project would facilitate development that would convert the project sites from undeveloped land in a rural and semi-rural setting to a developed landscape, resulting in new sources of light and glare. Development of the proposed project areas may expose offsite residents to new sources of lighting. If this lighting is not adequately directed toward its intended use, it may cause spill-over and glare that would present a nuisance to surrounding residents. Additionally, excessive light spill-over may act as a deterrent to wildlife in sensitive habitat areas during evening hours and may present a nuisance or potential safety hazard by distracting motorists on nearby roadways.

New sources of lighting would include street lighting, security lighting, vehicle headlights and lighting that would emanate from the interior of proposed residential uses. As part of the Development Review process (and under Section L-II 4.2.8, Lighting, of the Nevada Land Use and Development Code and Section 17.30.060, Outdoor Lighting, of the City of Grass Valley Development Code), future project developers would be required to prepare lighting plans on a project-by-project basis to ensure that the exterior lighting does not spill over onto the adjacent uses. All exterior light fixtures would be required to be shielded or directed

away from adjoining uses, pursuant to all applicable lighting standards and requirements of the applicable codes.

Glare impacts are typically related to the use of modern, highly reflective surfaces such as gold or silver, glass, acrylic and broad, flat surfaces that are painted with highly reflective colors and are common in urbanized areas. As such, mirror and tinted glass materials would be prohibited with implementation of the proposed project. All potentially reflective building materials and surfaces would also be required to be painted or otherwise treated to minimize potential glare impacts (Mitigation Measure 4.3-4). All glass used on external building walls would be low-reflectivity.

Additionally, glare impacts and potentially reflective building materials would be reviewed by the Planning Commission as part of the design review process in Mitigation Measure 4.3-3. Therefore, the implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.3-3 and 4.3-4, requiring design review of future projects within the RH Combining District, proper lighting techniques and compliance with the Nevada County and City of Grass Valley applicable lighting codes would reduce project light and glare impacts to less than significant.

Mitigation Measure: Implement Mitigation Measures 4.3-3 and 4.3-4

The following mitigation measure pertains to all sites:

- 4.3-4 For all future projects in the proposed project area, all potentially reflective building materials and surfaces shall be painted or otherwise treated to minimize reflectivity, except as necessary to achieve desired green building objectives. All glass used on external building walls shall be low-reflectivity.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

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