

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

This section of the Draft EIR describes the existing visual resources of the project area, summarizes the landscape characteristics of the surrounding area, describes current planning activities in the project area, and discusses the project in the context of the Elk Grove General Plan. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics of the proposed project, General Plan consistency, and the aesthetic alteration of the existing landscape.

4.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The proposed project area is a heavily trafficked area characterized by commercial, light office institution, public/quasi public, and medium density residential land uses surrounding the site. The level terrain of the Central Valley generally characterizes the project area. The surrounding areas are zoned for limited commercial, auto commercial, single-family residential, and space rental park. The Elk Grove Boulevard overpass at SR 99 consists of three through lanes in each direction and two dedicated left turn lanes from eastbound Elk Grove Boulevard to northbound SR 99. East of SR 99, the lanes are separated by a raised landscaped median and a raised concrete median approaching East Stockton Boulevard. Overhead utilities line the north side of the roadway. Signalized controls are located at the intersections of Emerald Vista Drive/East Stockton Boulevard, northbound SR 99 on-ramp, and southbound SR 99 off-ramp.

Trees

As provided in the Elk Grove General Plan, mature trees form an important part of the City's aesthetic, open space, and historical heritage. Because they provide relief from the primarily flat terrain of the City and ties to the area's historical past, mature trees are viewed as an important resource to be protected and conserved. Trees potentially impacted by the project are shown on **Figure 4.4-1**, in Section 4.3, Biological Resources.

Tree surveys conducted in December 2005, March 2006, and April 2006 found 160 trees of 6-inch diameter at breast height (dbh) or greater within the project area, including valley oak, redwood, purple leaf plum, ornamental pear, tulip tree, red ironbark, and magnolia, which due to their location may be impacted by the proposed project, potentially facing relocation or removal within the project area. These technical memorandums are available for review at Elk Grove City Hall, Development Services-Planning Department, 8401 Laguna Palms Way in Elk Grove, CA 95758 and on the website at www.egplanning.org/environmental/ along with the Initial Study.

Scenic Vistas and Public Views

There are no designated scenic vistas or scenic highways in the vicinity of the project site (Caltrans, 2005); however the City of Elk Grove General Plan EIR (2003) provides that SR 99 from the Calvine Road exit to the juncture of SR 99 and the Cosumnes River south of Grant Line Road is a scenic corridor. The purpose of the corridor is to beautify the freeways to make road travel more pleasant and to create a more attractive image of the urban areas in Sacramento County.

Additionally, SR 99 in the project area is zoned along both sides as a "Special Sign Corridor." The Elk Park Village Shopping Center is located within that Special Sign Corridor zoning designation. The purpose of the zoning is to make provisions for signs that identify the name and type of business in an aesthetic manner that complements the architecture of the building and serves the needs of the traveling public.

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4.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

CITY OF ELK GROVE GENERAL PLAN

The following General Plan policies for visual resources and aesthetics are relevant to the proposed project. **Table 4.1-1** summarizes the project's consistency with the applicable General Plan policies. While this EIR analyzes the project's consistency with the General Plan pursuant to CEQA Section 15125(d), the Elk Grove City Council determines the project's consistency with the General Plan.

**TABLE 4.1-1
PROJECT CONSISTENCY WITH GENERAL PLAN AESTHETIC POLICIES**

General Plan Policies	Consistency With General Plan	Analysis
<p>CAQ-8</p> <p>Large trees (both native and non-native) are an important aesthetic (and in some cases biological) resource. Trees which function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat should be retained to the extent possible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks drainage channels, and other uses and structures.</p> <p>If trees cannot be preserved onsite, offsite mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee may be required by the City. Where possible, trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees, which were removed.</p> <p>Trees that cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City.</p>	Yes	<p>The Arborist Reports prepared for the Elk Grove Blvd/SR 99 Modification Project indicate that 160 trees > 6" dbh are located within the project study area. The removal of up to 70 trees is required for project construction due to both condition and location. In addition, trees to be preserved could potentially be impacted by grading or other ground-disturbing activities during project construction. Implementation of mitigation measures MM 4.1-1a, b, and c would ensure consistency with this policy.</p>
<p>Policy LU-38</p> <p>Reduce the unsightly appearance of overhead and aboveground utilities.</p>	Yes	<p>The project would relocate existing overhead utilities to an underground location to the extent feasible.</p>

4.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The impact analysis provided below is based on the following State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G thresholds of significance. The project would have a significant impact if it would:

- 1) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- 2) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

- 3) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- 4) Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY

Approximately 160 trees larger than 6 inches dbh were surveyed within the project area, including 48 valley oak trees that could require relocation or removal within the project impact area. Reconfiguration of the shopping center parking lot could impact approximately 17 of those trees and an additional 5 to 8 small trees that were not surveyed. The two large valley oak trees in the parking lot would not be disturbed or removed as a part of the project, but would remain in place. The remainder of the trees that could be impacted consist of redwood, purple leaf plum, ornamental pear, tulip tree, red ironbark, and magnolia. This information is based upon tree surveys completed for the project in December 2005, and March and April 2006, by City of Elk Grove Certified Arborist Rochelle Wicky Amrhein. These technical memorandums are available for review at Elk Grove City Hall, Development Services-Planning Department, 8401 Laguna Palms Way, Elk Grove, CA 95758.

The purpose of the arborist site visits was to conduct field inspections and collect data on all trees on the proposed project site required by the City of Elk Grove Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance (Tree Ordinance). The Tree Ordinance requires an inventory and field identification of any single-trunked native oak 6 inches dbh and larger, or multi-trunked native oak having an aggregate diameter of 10 inches dbh and larger, as well as any significant trees 19 inches dbh and larger. In order to ensure that landmark trees (particularly significant trees) were not overlooked, all single-trunked trees 6 inches dbh and larger and all multi-trunked trees 10 inches dbh and larger were surveyed. All trees that were surveyed were identified with oblong metal numbering tags with the numbers 1–62, 282–300, and 322–400.

In evaluating visual impacts, particularly those from tree removal and light and glare, the City of Elk Grove General Plan and the General Plan EIR (2003) have been reviewed and policies pertinent to assessing visual impacts have been identified. Analysis of impacts to visual character is subjective by nature, since the qualities that create an aesthetically pleasing setting will vary from person to person. This analysis looks at the resource change that would be introduced by the project and the corresponding viewer response to that change, particularly those traveling along the segment of Elk Grove Boulevard from SR 99 to the northbound loop on-ramp at East Stockton Boulevard.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Damage Scenic Resources

Impact 4.1-1 Implementation of the project would remove trees from within the project site, thereby altering the existing visual character of the area. This is a **potentially significant** impact unless mitigation is incorporated.

Fifty-four (48 valley oak and 6 interior live oak) of the trees would require protection or mitigation under the City of Elk Grove Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance. In addition to these trees, 9 others (4 redwood, 3 black walnut, and 2 Monterey pine) are also recommended for protection under the Tree Ordinance due to their aesthetic and biological value. Impacts to protected trees would be considered significant and would require mitigation.

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Mitigation Measures

MM 4.1-1a

The City shall retain, where feasible, all oak trees larger than 6 inches dbh and other large native and non-native trees. Where possible, the following measures shall be followed to protect trees identified for preservation:

- For trees within the project area that are designated for preservation, a temporary protective fencing shall be placed between the proposed road widening and the protected tree trunks. The protective fencing shall extend from the proposed road widening to the back of future sidewalk on the westbound lane. Protective fencing shall also be placed between the proposed road widening and both sides of the protected tree trunks for the trees in the proposed median. Protective fencing shall be adjusted when installing the sidewalk on the westbound lanes. Tree trunks shall be protected by trunk protection guards. The project improvement plans shall indicate the location of temporary protective fencing.
- Final Grading Plans shall show all protected trees, tree numbers, and protected dripline areas and shall show the location of the required protective temporary fencing.
- Any protected trees on the site that require pruning shall be pruned by a certified arborist prior to the start of construction work in the area. All pruning shall be in accordance with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 pruning standards and the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) "Tree Pruning Guidelines."
- No signs, ropes, cables (except those which may be installed by a certified arborist to provide limb support), or any other items shall be attached to the trees. Small metallic numbering tags for the purpose of preparing tree reports and inventories shall be allowed.
- Minimal grading (grade cuts or fills) shall be allowed within the driplines of any protected trees to construct walks and roadways.
- Where construction equipment must be operated within the dripline of any protected tree, resulting in a change of soil compaction, measures shall be taken to restore soil condition, aeration, and permeability to water.
- No trenching shall be allowed within the dripline of any protected trees. If it is absolutely necessary to install underground utilities within the dripline of any protected tree, the utility line shall be bored or jacked under the supervision of a certified arborist.
- No sprinkler or irrigation system shall be installed in such a manner that it sprays water or requires trenching within the driplines of any protected trees. An aboveground drip irrigation system is recommended.
- During construction, normal watering frequency shall be maintained around protected trees.

- Landscaping beneath protected trees may include non-plant materials such as bark mulch, wood chips, boulders, etc. The only plant species that shall be planted within the driplines of protected trees are those that are tolerant of the natural semi-arid environment of the trees, as discussed in the City Tree Preservation Ordinance. Limited drip irrigation approximately twice per summer is recommended for the understory plants.
- Weed control chemicals utilized prior to laying of new asphalt shall not be applied where they can leach into the dripline area of any protected tree.
- Clearing of weeds and debris from the protected dripline area shall be done by hand.
- Weedeaters shall be used to remove weeds and grasses so that the natural grades within the protected dripline area will not be disturbed.
- No storage of oil, fuel, concrete mix, or any deleterious substance within the dripline of any protected tree.

Timing/Implementation: *Prior to and throughout construction*

Enforcement/Monitoring: *City of Elk Grove Development Services*

MM 4.1-1b

For trees that cannot be preserved in their current location, a qualified biologist or certified arborist shall evaluate each tree identified for removal to assess the tree's potential for successful relocation away from the project impact area. If the tree is a candidate for relocation, the City shall relocate the tree whenever feasible. From surveys completed to date, eight (8) trees have been identified as candidates for relocation. If feasible, the City shall relocate these trees as part of the project.

Monitoring for the success of relocated trees shall be conducted by a qualified biologist or certified arborist on a once-yearly basis for a period of five years after relocation. The survey shall assess the health and vigor of the tree and make a determination whether the tree is successfully establishing and growing. If a tree is found to be unsuccessful (i.e., dead or dying) at the end of the five-year period, the City shall compensate for the loss of the tree by planting replacement trees, either in or as near to the project area as possible, as required by the City of Elk Grove Tree Preservation Ordinance.

Timing/Implementation: *During development of the Tree Preservation and Mitigation Plan, during construction, and after completion of construction. Tree relocation shall occur prior to construction.*

Enforcement/Monitoring: *City of Elk Grove Development Services*

MM 4.1-1c

When relocation is not feasible, or if a tree is not a candidate for successful relocation, then trees removed by the project shall be compensated for by planting of replacement trees per the requirements of the City of Elk Grove Tree Mitigation Policy and fees. To reestablish the aesthetic value of the trees

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removed and to encourage native tree regeneration, replacement trees shall be planted within the project area to the extent feasible. When it is not feasible to plant replacement trees within the project area, the replacement trees shall be planted as close to the project area as possible. Preference shall be given for use of the largest replacement trees available when selecting replacement trees. These trees shall be placed strategically to provide immediate visual benefit.

Monitoring for the success of replacement trees shall occur on a once-yearly basis for a period of three years after planting. At the end of the three-year period, the replacement trees must demonstrate successful establishment to achieve a “no net loss” of trees (on a per-inch basis) from the project. If the success rate for the replacement trees is unacceptable, the City shall consult with a certified arborist to evaluate the mitigation plan and determine appropriate remediation to achieve a “no net loss” of trees from the project.

Timing/Implementation: During development of the Tree Preservation and Mitigation Plan, during construction, and after completion of construction

Enforcement/Monitoring: City of Elk Grove Development Services

Implementation of the above mitigation measures would reduce impacts to a **less than significant** level related to tree removal and would help to retain the scenic views in the area.

The removal of 16 additional trees (12 Monterey cypress, 1 purple leaf plum, 1 ornamental pear, 1 tulip tree, and 1 pecan) from within the project site would also be required for project construction. These trees have trunk diameters ranging from 8 to 27 inches (totaling 242 inches dbh); however none are eligible for protection under the Elk Grove Tree Ordinance. Eight are considered to be in “poor” condition and the remaining 8 are in “fair/poor” condition, according to the arborist report.

Degrade the Existing Visual Character of the Site

Impact 4.1-2 Implementation of the proposed project would modify the existing landscaping by creating a loop on-ramp onto northbound SR 99. This would result in a **less than significant** impact.

The existing landscape and setting of the proposed project site consists of several trees, vegetation, and a former Caltrans maintenance yard. Project construction would clear vegetation from the work area at the beginning of construction; the area would be replanted with native vegetation upon project completion. Overhead views of the area would be modified to show a more consistent and intentional landscaped design. Trees that would require removal would be replanted within the project site or within the project study area if feasible (refer to mitigation measures **MM 4.1-1a** through **MM 4.1-1c**). At completion, the project would ensure that modifications would result in a less than significant impact on the existing visual character and quality of the project site and its surroundings.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Creation of Substantial Light and Glare

Impact 4.1-3 Implementation of the proposed project would result in the introduction of new nighttime light associated with the proposed project that could adversely affect adjacent areas. This would be a **less than significant** impact.

The proposed project would introduce new streetlights along the loop on-ramp within the project area. Additional lighting would be installed at bus turnouts for the purpose of public safety. While this new light source could adversely affect adjacent residential land uses located east of the project site, light “spilling over” and increased sky glow in the region would be minimized by complying with City of Elk Grove Development Standards, which require street lighting to be constructed to minimize adverse affects to day or nighttime views. Additionally, the surrounding project area consists of various commercial uses that presently emit light spillover during the nighttime hours. Therefore, the project would have a less than significant impact on light and glare in the area.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

4.1.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for aesthetics includes approved and proposed developments in the eastern portion of the city limits of Elk Grove, including the Elk Grove Triangle Special Planning Area. These projects could result in increased daytime glare and nighttime lighting over existing levels and would contribute to cumulative visual changes.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Visual Changes

Impact 4.1-4 Implementation of the proposed project, in combination with existing, approved, proposed and reasonably foreseeable development, would cumulatively contribute to affect visual resources. This impact is considered **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Project-specific and cumulative impacts are inherently related to the general conversion to urban development, introduction of lighting sources, roadways and other supporting development. Potential projects in the region include further commercial and residential development in the City of Elk Grove. Cumulative impacts from these projects would include the conversion of rural residential or agricultural land to urban uses and the introduction of nighttime illumination. Although individual development projects would be responsible for incorporating mitigation measures to minimize their visual impacts, the net result would still be a general conversion of an area with a rural character to a more urban, developed character. The proposed project would not substantially contribute to this rural to urban change, however, because it is surrounded by build-out development and existing light sources, and because of building and land use restrictions along roadways and the state highway. Thus, this impact is considered **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

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4.1.5 REFERENCES

Caltrans, 2005. Caltrans Scenic Highway System Mapping System, Sacramento County, accessed August 15, 2008. www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm .

City of Elk Grove, 2005. *City of Elk Grove General Plan*. Elk Grove, CA. Adopted November 2003; amended January 2005.

City of Elk Grove, 2003. *City of Elk Grove General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report*. Elk Grove, CA. August 2003.