
4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

This section of the EIR describes the existing visual resources of the project area, identifies the current planning activities in the project area, and discusses the project in the context of the City of Elk Grove. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the existing visual character, views of the project site from surrounding roadways, and project consistency with the City of Elk Grove General Plan.

4.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT SITE

The project site is currently occupied by three steel-framed, metal sided structures from its previous use as a Caltrans Maintenance Yard as well as an actively used park and ride lot (refer to **Photos 1 and 2** in Section 3.0). The structures are single-story and approximately 15 feet in height. The park and ride occupies the northern portion of the site and consists of a paved parking lot with painted parking stalls and directional arrows along the driveways (refer to **Photo 3** in Section 3.0). A chain link fence surrounds the perimeter of the entire site. Overhead light poles are placed throughout the park and ride lot driveways (refer to **Photo 5** in Section 3.0). Mature trees border the northern boundary of the site driveways (refer to **Photo 8** in Section 3.0). A portion of the eastern border of the site adjacent to East Stockton Boulevard also contains a row of trees refer to **Photo 6** in Section 3.0) and two large trees are located on the western portion of the project site. In addition, three man-made jurisdictional channels that convey water during winter storms are located on the site.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF ADJACENT LAND USES

The site is located in the southeast quadrant of the Elk Grove/SR 99 interchange. The visual character of the area surrounding the project site is typical of areas next to interchanges and includes a mix of commercial, retail, gas station uses and landscaping.

The Elk Grove Masonic Cemetery is located immediately north of the site (refer to **Photo 8** in Section 3.0) and south of Elk Grove Boulevard, an east-west arterial which crosses SR 99 to the northwest of the project site. The cemetery is characterized by grass with headstones and low monuments on individual plots. Two maintenance buildings are located on the western portion of the cemetery and trees of various species are interspersed throughout.

SR 99 borders the site on the west. This segment of SR 99 is at-grade with the project site. The portion of the site adjacent to SR 99 is currently vacant and covered with grasses and trees.

East Stockton Boulevard borders the site to the east. Uses to the east of the project site include single-story commercial and retail developments. Parking lots associated with these uses include landscaping and lighting.

A vacant strip of land adjacent to the southern boundary of the project site separates it from the Elk Grove Boulevard off-ramp and proposed on-ramp. The off-ramp consists of a single lane that loops to the east connecting with East Stockton Boulevard. Other visual features in the area include building lighting and signage, overhead electrical/telephone poles, and a cell tower (refer to **Photo 4** in Section 3.0).

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS, PUBLIC VIEWS, AND SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

The visual characteristics of the project site are typical of areas located near highways. The site is relatively flat and at-grade with SR 99. The surrounding area, with the exception of a few vacant parcels in the vicinity of the site, is entirely built out with urban uses. While there are no scenic corridors in the City of Elk Grove, there are public views of the site from SR 99 and the SR 99 off-ramp. In addition, the site is visible from East Stockton Boulevard. In all cases, public views of the site are partially obstructed by intervening stands of trees. As described above, site features include trees, abandoned buildings, and parking lot lights (refer to **Photos 1 – 9** in Section 3.0 for views of the project site). No significant aesthetic features are located on the site nor are any significant aesthetic features or visible from the project site.

4.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

LOCAL

City of Elk Grove General Plan

Table 4.1-1 identifies the City of Elk Grove General Plan policies regarding visual resources that are applicable to the proposed Reynolds & Brown Plaza III project, and presents an evaluation of the consistency of the project with these statements as required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(d). This assessment is based on City staff's interpretation of the General Plan policies and action items. The final authority for interpretation of these policy statements, and determination of the project's consistency with the City's General Plan rests with the Elk Grove City Council.

**TABLE 4.1-1
PROJECT CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN POLICIES: VISUAL RESOURCES**

General Plan Policies and Action Items	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
<p>Policy 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 that were removed.</p> <p>Trees that cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City.</p>	<p>Yes, with mitigation</p>	<p>A total of 72 trees are located on the project site. The Initial Arborist Report and Inventory Summary prepared for the site recommended removal of 6 trees based on poor health. Fourteen additional trees were identified for removal by the applicant based on a conceptual site plan for the site. No development is currently proposed in association with the GPA, rezone and TPM. However, mitigation measures are provided in this section and Section 4.3 (Biological Resources) of this EIR to address loss of trees associated with development on the project site.</p>
<p>Policy LU-18:</p> <p>Design new development to be compatible with surrounding development.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>No development is proposed in association with the GPA, rezone and TPM. Conceptual development envisioned on the project site includes a hotel, restaurant, gas station with mini-</p>

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

General Plan Policies and Action Items	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
		mart and car wash. These uses are consistent with surrounding commercial and retail uses in the area.
<p>Policy LU-22:</p> <p>Exterior building materials on nonresidential structures shall be composed of a minimum of 50 percent low-reflectance, non-polished finishes.</p>	Yes	At this time, the applicant is requesting a GPA, rezone and TPM. In keeping with the Commercial land use designation, the proposed project would be limited to development of non-residential structures in the future. At the time a development proposal is brought forward for the site, the project would be required to undergo the design review process and must comply with the provisions of this policy.
<p>Policy LU-23:</p> <p>Bare metallic surfaces such as pipes, flashing, vents, and light standards on new construction shall be painted so as to minimize reflectance.</p>	Yes, with mitigation	New buildings are conceptually identified, but would occur subsequent to the current application which is limited to a GPA, rezone and TPM. At the time the project's development proposal is brought forward, the project would be required to undergo the design review process and must comply with the provisions of this policy.
<p>Policy LU-25:</p> <p>Require exterior lighting to be low-intensity and only used where necessary for safety and security purposes.</p>	Yes, with mitigation	The project's current application is limited to a GPA, rezone and TPM. Conceptual uses identified for the project site would include exterior lighting. At the time the project's development proposal is brought forward, the project would be required to undergo the design review process and must comply with the provisions of this policy.

City of Elk Grove Zoning Code

The City of Elk Grove Zoning Code provides standards for lighting in each land use zone (Section 23.56). Zoning regulations also include development and design standards for the location of signs along roadways to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance (Section 23.62). These concepts of the Zoning Code would be applicable and enforced relative to the proposed project.

City of Elk Grove Design Guidelines

In September 2002, City Council directed the preparation of a Design Review Ordinance and corresponding Citywide Design Guidelines (Elk Grove Design Guidelines). The Design Review Ordinance establishes an expanded design review process. Design Guidelines for non-residential development were adopted in April 2004.

The Elk Grove Design Guidelines include design provisions for site planning, architecture, parking, lighting, and landscaping. The Non-Residential Development Design Guidelines apply to all non-residential development including retail and service commercial, office, industrial and quasi-public development unless otherwise specified. The Site Planning section provides both design concepts and design guidelines. The concepts are broad and generally address desired characteristics for non-residential development (i.e. designing new development to contribute to the character of a community, integrating with adjacent properties, design compatibility,

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

unified design theme, pedestrian-friendly, streetscape, smaller parking lots, etc.). Design guidelines are specific directives regarding the physical layout and attributes for non-residential development. The proposed project would be required to comply with the provisions of the Elk Grove Design Guidelines.

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. An aesthetic or visual resource impact is considered significant if implementation of the project would result in any of the following:

- 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 which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The City of Elk Grove General Plan and General Plan EIR have been reviewed and goals and policies pertinent to assessing visual impacts have been identified. No other adopted plans apply to visual resources within the project area.

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. For the purposes of this analysis, the site and its vicinity have been visited in order to consider the existing character and to determine the project's consistency with the surrounding setting. Site photographs depict the existing visual character of the project site and have contributed to the analysis of the project's visual impacts (see Photos 1 through 9 in Section 3.0 of this EIR).

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) determined that there are no identified scenic vistas in the vicinity of the project site. Therefore, this issue is not addressed further in the EIR.

The NOP also determined that there are no state designated scenic highways or eligible scenic highways located in the vicinity of the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would result in less than significant impacts to scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. This issue will not be discussed further in this EIR.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Views from Surrounding Areas

Impact 4.1.1 As viewed from the surrounding area, development of the project site could substantially alter the existing natural and built characteristics of the project site. This is considered a **significant** impact.

The project is currently limited to a GPA, rezone and TPM. A formal proposal to develop the site has not been submitted. However a conceptual site plan for the project site depicts a hotel, restaurant, and gas station with a mini-mart, and car wash. Development of the project site with conceptual uses would substantially alter the existing landscape characteristics of the site. Currently the site contains a former Caltrans maintenance yard with buildings and park and ride facility. In addition, the site contains a number of natural features including 72 trees of various species as well as several drainage channels.

Development would change the features of the site by removing existing structures, covering the jurisdictional manmade ditches and removing existing trees. The Elk Grove Design Guidelines for Non-Residential Development encourage retention of existing significant natural features such as protected trees/tree clusters, topography and creeks.

The conceptual site plan depicts proposed development arranged on the southern portion of the site with parking on the northern portion of the site. The hotel would be the most prominent structure as viewed from SR 99. The hotel, restaurant, gas station, mini-mart and car wash would be visible from the existing off-ramp as well as the future on-ramp associated with the improvements to the interchange of Elk Grove Boulevard and SR 99. The gas pumps would be oriented along East Stockton Boulevard.

With the exception of the hotel (which is estimated to be four stories), the type and scale of conceptual development envisioned for the project site would be consistent with that of the surrounding development and would be consistent with the proposed land use and zoning requested as part of the GPA and rezone. Development would be required to comply with the provisions of the SC zoning designation and Commercial land use designation. SC zoning development standards address the physical layout, size and features of structures within this zoning district. Standards include maximum height of structures (40 feet, but maximum height may be increased up to 150 feet), requirements for 20 percent landscape lot coverage, illumination for outdoor lighting, types of fixtures, signage, parking requirements etc. In addition, the project would be required to comply with the provisions of the Elk Grove Design Guidelines for Non-Residential Development which address all aspects of site planning (placement of buildings, landscaping, lighting) and architectural styles (styles, building materials, colors, etc). However, the change from the existing condition is considered **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

MM 4.1.1 Landscaping plans for the project shall be developed and designed to preserve existing site features including trees and drainage channels wherever feasible. The plans shall be reviewed and approved by the City of Elk Grove, Development Services, Planning prior to approval of project site grading plans.

Timing/Implementation: Prior to approval of grading plans.
Enforcement/Monitoring: Development Services, Planning.

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

Implementation of mitigation measure MM 4.1.1 would reduce impacts associated with alteration of views by preserving as many existing features as possible. In addition, the project would be consistent with the proposed GPA and rezone which would allow retail and commercial uses on the site. Since the project would be required to comply with the provisions of SC zoning, the Design Guidelines for Non-Residential Development and the proposed mitigation measure, impacts to alteration of views would be reduced to **less than significant**.

Daytime Glare and Nighttime Lighting Impacts

Impact 4.1.2 Implementation of the proposed project would result in the introduction of daytime glare sources and increased nighttime lighting to the project site. This would be a **less than significant** impact.

Development of uses allowed as part of the proposed GPA, rezone and TPM could introduce a hotel, restaurant, and a gas station with mini-mart and car wash to the project site. During the day, sunlight reflecting from structures, motor vehicles, and windows would be the primary sources of glare. Sources of night lighting would include signage, security lights, overhead parking lot lights and vehicle head lights. These types of light and glare are currently generated in the vicinity of the site. Residential uses are most susceptible to night light spillage. However, no residential uses are located immediately adjacent to the site.

Lighting standards for all development within the City are addressed in Section 23.56 of the Elk Grove Zoning Ordinance. The standards describe fixture type, height of lighting poles, hours of illumination, etc. In addition, General Plan Policy LU-23 requires exterior building materials used on the commercial structures to be composed of a minimum of 50 percent low-reflectance, non-polished finishes and all bare metallic surfaces to be painted. Compliance with this policy would substantially reduce the potential for buildings to generate daytime glare by eliminating the use of highly reflective materials. The Design Guidelines for Non-Residential Development also identify guidelines for Lighting of Parking Areas, Drives, and Pedestrian Walkways. These guidelines direct that exterior site lighting be contained on-site; be architecturally integrated with building style, material and colors; avoid light spill and glare on adjacent properties; be fully shielded; have a narrow cone of light for confining the light to the object of interest; and minimize light trespass and glare. Compliance with all of these provisions would ensure that light and glare impacts are within acceptable City standards. Therefore, increases in nighttime light and glare are considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

4.1.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for visual resources/light and glare is the existing development in the City of Elk Grove as well as proposed, approved and conceptual development anticipated in the City under the General Plan (see **Table 4.0-1** in Section 4.0, Assumptions). Currently there are a number of projects proposed in Elk Grove that would result in the addition of urban uses to City's landscape. The increased number of residential and commercial uses in the area would contribute to impacts on the visual resources and nighttime lighting and daytime glare. Additionally, the cumulative setting for visual resources includes new development and aesthetic/landscaping improvements along the SR 99.

The cumulative impact analysis below is based on the standards of significance listed above under Section 4.1.3.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Alteration of Views

Impact 4.1.3 Implementation of the proposed project, in combination with existing, approved, proposed, and reasonably foreseeable development, throughout the City of Elk Grove, would result in a change to the City's current mix of proposed land uses and their associated visual character. The project site is currently developed with urban uses but would be altered in association with the proposed project. This is considered a **less than cumulatively considerable** impact.

Implementation of the proposed project, in combination with approved and proposed projects throughout the City of Elk Grove, would result in the further conversion of the City's landscape to residential and commercial uses. Future development under the City of Elk Grove General Plan would also result in further alteration of the existing rural landscape of the region.

As described under Impact 4.1.1, the project site is currently designated Public/Quasi Public with RD-5 zoning and developed with a Caltrans maintenance yard and park and ride facility. Development envisioned in association with the proposed GPA, rezone and TPM would alter the existing features of the site by removing existing structures and introducing new uses to the site. However, the site is designated for development and would change from Public/Quasi Public to Shopping Center uses with approval of the proposed GPA and rezone and implementation of the proposed project. Furthermore, because the project involves in-fill of an urbanized area that was previously developed, the change in view would be from one urban use to another rather than from a rural undeveloped condition to an urbanized use. In addition, project specific mitigation would reduce visual impacts on a project-by-project basis. For these reasons, cumulative alteration of views is considered **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Mitigation Measures

None required. However, implementation of mitigation measure MM 4.1.1 would ensure that the project's contribution to cumulative alteration of views would remain **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Cumulative Nighttime Lighting and Daytime Glare Impacts

Impact 4.1.4 Implementation of the proposed project, in combination with existing, approved, proposed and reasonably foreseeable development in the City of Elk Grove, would increase daytime glare levels and nighttime light. This is considered a **less than cumulatively considerable** impact.

As described in Impact 4.1.2, implementation of the proposed project would change the character of the project area by changing the types of uses that could occur on the project site from Public/Quasi Public to Shopping Center. New buildings, parking areas, landscaping, lighting and signage would replace the existing Caltrans maintenance yard and associated features. These uses would contribute to a cumulative increase in nighttime lighting from the introduction of outdoor lights, signage and vehicle lights, as well as daytime glare from the introduction of new structures, windows and automobiles. Future development under the City of

4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

Elk Grove General Plan and approved and proposed projects would also result in further alteration of the existing landscape of the region, by increasing the number of land uses that would result in nighttime lighting and daytime glare. The Zoning Ordinance as well as the City's Design Guidelines for Non-Residential Development ensure that development is designed using materials and lighting fixtures which minimize light and glare. Individual projects must be designed consistent with the Zoning Ordinance as well as the Design Guidelines which would reduce each project's contribution to cumulative nighttime lighting and daytime glare impacts. Therefore, cumulative nighttime lighting and daytime glare impacts are **considered less than cumulatively considerable**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

REFERENCES

- Elk Grove, City of. Zoning Code. http://www.egplanning.org/gp_zoning/zoning/current/ Accessed May 14, 2007 and July 18, 2007.
- Elk Grove, City of General Plan. 2005. *Elk Grove General Plan*. Elk Grove, CA. Amended 2005.
- Elk Grove, City of. *Elk Grove Design Guidelines (Chapter 5A and 5B)*. 2004.
- Sierra Nevada Arborists. *Reynolds and Brown East Stockton Boulevard Project Site. City of Elk Grove, California. Initial Arborist Report and Inventory Summary*. January 25, 2006.