

4.7 Visual Resources/Light and Glare

This section of the EIR describes the existing visual resources of the City of Elk Grove, summarizes the landscape characteristics of the surrounding area, and discusses the impacts associated with implementation of the land use plan options. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics and potential visual resource impacts in the City.

4.7.1 EXISTING SETTING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In general, the dominant visual features within the City are the open sections of the valley floor, urbanized land uses, agricultural land uses, rivers and creeks, and various species of trees. Because the entire City consists of relatively flat terrain, views of these resources are available from roadways throughout the City. Oak trees and creeks are among the most significant natural visual features in the City, specifically Laguna Creek. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coastal ranges can be visible under clear conditions.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

Creeks

Some of the most significant natural features are creeks located in the City, such as Laguna Creek and its associated tributaries. The stream corridors also constitute riparian habitats that provide natural scenic views.

Tree Resources

The City is dominated by many native tree types, such as valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and willow. These tree types found in rural and urban areas propagate and grow under natural conditions. These trees also provide a visual break from the uniformity of urban development. Non-native trees are also found in the City, mostly planted because of ornamental value, shade, resistance to particular pests, or proven adaptation to the urban environment.

There are no woodland corridors in the City, except riparian woodland corridors along area waterways. There are also several roadways in the City that are lined with mature trees in the rural areas.

Scenic Corridors

Many state highways are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose was to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. A scenic corridor is the land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway and is identified using a motorist's line of vision. A reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to the distant horizon.

Scenic corridors that extend 660 feet on each side of the right-of-way protect all freeways within Sacramento County. Specifically within the City, these scenic corridors protect Interstate 5 (I-5) from the Laguna Boulevard exit to Elk Grove Boulevard, and State Route 99 (SR 99) from the Calvine Road exit to the juncture of SR 99 and Grant Line Road. The purpose of the corridor is to

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beautify the freeways to make road travel more pleasant and to create a more attractive image of the urban areas in Sacramento County. Both I-5 and SR 99 provide views for travelers passing through the City or into other areas in the vicinity. State Route 99 is also designated as a Special Sign Corridor by the Elk Grove Zoning Code, which regulates the type, size and location of signs within the view of the traveling public.

Landscape Corridors

Landscape corridors are linear open space corridors that link natural features with human populations. In addition, landscape corridors provide visual diversity and interest by contrasting urban and natural elements of the visual environment. Examples of landscape corridors include riparian/stream buffers, grassed waterways, field borders, hedgerows and windbreaks. Many of the new residential neighborhoods in the City incorporate landscape corridors directly adjacent to the public right-of-way.

Historic Visual Resources

Historic visual resources are important features of a community's history, providing a link between the visual landscape of the past and the urbanized landscape that characterizes the present. Examples of historic visual resources include buildings, structures, landmarks, monuments and other visually prominent features. Within the City limits of Elk Grove, the Elk Grove Historic District, located along Elk Grove Boulevard is the only site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Properties of historical importance in California are currently designated as significant resources in three State registration programs: State Historical Landmarks, Points of Historical Interest, and the California Register of Historic Places. There are three sites listed on the California Register within the vicinity of the City, but that are located outside the City boundaries.

Agricultural Land

Agricultural lands offer a break from the urban landscape by providing an open space visual resource, characterized by no form, line, color or textural features. The majority of the agricultural land in the City is located in the City's eastern portion, east of Bradshaw Road. The agricultural land is mostly utilized by private farmers, with crop and animal raising, mostly just for private consumption.

4.7.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

LOCAL

City of Elk Grove General Plan

Table 4.7-1 identifies the General Plan policies regarding visual resources that are directly applicable to the proposed 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 rests with the City Council.

TABLE 4.7-1
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</p>	<p>The proposed project would change land use designations for parcels of land and does not propose any development. All future development on the project sites would be required to undergo the development review process and any conditions of approval for large tree removal prevention will be instituted at that time.</p>
<p>Policy LU-18</p> <p>Land uses within the "Sheldon" area (generally encompassing the area designated for Rural Residential uses in the eastern portion of Elk Grove) shall be consistent with the community's rural character, emphasizing lot sizes of at least two gross acres, roadways which preserve the area's mature trees, and limited commercial services.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Sites 21 and 29, located in the "Sheldon" area are proposed to change from the rural residential land use designation to low-density residential designation, which allows a density of 4.1 to 7 dwelling units per acre. This would be in direct conflict with Policy LU-18.</p>
<p>Policy LU-19</p> <p>Land uses in the Elk Grove Triangle Policy Area shall consist primarily of residential uses on lots of 1 acre in size, with approximately 40 acres of commercial land uses intended to serve primarily local needs.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>While none of the GPA sites are in the Elk Grove Triangle, Site 24 borders the Policy Area and is consistent with the proposed uses for the Policy Area.</p>
<p>Policy LU-35</p> <p>The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development – including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development – is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The proposed project would change land use designations for parcels of land and does not propose any development. All future development on the GPA sites would be required to undergo the development review process and design for individual projects will be reviewed at that time.</p>
<p>Policy LU-39</p> <p>Reduce the unsightly appearance of overhead and aboveground utilities.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Entitlements for development would not occur as a result of the proposed project. Future development that may result from this GPA would be required to comply with this policy, which reduces visual impacts.</p>

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City of Elk Grove Zoning Code

The City of Elk Grove Zoning Code provides standards for lighting in each land use zone. The code also provides development standards for industrial properties within scenic corridors along a freeway right-of-way and a county road. Finally, zoning regulations include development and design standards for the location of signs along roadways to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

City of Elk Grove Design Guidelines

In September 2002, City Council directed the preparation of a Design Review Ordinance and corresponding Citywide Design Guidelines. The Design Review Ordinance establishes an expanded design review process. The first phase of Design Guidelines for single-family residential development was adopted in March 2003. The second phase of Design Guidelines for non-residential development was adopted in October 2003. The City is currently reviewing design guidelines for multi-family development.

The overall purposes of the design guidelines within the City are:

- To encourage high quality land planning and architecture;
- To encourage development in keeping with the desired character of the City;
- To ensure physical, visual, and functional compatibility between uses; and
- To ensure proper attention is paid to site and architectural design, thereby protecting land values.

The guidelines include design provisions for site planning, architecture, lighting, and landscaping. Adopted guidelines also include provisions regarding the preservation of significant natural features and compatibility with surrounding property.

4.7.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS 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 affect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings or introduce a feature that is out of character that dominates the view;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource analysis is based on field review of the City, review of topographic conditions, review of the adopted and proposed land use map, and previous analysis and

mitigation measures provided in the Elk Grove General Plan EIR. The visual quality standards of the City of Elk Grove General Plan were used for guidance for this visual analysis. In addition, staff performed a visual field study from several vantage points within the City. This analysis is based on anticipated changes within the City from implementation of the proposed project.

The City Council adopted Findings of Fact for the environmental impacts associated with implementation of the Elk Grove General Plan and also adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations for significant and unavoidable impacts anticipated with implementation of the Elk Grove General Plan, which included the alteration of scenic resources and its cumulative contribution to the conversion of the region's rural landscape to residential, commercial, and other land uses resulting in alteration of visual conditions.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Alteration of Scenic Resources

Impact 4.7.1 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Amendment could result in the alteration of scenic resources and degradation of the visual character and quality in the City. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

The proposed General Plan Amendment would change the land use designation for eight sites in the City of Elk Grove. The majority of sites (A, 4, 5, 40, and 41) are located in urbanized areas surrounded primarily by commercial, office, residential, school, and park uses or a combination of these. The proposed changes to the land use designations for these sites would not result in a significant change to the visual character of the area, as the general area surrounding the sites is currently urban in nature and would remain urban with the proposed change.

Implementation of the GPA would result in a significant change in rural land use characteristics with the approval of Sites 21 and 29, changing from a Rural Residential land use designation to Low Density Residential. These sites would result in urban levels of development in the rural area, inconsistent with General Plan Policy LU-18, which states that land uses in the rural Sheldon area shall be compatible with the rural character, and emphasizes lot sizes of at least two acres. Development of these sites as Low Density Residential would entail the implementation of residential infrastructure including paved streets, sidewalks, curbs, gutters and other improvements associated with a subdivision. This would be out of character with the existing landscape and contradictory to Policy LU-18.

Site 24 is a small site of approximately 3.5 acres and is currently designated as estate residential. Implementation of the GPA would change this site to the commercial designation. Development as commercial would be more intensive than currently planned, changing the visual character of the area. While land to the west of Site 24 is developed with urban uses (residential), the area east of Site 24 is rural residential. Development of Site 24 is anticipated to be visually incompatible with adjacent uses.

The Elk Grove General Plan EIR anticipated urban levels of land uses on Sites A, 4, 5, 40, and 41, but analyzed estate and rural residential land uses on Sites 21, 24, and 29. Impacts associated with the alteration of scenic resources, such as alterations to existing landscape characteristics of the city, were identified as significant and unavoidable in the Elk Grove General Plan EIR. Potential development of Sites 21, 24, and 29 would result in significant impacts not identified in the General Plan EIR.

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General Plan Goals, Policies and Action Items

General Plan Policies CAQ-8, LU-35, and LU-39 and their associated action items lessen the visual impact of development by requiring that any future development be of high quality and visually pleasing and reduce impacts associated with tree removal.

Mitigation Measures

As discussed above General Plan Policies CAQ-8, LU-35 and LU-39 with their corresponding action items would reduce the impacts to the alteration of visual character to an area for all Alternative Sites. However, land uses and the visual character of the rural areas would change with the implementation of the proposed General Plan Amendment. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Daytime Glare/Nighttime Lighting

Impact 4.7.2 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Amendment could result in the introduction of additional daytime glare and nighttime lighting sources to the area. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

The main sources of daytime glare are generally sunlight reflecting from structures and other reflective surfaces and windows. Implementation of the proposed City of Elk Grove General Plan Amendment would result in an increase to the amount of development on the General Plan Amendment sites. The change from residential to potential commercial and/or office uses on Sites 4, 5, 21, 24, and 29, the increased level of residential development on Sites 21 and 29, and the designation of Site A for development could introduce new sources of daytime glare into the City that were not considered in the General Plan EIR. Daytime glare impacts would not be substantial in developed areas due to the large amount of recent growth and construction activities. Daytime glare would result in greater adverse impacts on any undeveloped portions of the City.

The General Plan EIR did indicate that a potentially significant impact could occur resulting from the introduction of daytime glare sources to the city and increased nighttime lighting. Mitigation measures MM 4.13.2 and 4.13.3 were identified in the General Plan EIR and incorporated into the General Plan to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.

General Plan Policies and Action Items

Policies LU-35 and LU-38 and their associated action items would reduce potential impacts to daytime glare and nighttime lighting to **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

4.7.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for the proposed project includes approved and proposed developments in the vicinity of the project areas as well as the City limits of Elk Grove. Currently, there are a number of projects proposed in Elk Grove that would result in the addition of urban

uses to the City's landscape. See Section 4.0 (Introduction to the Environmental Analysis and Assumptions Used).

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Impacts to Visual Character

Impact 4.7.3 Implementation of the proposed GPA along with potential development of the sites would result in the further conversion of the City's rural landscape to residential, commercial, and other land uses. This would contribute to the alteration of the visual character for certain areas in the City. This is considered a **cumulative significant** impact.

The proposed project would contribute to the urbanization of currently undeveloped areas throughout Elk Grove. This urbanization would change the existing scenic resources, however Sites 4, 5, 40, and 41 are located in urban areas and would allow urban uses without approval of the proposed project.

Sites 21 and 29 are large parcels of land (273 acres in total), currently rural in character. Development of these sites would change the rural character of the area and have a cumulative visual impact on the surrounding area by allowing more intensive residential development changing the visual character of the area from rural to urban. Site 24 would change from estate residential to commercial, introducing urban uses into an area adjacent rural residential uses. Site A is located in an urban area, but was originally identified in the General Plan, through a mapping error, for open space uses although the site is zoned RD-20.

The Elk Grove General Plan EIR determined that implementation of the proposed General Plan and potential development of the Urban Study Areas would result in further conversion of the region's rural landscape to residential, commercial, and other land uses, resulting in a cumulative significant and unavoidable impact. Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations discussing this significant and unavoidable impact were adopted by the City Council. Cumulatively, visual impacts associated with the land uses proposed with this project would be significant.

Mitigation Measures

General Plan Policies CAQ-8 LU-18, LU-19, and LU-35 with their associated action items would partially reduce visual impacts associated with development of the project sites. However, implementation of the proposed General Plan Amendment would contribute to cumulative changes to existing scenic resources and alterations of rural landscape, resulting in a **significant and unavoidable** impact.

REFERENCES

City of Elk Grove Development Services. 2003. *City of Elk Grove General Plan EIR*. Elk Grove, CA.