

4.1 AESTHETICS

This chapter contains information about the aesthetic character of Vacaville relevant to the proposed General Plan and proposed Energy and Conservation Action Strategy (ECAS). It provides an overview of the current regulatory framework, describes existing conditions, and analyzes the potential impacts of the proposed General Plan and proposed ECAS. Impacts involving light and glare, such as additional nighttime lighting, are also discussed in this chapter. As noted in Chapter 3, Project Description, impacts are determined by comparing the proposed General Plan and ECAS to existing conditions, rather than to the existing General Plan. The following evaluation is based on a spatial analysis, and assesses effects on scenic vistas, scenic resources, the existing visual character or quality of the area, and the creation of new sources of light or glare that would adversely affect views in the area.

A. Regulatory Framework

This section describes programs and regulations related to aesthetics in Vacaville.

1. State Programs and Regulations

This section describes State programs and regulations related to aesthetics.

a. State Scenic Highway Program

State Scenic Highways are designated by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to promote the protection and enhancement of the natural scenic beauty of California's highways and adjacent corridors. Caltrans is the State agency responsible for the planning, construction, and maintenance of highway, bridge, and rail transportation. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963.¹ The State laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 *et seq.* There are no roadways in Vacaville that are designated as a Scenic Highway.²

¹ Scenic Highways Program website, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/faq.htm>, accessed on February 26, 2012.

² Scenic Highways Program website, *Eligible and Officially Designated Routes*, <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/cahisys.htm>, accessed on March 14, 2012.

b. California Building Code, 2010

The California Building Code, Part 2 of Title 24 in the California Code of Regulations (CCR), is based on the International Building Code and combines three types of building standards from three different origins:

- ◆ Building standards that have been adopted by State agencies without change from building standards contained in the International Building Code.
- ◆ Building standards that have been adopted and adapted from the International Building Code to meet California conditions.
- ◆ Building standards, authorized by the California legislature, that constitute extensive additions not covered by the International Building Code that have been adopted to address particular California concerns.

The California Building Code includes standards for outdoor lighting that are intended to improve energy efficiency, and to reduce light pollution and glare by regulating light power and brightness, shielding, and sensor controls.

2. Solano County General Plan

The Solano County General Plan addresses scenic resources in the Resources Element and cites “agricultural landscapes, the delta and marshlands, and the oak and grass covered hills” as valuable scenic vistas. Figure RS-5 in the Solano County General Plan illustrates scenic roadways in Solano County, which include the entire length of Interstate 80, Interstate 505, and Pleasants Valley Road.

In addition, Policy RS.P-37 states that the County will “[p]rotect the visual character of designated scenic roadways,” and Implementation Program RS.I-21 states “[p]reserve the visual character of scenic roadways as shown in Figure RS-5 through design review, designating alternate routes for faster traffic, regulating off-site advertising, limiting grading in the view corridor through the grading ordinance, limiting travel speeds, and providing pullover areas with trash and recycling receptacles.”

3. Vacaville Land Use and Development Code

The Vacaville Land Use and Development Code has a number of sections requiring design review and stipulating aesthetic standards, such as ensuring that a project’s proposed building type, intensity, design, and size is appropriate for the location and is compatible with adjacent uses and resources (Section 14.09.113). It also provides standards for architectural design, variety in housing types and massing, configuration of subdivisions, and site improvements such as land-

scaping and fencing (Section 14.09.074). Additionally, the Land Use and Development Code has provisions for regulating lighting and minimizing glare (Section 14.09.127.110).

4. City Gateways Design Master Plan

The City Gateways Design Master Plan, adopted in 1999, establishes standards for entry points into the city, including landscape design and a coherent signage design. Focusing on the Interstate 80 and Interstate 505 corridors, the City Gateways Design Master Plan identifies ways to further enhance visible areas of Vacaville as viewed from the freeways.

B. Existing Setting

This section provides a general description of the existing character and visual quality of Vacaville.

1. Visual Character

Nestled against the rugged Vaca Mountains to the west, Vacaville spreads eastward into the farmed plains on the edge of California's Central Valley. The city is characterized mostly by tidy, modern suburban streets surrounding a downtown core which evokes the city's history as a regional center of agriculture and commerce. As the oldest area of the city, Downtown Vacaville includes a traditional grid of streets lined with historic commercial and mixed-use buildings. The city overall is characterized by wide streets with ample sidewalks, landscaping, and a variety of trees. Alamo and Ulatis Creeks flow west to east across the city and feature largely natural channels flanked by areas of thick vegetation. Interstate 80 bisects the center of the city, bringing visitors, workers and shoppers and providing access to the Bay Area to the southwest and to Sacramento to the northeast. Views of central Vacaville from Interstate 80 are dominated by signs for the city's numerous thriving shopping centers.

Open space areas, characterized by oak-dotted hillsides in the west and flat fields of row crops in the east, define the edges of the city.

2. Scenic Vistas

The existing and proposed General Plans do not designate official scenic vistas. However, there are a number of vistas within Vacaville that could be considered scenic and worthy of preservation.

Portions of the Inner Coast Range that fall within the EIR Study Area include the English Hills to the north and the hills surrounding Lagoon Valley in the southwest. Within Vacaville, scenic vistas include westward views to the Vaca Mountains, a part of the Inner Coast Range, and

views of the Inner Coast Range hillsides within the city. Views of these hillsides are intermittent throughout the city, and in many areas are partially or fully blocked by existing buildings and trees. In Vacaville, uninterrupted scenic views of hillsides exist along many roadways in the Lagoon Valley area and along roadways near the English Hills, such as Dobbins Road/Gibson Canyon Road, Vine Street, Brown Street, and Browns Valley Road. Within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) and Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), scenic views exist along many roadways in rural residential and agricultural areas, such as along Pleasants Valley Road and Vaca Valley Road in western Vacaville, Midway Road and Cantelow Road in northern Vacaville, Hawkins Road in eastern Vacaville, and Vanden Road in southern Vacaville.

3. Lighting and Glare

Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky, including glare, light trespass, sky glow, and over-lighting. Views of the night sky are an important part of the natural environment. Excessive light and glare can be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species. Light pollution in Vacaville is restricted primarily to street lighting along local streets and Interstates 80 and 505, and to night-time illumination of commercial buildings in the Downtown and shopping centers. Light spillage from residential developments is mostly screened by trees.

C. Standards of Significance

Implementation of the proposed General Plan and proposed ECAS would have a significant impact with regard to aesthetics if they 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 which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

CEQA significance thresholds address the physical impacts associated with visual changes; however, CEQA does not provide guidance on, or require the consideration of, design-related implications. Issues of design quality are outside of the scope of CEQA.

D. Impact Discussion

This section discusses potential impacts of the proposed General Plan on aesthetics in the EIR Study Area. Implementation of the proposed ECAS would have minimal aesthetics impacts and is discussed, where relevant, in the sections below.

1. Project Impacts

The discussion of potential project impacts is organized by and responds to each of the potential impacts identified in the Standards of Significance.

- a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

As discussed in Section B.2, Existing Setting, the existing and proposed General Plans do not designate official scenic vistas, but westward views to the Vaca Mountains, a part of the Inner Coast Range, and views of the Inner Coast Range hillsides within the city are considered scenic vistas in this analysis. Scenic views are generally intermittent and partially obscured by existing development and trees. Uninterrupted scenic vistas do exist throughout the city, and are primarily in agricultural areas, hillside areas that are developed at a low density, and other areas that remain largely undeveloped.

In many areas of the city with scenic views, development patterns are substantially built out, and the proposed General Plan land use designations are generally consistent with existing development patterns. Therefore, new development would not be expected to significantly alter scenic viewsheds in these areas. Many portions of the EIR Study Area that currently consist of rural residential, agricultural, and open space uses would remain designated for these uses under the proposed General Plan. New development in these areas would similarly not be expected to significantly affect scenic viewsheds.

However, some future development allowed by the proposed General Plan would have the potential to partially or fully block scenic vistas:

- ◆ In the foothills and ridgeline areas in the western portion of the city, including along Gibson Canyon Road and Vine Street, development could occur in currently undeveloped areas that are visible from other portions of the city.
- ◆ Along Interstate 80 at the southern edge of the city, views to the east include uninterrupted views of hillsides around Lagoon Valley. In this area, land uses adjacent to Interstate 80 include existing agricultural and open space lands that are proposed for commercial use under the proposed General Plan. Although this area is already designated for development under the existing General Plan, there is an approved development plan for this area. The Lagoon Valley Specific Plan EIR has been certified (SCH No. 2003032063), although development

has not yet occurred and the area is currently open space. As described in Chapter 3, Project Description, CEQA requires a comparison of the proposed project to existing conditions on the ground rather than a comparison to what would be allowed by an existing plan. Even though the General Plan does not change any approved projects, this EIR must consider the impacts of implementation of the General Plan on the existing conditions. Therefore, although the approved development plan for Lagoon Valley plans for the area between Interstate 80 and the lagoon to remain as open space, the General Plan designates this area for commercial use, and commercial development on these parcels could block currently uninterrupted views to the hillsides east of the lagoon.

- ◆ South of the lagoon, existing agricultural and open space land is designated for Business Park and Residential Golf Course under the proposed General Plan. Largely uninterrupted views to the west, north, and east current exist from these parcels. Development of business park uses in this area would alter these existing scenic views. Development of a residential golf course at the proposed density of 1 to 2 dwelling units per acre, however, would not be expected to substantially degrade these views because new buildings would be constructed in a low-density development pattern. In addition, these development areas are also visible from Interstate 80. Although the approved development program for Lagoon Valley includes a large earth berm tall enough to provide substantial screening of future development within the valley from views from Interstate 80, this provision is not part of the General Plan, and therefore aesthetic impacts could occur.
- ◆ The Interchange Business Park and Vacaville-Golden Hills Business Park currently contain several vacant parcels from which the English Hills can be viewed to the west. The proposed General Plan designates these parcels for Industrial Park; development of industrial uses in this area would alter these existing scenic views.
- ◆ East of Leisure Town Road, the proposed General Plan designates the existing rural residential, agricultural, and open space lands primarily for residential uses, as well as scattered commercial uses, public parks, and schools. When approached from the east on Hawkins Road, Elmira Road, or Fry Road, this portion of the EIR Study Area currently offers expansive, open views of hillsides to the west. The new development allowed by the proposed General Plan would be expected to significantly alter these views.
- ◆ In the northeastern portion of the EIR Study Area, on both sides of Interstate 80, the proposed General Plan designates the existing rural residential, agricultural, and open space lands for residential, commercial, park, business park, and technology park uses. These areas currently offer expansive, open views of hillsides to the west. These scenic views could be partially or fully blocked by development allowed by the proposed General Plan.

In addition, the proposed ECAS includes measures that promote the development of alternative energy facilities, including Measure RE-3, which calls for the development of an alternative energy development plan. Alternative energy facilities could interfere with scenic vistas.

While the existing and proposed General Plans do not designate official scenic vistas, the proposed General Plan states that important scenic views in the city include views of the rural and undeveloped lands surrounding the city, and Vacaville's hillside areas. The proposed General Plan also states that views of the surrounding countryside, ridgelines, and hilltops are important contributors to the identity of the city. The proposed General Plan includes the following goals, policies, and actions that would protect scenic views:

- ◆ Policy COS-P8.1 directs the City to preserve scenic features and the feel of a city surrounded by open space, and preserve view corridors to the hills and other significant natural areas.
- ◆ Policy COS-P8.2 directs the City to retain major ridgelines and hillsides as open space.
- ◆ Policy LU-P1.1 directs the City to maintain Vacaville as a free-standing community surrounded by foothills, farmland, and other open space.
- ◆ Policy LU-P1.2 directs the City to protect Vacaville's natural environment and integrate creeks, hills, utility corridors, and other significant natural features into major development plans.
- ◆ Policy LU-P1.9 directs the City to define the boundary of the city by elements such as the natural topography of the land, enhanced landscaping, and other existing visual barriers.
- ◆ Action LU-A17.3 directs the City to amend the City Gateways Design Master Plan to include freeway frontage in the Northeast Growth Area and to address billboard development in this area.
- ◆ Goal LU-22 and its associated policy and action provide design requirements for development near Lagoon Valley to protect view corridors.
- ◆ Policy SAF-P1.2 prohibits development on ridges and slopes at or exceeding 25 percent.

New development and new alternative energy facilities designed consistent with these goals, policies, and actions would minimize impacts on scenic vistas to a *less-than-significant* level.

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

There are no designated State Scenic Highways in Vacaville.³ Therefore, implementation of the proposed General Plan would have no impact on scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway.

The Solano County General Plan designates Interstate 80, Interstate 505, and Pleasants Valley Road as “scenic roadways.” Development allowed by the proposed General Plan or new alternative energy facilities promoted by the proposed ECAS along these roadways could degrade the scenic values that prompted the County to designate these corridors as scenic roadways. However, much of the area along these roadways is already developed, and for the portions that are not developed, they would be subject to the proposed General Plan policies that protect scenic resources described in Section D.1.a, Have a Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista.

Because there are no State-designated scenic highways in the EIR Study Area, and because development and other structures along roadways identified as scenic by the County would be subject to proposed General Plan policies to protect scenic resources, the impact related to scenic highways would be *less than significant*.

- c. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Vacaville’s scenic hillside areas are discussed above in Section D.1.a, Have a Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista. In addition to these scenic views, there are other scenic resources that contribute to the visual character of Vacaville and its surroundings. The proposed General Plan states that most of Vacaville’s scenic resources are associated with the open space, natural resources, and agricultural uses in and surrounding the city. These scenic areas include riparian corridors throughout the city and views of the rural and undeveloped lands.

The EIR Study Area includes two small valleys, Vaca and Lagoon, and is drained by Alamo Creek and its tributaries (Laguna Creek and Encinosa Creek), Ulatis Creek, and Horse Creek and its tributaries (Pine Tree Creek and Gibson Canyon Creek). Alamo and Ulatis Creeks flow west to east across the city and feature largely natural channels flanked by areas of thick vegetation. Gibson Canyon Creek has been highly modified and channelized, and large portions of Gibson Canyon Creek between Interstates 505 and 80 in the North Village area are protected under a conservation easement. New development along riparian corridors would have the potential to remove riparian vegetation and thereby degrade the visual quality of these scenic resources.

³ Scenic Highways Program website, *Eligible and Officially Designated Routes*, <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/Land-Arch/scenic/cahisys.htm>, accessed on March 14, 2012.

However, the proposed General Plan includes the following policies to protect riparian corridors from substantial degradation:

- ◆ Policy COS-P1.6 requires that new development minimize the disturbance of natural habitats and vegetation.
- ◆ Policy COS-P1.9 requires that new development protect and preserve wetland habitats that are contiguous to riparian or stream corridors.
- ◆ Policy COS-P2.1 discourages undergrounding of creeks and encourages daylighting of existing culverted creeks.
- ◆ Policy COS-P2.2 protects existing stream channels and riparian vegetation by requiring buffering or landscaped setbacks and storm runoff interception.
- ◆ Policy COS-P2.5 encourages restoration and expansion of riparian and floodplain habitat within channelized streams and flood channels where feasible.
- ◆ Policy COS-P2.7 requires creek areas in new developments to be visible from the public right-of-way.

New development implemented consistent with these policies would avoid or replace riparian vegetation. Therefore, implementation of the proposed General Plan would not substantially degrade the visual quality of riparian corridors as scenic resources.

As described in Section D.1.a, Have a Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista, some areas within the EIR Study Area that are currently largely undeveloped or in agricultural use offer open, expansive views of the hillsides in and surrounding the city. These areas also offer scenic views of agricultural landscapes and countryside. Under the proposed project, the City would continue to allow the erection of billboards along Interstate 80, which could impact views of undeveloped and agricultural lands. In addition, as described above, the proposed General Plan designates some of these areas for residential, commercial, and business/industrial uses. Conversion of these lands to developed uses under the proposed land use designations, or construction of new alternative energy facilities that are promoted by the proposed ECAS, would substantially alter the visual quality of these areas.

As discussed in Section D.1.a, Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista, the proposed General Plan includes goals, policies, and actions that would protect some scenic views. In addition, the proposed General Plan includes the following policies that would reduce the aesthetic effects of the project:

- ◆ Action LU-A17.3 directs the City to amend the City Gateways Design Master Plan to include freeway frontage in the Northeast Growth Area and to address billboard development in this area.
- ◆ Policy COS-P3.1 directs the City to maintain a compact urban form and locate new development to minimize the loss of agricultural resources and open space resources.
- ◆ Policy COS-P3.4 directs the City to work cooperatively with non-profit organizations, such as land trusts, to preserve agricultural land in the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area.
- ◆ Policy COS-P4.1 requires new development to maintain a 500-foot wide agricultural buffer along the eastern boundary of all residential development and existing agricultural lands, within the area east of Leisure Town Road, south of the Locke Paddon Community, and north of the railroad tracks.

Under Section 14.09.132, Prohibited Signs, of the Vacaville Municipal Code, billboards are largely prohibited, and under Action LU-A17.3 of the proposed General Plan, billboards will be addressed by an amended City Gateways Design Master Plan. The proposed General Plan also includes the Community Separator boundary, which restricts lands on the outskirts of the city to agricultural or other defined open space uses through zoning, joint power agreements between Vacaville and adjacent cities, and/or through acquisition of development rights by a public or nonprofit agency.

To some people, this change in landscape from agricultural to land developed with attractive neighborhoods, parks, and schools would be a deterioration of the visual landscape, while others may consider it an improvement. Development under the General Plan would unquestionably alter the existing rural and agricultural appearance of these undeveloped areas. This would amount to a substantial change which cannot be mitigated except by foregoing development. Therefore, there would be a *significant* impact.

Impact AES-1: The visual character in undeveloped portions of Vacaville would be substantially altered.

There are no available mitigation measures, and the impact would be *significant and unavoidable*.

The proposed ECAS also includes alternative energy and green building measures that could affect the appearance of a building, and these could potentially change the character of the building site and its surroundings. However, the proposed General Plan includes policies that would ensure new development, including new development using green building techniques or incorporating alternative energy facilities, would be consistent with its surroundings. In particular, Policy LU-P1.5 requires that infill projects be designed to complement the neighborhood and

surrounding zoning with respect to the existing scale and character of surrounding structures, and blend, rather than compete, with the established character of the area. Therefore, impacts from the proposed ECAS on the existing character of Vacaville's neighborhoods would be *less than significant*.

- d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Substantial light and glare comes mainly from commercial areas, lights kept on at night, traffic on major arterials and freeways, and from street lights. As described in Sections D.1.a, Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista, and D.1.c, Substantially Degrade The Existing Visual Character, the proposed General Plan designates certain areas of the EIR Study Area that are currently largely undeveloped for commercial and business/industrial uses. In these areas, lighting associated with new development would have the potential to substantially increase lighting and glare levels. In addition, the proposed ECAS requires strategies to reduce heat gain, including through the use of reflective paving and roofing materials, and requires new or major rehabilitations of commercial, office, or industrial development greater than or equal to 10,000 square feet in size to incorporate renewable energy generation, which could result in the installation of photovoltaic solar panels. New lighting and compliance with the proposed ECAS could increase glare issues in Vacaville.

Section 14.09.127 of the Vacaville Land Use and Development Code establishes standards for any land use approval which authorizes a new building or facility. Section 14.09.127.110, Lighting and Glare, sets forth the following standards:

- ◆ Lighting shall be shielded and directed so as not to create a hazard or nuisance to other properties or impact traffic on adjacent streets.
- ◆ Parking lot lighting shall comply with the standards of the Off-Street Parking and Loading Design Guidelines, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - Exterior lighting shall be a maximum of six foot-candles.
 - A photometric plan demonstrating compliance with these lighting standards and a site plan showing the location and design of exterior lighting fixtures shall be required as a condition of project approval.
 - Flickering or flashing lights are not permitted.

All new development would be subject to the standards in Section 14.09.127.110 of the Land Use and Development Code. Implementation of these standards would prevent the creation of sources of light and glare sufficient to adversely affect views. Therefore, impacts associated with light and glare would be *less than significant*.

2. Cumulative Impacts

The proposed General Plan and ECAS could affect scenic vistas and/or result in changes to the visual character and quality of Vacaville and the Solano County region through development in undeveloped areas and/or riparian areas throughout the EIR Study Area. However, as outlined in Section D.1, Project Impacts, goals, policies, and actions in the proposed General Plan would reduce project-level aesthetic impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Under the proposed project, the City would continue to allow the erection of billboards along Interstate 80, which, combined with other billboards along Interstate 80 in other nearby cities, could impact views of undeveloped and agricultural lands. However, under Section 14.09.132, Prohibited Signs, of the Vacaville Municipal Code, billboards in Vacaville are largely prohibited, and under Action LU-A17.3 of the proposed General Plan, billboards will be addressed by an amended City Gateways Design Master Plan. In other cities and in unincorporated areas of the County, billboards would be subject to local signage design requirements.

When combined with the overall growth trends in Solano County, the conversion of agricultural and open space lands at the edge of the city could contribute to a cumulatively significant aesthetic impact. However, other jurisdictions in Solano County have adopted General Plan policies that direct growth to existing urbanized areas and/or protect agricultural and open space land. For example, the Solano County General Plan includes strong policy statements that direct urbanization to existing municipal areas (see in particular LU.P-2). In addition, the City of Fairfield has entered into a greenbelt agreement with Vacaville, covering approximately 4,100 acres between Vacaville and Fairfield, and requiring that the area be preserved as agriculture or open space to serve as a permanent separation between the urban areas of Fairfield and Vacaville. In addition, Policy LU 2.1, as well as policies in the Agriculture Element and Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Element of the Fairfield General Plan, encourages the preservation of agricultural land surrounding the city. The City of Dixon has also entered into a greenbelt agreement with Vacaville, covering approximately 1,000 acres of land that have been purchased by the Vacaville-Dixon Greenbelt Authority (VDGA) to be maintained in productive agriculture or as other open space uses mutually agreed upon by VDGA.

New development allowed by the proposed General Plan could contribute to significant light pollution in the region. However, future development in all jurisdictions would be subject to the California Building Code standards that would prevent potential impacts associated with light and glare.

Overall, the cumulative aesthetic impact would be *less than significant*.

E. Full Buildout

The full buildout anticipated under the proposed General Plan would include significantly more development than the 2035 horizon-year development projection analyzed in Section D, Impact Discussion, in terms of both the amount and the extent of development. Therefore, the potential for impacts related to aesthetics would increase. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Project Description, it is extremely unlikely that full buildout would ever occur under the proposed General Plan. Therefore, an analysis of full buildout is not required by CEQA.

This page intentionally blank