

4.1

AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

This section of the EIR describes existing visual and aesthetic resources for the project site and the region, and evaluates potential impacts of the project with respect to urbanization of the area. In addition, the Davis General Plan goals and policies pertaining to aesthetics are described. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) describes the concept of aesthetic resources in terms of scenic vistas, scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway), the existing visual character or quality of the project site, and light and glare impacts. The following impact analysis is based on information drawn from the City of Davis General Plan¹, and the *Program EIR for the City of Davis General Plan Update and Program EIR for Establishment of a New Junior High School* (General Plan Update EIR).²

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following setting information provides an overview of the existing condition of visual resources in the Second Street Crossing project area, located in the eastern portion of the City along Second Street approximately at the intersection of Second Street and Faraday Avenue.

Regional Setting

The City's planning area is located 11 miles west of Sacramento and approximately 79 miles northeast of the City of San Francisco. The planning area consists of approximately 160 square miles, and is characterized by agricultural/open space landscapes to the north, west, and south; developed urban landscapes within the City Limits; and open space lands, including the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area to the east. Views from agricultural fields are enclosed on the west by the Coast Range hills. Views to other directions are open to the horizon, although the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Sutter Buttes, and Mount Diablo can be seen on clear days. The UC Davis campus is located adjacent to the southwest corner of the City and occupies a total of 2,900 unincorporated acres. General Plan land uses within the planning area include Residential (low, medium, and high density); Neighborhood Retail; Community Retail; General Commercial; Business Park; Industrial; Public/Semi-Public; Parks and Recreation; Urban Agriculture Transition Areas; Agriculture; and Natural Habitat.

The planning area has no officially designated scenic highways, corridors, vistas, or viewing areas (Davis General Plan Update EIR, p. 5A-1). Landscapes in and near the City are predominantly urban, with the core area of the community having more established neighborhoods and urban landscaping. Newer developed areas on the edges of the community are more noticeable from a distance due to the immaturity of the

landscaping. The City's planning area buffers the City on all sides by extending into areas that are dominated by agricultural uses, and views in this area are open and rural in nature.

Project Area Setting

The project site consists of approximately 19 acres of land within the City of Davis, California (please refer to Figure 3-1, Regional Location Map). The project site is generally located in the eastern portion of the City along Second Street, approximately at the intersection of Second Street and Faraday Avenue (please refer to Figure 3-2, Project Location Map). The site consists of 9 lots on approximately 19 acres identified by Yolo County Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 071-411-01, 071-411-02, 071-412-02, 071-421-01, 071-421-02, 071-421-03, 071-422-01, 071-422-02, and 071-422-03.

The site is bordered along the north by existing single-family and multi-family housing and a future neighborhood park within the City of Davis city limits. In addition, the Mace Ranch Park drainage channel and bike path, run along the northwestern portion of the project site. South of the project site is the Union Pacific Railroad rail line and Interstate 80. Recently constructed light industrial and small office buildings are east of the project site. Land uses to the west consist of vacant land; southwest of the project site is located the Frontier Fertilizer site.

Unique Visual Features

The project site is essentially flat and is characterized by open, vacant land consisting of grasses and ruderal vegetation. The project site is bordered by the Mace drainage channel to the north/northwest; a portion of the channel supports some riparian vegetation and the remainder is either concrete-lined or piped. Several trees are located at the southern portion of the project site.

Project Features

The proposed project involves the development of an approximately 19-acre commercial site which includes a Target retail store, including a garden center, and four additional building pads for future retail development. The project also include site improvements including the construction of additional access points to and from Second Street, as well as a bike path connection(s), site landscaping, parking, and infrastructure required to serve the project (See Figure 3.3, Site Plan).

REGULATORY CONTEXT

Specific federal or State regulations do not directly pertain to the visual quality of an area. However, existing policies and regulations established in the City of Davis General Plan and Municipal Code are listed below, as applicable:

City of Davis General Plan

The following are applicable General Plan goals and policies related to aesthetics:

Urban Design and Neighborhood Preservation

- Goal UD 1 Encourage community design throughout the city that help to build community, encourage human interaction, and support non-automobile transportation.
- Policy UD 1.1 Promote urban/community design which is human-scaled, comfortable, safe, and conducive to pedestrian use.
- Goal UD 2 Maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment and manage a sustainable community forest to optimize environmental, aesthetic, social, and economic benefits.
- Policy UD 2.1 Preserve and protect scenic resources and elements in and around Davis, including natural habitat and scenery and resources reflective of place and history.
- Policy UD 2.2 Maintain and increase the amount of greenery, especially street trees, in Davis, both for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitat, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.
- Policy UD 2.3 Require an architectural “fit” with Davis’ existing scale for new development projects.
- Policy UD 2.4 Create affordable and multi-family residential areas that include innovative designs and on-site open space amenities that are linked with public bicycle/pedestrian ways, neighborhood centers, and transit stops.
- Policy UD 2.5 Ensure attractive functional signs.
- Goal UD 3 Use good design as a means to promote human safety.
- Policy UD 3.1 Use good design to promote safety for residents, employees, and visitors to the City.
- Policy UD 3.2 Provide exterior lighting that enhances safety and night use in public spaces, but minimizes impacts on surrounding land uses.
- Goal UD 4 Create an urban design framework that would strengthen the physical form of the city.
- Policy UD 4.1 Develop an urban design framework plan to consolidate and clarify the relevant design concepts in this chapter and other chapters to promote a positive and memorable image for the city and to reinforce the functional systems of the city such as land use, circulation, and open space.

- Goal UD 5 Create and enforce clear and reasonable design guidelines that operationalize the relevant goals, policies, and actions of this general plan.
- Policy UD 5.1 Develop and implement new design guidelines, which are reviewed periodically.
- Goal UD 6 Strengthen the city’s neighborhoods to retain desirable characteristics while allowing for change and evolution, promoting public and private investments, and encouraging citizen involvement in neighborhood planning.
- Policy UD 6.1 Recognize the existence of individual neighborhoods with general boundaries and facilitate the development of neighborhood strategies in partnership with residents and property owners. The strategies should recognize the unique characteristics of the individual neighborhood and the potential for change, within the context of a well-planned city. The strategies should be directed toward solving unique neighborhood problems and implementing neighborhood priorities and enhancing livability.

Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance

The City enacted the Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance in 1998. The ordinance, commonly referred to as the City’s “Dark Sky Ordinance,” provides standards for outdoor lighting in an effort to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass caused by inappropriate or misaligned light fixtures, while improving nighttime public safety, utility, security, and preserving the night sky as a natural resource and thus facilitating people’s enjoyment of stargazing. This ordinance does not apply to interior lighting, including lighting at greenhouse facilities.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Standards of Significance

An impact to the aesthetic values of the proposed Second Street Crossing project site would be considered significant if any of the following conditions would potentially result from implementation of the proposed project:

- Degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- Creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area; or
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

Method of Analysis

The section below gives full consideration to the development of the project site and acknowledges the physical changes to the existing setting. Impacts to the existing environment of the project site are to be determined by the contrast between the site's visual setting before and after proposed development. In this analysis, emphasis has been placed on the transformation of the existing rural setting into a landscape characterized by proposed commercial/retail development. Although few standards exist to singularly define the various individual perceptions of aesthetic value from person to person, the degree of visual change can be measured and described in a reasonably objective manner in terms of visibility and visual contrast, dominance, and magnitude. Current residents adjacent to the project site and travelers along Second Street and Interstate 80 would be considered sensitive to the visual and aesthetic alteration of the Second Street Crossing area.

Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.1-1 Impacts related to altering the existing undeveloped character of the project site.

The project site is currently undeveloped. Implementation of the proposed project would replace the undeveloped character of the project site with an urban setting containing a 126,842 square foot Target Store building plus a 10,000 square foot garden center; and building pads A, B, C, and D, which total 46,000 square feet for future retail development. The project site is primarily surrounded by development; the site is bordered to the north by residential development, to the south by Interstate 80, and to the east by office buildings. Although the project site is largely surrounded by development, the site currently provides open views from the adjacent roadways and surrounding properties. Therefore, the change in the character of the site would be recognizable. The change in the site from an undeveloped to urban environment would constitute a permanent alteration of the existing visual character of the project site.

The Landscape Plan indicates that the Second Street Crossing project would include landscaping along the project boundaries, including a 25-foot landscape corridor along Second Street. In addition, the project would include landscape plantings along the northern perimeter of the project site to provide screening. A landscape/grass area is proposed along the northwest corner of the property to buffer the rear portion of the Target Store, as well as provide open space between the Target Store and the residential development to the north. Additional trees and shrubs would line the Target Store and the proposed property line, thereby, further screening the proposed buildings. The landscaping proposed for the project would be consistent with the City of Davis Zoning Ordinance. It should also be noted that a Heritage tree, most likely an oak or olive species, would be planted in the plaza between pads A and B. Some trees currently exist at the southern boundary of the project site and would be incorporated into the project's

landscaping (See Section 4.7, *Biological Resources*, for a detailed discussion regarding existing trees).

The project involves a request for a General Plan and East Davis Specific Plan Amendment. Although the type of development proposed for the project site is inconsistent with the current zoning of the site, commercial uses were anticipated for the site in these City planning documents. Therefore, the conversion of the site from an undeveloped to an urban setting would result in *less-than-significant* aesthetic impacts.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None Required.

4.1-2 Impacts to scenic resources.

The 19.06-acre project site is currently undeveloped, characterized by open land consisting of grasses and ruderal vegetation. At the eastern boundary of the site, Faraday Avenue connects to Second Street and at the western end of the site Faraday Avenue terminates in a temporary cul-de-sac. Surrounding land uses include existing single-family and multi-family housing and a future park to the north of the site. A drainage channel and bike path run along the northwestern portion of the site. Second Street, a Southern Pacific Railroad rail line, and Interstate 80 are located south of the site. The properties to the west are vacant but are zoned for Light Industrial/Business Park. The City of Davis General Plan Update EIR states that development along Second Street west of Mace Boulevard would have a less-than-significant impact with regard to changes in views because of the existing urban setting and the lack of panoramic views through the area. Additionally, very few trees exist on-site and there are no rock outcroppings, historic buildings or State scenic highways in the project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed project would have *less-than-significant* impacts with respect to scenic resources.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None Required.

4.1-3 Impacts related to light and glare.

The 19.06-acre project site is currently undeveloped; therefore, light or glare is not currently emitted from the project site. The change from an undeveloped property to a commercial/retail development would generate new sources of light such as parking lot lighting and building lighting, which are intended to enhance safety and nighttime use in public spaces of the project site. Although the lighting is intended as a safety measure for those on the project site, the lighting would also create glare for the residential developments located to the northwest of the project site.

While the types of lighting and their specific locations are not specified at this point, the proposed project would increase the amount of light and glare into adjacent areas. Residences to the north of the project site are already subject to lighting from I-80 and the auto dealers south of I-80. Therefore, because the project would introduce land uses or structures that would contribute a substantial amount of new light or glare into an area that currently has minimal light or glare, this impact is considered *significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Implementation of the following mitigation measures would mitigate potential impacts to a *less-than-significant* level.

- 4.1-3 *Prior to the issuance of building permits, the developer shall submit a lighting plan for the review and approval of the Building Official of the City of Davis. The lighting plan shall include shielding on all light fixtures and shall address limiting light trespass and glare through the use of shielding and directional lighting methods, including but not limited to, fixture location and height. The Plan shall comply with Chapter 6 of the Davis Municipal Code- Article VIII: Outdoor Lighting Control.*

Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.1-4 Long-term impacts to the visual character of the region from the proposed project in combination with existing and future developments in the Davis area.

The proposed project would contribute to the cumulative change in visual character of the Yolo County region from undeveloped to urban. The properties to the north of the project site are currently developed for residential uses. The Southern Pacific Railroad and Interstate 80 are located south of the project site. Recently constructed light industrial and small office buildings are east of the project site. Properties to the west of the project site are currently vacant. Development of the project site would be consistent with the type and level of development anticipated for the site in the City of Davis General Plan, the East Davis Specific Plan, and City of Davis Zoning Ordinance as these documents designated the site for commercial, light industrial/business park, and public uses.

According to the General Plan Update (GPU) EIR significance criteria under Impact LU-4, a land use map alternative would be determined to have a significant impact on aesthetics if development would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. The GPU EIR found that under impact LU-4, development of the Mace Ranch and Under Second Street sites, and other potential sites within the in-fill area, including the project site, would not significantly degrade existing views. Because these sites are located in areas generally surrounded by urban uses that limit views through

the site, the conversion of the project site in addition to other lands in the project area from a rural to an urban setting would be considered *less-than-significant* impact.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None Required.

Endnotes

¹ City of Davis General Plan, May 2001.

² City of Davis, *Draft Program EIR for the City of Davis General Plan Update and Project EIR for Establishment of a New Junior High School*, January 2000.