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## AESTHETICS

### INTRODUCTION

New development can substantially change the visual qualities and characteristics of a site located within what is largely an agricultural area today. In an area characterized by agricultural activity, new development may increase the attractiveness of developing other nearby areas in agricultural uses in desired or planned land uses. On the other hand, new development can change the character of an area by disrupting the existing visual and aesthetic features that establish the identity and value of an agricultural area in the minds of local residents. Over time, a new development may become a valued component of the area and enhance its identity, or it may generate dissatisfaction among local residents who might prefer the existing visual character of a parcel as it appears when in agricultural use to that associated with new development.

The value of any given visual feature is highly subject to personal sensibilities. One person's negative visual impression may be another's positive or beneficial visual impression. Objective or commonly agreed upon standards are difficult to establish, although an extensive body of literature is devoted to the subject of urban design and visual aesthetics.

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### SITE DESCRIPTION

The core planning area of the Plan is largely currently in active agricultural use. The remaining area to the east of Crows Landing Road has existing G3 Enterprises industrial and commercial uses and County facilities, both of which are anticipated to continue to expand on their sites. The following photographs of the Project site provide a sense of the site's existing visual characteristics (see **Figure 4.1**, **Figure 4.2**, **Figure 4.3** and **Figure 4.4**).

**Figure 4.1: View of G3 Enterprises Facility.** View of G3 Enterprises industrial buildings looking southwest across Whitmore Avenue.



**Figure 4.2: View of County Agriculture Center.** A view east from Crows Landing Road of the County Agriculture Center, part of the Stanislaus County facility.



**Figure 4.3: View of Agricultural Fields.** A view of agricultural field crops in the core planning area, facing west from Crows Landing Road, near Service Road.



**Figure 4.4: View of Agricultural Orchards.** A view of agricultural orchards in the core planning area, facing east from Ustick Road, near Hackett Road.



## IMPACT ANALYSIS

### STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following thresholds for measuring a Project's aesthetic impacts are based upon CEQA Guidelines thresholds:

1. Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista (which could be caused by blocking panoramic views), views of significant landscape features, or landforms as seen from public viewing areas?
2. Would the Project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
3. Would the Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
4. Would the Project create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

### SCENIC VISTAS

While portions of the Plan area and surrounding area to the south and west are characterized by rural agricultural settings, the Plan area and vicinity are generally flat, affording little in the way of vantage points or panoramic views. Although the Plan area can be seen from numerous public roadways, it is not part of any formally-identified scenic vista. Construction of the proposed Project may block out a portion of the existing views from adjacent areas or existing uses on the site. However, the areas from which these views may be blocked are not designated scenic overlooks, and are not places where people gather in order to gain a view of any notable landscape features. Therefore, any blockage of existing views by development in the Plan area would be considered *less than significant*.

### SCENIC HIGHWAY

The State of California designates certain routes as scenic highways. The only designated state scenic highway within Stanislaus County is Interstate 5. The Plan area is not located along a designated or eligible state scenic highway<sup>1</sup>, and the proposed development, therefore, would have *no impact* related to visual effects along a scenic highway. Nothing on the site has otherwise been formally identified by the City of Ceres or any other agency as a "scenic resource."

### VISUAL CHARACTER

As described above, the majority of the core planning area is currently characterized visually as agricultural land. Development under the proposed Plan would involve the development of numerous structures (residential homes and apartments, commercial, office and industrial buildings, and schools) on land currently in agricultural use, which would result in a substantial change in the existing visual character of the Plan area. Changes to the Plan area would be visible from the adjacent roadways and land uses. The existing view from houses along Carol Lane would change from predominately agricultural views to views with a more urbanized character including noise/privacy walls/fences at rear property lines. Although the views from public roadways would change, they

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<sup>1</sup> California Department of Transportation, California Scenic Highway Mapping System, [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic\\_highways](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways), accessed May 7, 2009.

would be consistent and compatible with existing views to the north, which consists of Low- and Medium-Density residential uses, and commercial and industrial development along Crow's Landing Road.

The Plan includes Design Guidelines, with the aim to ensure new development is well designed, compatible with adjacent uses, and contributes to the character of the area and small town community character of Ceres. Throughout the Specific Plan area, landscaping would soften the visual impact of new development.

Because new development must comply with the Design Guidelines, and the development of the Plan area would be an extension of the existing City, the proposed Specific Plan would not substantially degrade views of the Plan area.

The Specific Plan includes design and landscaping standards that would ensure that new residential development would be compatible with existing and planned adjacent uses, as presented in Chapter 7 of the West Landing Specific Plan. Development under the Plan would be an extension of and visually compatible with existing surrounding communities, and the proposed Specific Plan would not "substantially degrade" the visual quality of the Plan area or its surroundings. Therefore, the impact would be considered *less than significant*.

## **LIGHT AND GLARE**

Development of the Plan area as proposed would result in the construction of new structures and parking areas on land that is currently in active agricultural use. The proposed structures in the Plan area, the lighting of parking areas, and the vehicles that would drive in and be parked there, would represent new sources of light and glare at the site.

The following design standards are included in the Specific Plan to reduce light and glare in the Plan area:

1. Lighting designs should employ fixtures that would cast light in a downward direction; building materials should not be sources of substantial glare.
2. Lighting should generally occur at intersections, areas of pedestrian activity, and building entrances, and be minimized elsewhere.
3. Appropriate ornamental, pedestrian-scale fixtures shall be utilized to the degree possible. Lighting shall be designed to minimize glare and the direct view of light sources.
4. No lighting shall blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness.
5. Lighting should utilize energy-efficient fixtures which provide a balance between energy efficiency and pleasing light color. High pressure sodium fixtures shall be utilized for street lighting.
6. Metal halide, incandescent, or color-balanced fluorescent fixtures may be used for other lighting systems.
7. Low pressure sodium fixtures are prohibited.
8. All street lights shall utilize cut-off fixtures to minimize visibility from adjacent areas.

9. Parking area lighting fixtures shall be no higher than necessary to provide efficient lighting of the parking areas.
10. Landscape lighting sources shall be shielded from view at night, with the emphasis being on the object or view being lit.

With adherence to these lighting standards, the amount of light and glare emanating from the Plan area would be consistent with other urbanized areas and the impact would be considered *less than significant*.

### **CUMULATIVE AESTHETICS IMPACTS**

The context for the cumulative analysis is the City of Ceres and surrounding communities, which continue to develop according to their respective plans. In the immediate area, areas to the east and north are already developed with urban uses as is a portion of the area to the south. It is anticipated that the area to the south would continue to develop with urban uses while the agricultural uses to the west would remain for the foreseeable future.

As discussed in the project-specific analysis above, there are no designated scenic resources, scenic overlooks or places where people gather in order to gain a view of any notable landscape features in the Plan area, nor is it viewable from a state scenic highway. While there would be a trend toward transitioning from agricultural to urban uses both in the Plan area and surrounding vicinity, this is a change in visual character that would not “substantially degrade” visual quality. It can be assumed that other development in the vicinity would also adhere to lighting standards that would control the cumulative level of light and glare. Therefore, impacts related to cumulative aesthetic impacts would be less than cumulatively considerable and less than significant.