

AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

4.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

Aesthetic and visual resources encompass the elements of the landscape and the built environment that contribute to the visual character of a place. This chapter evaluates the potential impacts that could occur to aesthetics and visual resources as a result of Scenarios 5 and 6. This analysis is based on the Regulatory Framework and Existing Conditions information provided in the February 2016 Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

4.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

No revisions are required to the Regulatory Framework and Existing Conditions information presented in the February 2016 Draft EIR.

4.1.2 STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed Plan would result in a significant aesthetic impact if it would:

- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area and its surroundings.
- Significantly alter public viewsheds or view corridors or scenic resources (such as trees, rocks, outcroppings or historic buildings along a scenic highway).
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
- Substantially shadow public open space (other than public open streets and adjacent sidewalks) between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. from September 21 to March 21.

4.1.3 IMPACT DISCUSSION

The remaining sections of this chapter provide an analysis of the potential project impacts, including impacts from growth expected to occur during the life of the proposed Plan, as well as cumulative aesthetics impacts that could occur as a result of the implementation of the proposed Plan when combined with projects outside of Palo Alto.

The conclusions below are based on the same analytical approach used in the impact discussions in the February 2016 Draft EIR. The characteristics of Scenarios 5 and 6 are described in detail in Section 3.4 of Chapter 3, Project Description, of this Supplement to the Draft EIR.

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AES-1 Implementation of the proposed Plan would have the potential to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area and its surroundings. (Potentially Significant and Mitigable – Scenarios 5 and 6)

February 2016 Draft EIR Findings: Less than significant for Scenarios 1 and 2; potentially significant and Mitigable for Scenarios 3 and 4. Mitigation Measure AES-1 would apply to Scenarios 3 and 4 and would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level after mitigation.

Summary of Supplemental Analysis: The impact would be significant and mitigatable for Scenarios 5 and 6 and Mitigation Measure AES-1 would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. Mitigation Measure AES-1 has been revised, as shown below. These revisions will also be applied to the mitigation for Scenarios 3 and 4. The revisions do not change the original intent or effectiveness of Mitigation Measure AES-1.

Mitigation Measure AES-1: ~~The following policies and programs, or equally effective language, shall be included in the proposed Plan to~~ To ensure that future development under Scenarios 3 and 4 increased residential densities would not degrade the visual character or quality of the area, the proposed Plan shall include policies that address the following topics:

- High-quality building and site design.
- Compatibility with surrounding development and public spaces.
- Enhancement of existing commercial centers.
- Requirements for landscaping and street trees.
- Preservation and creation of a safe and inviting pedestrian environment.
- Appropriate building form, massing, and setbacks.
- ~~Policy: Promote high quality, creative design, and site planning that is compatible with surrounding development and public spaces.~~
- ~~Policy: Preserve the character of residential neighborhoods by encouraging new or remodeled structures to be compatible with the neighborhood and adjacent structures.~~
- ~~Policy: Maintain and enhance the University/Downtown area as the central business district of the City, with a mix of commercial, civic, cultural, recreational, and residential uses. Promote quality design that recognizes the regional and historic importance of the area and reinforces its pedestrian character.~~
- ~~Program: Review and revise as needed the Downtown, El Camino Real, and South of El Camino Real Design Guidelines to support and enhance the existing visual character of these neighborhoods with building forms and massing that relate to the street and the pedestrian, whether through traditional architectural forms or innovative new designs.~~

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- ~~Program: In areas of the City having a historic or consistent design character, design new development to maintain and support the existing character.~~

As described in the February 2016 Draft EIR, a significant impact would occur if implementation of the proposed Plan would considerably diminish the existing visual character of a neighborhood, district, or area within the city, including the identified scenic routes identified in the Comp Plan and described in Section 4.1.1.2 of the February 2016 Draft EIR. For example, the visual character could be diminished through a change in the form and appearance as a result of new development within existing neighborhoods. A change in form and appearance is often – but not exclusively - associated with the introduction of new land uses into an existing neighborhood or district.

As under Scenarios 1 through 4, under Scenarios 5 and 6 Palo Alto's open spaces and single-family neighborhoods, which account for over 80 percent of the city's existing land uses, would remain unchanged. Further, under all six scenarios, single-family neighborhoods (those zoned R-1) would be protected and policies would be included to encourage the preservation and enhancement of neighborhood-serving retail and services where they currently exist. Lastly, none of the six scenarios identify new employment districts and the majority of employment growth would take place in existing employment districts, concentrated in the Downtown, Stanford Research Park, and Stanford University Medical Center. Therefore, under all six scenarios, the majority of the city would retain its existing visual character. Because Scenarios 5 and 6 represent the lowest levels of employment growth among all of the scenarios, non-residential growth under both new scenarios would represent the least amount of physical or visual change in the City's employment districts.

Under Scenario 5, housing potential along South El Camino Real and San Antonio Road would be reduced by removing housing sites in those areas and shifting new housing potential to transit-rich areas such as the Downtown and the California Avenue area. Options for increasing densities in these areas include extending the Pedestrian and Transit Oriented Development (PTOD) combining district boundary; eliminating maximum dwelling unit densities and using minimum densities and floor area ratios (FAR) to encourage more, smaller units; and encouraging and streamlining multi-family housing. Additional housing would be prohibited in the East Meadow Circle/Bayshore and South San Antonio Road areas. Like Scenario 3, Scenario 5 would also allow a slight increase in the height limit Downtown from 50 feet to a maximum of 55 or 60 feet, as long as the additional height is used for residential units. The allowances for increased residential density and building heights in specific areas of the city under Scenario 5, which consist of the Downtown and California Avenue areas, would result in changes in Palo Alto's visual character that could potentially be adverse if not handled appropriately.

Scenario 6 represents the highest amount of housing growth out of all of the scenarios, increasing housing densities in specific areas of the city, adding new housing sites along the El Camino Real frontage of the Stanford Research Park and the Stanford Shopping Center, and considering additional new housing sites in the Stanford Research Park. Similar to Scenario 3, Scenario 6 would also allow for increased residential densities, potentially extending the PTOD boundary to the Downtown, in the California Avenue area, and

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along El Camino Real. Development along El Camino Real and in the Downtown would occur at the same heights as Scenario 4, although there would be an increased focus on housing and reduction in non-residential development in comparison to Scenario 4. Areas along El Camino Real near the Stanford Shopping Center and Stanford Research Park would allow for mixed-use development with ground floor retail and residential above, which would include introducing residential to an otherwise commercially used area, with an increased focus on housing and reduction in non-residential development in comparison to Scenario 4. Scenario 6 would consider more housing near Stanford University Medical Center than under Scenarios 1 through 5. Like Scenario 5, Scenario 6 would also allow a slight increase in the height limit Downtown from 50 feet to a maximum of 55 or 60 feet, as long as the additional height is used for residential units.

As detailed in Section 4.1.1.1 of the February 2016 Draft EIR, there are several regulations, zoning requirements, and development standards intended to guide the design of new buildings and reduce potential aesthetic impacts. The existing design guidelines described under Section 4.1.1.1 would continue to apply to future development. Further, under all six scenarios the City's Architectural Review Board would continue to review all commercial and multi-family development to ensure that visual resources in Palo Alto are protected through compliance with applicable development standards. Further, coordinated area plans would become a routine planning tool to guide future development in areas identified to be subject to the most redevelopment, such as El Camino Real, the California Avenue area, the Downtown, and the Fry's site (under some scenarios). Further, under Scenario 6, performance-based zoning strategies would be adopted to minimize potential impacts of new market rate housing and non-residential development. However, proposed redevelopment under Scenarios 5 and 6 would introduce housing on sites previously used for non-residential purposes and increase the scale of development on existing housing sites. This redevelopment could replace existing structures with newer and larger structures, representing a change to the current mix and proportion of buildings in Palo Alto, which would be *potentially significant*.

Applicable Regulations:

- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 2.21 Architectural Review Board
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 8, Trees Vegetation
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 18, Zoning
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.030, Lighting
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.050, Visual, Screening and Landscaping
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.40.130, Landscaping
- Single-Family Individual Review Guidelines
- El Camino Real and South El Camino Real Design Guidelines
- Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve Site Assessment and Design Guidelines
- *South of Forest Avenue Coordinated Area Plan*
- *Downtown Urban Design Plan*
- Public Art and Private Development Ordinance

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Significance before Mitigation: Scenarios 5 and 6 would allow redevelopment that could affect the visual quality and character of the area surrounding the project site. Without Comp Plan policies in place to encourage compatible design, this impact would be potentially significant for Scenarios 5 and 6, requiring mitigation to ensure policies are incorporated into the proposed Plan.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure AES-1 would apply to Scenarios 5 and 6.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

AES-2	Implementation of the proposed Plan would not significantly alter public viewsheds or view corridors or scenic resources (such as trees, rocks, outcroppings, or historic buildings along a scenic highway). (Less than Significant – Scenarios 5 and 6)
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February 2016 Draft EIR Findings: Less than significant for Scenarios 1 through 4.

Summary of Supplemental Analysis: The impact would be less than significant for Scenarios 5 and 6.

As described in the February 2016 Draft EIR, Palo Alto identifies the backdrop of forested hills to the southwest and San Francisco Bay to the northeast as view corridors that are character-defining features of the city, including the East Bay hills and the Santa Cruz Mountains. Further, Palo Alto includes several scenic routes, including Sand Hill Road, University Avenue, Embarcadero Road, Page Mill Road, Oregon Expressway, Interstate 280, Arastradero Road (west of Foothill Expressway), Junipero Serra Boulevard/ Foothill Expressway, and Skyline Boulevard as having high scenic value. The proposed Plan would have the potential to affect these scenic resources if new or intensified development would block public views of areas that provide or contribute to such scenic viewsheds, view corridors, or scenic resources. Because there are no officially designated State scenic highways in the EIR Study Area, Scenarios 5 and 6 would not affect scenic resources along a State-designated scenic highway.

Similar to Scenarios 1 through 4, existing Comprehensive Plan land use designations would remain unchanged under Scenarios 5 and 6. However, some policies would be modified, and some zoning adjustments would be implemented, as presented in Table 3-7 in Chapter 3 of this Supplement to the Draft EIR.

Under Scenario 5, the allowable FAR in the CC-2 district would be reduced from 2.0 to 1.5, representing a reduction to the scale of development within the area. Scenario 5 would include a mechanism or combination of mechanisms to increase residential densities in the Downtown and California Avenue areas to encourage more, smaller units. Similar to Scenarios 3 and 4, Scenario 5 would allow taller building heights than are currently allowed in Downtown for residential units. Although University Avenue is

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identified as a scenic route, the height increase of buildings would not affect the corridor itself given that all other design guidelines in this area would remain the same. The increase in maximum height would occur in areas that are already urbanized and do not offer near or far field views of any of the scenic vistas; therefore, Scenario 5 would not have a substantial effect on scenic viewsheds, view corridors, or resources as a result of a slight increase in maximum height in Downtown.

Similar to Scenarios 3 through 5, under Scenario 6 the height limit in the Downtown would be increased from a 50-foot maximum to a maximum of 55 or 60 feet, as long as the additional height is used for residential units. Although University Avenue is identified as a scenic route, the height increase of buildings would not affect the corridor itself given that all other design guidelines in this area would remain the same, such as setbacks and other development standards aimed at enhancing and preserving the scenic values of this corridor included in the *Downtown Urban Design Plan* and *El Camino Real Design Guidelines*. The increase in maximum height would occur in areas that are already urbanized and do not offer near or far field views of any of the scenic vistas; therefore, Scenario 6 would not have a substantial effect on scenic viewsheds, view corridors, or resources as a result of a slight increase in maximum height in Downtown. In addition to potential height increases in the Downtown, height limits under Scenario 6 would also exceed the 50-foot height limit at two or three nodes along El Camino Real, where projects would be subject to specific sustainability requirements. New development along El Camino Real would serve to better define the street wall and important nodes and intersections along the corridor. While most of El Camino Real would consist of two or three stories, the potential to exceed the 50-foot maximum could affect views of scenic vistas from vantage points in this area; however, the City does not consider El Camino Real a major view corridor.

Zoning Code development standards that would guide the design of new buildings and reduce potential aesthetic impacts would apply to all future development under the Comp Plan. Further, the development standards in the several design guideline plans, as listed under Section 4.1.1.1 of the February 2016 Draft EIR, would further ensure that development throughout the city would continue to protect and enhance important visual qualities, such as preservation of views of the East Bay hills, San Francisco Bay, and Santa Cruz Mountains. Although Scenarios 5 and 6 would allow for a slight increase in heights for new residential development in the Downtown and (for Scenario 6 only) along El Camino Real, these areas are currently urbanized and taller buildings would not obstruct a currently available scenic view or vista. Further, much of the existing Zoning Code development standards would remain the same, and review by the City's Architectural Review Board would ensure that all development within the city complies with applicable design guidelines and development standards in order to protect, maintain, and enhance the visual resources of Palo Alto, including protection of its scenic vistas and routes. As such, Scenarios 5 and 6 would not have a substantial effect on a scenic vista, and the impact would be *less than significant*.

Applicable Regulations:

- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 2.21. Architectural Review Board
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 8. Trees Vegetation
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 18. Zoning
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.030, Lighting

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- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.050, Visual, Screening, and Landscaping
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.40.130, Landscaping
- Single-Family Individual Review Guidelines
- El Camino Real and South El Camino Real Design Guidelines
- *South of Forest Avenue Coordinated Area Plan*
- *Downtown Urban Design Plan*
- Public Art and Private Development Ordinance

Significance before Mitigation: Development under Scenarios 5 and 6 would be subject to existing City regulations and procedures that would protect scenic vistas, viewpoints, and resources. In addition, the key areas where redevelopment could affect scenic resources would be in areas that are already urbanized. Impacts under both scenarios would be less than significant.

AES-3 Implementation of the proposed Plan would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (Less than Significant – Scenarios 5 and 6)

February 2016 Draft EIR Findings: Less than significant for Scenarios 1 through 4.

Summary of Supplemental Analysis: The impact would be less than significant for Scenarios 5 and 6.

As described in the February 2016 Draft EIR, the proposed Plan would result in a significant impact if future development resulted in a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Scenarios 5 and 6 would generally facilitate infill development or development in already urbanized areas, and Scenario 6 would consider additional housing sites in the western portion of the Stanford Research Park and Stanford University Medical Center. New development under both scenarios could add new sources of light and glare, such as interior lighting of commercial and residential structures, or glare from building windows, building surfaces, and vehicle windshields. However, these new sources of lighting and glare would be consistent with the type and intensity of lighting and glare already created from existing uses in these areas. Further, future development under both scenarios would be subject to the same design guidelines as listed in Section 4.1.1.1 of the February 2016 Draft EIR, including Zoning Code Chapter 18.23.030, which regulates lighting intensity and design to reduce impacts or visual intrusions on abutting or nearby properties.

Overall, future development under Scenarios 5 and 6 would be required to comply with the City's Zoning Code related to lighting and glare performance and commercial and multi-family development under all scenarios would undergo design review from the City's Architectural Review Board, which would ensure that future development is consistent with City regulations and design guidelines, including lighting and glare. Consequently, the Comp Plan would result in *less-than-significant* impacts regarding light and glare.

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Applicable Regulations:

- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 2.21, Architectural Review Board
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23 Performance Standards
- El Camino Real and South El Camino Real Design Guidelines
- *Downtown Urban Design Plan*

Significance before Mitigation: Development under Scenarios 5 and 6 would be required to comply with existing regulations that would minimize glare and lighting impacts, and the impact would be less than significant.

AES-4 **Implementation of the proposed Plan would have the potential to substantially shadow public open space (other than public open streets and adjacent sidewalks) between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. from September 21 to March 21. (Significant and Mitigable – Scenarios 5 and 6)**

February 2016 Draft EIR Findings: Significant and mitigable for Scenarios 1 through 4. Mitigation Measure AES-4 would apply to all four scenarios and would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level after mitigation.

Summary of Supplemental Analysis: The impact would be significant and mitigatable for Scenarios 5 and 6 and Mitigation Measure AES-4 would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. Mitigation Measure AES-4 has been revised, as shown below. These revisions will also be applied to the mitigation for Scenarios 1 through 4. These revisions do not change the original intent or effectiveness of Mitigation Measure AES-4.

Mitigation Measure AES-4: The City shall ~~develop an ordinance that will~~ amend its local CEQA guidelines to require development projects of a certain size or location to prepare an analysis of potential shade/shadow impacts. The ~~ordinance analysis~~ shall focus on potential impacts to public open spaces (other than public streets and adjacent sidewalks) between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. from September 21 to March 21. ~~P~~The analysis shall identify whether the projects that are shown to would shadow open spaces during these times shall, explain how the project meets City design requirements and other City policy goals, and describe ways to mitigate these substantial shade and shadow impacts through feasible building and site design features.

As described in the February 2016 Draft EIR, the proposed Plan would have a significant impact if it would allow new development that would substantially shadow public open spaces (such as parks and plazas) during the daytime hours of the times of year when shadows are longest (that is, between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. from September 21 to March 21).

The primary areas of the EIR Study Area where potential shade impacts would be a concern would be along the city's mixed use corridors, where buildings could cast shadows across public plazas and small parks. This potential shading impact could occur under both Scenarios 5 and 6, which would allow modest height

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increases in certain parts of the city and introduce additional housing sites in the western portion of the Stanford Research Park and near Stanford University Medical Center. However, as future development occurs throughout the city under the proposed Plan, project-by-project analysis would be required to determine which projects would substantially shade public open spaces. Nevertheless, this would remain a *significant* impact, requiring mitigation under Scenarios 5 and 6.

Applicable Regulations:

- None

Significance before Mitigation: Development under Scenarios 5 and 6 could cast shadows on public open spaces. This would be a significant impact, requiring mitigation to ensure policies are incorporated into the proposed Plan.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure AES-4 would apply to Scenarios 5 and 6.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

4.1.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

AES-5	Implementation of the proposed Plan would not contribute to cumulative aesthetics impacts in the area. (Less than Significant– Scenarios 5 and 6)
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February 2016 Draft EIR Findings: Less than significant for Scenarios 1 through 4.

Summary of Supplemental Analysis: The impact would be less than significant for Scenarios 5 and 6.

As described in Section 4, Environmental Analysis, of the February 2016 Draft EIR, the geographic scope of this cumulative analysis includes growth within the EIR Study Area, which includes the city limit, Sphere of Influence (SOI), and Urban Service Area (USA), as well as development on lands adjacent to the EIR Study Area. A cumulative aesthetic or visual resource impact would be considered significant if, together with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable development within the geographic scope of this analysis, it would result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic viewshed, scenic route, view corridor, the degradation of scenic resources along a scenic highway, or if development would create new sources of light or glare adversely affecting day or nighttime views in the area.

Cumulative impacts on the visual character and cumulative impacts associated with light and glare would be minimized through compliance with development standards of the Palo Alto Municipal Code, such as height, scale, setbacks, and form standards; compliance with existing design guidelines and plans described in Section 4.1.1.1 of the February 2016 Draft EIR; and design review by the Architectural Review Board.

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Potential impacts to visual character under the proposed Plan, which would be mitigated to less-than-significant levels with the adoption of policies in Mitigation Measure AES-1, would be isolated to the direct vicinity around new development projects and would not contribute to potential impacts in the cumulative setting. Similarly, shade impacts under Impact AES-4 would be mitigated to less-than-significant levels under Mitigation Measure AES-4 and would be evaluated on a project-by-project basis. Shade impacts would be isolated to the public open spaces around new development and, as under the proposed Plan, cumulative shade impacts would be limited to urbanized areas of the cumulative setting where urban areas interface with small open space areas.

As discussed under Impact AES-2, the Comp Plan identifies the East Bay hills, Santa Cruz Mountains, and the Bay as important scenic qualities. However, compliance with existing City regulations and review procedures would ensure that development under the proposed Plan does not contribute to cumulative impacts to scenic resources, such as the East Bay hills and Santa Cruz Mountains. As described above under Impact AES-2, there are no State-designated scenic highways in the area of cumulative effect that could be affected by buildout of the Comp Plan. Therefore, there would be no cumulative impacts to scenic highways.

Further, mitigation and sustainability measures would be adopted under Scenarios 5 and 6 to minimize potential impacts of new market rate housing and non-residential development by requiring mitigation, monitoring and enforcement, and coordinated area plans (or “precise plans”) would become a routine planning tool. Further, Scenario 6 would adopt performance based zoning strategies to minimize potential impacts of new development. Therefore, cumulative impacts to the aesthetics and visual resources of Palo Alto would be *less than significant*.

Applicable Regulations:

- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 2.21, Architectural Review Board
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 8, Trees Vegetation
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 18, Zoning
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.030, Lighting
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.23.050, Visual, Screening, and Landscaping
- Palo Alto Municipal Code, Chapter 18.40.130, Landscaping
- Single-Family Individual Review Guidelines
- El Camino Real and South El Camino Real Design Guidelines
- Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve Site Assessment and Design Guidelines
- *South of Forest Avenue Coordinated Area Plan*
- *Downtown Urban Design Plan*
- Public Art and Private Development Ordinance

Significance before Mitigation: Neither Scenario 5 nor Scenario 6 would contribute to cumulative impacts and the impact would be less than significant.