

## **3.1 Aesthetics and Visual Resources**

This section presents the environmental setting and impact analysis for visual resources and aesthetic character. It evaluates to what extent implementation of the proposed Plan will affect the visual quality of the Planning Area.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

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#### **PHYSICAL SETTING**

##### **Visual Character Overview**

The Planning Area is characterized mostly by open space covered with grasses and small trees, with a few isolated residential and industrial sites. The southeastern portion of the Planning Area is dominated by two rolling hills, the taller of which has an elevation of approximately 190 feet above sea level. East Antioch Creek meanders across the Planning Area, though water is not always visible. The Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way (UP ROW) Mococo Line also traverses the Planning Area, roughly parallel and 700 feet north of SR 4. A PG&E Substation, electrical transmission lines and towers are dominant visual features. Photos on the following page show the existing visual resources and aesthetic character of the site.

Rolling hills with single family residential neighborhoods and related open space represent the majority of the land uses south of SR 4 and the Planning Area. SR 4 and hills to the south create a physical and visual barrier. Mount Diablo, to the south and west, is about 3,800 feet in elevation; therefore, it can be seen from public streets within the residential development to the north of the Planning Area. Other views are limited by SR 160 to the east, and Hillcrest Avenue and the electrical substation to the west. Land north of the Planning Area is primarily developed as single family homes and a church. A few parcels along Oakley Road are vacant or are cultivated with orchards or grapes. Two cemeteries provide additional visual open space.

##### **Scenic Resources and View Corridors**

The City of Antioch General Plan identifies views of Mount Diablo, the ridgelines, and the San Joaquin River as important scenic resources for the City because they contribute to community identity, visual enjoyment, and a sense of Antioch's history. Mount Diablo is a prominent regional scenic landmark that can be seen throughout much of the North Bay Area and acts as a visual focal point, particularly for travelers along SR 4. Views of Mount Diablo and other scenic hillsides help reinforce the rural character that historically existed in Antioch, and provides a visual balance to current and planned development. Another prominent natural landmark within the City of Antioch is the San Joaquin River. It is part of the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system and extends along the northern part of Antioch, about a mile north of the Planning Area. The San Joaquin River is visible to travelers going north on SR 160 but is not visible from SR 4 or from the Planning Area due to elevation differences, intervening development, and distance to the river.



*Hillcrest Avenue Substation and rail line*



*Non-native grasslands and rolling hills*



*Established trees and hills*



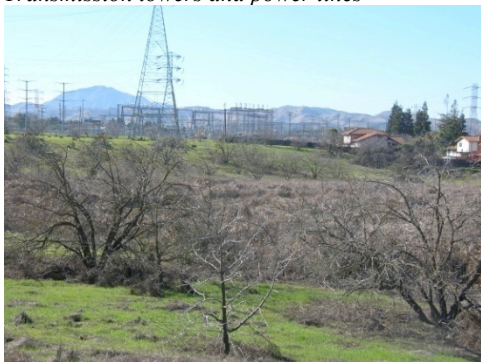
*Willow Avenue and car towing yard*



*Transmission towers and power lines*



*Wetland marsh and train car storage*



*Substation and adjacent residential*



*Seasonal pond*

Designated scenic highways and routes are intended to protect and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the highways, routes and adjacent corridors. Designation ensures that new development projects along recognized scenic corridors are designed to maintain the route's scenic potential. SR 4 (from SR 160 near Antioch to SR 84 near Brentwood) and SR 160 (from SR 4 near Antioch to Sacramento) are both eligible to be State-designated Scenic Highways within the State Scenic Highways program but are not officially designated. (CalTrans, 2008) In the Contra Costa County General Plan, a scenic route is defined as "a road, street, or freeway which traverses a scenic corridor of relatively high visual or cultural value." The County General Plan designates SR 4 (from Hillcrest Avenue to SR 160), Hillcrest Avenue, and East 18th Street as a Connecting Highway and Connecting Roads that form the County Scenic Routes Plan. There are no significant resources within the Planning Area along these portions of highways and roads.

### **Light and Glare**

There are no known sources of light or glare within or near the Planning Area.

## **REGULATORY SETTING**

### **State Regulations**

#### ***California Scenic Highways Program***

Recognizing the value of scenic areas and the value of views from roads in such areas, the State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program in 1963. This legislation sees scenic highways as "a vital part of the all encompassing effort...to protect and enhance California's beauty, amenity and quality of life." Under this program, a number of State highways have been designated as eligible for inclusion as scenic routes. Once the local jurisdictions through which the roadway passes have established a corridor protection program and the Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee recommends designation of the roadway, the State may officially designate roadways as scenic routes. Interstate highways, state highways, and county roads may be designated as scenic under the program. The Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation maps show designated highway segments, as well as those that are eligible for designation. Changes to the map require an act of the legislature.

As noted, a corridor protection program must be adopted by the local governments with land use jurisdiction through which the roadway passes as the first step in moving a road from "eligible" to "designated" status. Each designated corridor is monitored by the State and designation may be revoked if a local government fails to enforce the provisions of the corridor protection program. At a minimum, each corridor protection program must include:

- Regulation of land use and density of development;
- Detailed land and site planning;
- Control of outdoor advertising devices;
- Control of earthmoving and landscaping; and
- Regulation of the design and appearance of structures and equipment.

The Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation requires that proposed projects be evaluated for their impact on the scenic qualities of the corridor.

## Local Regulations

### *Contra Costa County General Plan*

#### *Scenic Routes Policies*

5-35. Scenic corridors shall be maintained with the intent of protecting attractive natural qualities adjacent to various roads throughout the County.

5-37. Scenic views observable from scenic routes shall be conserved, enhanced, and protected to the extent possible.

5-44. Aesthetic design flexibility of development projects within a scenic corridor shall be encouraged.

### *City of Antioch General Plan*

#### *5.4.2 Community Image and Design: General Design Policies*

c. Maintain view corridors from public spaces to natural ridgelines and landmarks, such as Mount Diablo and distant hills, local ridgelines, the San Joaquin River, and other water bodies.

- Recognizing that new development will inevitably result in some loss of existing views, as part of the City's review of development and commercial and industrial landscape plans, minimize the loss of views from public spaces.
- Important view corridors to be protected include Somersville Road, Lone Tree Way, Hillcrest Avenue, SR 4, SR 160, James Donlon Boulevard, Deer Valley Road, and Empire Mine Road.

e. Create a framework of public spaces at the neighborhood, community, and regional scale.

- Provide an open space network linked by pedestrian and bicycle paths, which preserves and enhances Antioch's significant visual and natural resources.
- Views along utility corridors should be retained and enhanced through the use of planting materials to frame and focus views and to provide a sense of orientation.

h. Wherever feasible, existing above-ground utility lines should be placed underground.

o. Design onsite lighting to improve the visual identification of adjacent structures.

- Within commercial and industrial development, provide design features such as screened walls, landscaping, setbacks, and lighting restrictions between the boundaries of adjacent residential land use designations to reduce the impacts of light and glare.
- On-site lighting shall create a safe environment, adhering to established crime prevention standards, but shall not result in nuisance levels of light or glare on adjacent properties. Limit sources of lighting to the minimum required to ensure safe circulation and visibility.

p. Lighting should accommodate night use of streets and promote security while complying with the provision of a dark night sky. Streetscape areas that are used by pedestrians at night should be well lit. Within rural and open space areas, limit street lighting to intersections and other locations that are needed to maintain safe access (e.g., sharp curves).

*5.4.14 Community Image and Design: Hillside Design Policies*

e. Grading of ridgelines is to be avoided wherever feasible, siting structures sufficiently below ridgelines so as to preserve unobstructed views of a natural skyline. In cases where application of this performance standard would prevent construction of any structures on a lot of record, obstruction of views of a natural skyline shall be minimized through construction techniques and design, and landscaping shall be provided to soften the impact of the new structure.

g. Buildings should be located to preserve existing views and to allow new dwellings access to views similar to those enjoyed from existing dwellings.

*10.3.2 Resource Management: Open Space Policies*

b. Implement the design standards of the Community Image and Design Element so as to maintain views of the San Joaquin River, Mount Diablo and its foothills, Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and other scenic features, and protect the natural character of Antioch's hillside areas as set forth in the Community Image and Design Element.

**Local Standard**

At this time, no viewshed protection ordinance or standard has been adopted.

**IMPACT ANALYSIS**

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**SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA**

Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would have a potentially significant adverse impact on visual resources if the Plan 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;  
or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

**METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS**

Aesthetics and visual resources can be subjective by nature, and therefore the level of the proposed Specific Plan's visual impact is difficult to quantify. In addition, it is difficult to estimate the impact future development would have on scenic resources, since individual development projects can enhance the aesthetic quality of an area. As such, this analysis was conducted qualitatively, assessing potential growth implications of the Specific Plan, including the potential degradation of the existing visual character of the Planning Area, particularly its scenic resources such as views of Mount Diablo and surrounding hillsides.

**SUMMARY OF IMPACTS**

The construction of new projects in the Planning Area could result in short-term visual impacts including blockage or disruption of views by construction equipment and scaffolding, the removal

of landscaping, temporary route changes, temporary signage, exposed excavation and slope faces, and construction staging areas. However, considering Plan policies which require landscaping and other design features in the final built condition, these short-term impacts are found to be less than significant.

New development under the proposed Plan could affect scenic views of Mount Diablo and distant hill from a few streets and/or public spaces. However Plan policies require site planning to incorporate view opportunities towards Mount Diablo, and views of the hillsides and ridgelines will continue to be available from numerous points throughout the Hillcrest Station Area. Thus the impact on these scenic views is less than significant.

New development under the Specific Plan will change the Planning Area's existing undeveloped condition by replacing open grassland and hillsides with new transit-oriented development. In the final built condition of the project, extensive landscaping and public spaces will be added, and key natural features will be preserved, and thus the visual impact of new development under the Proposed Plan will be less than significant.

The construction of new buildings and street lighting may create nighttime light pollution or daytime glare in an area that currently has no sources of light or glare. However, compliance with Plan policies would reduce potentially significant long-term light and glare impacts to less than significant levels.

## **IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **3.1-1            *Construction of new development under the proposed Plan could adversely affect visual resources in the short-term during period of construction by blocking or disrupting views. (Less than Significant)***

The construction of new projects in the Planning Area could result in short-term visual impacts including blockage or disruption of views by construction equipment and scaffolding, the removal of landscaping, temporary route changes, temporary signage, exposed excavation and slope faces, and construction staging areas. Because current site conditions will be changing during periods of construction, and residential and commercial uses are nearby, construction activities are considered a potentially significant visual impact. However, the construction impact will be short-term and last intermittently during actual phased periods of construction at specific locations within the Planning Area. In the final built condition of the project, extensive landscaping and other design features will be installed, which enhance visual character.

***Specific Plan Policy that Reduces Impact***

Compliance with the Antioch General Plan and implementation of the following proposed Specific Plan policy will reduce the short-term visual impacts of construction in the Hillcrest Station Area:

- UD-17      Reduce the visibility of construction yards and staging areas to the maximum extent possible.
- Construction yards and staging areas shall be located as close to construction areas to the extent practicable away from residential and commercial areas, community traffic, pedestrian use, and local views.
  - Low contrast fencing and screening shall be used to minimize contrast with surrounding environment.

***Mitigation Measures***

No mitigation measures required.

***3.1-2      New development under the proposed Plan could adversely affect scenic views, scenic resources, or the existing visual character of the Planning Area. (Less than Significant)***

New development under the proposed Plan could affect scenic views of Mount Diablo and distant hills, from a few streets and/or public spaces, due to the addition of buildings that are three to eight stories tall. However Plan policies require site planning to incorporate view opportunities towards Mount Diablo, such that views of Mount Diablo are available from both public streets and public open spaces. Moreover, the elevation of Mount Diablo and the distant hillsides is far above the elevation of the Station Area, and thus views of the hillsides and ridgelines will continue to be available from numerous points throughout the Hillcrest Station Area. Thus the impact on these scenic views is less than significant.

New development under the Specific Plan will change the Planning Area’s existing undeveloped condition by replacing open grassland and hillsides with new transit-oriented development. The Planning Area will include new structures in the form of residential buildings, office buildings, retail buildings, hotels, and parking structures. Buildings are expected to be between one and eight stories in height. New development will constitute a significant change from existing conditions. The existing General Plan has policies that support the change from open undeveloped area to a mix of transit-oriented development and employment uses.

Many policies are incorporated into the Specific Plan to ensure that the visual character of the Planning Area remains attractive and is not adversely impacted as it is developed with new streets, buildings, and landscaping. East Antioch Creek will be preserved and enhanced, and thus a dominant natural feature of the site is preserved. Extensive landscape buffers will be added throughout the site along existing industrial uses, utility lines, and freeway edges. Parks and public spaces will be created which provide view opportunities to Mount Diablo and distant hills. All new streets incorporate street trees, and streets wider than two lanes often incorporate landscaped medians, as described in Specific Plan Chapter 4: Urban Design. In the final built condition of the project, extensive landscaping and public spaces will be added, and key natural features will be preserved, and thus the visual impact of new development under the Proposed Plan will be less than significant.

### ***Specific Plan Policies that Reduce Impact***

Compliance with General Plan policies, Contra Costa County General Plan policies, and proposed Specific Plan policies will reduce the impact on scenic resources to a less than significant level.

#### *Visual Resources*

- UD-12 Site or design projects to consider their intrusion into important view-sheds towards Mount Diablo and the San Joaquin River.
- UD-13 Incorporate view opportunities towards Mount Diablo into site plans, such that views of Mount Diablo are available from both public streets and public open spaces at specified locations.
- UD-14 Design buildings to take advantage of views to Mount Diablo, and views of the San Joaquin River from taller buildings.
- UD-18 The hillside areas of the site adjacent to SR 4 may be graded to accommodate development. Low-lying areas may be filled to create level development sites.
- All grading and cut and fill activities must be consistent with the environmental protection and hazard policies in Chapter 5.
  - Graded slopes and exposed earth surfaces shall be re-vegetated at the earliest opportunity.
- UD-19 Design projects to minimize abrupt changes in scale and massing between the project and surrounding natural or man-made forms, such as hillsides, adjacent freeways, and low-lying wetlands. Where appropriate, step buildings up or down to be compatible with the scale of natural features.
- UD-26 Locate streets adjacent to parks, pedestrian trails, and detention basins, in order to allow public access to and public views of these recreation and water areas. Avoid locating private rear yards along these public recreation and water areas; this precludes public access and views and can also pose security problems.

#### *Scenic Highway Designation*

- UD-5 Design the Freeway Area such that businesses can take advantage of the freeway visibility and access, and SR 4 becomes a visually attractive freeway corridor.
- Provide landscape buffers adjacent to the rail line and the highway per the policies regarding landscape buffers.
  - Commercial facades facing the freeway and Slatten Ranch Road should both be designed with high-quality materials due to their visibility. Design the freeway-facing building facades with windows, equivalent in design quality to a front façade, in order to present an attractive appearance from the freeway.
  - Limit the number of freeway-oriented signs allowed within the Hillcrest Station Area. Work with businesses and property owners to create high-quality, consistent freeway signage for the Hillcrest Station Area. Design any freeway-oriented signs such that SR 4 remains a corridor that is eligible for Scenic Highway designation.
- UD-15 Design project site plans and buildings to preserve the potential for Scenic Highway designation for SR 4 and SR 160 adjacent to the Hillcrest Station Area.



UD-16 Work with Contra Costa County and Caltrans to consider the “complete” highway system and minimize impacts on the quality of the views or visual experience, particularly for projects greater than 40 acres in scope.

***Mitigation Measures***

No mitigation measures are required.

**3.1-3 *New development under the proposed Plan could result in increased light and glare. (Less than Significant)***

Some long-term impacts are associated with the construction of new buildings and street lighting, which may create nighttime light pollution or daytime glare. Nighttime lighting impacts are significant when they interfere with or intrude into sensitive land use areas such as private residences. Nighttime light pollution can also result in diminished views of the nighttime sky, something that can be a noticeable loss in visual quality for communities used to seeing the stars at night. Light pollution is typically related to the use of high voltage light fixtures with inadequate shields and improper positioning or orientation. Glare impacts can cause daytime interference with activities at sensitive land use areas, as defined above, as well as public roadways where automobile drivers can be temporarily blinded by glare thus causing a safety concern.

Compliance with the following General Plan policies (which are also included in the Specific Plan, Chapter 4, Urban Design) would reduce potentially significant long-term light and glare impacts to less than significant levels:

*5.4.2 Community Image and Design: General Design Policies*

- o. Design onsite lighting to improve the visual identification of adjacent structures.
  - Within commercial and industrial development, provide design features such as screened walls, landscaping, setbacks, and lighting restrictions between the boundaries of adjacent residential land use designations to reduce the impacts of light and glare.
  - On-site lighting shall create a safe environment, adhering to established crime prevention standards, but shall not result in nuisance levels of light or glare on adjacent properties. Limit sources of lighting to the minimum required to ensure safe circulation and visibility.
- p. Lighting should accommodate night use of streets and promote security while complying with the provision of a dark night sky. Streetscape areas that are used by pedestrians at night should be well lit. Within rural and open space areas, limit street lighting to intersections and other locations that are needed to maintain safe access (e.g., sharp curves).

***Mitigation Measures***

No mitigation measures are required.

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