

4.1 AESTHETICS

4.1.1 Setting

a. General Visual Character. The visual character of the area surrounding the City is generally defined by several low hills and ridges formed by the more resistant volcanic rocks of the area such as Bishop Peak and Cerro San Luis Obispo. These peaks are also known as Morros and provide a scenic focal point for much of the City. Along with the Morros, the Santa Lucia Mountains and Irish Hills visually frame the City and are considered the scenic backdrop for much of the City. The surrounding hills have created a hard urban edge for the City where development has remained in the lower elevations.

The City itself combines a compact urban form in a rural setting, transitioning from a well-defined urban edge to open space (Section 9, Views, General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, City of San Luis Obispo, 2006). As reflected in its current General Plan policies, the City has been successful in maintaining an urban or suburban character, separated from a more rural character outside the City by a hard urban edge integral to its development pattern.

b. Existing Visual Conditions at the Project Site. The 131-acre San Luis Ranch project site is located in unincorporated San Luis Obispo County, completely surrounded by the corporate boundary of the City of San Luis Obispo, and within the City's Sphere of Influence. Visually, it is an agricultural "island" surrounded by urban development. The site is located on the south side of Dalidio Road, between Madonna Road and U.S. 101. The property is located within a transition area between the commercial development to the north and the residential development to the west: adjacent land uses include single-family residences to the west; Laguna Lake Park to the northwest, commercial uses to the north, including a post office and the San Luis Promenade shopping center; U.S. 101 to the east; and the SLO City Farm to the south.

The project site is characterized primarily by its use as an agricultural property. A single broad swale bisects the western portion of the site, draining toward Prefumo Creek at the site's southern edge. Prefumo Creek is lined with multiple rows of mature blue gum eucalyptus trees, making that edge of the property visually prominent in the area. The relatively flat topography onsite and the low profile of the row crops provide for expansive views across the property. Views of the site from key viewing corridors, including U.S. 101, Madonna Road, and Prado Road are discussed below.

Dominant visual features within the project site are the predominantly flat landform planted with row crops and an existing stand of eucalyptus trees in the southwestern portion of the site. The San Luis Ranch Farm Complex, located in the northwestern portion of the site, consists of a farm house, agricultural outbuildings, and vehicle and materials storage. These existing structures were constructed in the early 20th century and appear to be in a state of disrepair (refer to Section 4.5, *Cultural Resources*, for a detailed discussion of these structures). Limited views of this complex are available from Madonna Road, although views are partially obscured by the eucalyptus trees.



Figures 2-3a and 2-3b in Section 2.0, *Project Description*, depict the existing visual condition of the site and surrounding area. Views from key viewing corridors are further described below.

Key Viewing Corridors and Scenic Roadways. Several roadways/roadway segments in the vicinity of the project site have been identified in the City's Land Use Element, Circulation Element, and Conservation and Open Space Element as scenic corridors, either of High or Moderate Value. These roadways include:

- U.S. 101 (from the southern City limit to Marsh Street);
- South Higuera Street (between Prado Road and the southern City limit);
- Prado Road;
- Madonna Road; and
- Los Osos Valley Road (east of Laguna Lane to U.S. 101).

Of these roadways/roadway segments, the project site is largely visible from the stretch of U.S. 101 between the southern City limit and Marsh Street, Madonna Road, and Prado Road. The project site is partially visible from Los Osos Valley Road where it crosses U.S. 101, and is not visible from South Higuera Street. Views of the site from these roadways are described below, and are characterized in terms of foreground, middle-ground, and background views. Foreground views are those immediately presented to the viewer, and include objects at close range. Middle-ground views occupy the center of the viewshed, and tend to include objects that dominate the viewshed in normal circumstances. Background views include distant objects and other objects that make up the horizon.

- *U.S. 101.* Views for northbound travelers on U.S. 101 include expansive, flat agricultural row crops in the foreground; commercial shopping centers in the middle-ground; and Cerro San Luis and Bishop Peak in the background. For southbound travelers, views from U.S. 101 include the same expansive, flat agricultural row crops in the foreground; stands of eucalyptus trees in middle-ground; and the Irish Hills in background.
- *Madonna Road.* Views from Madonna Road travelling in both directions are largely obstructed by the stands of eucalyptus trees. Intermittent views of the San Luis Ranch Farm Complex, including an existing farmhouse and agricultural outbuildings, are briefly available through breaks in the trees.
- *Prado Road.* The project site is only visible from Prado Road when facing westbound at the western terminus of Prado Road at the on-ramp for U.S. 101. Views of the site from this location are generally similar to those from northbound U.S. 101.
- *Los Osos Valley Road.* Views northward from Los Osos Valley Road are largely obstructed by residential and commercial development and stands of trees north of the roadway. The project site is only visible for westbound travelers from the bridge where this roadway crosses U.S. 101. Views of the site are distant and provide only limited visibility of the portion of the site nearest U.S. 101.

The General Plan includes policies related to development criteria to protect viewsheds associated with these roadways (see 4.4.4(c), *Regulatory Setting*, below).



The site's historic agricultural character is highly visible from U.S. 101. Due in part to the site's visually prominent location at a southern gateway to the City, the Land Use Element includes a requirement that the City preserve half of the agriculture and open space on-site, to maintain the City's agricultural heritage.

Scenic Vistas. A scenic vista is a view of natural environmental, historic, and/or architectural features possessing visual and aesthetic qualities of value to the community. The term "vista" generally implies an expansive view, usually from an elevated point or open area. The Conservation and Open Space Element identifies one scenic vista adjacent to the project site. As shown in Figure 11 (Scenic Roadways and Vistas) of the Conservation and Open Space Element, there are two identified "cones of view" near the project site. One "cone of view" is located on Madonna Road directly adjacent to the project site, looking northwest toward Laguna Lake. Because the site is southeast of Madonna Road, it is not included in this cone of view. A second "cone of view" is located on the KSBY station hilltop at the southern edge of town, looking north. The project site is highly visible from this point and, therefore, is located within a City-designated scenic vista.

Scenic Highways. The California Scenic Highway Program, maintained by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) protects State scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. According to the California State Scenic Highway Program, the section of U.S. 101 in the project vicinity is eligible for State Scenic Highway designation, but currently is not officially designated (Caltrans 2015).

In addition, the City's General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element and Circulation Element assign scenic value ratings of 'moderate' and 'high' to several roadways in the City, based on the availability of views of scenic resources from these public viewpoints. According to the General Plan the segment of U.S. 101 along the eastern project site boundary is identified as having moderate scenic value (City of San Luis Obispo 2014a). Madonna Road immediately adjacent to the project site is also identified as having a moderate scenic value by the Conservation and Open Space Element (City of San Luis Obispo 2006) and as having a medium scenic value in the Circulation Element (City of San Luis Obispo 2014a).

Light and Glare. Nighttime lighting conditions vary throughout the City, from heavily lit areas of commercial development to more rural areas with little night lighting. There is no street lighting or lighted nighttime activity on the project site other than that associated with the San Luis Ranch Farm Complex. The San Luis Ranch Farm Complex currently provides minimal nighttime lighting. However, lighting and glare levels in the project vicinity (i.e., surrounding the site) are typical of urban areas. The majority of light and glare in the project vicinity is generated by commercial and industrial uses to the north, south, and east of the site, residential uses to the west of the site, and U.S. 101 immediately to the east of the site. Vehicle headlights, street lighting at intersections and along the streets, and building lighting, contribute to the existing light setting to the north, south, and east of the project site.



c. Regulatory Setting.

State.

State Streets and Highways Code, Section 260, et. seq. A California highway may be designated as scenic depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on the traveler's enjoyment of the view. When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must identify and define the scenic corridor of the highway, defined by the motorist's line of vision (a reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to a distant horizon). A city or county must also adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor, including: 1) regulation of land use and density of development; 2) detailed land and site planning; 3) control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards); 4) careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and 5) careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment.

Senate Bill (SB) 743. Governor Brown signed SB 743 in September 2013, which made several changes applicable to CEQA for projects located in areas served by transit (Public Resources Code Section 21099). Under SB 743, a project's aesthetic impacts are not considered significant impacts on the environment if: 1) the project is a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project, and 2) the project is located on an infill site within a transit priority area. A transit priority area is an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop that is existing or planned, if the planned stop is scheduled to be completed within the planning horizon included in an adopted Transportation Improvement Program. A major transit stop is defined in Section 21064.3 of the California Public Resource Code as a site containing an existing rail transit station, a ferry terminal served by either a bus or rail transit service, or the intersection of two or more major bus routes with a frequency of service interval of 15 minutes or less during the morning and afternoon peak commute periods. This provision for aesthetic impacts does not include impacts to historic or cultural resources. The project is an open space, residential, and commercial use development project, which is located on land currently identified as a Specific Plan Area by the City and would include a transit center, bike trails, and walking paths. ~~but~~ However, the project site is not considered to be a transit priority area, and the proposed transit center is not designated as a "major transit stop" since the number of routes serviced by the stop and frequency of service intervals are unknown at this time. ~~and~~ Therefore, the project is not exempt from consideration for aesthetic impacts under the CEQA process.

Local.

City of San Luis Obispo General Plan. The City of San Luis Obispo regulates aesthetics of buildings and public spaces through implementation of the General Plan Land Use Element, Circulation Element, Conservation and Open Space Element, and the implementing statutes of the Municipal Code, Community Design Guidelines and Historic Preservation Guidelines.

Land Use and Circulation Elements. The Land Use Element and Circulation Element provide policies and programs for maintenance of public views during urbanization along viewing corridors and scenic roadways throughout the City, and additionally provides specific guidance for future development of the project site. As stated in Chapter 8, Section 8.1.4, the site



“should be developed as a mixed use project that maintains the agricultural heritage of the site,” with consideration given to the following land use and design issues relevant to visual resources:

- e. *Maintain agricultural views along Highway 101 by maintaining active agricultural uses on the site, and maintain viewshed of Bishop Peak and Cerro San Luis.*
- f. *Maintain significant agricultural and open space resources on site. Land dedicated to Agriculture shall be of size, location and configuration appropriate to maintain a viable, working agricultural operation.*
- h. *Integrate agricultural open space with adjacent SLO City Farm and development on property.*
- j. *Commercial and office uses shall have parking placed behind and to side of buildings so as to not be a prominent feature.*

The following additional Land Use Element and Circulation Element policies define the local regulatory setting related to the protection of visual resources:

Land Use Element Policies.

Policy 1.4. Urban Edges Character. *The City must maintain a boundary between urban development and surrounding open land, including measures to prevent a stark-appearing edge such as groves of trees, hills to set the edge of development, or providing open space and agricultural transitional buffers.*

Policy 1.8.1. Open Space Protection. *Within the City’s planning area and outside the Urban Reserve Line, undeveloped land should be kept open. Prime agricultural land, productive agricultural land, and potentially productive agricultural land shall be protected for farming. Scenic lands, sensitive wildlife habitat, and undeveloped prime agricultural land shall be permanently protected as open space.*

Policy 1.13.8. Open Space. *Future development on the San Luis Ranch property shall dedicate one half of the total land or easements for open space use.*

Policy 2.2.10. Site Constraints. *Residential developments will respect site constraints including property size and shape, ground slope, access, creeks and wetlands, wildlife habitats, wildlife corridors, native vegetation, and significant trees.*

Policy 2.3.3. Residential Next to Non-residential. *In designing development at the boundary between residential and non-residential uses, the City shall make protection of a residential atmosphere the first priority.*

Policy 2.3.5. Neighborhood Pattern. *The City shall require that all new residential development be integrated with existing neighborhoods. Where physical features make this impossible, the new development should create new neighborhoods.*

Policy 2.3.7. Natural Features. *The City shall require residential developments to preserve and incorporate as amenities natural site features, such as land forms, views, creeks, wetlands, wildlife habitats, wildlife corridors, and plants.*



Policy 2.3.9. Compatible Development. *The City shall require that new housing built within an existing neighborhood be sited and designed to be compatible with the character of the neighborhood.*

Policy 2.3.11. Residential Project Objectives. *Residential projects should provide:*

- A *Privacy, for occupants and neighbors of the project;*
- B *Adequate usable outdoor area, sheltered from noise and prevailing winds, and oriented to receive light and sunshine;*
- C *Use of natural ventilation, sunlight, and shade to make indoor and outdoor spaces comfortable with minimum mechanical support;*
- D *Pleasant views from and toward the project;*
- E *Security and safety;*
- F *Bicycle facilities consistent with the City's Bicycle Plan;*
- G *Adequate parking and storage space;*
- H *Noise and visual separation from adjacent roads and commercial uses (Barrier walls, isolating a project, are not desirable. Noise mitigation walls may be used only when there is no practicable alternative. Where walls are used, they should help create an attractive pedestrian, residential setting through features such as setbacks, changes in alignment, detail and texture, places for people to walk through them at regular intervals, and planting.)*
- I *Design elements that facilitate neighborhood interaction, such as front porches, front yards along streets, and entryways facing public walkways;*
- J *Buffers from hazardous materials transport routes, as recommended by the City Fire Department.*

Circulation Element Policies.

Policy 15.1.2. Development Along Scenic Routes. *Development along scenic roadways should not block views or detract from the quality of views. Projects in the viewshed of a scenic roadshed will be considered "sensitive," will not wall off scenic roadways and block views, signs will not clutter vistas or views, street lights will be low scale and focus at the intersections where it is most needed, and lighting will not degrade the nighttime visual environment. (City of San Luis Obispo, 2014a).*

Conservation and Open Space Element. The Conservation and Open Space Element (adopted in 2006) also lists policies and programs that protect public viewsheds. The following Conservation and Open Space Element policies influence the local visual resources regulatory setting:

Policy 8.3.2 Open Space Buffers. *Buffers shall be required in the following situations:*

- *Between urban development -- including parks and public facilities -- and natural habitats such as creeks, wetlands, hillsides and ridgelines, Morros, scenic rock outcrops and other significant geological features, and grassland communities, to address noise, lighting, storm runoff, spread of invasive, non-native species, and access by people and pets.*
- *Between urban development and agricultural operations, to address dust, noise, odors, chemical use, and access by people and pets.*



- *Between new development and scenic resources or the greenbelt, to address view blockage, lighting and noise, and visual transition from urban character to rural character.*
- *Urban development or uses located adjacent to the Urban Reserve Line to provide a transition to open space or greenbelt areas. Transition areas should add to the preservation of open space lands or resources. At a minimum, a 50-foot transition area (preserved in essentially a natural state) shall be provided within the project along the project boundary with the Urban Reserve Line, unless the transition area is defined elsewhere in this Element.*

Policy 8.6.3 (G). Required Mitigation. *Any development that is allowed on a site designated as Open Space or Agriculture, or containing open space resources, shall be designed to minimize its impact on open space values on the site and on neighboring land.*

Policy 9.1.1. Preserve Natural and Agricultural Landscapes. *Any development that is permitted in natural or agricultural landscapes shall be visually subordinate to and compatible with the landscape features. Development shall avoid visually prominent locations such as ridgelines, avoid unnecessary grading, vegetation removal, and site lighting, incorporate building forms, architectural materials, and landscaping that respects the setting and historical pattern of development, and preserve scenic or unique landforms. The City's construction of projects in highly visible locations shall be subject to at least "minor or incidental" architectural review.*

Policy 9.1.2. Urban Development. *Urban development should reflect its architectural context. This does not necessarily prescribe a specific style, but requires deliberate design choices that acknowledge human scale, natural site features, and neighboring urban development, and that are compatible with historical and architectural resources. Plans for sub-areas of the City may require certain architectural styles.*

Policy 9.1.3. Utilities and Signs. *Features that clutter, degrade, intrude on, or obstruct views should be avoided. Necessary equipment including utility, communication, and traffic equipment should be designed and placed as to no impinge upon or degrade scenic view of the Morros or surrounding hillsides and farmland.*

Policy 9.1.4. Streetscapes and Major Roadways. *In the acquisition, design, construction, or significant modification of major roadways the city promotes the creation of "streetscapes" and linear scenic parkways or corridors that promote the City's visual quality and character, enhances adjacent uses, and integrates the roadway with surrounding districts.*

Policy 9.1.5. View Protection in New Development. *The City will include in all environmental review and carefully consider effects of new development, streets, and road construction on views and visual quality by applying the Community Design Guidelines, height restrictions, hillside standards, Historical Preservation Program Guidelines, and the California Environmental Quality Act and Guidelines.*

Policy 9.2.1. Views To and From Public Places, Including Scenic Roadways. *The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources from public places and encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do so. Public places include parks, plazas, the grounds of civic buildings, streets and roads, and publicly accessible open space.*



1. *Development projects shall not wall-off scenic roadways and block views.*
2. *Utilities, traffic signals, and public and private signs and lights shall not intrude on or clutter views, consistent with safety needs.*
3. *Where important vistas of distant landscape features occur along streets, street trees shall be clustered to facilitate viewing of the distant features.*
4. *Development projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway shall be considered "sensitive" and require architectural review.*

Policy 9.2.2. Views To and From Private Development. *Projects should incorporate as amenities views from and within private development sites. Private development designs should cause the least view blockage for neighboring property that allows project objectives to be met.*

Policy 9.2.3. Outdoor Lighting. *Outdoor lighting shall avoid: operating at unnecessary locations, levels, and times; spillage to areas not needing or wanting illumination; glare (intense line-of-site contrast); and frequencies (colors) that interfere with astronomical viewing.*

Policy 9.3.6. View blockage Along Scenic Highways. *Determine that view blockage along scenic roadways is a significant impact.*

City of San Luis Obispo Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance of the City's Municipal Code was developed in conformance with the General Plan (City of San Luis Obispo 2015a). Zoning is intended to promote and enforce broad General Plan policies related to land use, physical development, and construction. The following ordinance concerns the visual impact of lighting.

17.18.030. Illumination. *No lighting or illuminated device shall be operated so as to create glare which creates a hazard or nuisance on other property. (Ord. 941 – 1[part], 1982: prior code - 9202.6[C]).*

17.23. Night Sky Preservation. *Establishes lighting regulations that encourage lighting practices and systems that will:*

- a. *Permit reasonable uses of outdoor lighting for nighttime safety, utility, security, and enjoyment while preserving the ambience of night;*
- b. *Curtail and reverse any degradation of the nighttime visual environment and the night sky;*
- c. *Minimize glare and obtrusive light by limiting outdoor lighting that is misdirected, excessive, or unnecessary;*
- d. *Help protect the natural environment from the damaging effects of night lighting; and*
- e. *Meet the minimum requirements of the California Code of Regulations for Outdoor Lighting and Signs (Title 24, Chapter 6).*

Architectural Review Commission. The City's Architectural Review Commission (ARC) reviews and approves the design for proposed buildings within the City. Architectural review is a process whereby the City's ARC examines a proposed project's layout, building design, its relationship to the neighborhood in which it would be located, landscaping, parking, signage,



lighting, and other features affecting the project's appearance. This process would be applied to proposed development within the project area, and may result in conditions or design modifications that expand on mitigation measures that may be included in this EIR. The ARC is charged with administering architectural review in a way that creates a pleasant environment, maintains property values, preserves the City's natural beauty and visual character, and ensures orderly and harmonious development. The ARC uses the City's Community Design Guidelines as a basis for evaluating the suitability and appropriateness of individual project design to help achieve attractive and environmentally sensitive development. Refer to Section 4.5, *Cultural Resources*, for the regulatory oversight and requirements associated with the designation and management of historic resources.

City of San Luis Obispo Community Design Guidelines. San Luis Obispo's Community Design Guidelines were developed to communicate the City's expectations relating to the quality and character of site and building design. Many of the guidelines specifically target the reduction of visual impacts and the promotion of visual harmony with surrounding context (City of San Luis Obispo 2010). The following chapters and sections from the Community Design Guidelines are applicable to the analysis in this section:

Chapter 2 – General Design Principles: *This chapter includes general principles that should be considered in design of all development. Certain guidelines within this chapter apply only to certain types of projects (e.g., residential or non-residential). Site design considerations include designing each project with careful consideration of site character and constraints, designing projects to fit with the best examples of appropriate site design and architecture in the vicinity of the site, keeping building elements in proportion, and selecting exterior treatments carefully.*

Chapter 3 – Commercial and Industrial Project Design: *This chapter provides guidelines for new and renovated commercial and industrial structures outside of the Downtown. Overall design objectives for commercial projects include consideration of the City's small down scale and sensitivity to the design context of the surrounding area; avoiding boxy structures; providing landscaping as a project amenity; and locating outdoor equipment, trash receptacles, storage, and loading areas in the least conspicuous part of the site. Section 3.2 includes specific guidelines for large-scale retail projects to create projects that are pedestrian-orientation and that avoid monolithic "big-box" structures surrounded by extensive parking lots. Specific considerations for site planning; the location, design, and landscaping of parking areas; and pedestrian circulation and amenities are included.*

Chapter 5 – Residential Project Design: *This chapter includes guidelines relating to the goals for residential project design, subdivision design and general residential project principles, infill development, multi-family and clustered housing design, and single-family housing design, all of which apply to this proposed Project. Qualities examined include protection of scenic roadways; visually-pleasing parking design and location; consideration of neighboring development; quality landscaping and lighting; and site-specific building design.*

Chapter 6 – Site Planning and Other Design Details: *This chapter details qualities such as energy and resource conservation, lighting, storage, trash/recycling enclosures, landscaping, parking, and public art, among other items.*



Section 7.1 Creekside Development: The City's Design Guidelines focus partially on development near creeks and riparian corridors. Guidelines for such development outline the City's expectations concerning necessary setbacks from creek banks and the maintenance of public visual access to scenic creeks and corridors.

4.1.2 Previous Program-Level Environmental Review

The 2014 Land Use and Circulation Elements Update EIR (LUCE Update EIR) previously analyzed overall Citywide impacts to aesthetics and visual resources, including those associated with development of the project site, related to the adoption of the Lane Use and Circulation Elements, including planned future land use development and proposed goals, policies, and programs. The LUCE Update EIR identified potentially significant program-level impacts to aesthetic resources due to increased urbanization of the existing viewshed along the U.S. 101 corridor, obstruction of existing public views, and an increase in nighttime lighting from development of the project site with residential, commercial, and agriculture uses. However, the LUCE Update EIR concluded that implementation of the proposed Land Use and Circulation Element policies and existing City policies would reduce program-level impacts to a less than significant level.

4.1.3 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. The assessment of aesthetic impacts involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. This discussion evaluates the existing visual environment against the anticipated level of development with implementation of the proposed San Luis Ranch project. The project site was observed and photographically documented in its surrounding context. The LUCE Update EIR served as a basis of evaluation, and analysis of aesthetic resources was built upon the conclusions of the LUCE Update EIR.

The following criteria are based on Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. An impact is considered significant if the project would result in one or more of the following conditions:

1. *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;*
2. *Substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;*
3. *Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and/or*
4. *Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.*

The potential for lighting and glare at the project site to affect airport operations and/or aircraft flights from the San Luis Obispo Airport, would be addressed by the Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) in their review of the project. A discussion of potential hazards that may result from the proximity of the project site to the San Luis Obispo County Regional Airport can be found in Section 4.7, *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.



b. Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

<i>Threshold 1</i>	<i>Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?</i>
<i>Threshold 2</i>	<i>Would the project substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?</i>

Impact AES-1 **Although there are potentially adverse impacts to scenic viewsheds, the project would implement the open space and agricultural preservation and design elements included in the proposed Specific Plan. Therefore, potential impacts to scenic vistas and scenic resources within a state scenic highway would be Class III, less than significant.**

The project would convert 131 acres of agricultural landscape, farm structures, and open space to a mix of more urban uses, including 43.3 acres of mixed-density residential uses, 16.8 acres of commercial, office, and hotel development, and 3.4 acres of developed parkland. However, 60.3 acres of the site (approximately 47 percent) would remain in agriculture and open space. Proposed project landscaping and development would modify existing background views of the Santa Lucia Mountains to the east, Irish Hills to the west, and Cerro San Luis and Bishop Peak to the northwest, which are currently visible across the site. The obstruction of views would be most noticeable to travelers along U.S. 101 as the effects on view blockage from the project would be most pronounced to travelers in close proximity to the site. Development of the project would result in the partial loss of the large and uninterrupted agricultural landscape that currently occupies the site, which is the prominent visual feature in the foreground and middle-ground from public viewpoints on U.S. 101 and the western end of Prado Road as well as from the elevated cone of view from the KSBY hilltop.

As described in Section 4.1.1(a), the project site is visible from U.S. 101, Madonna Road, and the western end of Prado Road, which are identified in the Land Use and Circulation Elements and the Conservation and Open Space Element as scenic corridors. The portion of the project site nearest U.S. 101 is also briefly visible from the westbound lanes of the Los Osos Valley Road scenic corridor where it crosses U.S. 101. However, the design of the project is intended to preserve the quality of views along U.S. 101 by retaining agricultural uses along the northwest side of the highway and by including height limitations on the low-density residential development that would be primarily visible from U.S. 101, surrounding roadways, and other viewpoints south and east of the project site.

Views from U.S. 101. U.S. 101 has been identified by the California Department of Transportation as an eligible state scenic highway, but does not have official designation. With the project, immediate foreground views of the project site from U.S. 101 would be maintained in agricultural use. The northern portion of the project site located closest to U.S. 101 would include commercial structures adjacent to the highway. However, these structures would make up approximately 300 feet of the project site’s approximately 2,500 feet of frontage along U.S. 101. These commercial structures would visually function as an extension of the existing San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping center immediately north of the project site, which also fronts



on U.S. 101. Residential portions of the proposed development would also be visible in the middle-ground, but would be a minimum of 800 feet from U.S. 101, with agricultural uses remaining in the foreground adjacent to the highway. Neighborhood commercial development would be set back approximately 350 feet from U.S. 101 near the proposed intersection of the extended Prado Road/Dalidio Drive and Froom Ranch Way in the northeastern corner of the site, with agricultural uses remaining in the foreground adjacent to the highway (refer to Figure 2-6 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*, for relative locations of proposed development and land use types).

The commercial components of the project would be consistent in height, scale, and character with the San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping center to the north. The project would be subject to landscaping requirements in the City's Community Design Guidelines, partially shielding new commercial and residential uses from view along U.S. 101. Development would also be subject to formal Architectural Review, which may result in additional design modifications to improve the visual quality of the development.

Due to the proposed building setbacks from U.S. 101, background views of Cerro San Luis, Bishop Peak, and the Irish Hills from U.S. 101 would continue to be visible to the same extent as they are currently, as these features are visible above the existing eucalyptus tree line west of the project site and existing commercial structures north of the project site, and the heights of the proposed structures would not project above the existing tree line to the west or the existing development to the north. Residential development would range from detached single-family units to attached multi-family dwellings, with a maximum height limit for ~~all single-family~~ residential land use types of 35 feet and multi-family residential land use types of 40 feet. Proposed architectural styles, massing, and building heights are described in the Specific Plan. Commercial structures would be constructed at a maximum height of 50 feet. Mature eucalyptus trees at the site range from 80 to 100 feet in height.

Views from Madonna Road. Views of the site from Madonna Road are dominated by stands of eucalyptus trees. In the short term, portions of the proposed residences constructed under Phase 1 (near the center of the site) would continue to be shielded from views from Madonna Road and the residences to the southwest by the eucalyptus trees, the existing structures on-site, and the post office. In Phase 3 of development of the project site, the eucalyptus trees and existing on-site structures would be removed to accommodate high density multi-family residences adjacent to Madonna Road.

Removal of the eucalyptus trees and construction of new high density multi-family residential units would alter existing foreground views from Madonna Road to a more developed condition. Background views from Madonna Road would not be affected, as existing views through the site are substantially blocked by eucalyptus trees, the San Luis Ranch Farm Complex, the post office, and commercial structures. Future views through the site would be similarly blocked by proposed multi-family residences.

Views from Prado Road. Views of the site from the western terminus of Prado Road are generally similar to those from U.S. 101, with agricultural row crops in the foreground, stands of eucalyptus trees and commercial shopping centers in the middle-ground, and Cerro San Luis



and the Irish Hills in the background. As a result, the potential change in scenic views from this location would be similar to those from U.S. 101.

Views from Los Osos Valley Road. Views of the site from Los Osos Valley Road where it crosses U.S. 101 are distant with residential and commercial development, stands of trees and other vegetation, and U.S. 101 in the foreground, limited visibility of the on-site agricultural row crops nearest U.S. 101 in the middle-ground, and Cerro San Luis and the SLO Promenade commercial buildings in the distant background. The project would retain the existing agricultural designation along the western side of the project side, adjacent to U.S. 101, which is the portion of the site most visible from Los Osos Valley Road. As a result, the limited view of the project site from Los Osos Valley Road would not be substantially altered by the project.

Mitigative Components of the Specific Plan and Impact Conclusion. The San Luis Ranch Specific Plan proposes programs and policies intended to protect scenic resources. Proposed Specific Plan Policy 2.2 requires the preservation of the site’s visual prominence as a gateway to the City. Proposed Specific Plan Policy 2.3 requires that Specific Plan buildout protect scenic vistas from the site. The proposed Specific Plan proposes to maintain agriculture and open space along U.S. 101, reducing the visual change from this high scenic value corridor. The proposed commercial and residential development would be visually consistent with adjacent land uses to the north and west. Views from Madonna Road would change substantially with the replacement of the existing eucalyptus trees with multi-family residential development. However, based on surrounding development on the south side of Madonna Road, viewer expectations along this roadway are generally of suburban and commercial uses. The proposed multi-family residential development along this approximately 800-foot segment of Madonna Road would be consistent with the surrounding development along the south side of the roadway, and would provide a visual transition from suburban residential uses west of the project site frontage to commercial uses east of the project site frontage.

In addition, as stated in the LUCE Update EIR, proposed development would be subject to review by the Architectural Review Committee to ensure compliance with the City’s applicable design guidelines, compliance with which would ensure that the project would result in minimal impacts to scenic resources. Therefore, consistent with the conclusion of the LUCE Update EIR, adherence to City policies and regulations would ensure that impacts associated to scenic resources would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures would be required.

Residual Impacts. This impact would be less than significant without mitigation.

<i>Threshold 3</i>	<i>Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?</i>
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Impact AES-2 **The project would alter the existing visual character of the site by converting over half of the agricultural site into a predominantly residential and commercial use site. Due to the project’s visual compatibility with surrounding development, preservation of on-site open space and agricultural land, and compliance with design guidelines,**



the project's impact on the visual character and quality of the site would be Class III, less than significant.

The project would convert over half of the 131-acre site from agricultural uses to residential, commercial, and developed parks, while maintaining 52.7 acres of the project site along U.S. 101 in agriculture. As previously described, the project vicinity is primarily characterized by residential and commercial development to the north, south, and west. U.S. 101 borders the site to the east. Project development would substantially alter the visual character of the majority of the site from rural-agricultural to suburban/urban development. Although this would be a major visual transformation of much of the site, the project would maintain agriculture and open space along the project site's eastern boundary, as described in Impact AES-1.

Proposed commercial and residential development in the northern portion of the site would be visually consistent with adjacent land uses to the north and west, and would provide a visual transition from suburban residential uses west of the project site to commercial uses east of the project site. The eastern 52.7 acres of the project site along U.S. 101 would be maintained in agricultural use. The San Luis Ranch Specific Plan development standards include building height maximums for each of the development types proposed on the project site. In general, low-medium density residential (NG-10) would have a maximum height of 35 feet. Medium- and high-density residential (NG-23 and NG-30) would have a maximum height of 40 feet, and eCommercial, office, and hotel uses, would have a maximum height of 50 feet.

Mitigative Components of the Specific Plan and Impact Conclusion. The San Luis Ranch Specific Plan contains policies and guidelines intended to preserve the visual character and quality of the project site and surroundings. Proposed Specific Plan Policies 1.3, 2.4, 2.8, and 7.1 require the encouragement of an attractive and relevant streetscape design to provide appropriate options for street development depending on the adjacent land use, monitoring of the conversion of active agriculture to non-agricultural uses and consideration of the possible effects of new development on character of the community as a whole, the promotion of building architectural styles that are consistent with agricultural history of the community, and that buildings be designed in a manner consistent with the character of the Specific Plan Area. Furthermore, the Specific Plan design guidelines establish that residential development would include primarily Modern Agrarian and Craftsman architectural styles. Other styles that may be used include Farmhouse, Modern Dutch, Traditional, Cottage, French Country, and Spanish/Spanish Revival, and modern. The Specific Plan includes minimum feasible hardscaping, consistent with the circulation, connectivity, and water quality goals of the City's General Plan. The Specific Plan also includes specific landscaping requirements, such as drought-tolerant, native plantings. The Specific Plan design guidelines are generally consistent with San Luis Obispo Community Design Guidelines (refer to Appendix A: General Plan Consistency of the Specific Plan [Appendix B of this EIR]), which are intended to ensure that future development is consistent with the City's expectations relating to the quality and character of site and building design, and to protect scenic resources and views, from public rights-of-way. However, it should be noted that a final determination of project consistency with the Community Design Guidelines would be made by the ARC and City Council.

As described above, the LUCE Update EIR analyzed potential impacts to visual character from buildout of the San Luis Ranch Specific Plan Area and determined that program-level visual



impacts would be less than significant. As discussed in Impact AES-1, the project includes a similar extent of overall development to that which would be permitted under the General Plan performance standards. Neither the General Plan nor the LUCE Update EIR includes an assumption for how development under the General Plan performance standards would be configured on the project site. However, with the San Luis Ranch Specific Plan, agriculture and open space would be maintained along U.S. 101, preserving the visual character of the site as seen from U.S. 101. The project would also be visually compatible with surrounding development. In addition, as described above, the Specific Plan has been prepared by the project applicant to represent the agricultural heritage associated with San Luis Ranch as well as architectural styles typically found within the City to be consistent with the City's Community Design Guidelines and would undergo consistency review by the ARC and City Council. Therefore, consistent with the conclusion of the LUCE Update EIR, adherence to City policies and regulations would ensure that the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, and this impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures would be required.

Residual Impacts. This impact would be less than significant without mitigation.

<i>Threshold 4</i>	<i>Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?</i>
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Impact AES-3 **The project would introduce a new source of nighttime lighting and daytime glare, which could increase ambient light and affect the quality of the nighttime sky. However, project compliance with existing City requirements and design guidelines would limit the magnitude of these effects. This would be a Class III, less than significant impact.**

The project would result in the replacement of existing agricultural lands that do not currently include any substantial sources of artificial light with residential and commercial uses. There are existing sources of nighttime lighting in the vicinity of the site, provided by the streetlights along Madonna Road, spillover lighting from surrounding development, light from the headlights of vehicles traveling along U.S. 101, and the San Luis Ranch Farm Complex. All of these contribute to the existing urban environment, and degrade the quality of the nighttime sky. Development of the project site would result in an increase in ambient nighttime lighting through the addition of residential and commercial uses and associated exterior lighting. This would include parking lot and security/safety lighting, and fixtures associated with the proposed structural development.

The project would be required to conform to the Night Sky Preservation Ordinance (Zoning Regulations Chapter 17.23), which sets operation standards and requirements for lighting installations. These include limits on outdoor lighting that is misdirected, excess, or unnecessary, and meeting the minimum requirements of the California Code of Regulations for Outdoor Lighting and Signs (Title 24, Chapter 6). The project would also be required to comply with City General Plan policies pertaining to lighting and glare (refer to Section 4.1.1[c]), as well



as the City's Community Design Guidelines and the City's Night-Sky Preservation Ordinance. The project applicant would also be required to provide an overall lighting plan that demonstrates that the project complies with the requirements of City of San Luis Obispo Ordinance No. 17.18.030, which prohibits lighting or illuminated devices that would create glare which results in a hazard or nuisance on other properties (City of San Luis Obispo, Zoning Regulations). This plan would be reviewed and approved by the ARC prior to issuance of building permits.

In addition, exterior building materials, windows, and surface paving materials may cause glare that could affect nearby residences and other glare sensitive land uses.

Future development within the Specific Plan Area would be required to provide an overall lighting plan that demonstrates that the project complies with the requirements of City of San Luis Obispo Ordinance No. 17.18.030, which prohibits lighting or illuminated devices that would create glare which results in a hazard or nuisance on other properties (City of San Luis Obispo, Zoning Regulations).

Mitigative Components of the Specific Plan and Impact Conclusion. Proposed development under the San Luis Ranch Specific Plan would be required to comply with City General Plan policies pertaining to lighting and glare (refer to Section 4.1.1[c]), Community Design Guidelines, and the Night-Sky Preservation Ordinance. As identified by the LUCE Update EIR, adhering to the existing regulations and ordinances, as well as the City's Community Design Guidelines, would ensure that exterior lighting and glare is designed to minimize impacts on neighboring properties and other light and glare sensitive uses. Therefore, impacts associated with the creation of new sources of exterior lighting and glare would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures would be required.

Residual Impacts. This impact would be less than significant without mitigation.

c. Cumulative Impacts. The project, in combination with approved, pending, and proposed development in San Luis Obispo, would contribute to increasing urbanization of the southern portion of the City. Consistent with long-term buildout under the General Plan, the project would be required to adhere to the design standards of the City General Plan and City Building Standards and would be subject to discretionary review by the Planning Commission and/or City Council, as well as final design review by the Architectural Review Committee. As determined in the LUCE Update EIR, all development that adheres to the General Plan policies would result in less than significant aesthetic impacts. Therefore, although the visual character of the southern portion of the City could incrementally change as development intensity increases, this change is consistent with the General Plan vision for the urban environment and impacts to visual quality would not be cumulatively considerable. The overall aesthetic impact of cumulative development in the project vicinity would be less than significant.

