

4.7 AESTHETICS

The proposed project would involve the urbanization of a portion of the 131-acre Dalidio property and the construction of the Prado Road interchange. This would represent a major change of the aesthetic character of the project site and an intensification of the urban character of the project vicinity. The design of the project has the potential to conflict with some of the Architectural Review Commission Guidelines relative to architectural features and landscaping amenities. The proposed project would also result in the introduction of a new source of nighttime lighting. Design recommendations and other mitigation measures have been developed to reduce the project's aesthetic impact. The project would also affect foreground and background views from the surrounding areas, and would have significant but mitigable impacts on foreground and background views from U.S. Highway 101 and Madonna Road.

4.7.1 Setting

a. Existing Visual Conditions at the Project Site. The Dalidio site is located between U.S. Highway 101 and Madonna Road, just south of the San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping center. This site is described in the 1992 Land Use Element EIR as part of the southern gateway to the City of San Luis Obispo and is identified as part of a transition zone between the commercial development to the north and residential development to the south.

The Dalidio site is characterized primarily by its use as an agricultural property. Dominant visual features at the site are the predominantly flat landform planted with row crops, an existing stand of eucalyptus trees in the southwest portion of the site, and the Dalidio farm home located in the northwest portion of the site. The San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping center is located east of the site; Laguna Lake Park is located to the north; single family residential development is to the west; U.S Highway 101 is to the east and south; and agricultural land with commercial development beyond, is south of the site.

The cultivated area of the site and the stand of eucalyptus trees along Prefumo Creek dominate foreground views of the site from U.S. Highway 101. Background views from this vantage are dominated by views of the Irish Hills and Cerro San Luis. Views from the west are also dominated by the on-site stands of eucalyptus trees, with background views of the Santa Lucia Mountain Range.

The project site currently has no street lighting or lighted nighttime activity other than that associated with the existing residence. Land uses in the vicinity that are most sensitive to night lighting are the residences west of the project site.

The proposed Prado Road/U.S. Highway 101 interchange site is located adjacent to San Luis Obispo Creek. Views of the riparian areas are available from U.S. Highway 101, particularly north of the existing Prado Road alignment. This portion of the project site generally supports vegetation that consists mostly of ruderal species with eucalyptus, acacia, a few coast live oak, pepper trees and scattered walnut trees. The proposed interchange is bordered by commercial, industrial, and mobile home park uses to the east, and commercial and agricultural uses to the west. U.S. Highway 101 is not a designated County or federal scenic highway. However, the highway is considered eligible for scenic listing status by Caltrans, and the City General Plan identifies the highway corridor as being of high to moderate scenic value.



b. Regulatory Setting. The City of San Luis Obispo regulates aesthetics of buildings and public spaces through implementation of adopted policies and the programs. The City's General Plan Land Use Element and the implementing statutes of the Municipal Code are the core of this mechanism. In addition, the City's Architectural Review Commission (ARC) reviews and approves the design for proposed buildings. 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. 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 (November 2002) as a basis for evaluating the suitability and appropriateness of individual project design to help achieve attractive and environmentally sensitive development.

4.7.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. The applicant has prepared an independent visual resources evaluation of the effects of the proposed project on the aesthetic character of both the project site and the surrounding area. The visual resources analysis includes a discussion of how the project would affect foreground views of the site and background views from six different locations. These locations include four views from U.S. Highway 101, the view from Los Osos Valley Road, and the view from Madonna Road. The visual resources analysis prepared by the applicant has been used in this section of the EIR to supplement the descriptions of the project contained in the development application. The applicant's visual resources evaluation also included photo simulations of the project from U.S. Highway 101, and an evaluation of views of the proposed interchange from northbound U.S. Highway 101, prepared by Perkowitz + Ruth Architects in March 2003. These visual resources assessments have been incorporated into the EIR analysis and have been used to determine the project's effect on views from various vantage points.

The assessment of aesthetic impacts involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. In an attempt to reduce the subjective nature of this analysis the project was evaluated relative to whether it complies with adopted City of San Luis Obispo design and architectural guidelines for development. If the project design is found not to comply with these policies, then it is said to have a significant aesthetic impact.

This analysis incorporates an evaluation of design compatibility within the established urban context. This analysis is considered preliminary since all final policy consistency will be determined by City decision-makers, including the Architectural Review Commission and the City Council.

Pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact is considered significant if it can be reasonably argued that:

- *the change would adversely affect a viewshed from a public viewing area (such as a park, scenic highway, roadway, or other publicly-accessible property);*



- *new light and glare sources are introduced that substantially alter the nighttime lighting character of the area; or*
- *an existing identified visual resource is adversely altered or obstructed.*

Foreground views are those immediately presented to the viewer, and include objects at close range. Middleground 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. Background views often include the objects that close out the perspective.

b. Project Impacts. The effects of the project within the context of the planned urban environment are described below.

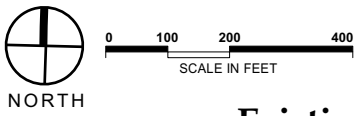
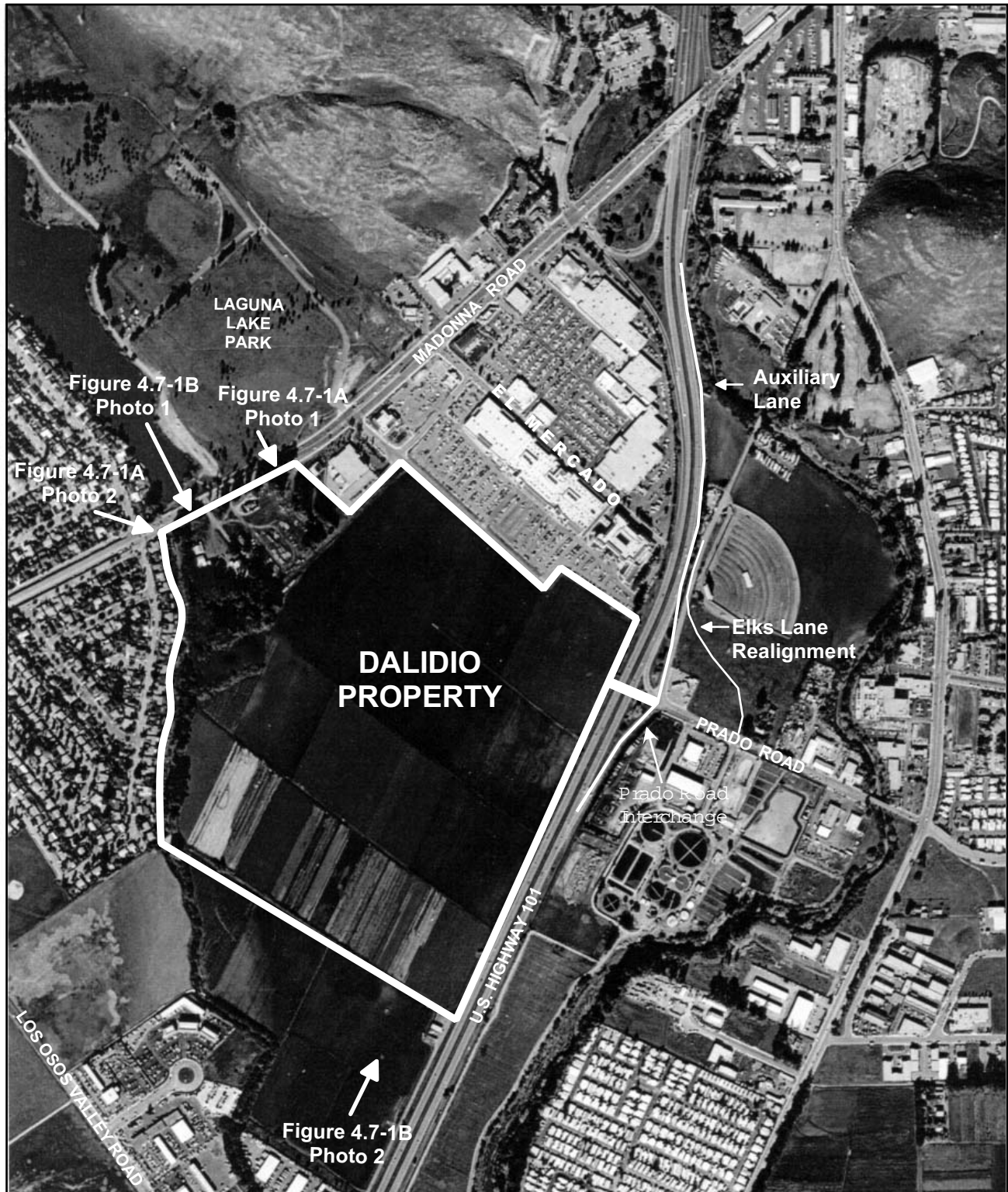
Impact AES-1 The proposed development would affect the aesthetic character of the site and vicinity through alteration of viewsheds from U.S. Highway 101 and Madonna Road. This is considered a Class II, significant but mitigable impact.

Views from Madonna Road and Nearby Residences. Views of the site from this perspective are currently obscured by the stands of eucalyptus trees along Madonna Road, Prefumo Creek, and the drainage swale behind the Post Office, as shown in Figures 4.7-1, 4.7-1A and 4.7-21B. In the short term the San Luis Obispo Marketplace portion of the project 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 the second phase, the applicant would thin the eucalyptus groves and remove the structures to accommodate the proposed office/business park development. The thinning of the eucalyptus groves would affect foreground views from Madonna Road.

The proposed commercial and office/business park developments would affect background views from this direction because the proposed eucalyptus tree removal would reduce screening of this portion of the project site. The structures would not be expected to block background views of the mountains to the east of the site. In addition, aesthetic impacts related to modifications to foreground views would be reduced by the proposed landscape screening. Nevertheless, proposed commercial and office/business park developments would affect foreground views from Madonna Road and the nearby residences.

Views from Los Osos Valley Road. Views of the site from Los Osos Valley Road would be partially obscured by existing development along this roadway. Cerro San Luis and other prominent topographical features dominate existing background views with the distant San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping mall diminutive in comparison. Development of the proposed project would not significantly alter the viewshed from its current condition. This is due to the size and scale of the proposed project and relative distance to Los Osos Valley Road, which would allow the proposed project to be considered as a minor part of the background view.





**Existing Visual Character of the Subject Site:
Viewpoint Location Map**

Figure 4.7-1



Photo 1 View toward the proposed residential area from Madonna Road

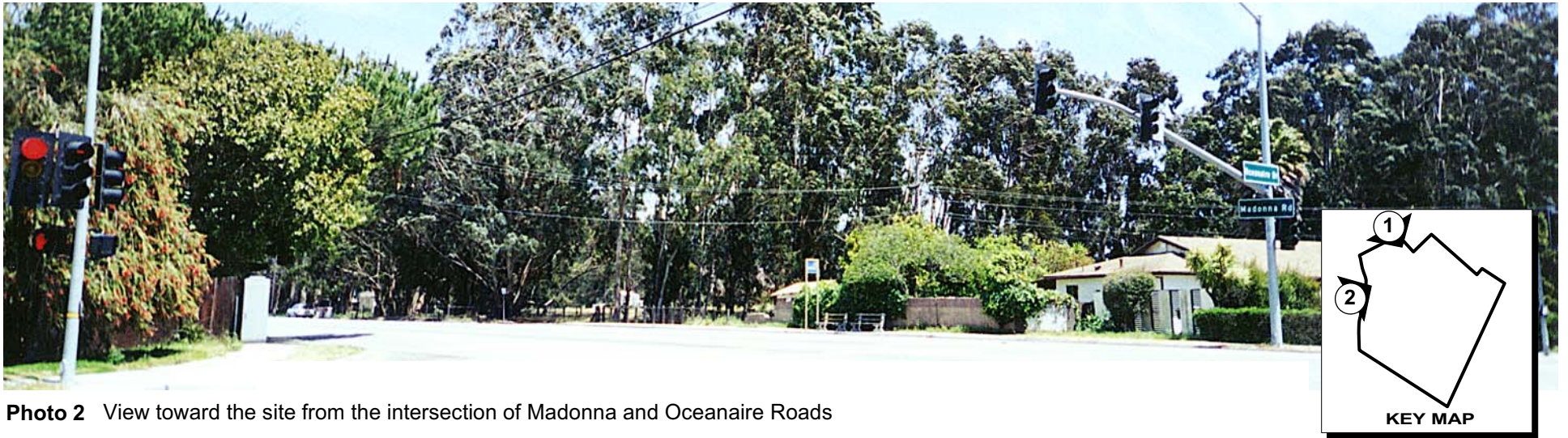


Photo 2 View toward the site from the intersection of Madonna and Oceanaire Roads

Existing Visual Character of the Subject Site

Figure 4.7-1A

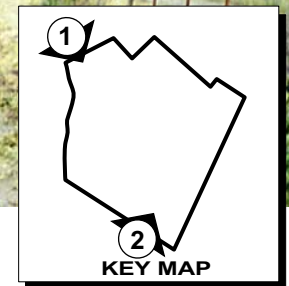




Photo 1 View toward the site from Laguna Lake



Photo 2 View toward the site from north of commercial development located along Los Osos Valley Road



Existing Visual Character of Dalidio Property

Figure 4.7-1B



The proposed office/business park development would be shielded from Los Osos Valley Road by the eucalyptus groves to the south and west. In addition, the scale of the structures would be such that they would not interfere with views of Cerro San Luis, and the more distant mountains to the north, as illustrated in Figure 4.7-2. Therefore, the proposed project would have a less than significant impact on foreground and background views of the site from this direction.

Views from U.S. Highway 101. U.S. Highway 101 has been designated as a roadway with high to moderate scenic value within the City's 1994 Circulation Element; therefore, the project's effect on views from the east require special consideration. The portion of the proposed project on the Dalidio property that would be visible from U.S. Highway 101 would be San Luis Obispo Marketplace, and the open space areas to the south, as shown in Figures 4.7-2 and 4.7-3. The proposed office/business park development would not be visually prominent due to its distance from the highway and the visual interference from the San Luis Marketplace buildings and the existing eucalyptus groves. The closest proposed commercial structure in the main complex, south of Prado Road, would be setback 500 feet from the highway. This is substantially farther from the highway than existing commercial structures in the area, including the Embassy Suites Hotel to the north, which is 100 feet from the highway. In addition, the outside of the commercial area facing the highway would be partially blocked from view by landscape screening. Foreground views of the site would be altered by the development of the proposed project, as shown in Figure 4.7-2. Proposed landscape screening on the outside of the commercial area facing the highway will help offset these impacts as illustrated in Figure 4.7-3.

The San Luis Marketplace component would be consistent in size and scale with the San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping mall to the north. Also, the majority of the parking areas would either be screened from view by the structures or by the proposed landscaping. However, to assure that the landscape screen is effective, mature trees need to be planted once construction is completed. Because details as to the size or age of the trees to be included in the landscape screen are not known at this time, the project is considered to have a potentially significant impact on foreground views from U.S. Highway 101.

Background views from the east would continue to be visible at the same extent as they are currently, as the heights of the proposed structures would not project above the existing tree line to the west or the existing development to the north. As a result, views of Cerro San Luis and the Irish Hills would remain visible from U.S. Highway 101. Therefore, the visual impacts of the proposed project on background views from the east side of the freeway are considered less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. To reduce the visual impacts of the proposed project on views from the surrounding area, the following measures are required.

- AES-1(a) Foreground Views of Madonna Road.** As thinning of the eucalyptus groves occurs for every tree removed the applicant shall replace the tree on a 1:1 basis with a tree of minimum 36-inch box size. As feasible, the replacement trees shall be placed in an area where they will continue to screen the proposed development from existing views.



AES-1(b) Foreground Views from U.S. Highway 101. At the time of occupancy planted landscaping shall screen views of structures at 30% of their designed intent. Within five years of planting, landscaping shall screen 75% of the commercial structures of the project. All failed specimens shall be replaced within one month. Screening ratio and landscape vegetation health shall be achieved under the supervision of a qualified arborist, which shall be approved by the Community Development Director in consultation with the City Arborist.

Significance After Mitigation. The implementation of the above mitigation measures would reduce project-specific impacts to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-2 The proposed development would be potentially consistent with City urban design goals relative to the City's Community Design Guidelines. This is considered a Class III, less than significant, impact.

San Luis Marketplace Component. This component of the proposed project would be located in the northern portion of the site. With clustering of the commercial development near the existing San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping center, these two developments would appear as a single retail shopping area. The use of pedestrian corridors throughout the site, with potential connections to the San Luis Obispo Promenade and other land uses in the vicinity, would create more opportunities for shoppers to park once and travel by foot between various retailers and services. Clearly designated pedestrian corridors would have the added benefit of improving pedestrian safety by drawing the attention of drivers traveling through the site. The incorporation of pedestrian gathering places, benches, and planters would also increase the pedestrian orientation of the development. The inclusion of these pedestrian amenities is considered potentially consistent with the Community Design Guidelines concerning improving the pedestrian environment.

The applicant has described the architectural style of the development as a mix of agrarian, craftsman, and metropolitan style architecture. The visual analysis describes the building style as being "articulated into rural forms" in an attempt emulate "architectural forms more characteristic of barn[s], a downtown 'main street', or other buildings seen within the existing City context," and to avoid the look of large retail developments. The structures in the main retail area are described as containing a variety of roof forms, arcades and awnings, and being off set from each other, to reduce the perception of there being a single building. This design concept, which recalls local architectural vernaculars and helps brake up the boxy appearance of structures, is potentially consistent with the design principles contained in the Community Design Guidelines.

The articulation of these structures, including the proposed hotel, and their varied roof and building heights along with the minimum 500-foot setback from U.S. Highway 101 of the commercial development south of Prado Road would serve to reduce the perceived size and mass of the project from U.S Highway 101. Aiding in this would be the use of the landscape screen located along the perimeter of the commercial area from Prado Road to the potential collector to Los Osos Valley Road. In addition, landscaping would be located in the front and rear of all of the proposed commercial structures.



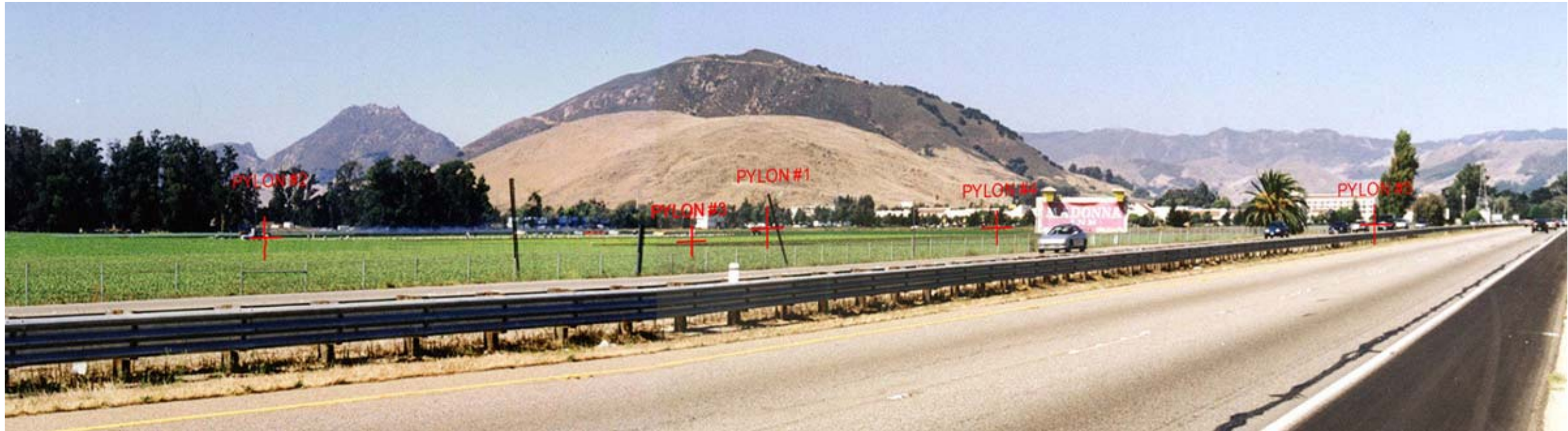


Existing View of Project Site from Northbound Highway 101



Photosimulation of View of Project from Highway 101, Without Landscaping.

Photo-Simulation of Proposed Project
from Highway 101 Without Landscaping



Existing View of Project Site from Northbound Highway 101



Photosimulation of View of Project from Highway 101, With Landscaping.

Photo-Simulation of Proposed Project
from Highway 101 with Landscaping

Figure 4.7-3



The retail component of the project would not locate a minimum of 30% of the proposed building frontages at the front setback line, and would therefore be potentially inconsistent with Guideline 3.1.C.2.e included in the City's Community Design Guidelines. This particular guideline is not a mandatory requirement, but will be weighed along with other guidelines in the evaluation of the project design by the City's Architectural Review Commission (ARC).

Office/Business Park Component. As part of the office/business park development, a bridge for vehicles and pedestrians would be built over the existing drainage swale dividing the area from the proposed commercial development. This design detail is potentially consistent with the established Community Design Guidelines. The development of the office/business park portion would require the removal of the existing on-site structures and substantial thinning of existing on-site eucalyptus groves. Because the structures to be removed may be considered historically significant, their removal may be considered potentially inconsistent with the Community Design Guidelines. In addition, the business park office buildings would not be built to the minimum required front setback, and would not have primary entrances that face the street. Therefore, the business park component would be considered potentially inconsistent with guidelines 3.4.C.1.a and 3.4.C.1.d, respectively. As mentioned above, the project will ultimately be evaluated by the ARC in terms of its consistency with these guidelines, as well as other contained in the Community Design Guidelines.

Open Space Component. This component of the proposed project would retain the essential aesthetic quality of portions of the site. This component would result in the preservation of the existing eucalyptus stands within these areas. Therefore, this component is considered potentially consistent with the Community Design Guidelines.

Refer to Section 5.0, *Land Use*, for a detailed discussion of the project's consistency with General Plan goals and policies related to aesthetics.

Mitigation Measure. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant.

Impact AES-3 The building massing of the proposed retail uses would reduce the quality of the visual appearance as seen from U.S. Highway 101, Los Osos Valley Road, and Madonna Road. In addition, the potential rooftop mechanical equipment in the proposed project may be visible from portions of U.S. Highway 101. This would be considered a Class II, significant but mitigable, impact.

Considering the potentially large scale of the proposed commercial development, the aesthetic massing of their facades may significantly impact views from surrounding areas, including public viewing corridors along U.S. Highway 101, Los Osos Valley Road, and Madonna Road. In addition, mechanical equipment on top of the large buildings could result in an adverse impact on visual quality, as viewed from U.S. Highway 101.

Mitigation Measures. The following measure would reduce visual impacts associated with the proposed buildings on the project site



- AES-3(a)** The applicant shall submit plans to the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) for review prior to applying for construction permits. Plans shall specifically be evaluated for consistency with Chapter 3.2, Large-Scale Retail Projects, of the City's Community Design Guidelines.
- AES-3(b)** The applicant shall submit plans with design measures to conceal rooftop equipment, before issuance of construction permits. The plans shall depict precise cross-sections and sightline indicators to assure that the rooftop equipment will not be visible from surrounding locations.
- AES-3(c)** Areas within commercial development for outdoor storage, truck parking, trash collection, or loading shall not be visible from abutting streets. Such facilities shall be thematically incorporated into the overall site design, and non-enclosed areas shall be permanently defined and screened with walls and/or fences. Materials, colors and design of screening walls shall conform to those used as predominant materials and colors on the building, subject to Architectural Review Commission approval.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of the above mitigation measures would improve the outward appearance of the potential commercial buildings resulting in a less than significant impact in terms of visual quality.

Impact AES-4 Light and glare produced from the proposed project would extend the area of night light across the currently undeveloped property, altering the nighttime sky due to parking lot lighting, wall mounted lighting, and internally illuminated signs, and daytime glare associated with plaster-type walls and/or brightly painted surfaces. This may affect the residences west of the site and views from the freeway and other local roadways. This is considered a Class II, significant but mitigable impact.

Site illumination provides safety for traffic movement and crossings, warns of hazards, and improves security. It can also serve to emphasize the plan arrangement by giving emphasis to focal points, gathering places, and building entrances. Well-conceived lighting gives clarity and unity to the overall site and to each subarea within it. At present, there is a minor amount of nighttime lighting at the site, provided by the streetlights along Madonna Road, spillover lighting from surrounding development, light from the headlights of vehicles traveling along U.S. Highway 101, and the on-site structures.

Prior to approval of the project, the applicant will 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. This plan will need to be reviewed and approved by the ARC prior to issuance of building permits. Areas of concern would be use of overly bright lights, unshielded lights and unnecessarily high light standards at the commercial portion of the site. These would result in an adverse light impact at night. Adjacent residential uses may be affected by such lights, by intensity of building signs, or by the lights of headlights associated with the evening use of the San Luis Obispo Marketplace.



Preliminary design shows the configuration of the commercial area as several clusters of development oriented away from existing residential development to the southwest. This configuration would help shield the existing nearby residences from parking lot lighting. Also, the approximately 350 feet between these homes and the commercial development and the eucalyptus groves located along the edge of Prefumo Creek would further reduce light impacts from the proposed development. The office/business park portion of the proposed project could also result in an increase in nighttime lighting at the site; however, lighting from this portion of the site would be partially blocked by the intervening eucalyptus trees. The increase in lighting at the site could also affect airport operations and/or aircraft flights from the San Luis Obispo Airport, because the proposed project is within the designated flight path of that facility. Because no lighting plan has been submitted at this time, the impacts cannot fully be evaluated. Therefore, the project is considered to have a potentially significant but mitigable impact with regard to lighting.

In addition, sources of glare that could affect nearby residences and other glare sensitive land uses include building exterior materials and surface paving materials. Any highly reflective façade materials would be of particular concern as well as the glare associated with vehicle exteriors. Building materials that have been identified for use in the San Luis Obispo Marketplace component of the project include a combination of stucco, tile, and split-faced block. However, since a plan detailing the exact types of building materials to be used in the exteriors of the structures has not been submitted, the project is considered to have a potentially significant but mitigable impact with regard to effects from glare.

Signs are graphic informational systems that are closely allied with site illumination, since the two are usually interdependent and complementary. Back-splashed illumination is an accepted treatment for signs when adjacent land uses are sensitive to nighttime lighting impacts. However, at this time no plan has been submitted detailing the types of signs that would be used on the exteriors of the structures, and at the edges of the site. Because of this uncertainty, the project is considered to have a potentially significant, but mitigable impact with regard to effects from light associated with signs on-site.

Mitigation Measures. The following measures would reduce the adverse effect from the introduction of new sources of nighttime lighting at the site as well as reducing the effects of glare from exterior building and façade materials:

- AES-4(a)** All lighting fixtures in customer parking and rear loading areas that are visible from surrounding residences shall be designed to fully contain glare on-site. All lighting poles shall be hooded, shielded, and located to direct light pools downward and prevent glare on the nearby residential lots. Non-glare lighting shall be used throughout the proposed project. Search lights and strobe lights shall be prohibited.
- AES-4(b)** All windows shall be of low-glare specification. Paint used for exterior façades shall be of low-reflectivity. Metal surfaces shall be brush-polished, and not highly reflective.
- AES-4(c)** The Architectural Review Committee shall review all proposed buffering methods, including exterior wall and landscape treatments, along the



western edge of the site to ensure that all automobile and parking lot lights are prevented from spilling over the property line. This may include, but is not limited to, the use of mature trees throughout the site. All ARC recommendations shall be implemented. It should be noted that mature trees often grow more slowly than smaller more vigorous trees, and that the younger trees often overtake the larger trees within a matter of years. Therefore, it is recommended that a mix of mature and immature trees be planted as part of the buffering methods.

- AES-4(d)** The Architectural Review Committee shall review proposed material and color plans to be submitted by the project applicant prior to issuance of building permits. These plans shall indicate that proposed exterior wall surfaces that face public viewing corridors, such as U.S. Highway 101, Los Osos Valley Road, and Madonna Road, would be of materials and colors that would not produce substantial glare, as determined by the ARC.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of the above mitigation measure along with measure *AES-1(a)* would reduce the effects of light and glare resulting from the proposed project to a less than significant level.

- Impact AES-5 The proposed interchange and overpass at Prado Road/U.S. Highway 101 would affect the aesthetic character of the site vicinity through brief disruption of viewsheds of persons traveling along U.S. Highway 101 and Prado Road. This is considered a Class II, significant but mitigable, impact.**

The Prado Road/Highway 101 interchange would include a four-lane overpass with double left-turn pockets, 6.6 foot (2 meter) raised median, two standard shoulders, and a 7.9 foot (2.4 meter) wide sidewalk on the north side of the structure. The facility would connect the existing Prado Road on the east side of U.S. Highway 101 with the proposed Prado Road Extension (Dalidio Drive) on the west side of the freeway. The proposed overcrossing would be a two-span pre-stressed concrete box girder structure with a total width of 111 feet (33.8 meters) and a total length of 208 feet (63.5 meters). Preliminary designs for the interchange and proposed auxiliary lane are illustrated in Figure 2-17. **Photo-simulations of the interchange and overpass, as viewed from Highway 101, are presented in Figures 4.7-4A and 4.7-4B.**

Two retaining walls are proposed for the Prado Road Interchange portion of the project. A retaining wall along the western and northern boundaries of the City's corporation yard would be constructed within the right-of-way. This retaining wall would be approximately 1,280 feet (390 meters) in length and 0.3 (0.1 meter) to 19.0 feet (5.8 meters) in height. A second retaining wall would be constructed along the east side of Highway 101, between Elks Lane and the proposed northbound diagonal on-ramp, between Prado Road and Madonna Road. This retaining wall would be approximately 688.8 feet (210 meters) in length and 0.3 (0.1 meter) to 6.6 feet (2 meters) in height.





Source: Mark Thomas & Company, Inc., 2004.

**Photo-simulation of Prado Road Interchange,
looking North from Highway 101**

Figure 4.7-4A





Source: Mark Thomas & Company, Inc., 2004.

**Photo-simulation of Prado Road Interchange,
looking South from Highway 101**

Figure 4.7-4B



Dalidio Drive would provide the primary access to the site through provision of a connection between U.S. Highway 101 and Madonna Road, and would replace Dalidio Road. The road would be connected to the east side of U.S. Highway 101 via the planned Prado Road interchange. This road would be designated as a "parkway arterial," accommodating a total of four 12-foot wide travel lanes, two 6-foot Class II bike lanes, and 6-foot sidewalks and 6-foot parkways along one side of the roadway. Directional lanes would be divided by a 16-foot planted median, interrupted with left turn lanes at intersection locations. Streetlights would be provided per City standards. Figure 2-11 illustrates a cross sectional diagram of the proposed Dalidio Drive.

Most of the proposed interchange improvements would be located within existing right-of-way. However, the proposed interchange would require acquisition of additional right-of-way, either through fee title (purchase of property) or by acquiring a public service easement (PSE). The proposed interchange would not displace any residences, but would displace the U-Haul storage facility located at the northeast corner of Prado Road and Elks Lane, and will encroach upon an agricultural field at the southwest corner of the interchange. The existing U-Haul storage facility would be demolished.

Views from Madonna Road and Nearby Residences. Because views of the proposed site from this perspective are currently obscured by the stands of eucalyptus trees along Madonna Road, it is not anticipated that the proposed overpass and interchange structures would be visible from this viewpoint. Mitigation measures recommended for Impact AES-1 for potential long-term impacts which would occur if the applicant needs to thin the eucalyptus groves would also serve to obscure views of the proposed overpass and interchange from this location. Therefore, the overpass, interchange structures and Dalidio Drive would be considered to have a less than significant impact on background views from Madonna Road and the nearby residences.

Views from Los Osos Valley Road. Views of the proposed overpass and interchange site from Los Osos Valley Road would be largely obscured by existing development along this roadway. As discussed above, Cerro San Luis and other prominent topographical features dominate existing background views with the distant San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping mall diminutive in comparison. Development of the proposed infrastructure features would not significantly alter the viewshed from its current condition. This is due to the existing structures along Los Osos Valley Road, in addition to the relative distance of these project features to Los Osos Valley Road, which would allow the proposed project to be considered as a minor part of the background view. Therefore, these proposed infrastructure improvements are expected to have a less than significant impact on foreground and background views of the site from this direction.

Views from U.S. Highway 101. The City's 1994 Circulation Element designates U.S. Highway 101 as a roadway with "high to moderate scenic value" within the vicinity of the proposed project. Therefore, the project's effects on views from the east require special consideration from an aesthetic perspective. As shown in Figures 4.7-3 and 4.7-4, the overpass would be visible from U.S. Highway 101. The construction of a highway overpass spanning U.S. Highway 101 would visually alter the continuity of views for vehicle-borne travelers of the freeway. The alteration of viewshed would affect both north and southbound travelers. Northbound views include foreground views of the existing farmland on to the west, with



background vistas of the Cerro San Luis and the Santa Lucia Mountains. Southbound views include the willows and eucalyptus windrows along Prefumo Creek and the edges of the commercial uses clustered at the Los Osos Valley Road/U.S. Highway 101 interchange in the foreground and the Irish Hills in the background.

For northbound travelers, views of Cerro San Luis and the Santa Lucia range would generally remain visible. However, views would be partially obscured for a brief duration of time by the overpass as vehicles approach the overpass. At that point in the travel trajectory, the structures of the San Luis Obispo Promenade shopping complex begin to interrupt the Cerro views. The view obstruction would be of brief duration because of the speed at which most travelers are experiencing the visual environment. Average speeds on this stretch of freeway are generally in excess of 65 miles per hour. The effect on views for southbound travelers would be similar to the effects on northbound views, with the overpass structure briefly obstructing views of the Irish Hills.

Long range views of the important scenic resources in the area would continue to be visible above the interchange, and for users of the bridge structure, who would be elevated above the surrounding vicinity and who would be traveling at slower speeds, views of the same features would be enhanced.

The mass of a concrete bridge structure such as the proposed overpass may create visual incontinuity for drivers traveling along U.S. Highway 101. The overpass complex would be visually prominent for vehicles approaching the overpass for only a very brief duration of time, again due to the speed at which vehicles travel along this highway. However, this type of overpass structure spanning the freeway would not be unexpected in this context, as similar structures are present along the freeway in the project vicinity to both the north and the south.

Lighting associated with the proposed overpass infrastructure could also result in light and glare impacts. Therefore, potential visual impacts of the proposed infrastructure improvements on background views from the freeway are considered potentially significant. Because no plan has been submitted detailing the types of building or lighting materials to be used on the overpass, the precise magnitude of impacts cannot be ascertained. Integration of appropriate design features into the overpass and review by the City's Architectural Review Commission (ARC) could ensure that the structure minimizes potential impacts related to lighting. ARC input could further address other bridge design features, ensuring its compatibility as part of San Luis Obispo's urban infrastructure.

Views of the proposed overpass and interchange would also be visible from portions of Prado Road and the proposed commercial and office/business park development on the Dalidio property. Review of and implementation of design recommendations to the project design by the City's ARC could ensure that such visual impacts are reduced to a level less than significant.

During preliminary review of the interchange, the ARC has indicated that preferred design components for the interchange would include: manipulation of bridge shadow-lines to reduce the visual mass of the bridge; faux-stone facing on retaining walls and bridge features; prominent landscaping to visually frame the bridge structure and soften views of the retaining walls; and featured lighting at each end of the bridge, with bollard-style pedestrian lighting along the interior length of the bridge. It should be noted that these design preferences are



subject to change based on the ARC's final review of the interchange design. In addition, bridge design and associated improvements would be subject to Caltrans design review.

Views from Prado Road. Westbound travelers on Prado Road and viewers at land uses along Prado Road and Elks Lane currently view existing Madonna Road commercial uses and agricultural uses on the Dalidio site across U.S. Highway 101. Foreground views are dominated by vehicles, road signs, and pavement on U.S. Highway 101 and overhead utility lines, with moderately dense vegetation and an overhead utility pole in the middleground, and hills in the background. Views to the south from Prado Road consist of ornamental vegetation the screens views of the City Corporation Yard and Wastewater Treatment Plant. The proposed Prado Road/U.S. Highway 101 interchange and associated improvements would also be visible from travelers on westbound Prado Road and existing land uses adjacent to Prado Road and Elks Lane. Construction of the proposed overpass would raise the elevation of vehicular traffic, which could partially block background views and increase light and glare. Other proposed improvements, including the connection between Prado Road and Elks Lane, the realignment of Elks Lane, and construction of a retaining wall along the City Corporation Yard property to the south, would also degrade views from these vantage points. However, due to the relatively low existing visual quality from these viewpoints, the adverse visual impact of the project would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. To reduce the visual impacts of the proposed project on views from the U.S. Highway 101, the following measure, in addition to measure *AES-1(b)* above, is required.

- AES-5(a)** Prior to approval by Caltrans of final design documents for the interchange, plans for the proposed overpass and retaining walls shall be reviewed by the City's Architectural Review Commission. The ARC shall make recommendations to Caltrans on the design of the overpass and retaining walls. Caltrans shall consider and implement all feasible design recommendations from the ARC. The bridge and retaining wall design should incorporate features that reflect the general character of the area. In its review of the bridge and retaining wall design, the ARC should focus on, but not be limited to, the following elements: massing, decorative treatments, landscaping, lighting, color and texture.

Significance After Mitigation. The above mitigation measure along with measure *AES-1(a)* would reduce impact *AES-4* to a less than significant level.

c. Cumulative Impacts. Buildout of the proposed project would alter the aesthetic rural character of the area by converting an existing agricultural area to urban use. Loss of agricultural open space in this area was identified as a less than significant adverse visual impact in the 1993 EIR for the 1992 Land Use Element/Circulation Element Updates. Although the proposed project would contribute to the loss of open space that was identified in the 1993 EIR, it would not convert additional open space beyond that previously identified. Therefore, the proposed project is considered to have a less than significant cumulative aesthetic impact.

