

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section assesses the DRSP project's potential impacts relating to aesthetics and visual resources. It incorporates information regarding the regulatory setting and analysis of viewsheds and visual resources in and around the community of Nipomo. A primary purpose of this analysis is to determine if a change in the visual environment would occur, whether that change would be viewed as a positive or negative one, and the degree of any change relative to the existing setting. If the project has the potential to cause visual impacts, this section specifically defines those impacts.

This analysis focuses on the potential for the proposed project components to result in impacts on visual resources as seen from public locations and roadways. The baseline visual condition is analyzed, visual resources are identified, and a baseline scenic character is established. The analysis methodology evaluates the aggregate effect that the project may have on the overall visual character of the project site and surrounding landscape. If a change in character is identified, it is compared to viewers' expected sensitivity, and is reviewed for consistency with applicable County of San Luis Obispo (County) and State of California planning policies. Levels of impact are determined according to CEQA definitions and guidelines and County Thresholds of Significance guidance.

4.1.1 Existing Conditions

4.1.1.1 *Regional Character*

The unincorporated community of Nipomo is located along U.S. Route 101 (US 101), between the cities of Arroyo Grande and Santa Maria, approximately 6 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. The regional landscape can be broadly defined as an ancient marine terrace between the coast and the Temettate and Newsome Ridges to the east. Sand dune complexes along the beach transition to wide mesas inland. Creeks and drainages in the region often have an east–west orientation on their way to the ocean. The Santa Maria River generally bounds the region to the south. The native landscape primarily includes coast live oak woodland and coastal sage chaparral with riparian corridors along the drainage ways. Eucalyptus trees were introduced into the area as a forest crop and have since become established over much of the Nipomo Mesa. The large stature of eucalyptus groves creates a dominant visual element throughout the area landscape and along the skyline.

The Nipomo region has a generally rural/suburban visual character, with agriculture, open space, and various density residential areas making up much of the land use. The community of Nipomo serves as a commercial center between Arroyo Grande and Santa Maria. In the past decade or so, the Nipomo area has been recognized as one of the faster-growing areas of San Luis Obispo County. Several residential subdivisions, including large golf resorts, have been constructed west of Nipomo. This increased development has had an incremental effect on the rural appearance of the region. Although the region is becoming somewhat more urbanized, the area still maintains a well-vegetated visual character, due in large part to the mature eucalyptus trees and the native oaks scattered throughout the area. Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-8 provide an overview of the character of the community.



Figure 4.1-1. View from near the intersection of Pomeroy Road and Juniper Street of the residential subdivision southwest of the Specific Plan Area.



Figure 4.1-2. View from Hill Street near Nellie Lane showing typical Nipomo rural residential visual character.



Figure 4.1-3. View from Willow Road near Black Lake Road of golf resort development west of Nipomo.

The Nipomo Old Town center and historic Dana Adobe are located east of US 101. This eastern side of the community also includes a few relatively compact residential subdivisions of different ages, along with scattered agricultural production operations and Nipomo High School. Farther to the east, the topography rises into the foothills, and larger residential parcels and ranchettes are seen. Along US 101, the eastern frontage shows a mix of visual elements, primarily including freeway commercial, older residential, and greenhouses.



Figure 4.1-4. View from Tefft Street near South Wilson Street of Old Town Nipomo east of US 101.

The central business district of the community follows Tefft Street on each side of US 101. Newer and more dense commercial development occurs along West Tefft Street. This development includes corporate-type development and smaller businesses. North and South Frontage Roads extend from West Tefft Street along US 101. These roads are easily visible from the freeway and present a range of development, including freeway commercial, residential subdivisions, storage facilities, vehicle sales, and a swap meet facility.



Figure 4.1-5. View from Mary Avenue near West Tefft Street of the central business district along West Tefft Street.

The southern portion of Nipomo is a combination of varied-density residential areas closer to the community center that transition to agricultural cropland farther south. Neighborhood commercial uses are also scattered throughout this area. Larger residential parcels and ranchettes are common throughout the western portion of the community. This western side of Nipomo also includes three golf resorts, and remnants of large eucalyptus groves tend to be more visually prominent throughout this area.



Figure 4.1-6. View from Orchard Road north of Division Street showing mixed residential development along the south side of the community.

Topographic variety is a primary contributor to the visual character of the Nipomo community. Gradual changes in elevation and low hills can be seen throughout the area. This landform variation can either limit or increase distant views, depending on the viewpoint. The Temettate Ridge approximately 3 miles east of US 101 is visually dominant and provides a high-quality scenic backdrop for much of the community.

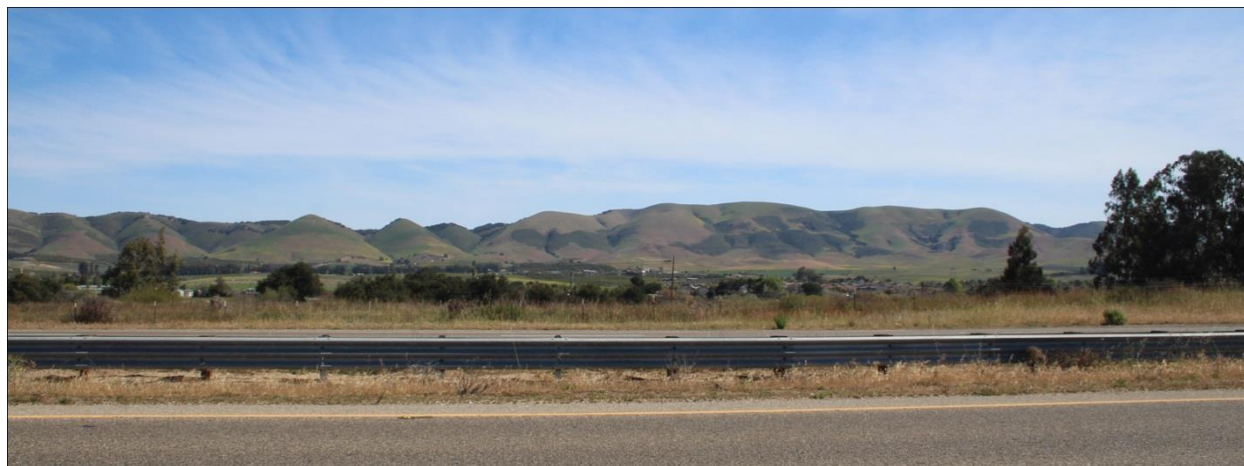


Figure 4.1-7. The scenic Temettate Ridge, as seen looking east from US 101.

Vegetation plays an important part in defining the region's visual quality and character. Mature oak forests and savannah can be seen throughout the area, both in the natural landscape and in many developed locations. Large eucalyptus and other large trees, typically associated with development, are also part of the setting, contributing to the visual quality of the region.



Figure 4.1-8. View from Sandydale Drive near Cory Way showing a well-vegetated neighborhood south of the project area.

4.1.1.2 *Specific Plan Area*

The approximately 288-acre Specific Plan Area is generally bounded by Willow Road and Cherokee Place to the north; Pomeroy Road, Sunnydale Drive, and residential development to the south; Hetrick Road and residential ranchettes to the west; and US 101 to the east. The Specific Plan Area is undeveloped and has historically been utilized for seasonal cattle grazing and periodic seasonal dry farming for feed over the past 100 years. ~~site has been used primarily for grazing for several decades.~~ There are no structures or other improvements on the site. No formal roads exist on the property, although unpaved ranch roads cross portions of the site.



Figure 4.1-9. The Specific Plan Area, as seen from Cherokee Place looking southwest.

The topography of the Specific Plan Area ranges from approximately 340 feet above sea level at the southwest corner rising to approximately 410 feet in elevation along the ridge near the center of the main parcel. The landform and landcover of the site are comprised of three visually distinct areas. The eastern

portion of the project site closest to US 101 is relatively flat with ruderal grasses and few trees. The second area is defined by an oak woodland-covered ridge oriented southwest/northeast, located in the mid-southern half of the site. Because of its elevation, the ridge contributes to the vegetated open space character of the site as seen from much of the surrounding area. The third visually distinct area is along the northern and northwestern portions of the site. This area is identified by undulating topography with large oak trees scattered among open grass areas. Although the trees in this area are less dense than those seen on the ridge, their overall size and number help establish a vegetated appearance and at the same time tend to limit views to the interior of the site as seen from community viewpoints to the west and north.



Figure 4.1-10. The Specific Plan Area, as seen from Hetrick Road looking east.

Portions of the site can be easily seen from much of the surrounding community. However, because of its size, topography, and mature trees, the entire site cannot be seen from any one viewpoint. The overall site is most visible from US 101 and from Willow Road. Surrounding viewpoints to the south and west are mostly limited to portions of the wooded ridge and the site’s perimeter because of intervening mature trees, landform, and residential development.



Figure 4.1-11. Scattered ranchettes north of the Specific Plan Area, as seen from Willow Road.

4.1.1.3 Primary View Corridors

Scenic corridors are view areas, or “viewsheds,” from public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. Principal travel corridors are important to an analysis of aesthetic features because they define the vantage point for the largest number of viewers. The California Department of

Transportation (Caltrans) has not officially designated any routes within the vicinity of the Specific Plan Area as scenic highways. However, the Caltrans Scenic Highways Map shows US 101 as “Eligible” for designation as a scenic highway. In addition, the *County of San Luis Obispo General Plan* considers US 101 as a candidate scenic corridor. The County has adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards along US 101 that address residential and related development; a portion of the Specific Plan Area frontage along US 101 is mapped within the County’s Highway Corridor Design Standards area. US 101 carries an average of approximately 65,000 vehicles per day through Nipomo and past the Specific Plan Area (Caltrans 2017).



Figure 4.1-12. View along southbound US 101 approaching Tefft Street.



Figure 4.1-13. View along northbound US 101 approaching Tefft Street.

4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

In addition to their regulatory application, the following policies, ordinances, and goals serve as indicators of potential sensitivity to changes in the visual environment for purposes of assessing visual impacts associated with implementation of the project.

4.1.2.1 Federal

There are no federal regulations related to visual resources applicable to the project.

4.1.2.2 State

There are no state regulations related to visual resources applicable to the project.

4.1.2.3 Local

4.1.2.3.1 COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO GENERAL PLAN

Conservation and Open Space Element

The *County of San Luis Obispo General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element* (COSE) is a comprehensive long-range planning document that sets forth goals, policies, and actions to address the conservation and preservation of public services, air quality, vegetation and wildlife, mineral resources, and visual resources, historic and archeological resources, as well as energy (County of San Luis Obispo 2010). Chapter 9, Visual Resources, of the COSE, provides the following guidance:

Major Issues

The COSE (Figure VR-1) identifies the Temettate Ridge east of Nipomo and US 101 between Arroyo Grande and State Route (SR) 166 as “Areas Subject to Scenic Protection Standards.”

Scenic Corridors

The County has adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards along US 101 that address residential and related development. Scenic corridors are view areas, or “viewsheds,” from popular public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. Inappropriate development or billboards can intrude upon these viewsheds. Some examples are highly visible graded roads and pads, buildings that are too close to a highway, and building designs that silhouette against the skyline, telecommunications facilities, utilities, signage, and other structures that dominate rather than blend with a natural landscape.

Specific goals and policies in the COSE are evaluated in Table 4.1-1, below.

Land Use and Circulation Elements

Framework for Planning (Inland)

The *County of San Luis Obispo Framework for Planning (Inland)*, Part I of the County’s Land Use and Circulation Elements (LUCE), provides a comprehensive overview of the County’s land use policies and defines land use categories for all unincorporated areas within the county (County of San Luis Obispo 2015). The Framework for Planning (Inland) also explains the criteria used in applying land use categories and combining designations to the land and the operation of the Resource Management System. The Framework for Planning (Inland) includes planning principles, policies, and implementing strategies to strengthen development toward strategically planned communities and to foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

South County Area Plan

The County Area Plans are included as Part II of the County’s LUCE. The *South County Inland Area Plan* refines the general land use policies of the Framework for Planning (Inland) and serves as a guide for future development within the South County Inland Planning Area (County of San Luis Obispo 2014). The South County Area Plan identifies where land use categories are applied within the planning area and establishes policies and programs for land use, circulation, public facilities, services, and resources that

apply areawide, in rural areas, and/or in unincorporated urban areas adjacent to cities. The South County Area Plan provides the following guidance related to visual resources:

1.5 Vision for South County (South) Sub-Area

The vision for the South County (South) sub-area revolves around three significant findings made during the studies leading to the evolution of this area: (1) the desire to protect the essentially rural character of the area and protect the continuation of economic agriculture; (2) the recognition that the current economic base is not capable of providing the public services desired; and (3) the desire of the Nipomo community to be self-governing. Further, the vision of this plan recognizes limited water resources that are incapable of supporting unlimited growth.

The South County (South) sub-area in 2013 has achieved a successful economic climate and yet maintained rural character. A relationship has evolved between an active economy and an older natural ambience that is evident throughout the sub-area. A peaceful rural atmosphere still prevails around and between Nipomo and the villages, as illustrated in Figure 1-3. A unique combination of seclusion and activity is apparent along the roads and streets in the sub-area.

Achieving the Vision

Rural Character

The separation of communities by open countryside gives them a basic identity, as shown in Figure 1-4. Large agricultural areas between Santa Maria, Nipomo and Arroyo Grande imbue that atmosphere. Rural character is also achieved by development in a rural residential density which is the dominant land use on the Nipomo Mesa between the urban and village areas. A combination of this overall low density and development which is sensitive to this issue retains and maintains rural charm. New development fits within a rural ambience both through standard and clustered subdivision designs. Development within rural villages and site-sensitive treatment in scenic areas further enhances this quality of life.

Cañada Ranch Specific Plan Area

Canada Ranch Specific Plan Area. An expansion of the urban reserve line north of Nipomo and west of Highway 101 should be evaluated to provide additional employment and associated residential development that will improve the jobs/housing balance within Nipomo. A specific plan should be prepared showing commercial retail, service commercial and light industrial uses on the large Canada ranch property northwest of Sandy Dale Drive and west of Highway 101.

The specific plan should determine the feasible extent of the job-generating uses as a first priority. Residential uses should be considered only in support of employment development. The property has a large oak woodland that should be evaluated for preservation as a long-term habitat. Due to its size, the site is also a potential location for a high school if feasible. A specific plan should be accompanied by market feasibility and fiscal impact studies and an environmental impact report to determine the logical extent and location of development.

Cañada Ranch Objectives

1. Service commercial and light industrial uses designed as business or office parks that have integrated site planning, architecture, and landscaping;
2. Commercial retail uses to serve travelers at an interchange of US 101 and an extension of Willow Road, if the location is determined to occur on this property, as a gateway to the community and employees and users of the area;
3. Residential uses that are affordable to employees of the area, to be developed concurrently or in later phases upon the success of the nonresidential uses.

[For identified sites in the South County Inland Planning Area,] Standards in Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance require the preparation of specific plans, which have state-mandated content requirements, to identify the optimum types and intensity of these uses in association with residential areas on and off-site. Primary concerns for traffic impacts and transportation alternatives are reflected within the standards. The environmental impacts of the proposed specific plans will be evaluated during their preparation.

Prior to the adoption of any specific plans, any development of these larger holdings, such as the Canada Ranch property, may cluster the allowed density into smaller parcels to create neighborhoods within larger common open space areas. Suburban scale clustered developments can maintain a rural character by fitting each project into the landscape and minimizing its visibility from public collector and arterial roads and highways.

Nipomo Community Plan

The *Nipomo Community Plan*, included in Part III of the LUCE, is intended to provide a long-term guide for land use and transportation within the community of Nipomo (County of San Luis Obispo 2014). The *Nipomo Community Plan* provides programs that are more specifically applicable to the community of Nipomo. The *Nipomo Community Plan* is consistent with other General Plan elements and provides the following guidance related to visual resources.

Chapter 4: Land Use

4.4 Land Use Concepts for Nipomo

A strong public interest exists in retaining the open, suburban character of Nipomo. Lower density development in a band of the Residential Suburban land use category surrounds most of the community. However, within the Residential Single Family and Residential Multi-Family categories, greater densities will increase and reduce the suburban character in exchange for more affordable and convenient housing. Some elements of suburban character can be retained and encouraged with the inclusion of the following guidelines:

1. The County Parks and Recreation Element should include the addition of small parks in this area. Park fees that are generated from this region should be used in the higher density areas in the urban core consistent with the parkland dedication ordinance (Chapter 9 of Title 21).
2. Suburban character can be enhanced through curvilinear street layout, wide and varied building setbacks, dense landscaping, and multi-use paths along streets. The street circulation in this area should be designed to connect neighborhoods with shopping areas, parks and schools to provide a pedestrian environment.

3. Open space can be retained by developing community drainage basins that detain area-wide storm water, or by installing smaller basins within new subdivisions to reduce area flooding. Drainage basins should be designed to allow for multiple uses when feasible.
4. As projects develop, attention to open uses should be evaluated to maximize the quality of life.

4.5 Nipomo Land Use Categories

Commercial Service

Freeway Corridor. The area designated Commercial Service is generally adjacent to the freeway along North and South Frontage Roads. An excellent opportunity is provided to develop business parks and accommodate outdoor storage and manufacturing uses with adequate screening. It will provide an excellent location and large properties for development when access is opened between Tefft Street and the proposed Willow Road interchange. This area also provides the "gateway" to the community, so consistently well-designed structures that face the highway are of primary importance within individual projects.

Because of the area's high visibility from the freeway and residential neighborhoods, special attention must be given to building siting, high quality design, signing, fencing and landscaping. Any open yard uses should be fully screened from the freeway, and all uses should be landscaped along the frontage road. The area should also be screened and landscaped where it is adjacent to residential areas.

North Frontage Road Area. The area should be developed under planned development concepts, since it is still under larger ownerships. This would make it possible to create industrial park type complexes that would be an asset to the community. Appropriate uses are small manufacturing shops, storage, service buildings and sales yards.

4.1.2.3.2 COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO INLAND LAND USE ORDINANCE (TITLE 22)

The County of San Luis Obispo Inland Land Use Ordinance (Title 22) (LUO) identifies the methods for implementation of the County General Plan, guides and manages the future growth of the county, and regulates land use in a manner that will encourage and support the orderly development and beneficial use of land within the county (County of San Luis Obispo 2021). The LUO minimizes adverse effects on the public resulting from the inappropriate creation, location, use or design of buildings, land uses, parking areas, or other forms of land development standards for development. The LUO sets regulations that protect and enhance significant natural, historic, archaeological, and scenic resources within the county and assists the public in identifying and understanding regulations affecting the development and use of land. The LUO provides the following guidance related to visual resources.

Chapter 22.10 – General Property Development and Operating Standards

22.10.095 – Highway Corridor Design Standards

The County LUO identifies standards to govern development of residential structures, residential accessory buildings, residential access roads, specified agricultural accessory buildings and signs located within the South County Highway Corridor Area. These standards are intended to expedite the permit process for projects that maintain scenic views and the rural character along US 101, while providing opportunities to use other design solutions through a discretionary review process to achieve scenic goals.

Chapter 22.98 – South County Planning Area

22.98.070 - South County Sub-area Standards

D. Open space preservation - Cluster division incentive. This standard applies to land where important physical, biological or historic resources are identified both on-site and on adjacent properties, to encourage cluster land divisions that will leave the resources in open space areas. Clustered land divisions may utilize an open space parcel area that is smaller than otherwise required by Chapter 22.22 where an important biological habitat, such as an oak woodland or the Nipomo Creek corridor, or land near an historic site such as the Dana Adobe, is identified through the application's review process. The size of the open space area may be determined by a visual, biological or other applicable analysis of the area in question. The analysis shall identify the area that is necessary to maintain open space to preserve the features of the applicable resource.

22.98.072 - Land Use Category Standards for the South County Sub-area

H. Residential Rural (RR). The following standards apply within the Residential Rural land use category.

8. Canada Ranch property - Specific Plan requirement. A Specific Plan shall be prepared for the Canada Ranch property shown in Figure 98-40 under the guidance of the County upon the application and funding by the property owner(s) prior to the approval of land division applications, although a clustered land division proposed in compliance with the Residential Rural category, Section 22.22.140, and other applicable provisions of this Title, may be approved without Specific Plan preparation. The Specific Plan shall be prepared in compliance with Government Code Section 65450 to plan for the following:

- a. Types of uses.** The concept of a Specific Plan is for uses in the following priority for acreage, scale and intensity:
- (1) Open space uses within the oak woodlands;
 - (2) Industrial park(s) that will generate “basic” employment for the Nipomo and south county area;
 - (3) Commercial service parks that do not conflict with downtown and community shopping commercial uses within Nipomo;
 - (4) Retail uses to serve the daily shopping needs of employees and residents of the site in compliance with purpose and character statements for neighborhood shopping areas in Framework for Planning - Inland Area;
 - (5) Commercial retail uses that are in compliance with purpose and character statements in Framework for Planning - Inland Area for highway-oriented retail;
 - (6) Residential areas to contain a mix of housing unit types, a portion of which should be affordable to average employee incomes on the site, timing to be concurrent with or following establishment and operation of nonresidential uses, the timing to be determined by a market feasibility study.
- b. Oak habitat preservation.** Designation of the existing oak forest habitat for open space preservation, where limited recreational and open space uses may be allowed.

- c. **Pedestrian-oriented site planning.** Location of workplaces, shopping, services, civic buildings and residences in close proximity to each other to facilitate walking and alternative transportation to the private vehicle.
- d. **Architecture and landscaping.** Guidelines for architecture and landscaping that respond to the rural character of the area.

4.1.2.4 **Applicable State, Regional, and Local Land Use Plans and Policies Relevant to Visual Resources**

Table 4.1-1 lists applicable state, regional, and local land use policies and regulations pertaining to visual resources that were adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect and that are relevant to the proposed project. A general overview of these policy documents is presented in Section 4.1.2, *Regulatory Setting*, and Chapter 3, *Environmental Setting*. Also included in Table 4.1-1 is an analysis of project consistency with identified policies and regulations. Where the analysis concludes the proposed project would potentially conflict with the applicable policy or regulation, the reader is referred to Section 4.1.5, *Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures*, or Section 4.11, *Land Use and Planning*, for additional discussion.

Table 4.1-1. Preliminary Policy Consistency Evaluation

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
County of San Luis Obispo General Plan		
Parks and Recreation Element		
Policy 6.8. When maintaining park, recreation and natural area facilities attempt to minimize signs and other structures that may impact the aesthetics of the facility.	The intent of this policy is to maximize the quality of county park, recreation, and natural area aesthetics.	Potentially Consistent. The project has the potential to provide new park and open space areas that maximize visual quality.
Conservation and Open Space Element		
Policy OS 1.1 Future open space protection. Continue to identify and protect open space resources with the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation areas • Ecosystems and environmentally sensitive resources such as natural area preserves, streams and riparian vegetation, unique, sensitive habitat, natural communities, significant marine resources • Archaeological, cultural, and historical resources • Scenic areas • Hazard areas • Rural character 	The intent of this policy is to protect the natural scenic character of the county.	Potentially Consistent. The project would preserve the existing scenic oak ridge and proposed open space areas would encompass approximately 49.8 acres of the Specific Plan Area. Proposed pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trails would either traverse open space areas or run along the edge of open space areas. The project's proposed open space and park amenities have been designed to maintain 17 acres of coast live oak forest habitat, which is a biologically significant resource and provides important native habitat for plants and wildlife.
Policy VR 1.1 Adopt scenic protection standards. Protect scenic views and landscapes, especially visual Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs) from incompatible development and land uses.	The intent of this policy is to preserve sensitive and scenic views and resources within the county.	Potentially Consistent. The project would not affect views of the Temettate Ridge to the east and would preserve the existing scenic oak ridge. The Specific Plan Area is not within a designated Sensitive Resource Area.

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
<p>GOAL 2. The natural and historic character and identity of rural areas will be protected.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to preserve the rural and historic visual character of the county.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>Although the project site is surrounded by existing development in all directions and is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan, the project would inherently change the existing visual character of the site and surroundings through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of approximately over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration.</u></p>
<p>Policy VR 2.1 Develop in a manner compatible with Historical and Visual Resources. Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that are compatible with the natural landscape and with recognized historical character, and discourage designs that are clearly out of place within rural areas.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to preserve the rural, scenic, and historic visual character of the county.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>Although the project site is surrounded by existing development in all directions and is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan, the project would be potentially inconsistent with the existing rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of approximately over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration.</u></p>
<p>Policy VR 2.2 Site development and landscaping sensitivity. Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms. Encourage abundant native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape. Consider fire safety in the selection and placement of plant material, consistent with Biological Resources Policy BR 2.7 regarding fire suppression and sensitive plants and habitats.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to preserve existing natural landforms and native vegetation to maintain the rural, scenic, and historic visual character of the county.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan. Although the project site would preserve the existing oak ridge, it would severely alter the existing native vegetation and natural landforms of the remainder of the site with the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of approximately over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration.</u></p>
<p>Goal 6. A cohesive visual character will be maintained in urban areas.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to encourage a positive aesthetic relationship in urban development.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project has the potential to be visually cohesive with existing development in the central business district.</p>
<p>Policy VR 6.1 Urban design. Ensure that new multi-family residential, mixed-use, and commercial or other non-residential development in the urban and village areas is consistent with local character, identity, and sense of place.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to promote development that respects existing community character.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project has the potential to be visually consistent with existing proximate urban development.</p>
<p>Goal 7. Views of the night sky and its constellations of stars will be maintained.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to minimize adverse effects to quality nighttime views and vistas.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project proposes measures that would minimize nighttime light and glare and views of the night sky.</p>
<p>Policy VR 7.1 Nighttime light pollution. Protect the clarity and visibility of the night sky within communities and rural areas, by ensuring that exterior lighting, including streetlight projects, is designed to minimize nighttime light pollution.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to minimize adverse effects to quality views and vistas.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project proposes measures that would minimize nighttime light and glare and views of the night sky.</p>

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
Framework for Planning (Inland)		
<i>Planning Principles, Policies, and Implementing Strategies</i>		
Principle 1: Preserve open space, scenic natural beauty, and natural resources. Conserve energy resources. Protect agricultural land and resources.	The intent of this policy is to protect existing visual quality and character.	Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> Although the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surroundings through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of approximately over <u>approximately</u> 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial sensitive habitat loss and landform alteration.
Policy 1. Maintain rural areas in agriculture, low-intensity recreation, very low-density residential uses, and open space uses that preserve and enhance a well-defined rural character.	The intent of this policy is to preserve the rural character of the county.	Potentially Inconsistent. Although the Specific Plan Area is planned for development in the County's existing General Plan <u>and South County Area Plan</u> , and the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surroundings through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of approximately over <u>approximately</u> 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial sensitive habitat loss and landform alteration.
Principle 2: Strengthen and direct development toward existing and strategically planned communities.	The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity and avoid development sprawl.	Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area, and the Specific Plan Area is identified for future development in the existing General Plan. Therefore, the project is part of planned growth in the South County area.
Principle 3: Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.	The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity.	Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape, resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area.
Policy 1. Protect and restore the valuable history, cultures, images and identity of communities and rural areas. 2. Protect rural areas between communities to achieve well-defined communities within an attractive rural setting.	The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity.	Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape, resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area.
Policy 3. Establish and maintain a distinct edge between urban and rural areas to enhance community separation while allowing for appropriate and compact urban expansion at the urban edge.	The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity.	Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape, resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area.

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
Policy 4. Enhance the commercial identity and viability of downtowns.	The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity.	Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape, resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area.
Policy 5. Foster a strong local identity through appropriate design of public spaces and buildings.	The intent of this policy is to foster a strong local community identity.	Potentially Consistent. Although the project may appear as a separate development outside of the core business district, it has the potential to provide a strong visual identity consistent with other development in the area.

County of San Luis Obispo Land Use Ordinance

22.10.095 – Highway Corridor Design Standards

<p>D. 5. Project Design and processing – Discretionary permit applications. Minor Use Permit approval is required for projects subject to Subsection D.4 that are unable to meet the requirements for a Zoning Clearance in Standards D.4.c through D.4.h. Minor Use Permit and any Conditional Use Permit applications that may otherwise be required by this Title shall include a visual analysis that is prepared by a registered architect, landscape architect, or other qualified individual acceptable to the Environmental Coordinator. The visual analysis shall be utilized to determine compliance with the intent of D.4 and the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Locate development, including access roads, in the least visible portion of the site consistent with the protection of other resources, as viewed from Highway 101, unless mitigated to insignificant levels. Use existing vegetation and topographic features to screen development from view as much as possible. b. Minimize grading for both structures and roads that would create cut and fill slopes visible from Highway 101. c. Minimize building height and mass by using low-profile design where applicable. Minimize the visual impacts of buildings by using colors that blend with surrounding natural colors and/or screen the building from view. d. Provide landscaping to screen and buffer both road and building development with native or drought-resistant plants, including the extensive use of trees and large-growing shrubs. e. Use of minimal signage is encouraged. Locate signs that are subject to a discretionary land use permit so that they minimize interference with important public views from Highway 101, such as those listed in the preamble to this section. 	<p>The intent of this policy is to require visual impact assessments for residential development within the US 101 corridor for the purpose of preserving visual quality and character.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>Although the project site is surrounded by existing development in all directions and is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan,</u> the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surroundings through the introduction of roads, commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of <u>approximately over</u> 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration within highly visible locations as seen from US 101. Mitigation Measure AES/mm-3.1 would require implementation of a Visual Screening Zone along the length of the project site adjacent to the required utility easement and US 101, for the purpose of reducing visibility of the development and minimizing visual impacts to the vegetated visual character of the site and its surroundings as seen from the highway. The proposed landscaping would, by necessity, be more urban in appearance and would likely take several decades to provide meaningful restoration of the vegetative character and quality of the site.</p>
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Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
<p>D.6. Residential Land Divisions.</p> <p>a. Clustering encouraged. Residential land divisions are encouraged to be clustered in compliance with Section 22.22.140, unless a standard subdivision design can include clustered residential building sites that will be in equal conformity with Subsection 1.5. Application review shall determine whether the proposed parcels or building sites are designed so that residential buildings, accessory buildings and roads will comply with Subsection 1.5, in addition to other applicable standards.</p> <p>b. Open space parcel incentive. Cluster divisions of land that are located within the Highway 101 corridor design standards may utilize an open space parcel area that is smaller than required by Section 22.22.140. The size of the area may be determined by a visual analysis of the area subject to the Highway 101 corridor standards as part of the subdivision review process. The analysis shall identify the area that is necessary to maintain open space views of features identified in the Highway 101 corridor design standards.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to establish and maintain strong community identity.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project would preserve the existing oak ridge, which would be seen from US 101. The project would also create public common areas and trails. These areas would be mostly visible from within the project and would have limited visibility as seen from US 101.</p>
<p>South County Inland Area Plan</p>		
<p><i>South County (South) Sub-area</i></p>		
<p>Guideline: Retain land in open space in new land divisions that will preserve oak woodlands, riparian and other important biological habitats, and historic place surroundings.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to maintain the scenic, historic, and biological qualities of the county's open spaces.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> Although the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surroundings through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of <u>approximately</u> over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial sensitive habitat loss and landform alteration.</p>
<p><i>Primary Goals</i></p>		
<p>4. The rural character and heritage of South County with a strong sense of identity and place.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to preserve the rural visual qualities of the South County planning area.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> Although the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surrounding landscape through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of <u>approximately</u> over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration.</p>

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
<p>6. The long-term sustainability of natural resources as growth occurs with sensitivity to the natural and built environment.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to maintain a long-term balance between development and the natural environment.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> Although the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surrounding landscape through the introduction of commercial, institutional, and residential development; the removal of <u>approximately</u> over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial landform alteration.</p>
<p><i>Supportive Goals</i></p>		
<p>Community Planning. 1. Retain the open, low-density character around and between population centers.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to promote compact urban form and prevent development sprawl between communities.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project would reduce the rural visual character of the site and surrounding natural landscape resulting somewhat in visual sprawl. However, the project has the potential to be visually compatible with existing development in the area and is located in close proximity to other existing urban development. The Specific Plan Area would be incorporated into the Nipomo URL and is identified for future development in the existing General Plan. Therefore, the project would result in new development within an existing population center.</p>
<p>Environment. 1. Promote the protection of natural resources and encourage the following in new development proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Retention of sensitive vegetation. d. Blending of new structures into the surrounding environment and minimal visual impacts in areas considered to be scenic. e. Protection of cultural and historic resources. f. Separation of new residential development from adjacent commercial agricultural and industrial operations. 	<p>The intent of this policy is to maintain high scenic quality and character.</p>	<p>Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> Although the project would preserve the existing oak ridge, the project would inherently change the visual character of the site and surroundings by the introduction of commercial, institutional and residential development; the removal of <u>approximately</u> over 4,000 mature oak trees; and substantial sensitive habitat loss and landform alteration.</p>
<p>SLOCOG 2019 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)</p>		
<p>Policy Objective 6.2. Preserve aesthetic resources and promote environmental enhancements.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to promote maintenance of the existing visual character of the region.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project would preserve the existing oak ridge on-site and would provide new park and open space areas that maximize visual quality. In addition, future development would have the potential to be visually consistent with existing development in the area.</p>
<p>Sustainable Communities Strategy</p>		
<p><i>Context Sensitivity</i></p>		
<p>18. Maintain and enhance quality aesthetic experiences along transportation corridors and surrounding landscapes through mitigation planting, urban streetscape improvements, removal of billboards, and other visual enhancements. (Ongoing)</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to preserve the high-quality visual character along the county's transportation corridors.</p>	<p>Potentially Consistent. The project may be compatible with existing development in the area, and the proposed design elements may appear as urban enhancement; however, it would also substantially reduce the scenic and rural visual character of the site as seen from US 101.</p>

Goals, Policies, Plans, Programs and Standards	Intent of the Policy in Relation to Avoiding or Mitigating Significant Environmental Impacts	Preliminary Consistency Determination
San Luis Obispo County Inland Land Use Ordinance (Title 22)		
22.98.072(H)(f) Siting of Buildings: Locate building envelopes that are subordinate to rural character, such as by varying their elevation along hills and ridges, and where siting below the highest elevations takes advantage of wind-protected locations.	The intent of this policy is to encourage development that does not dominate or diminish the rural character of scenic hills and ridgelines.	Potentially Inconsistent. <u>The Specific Plan Area is planned for growth in the County's South County Area Plan.</u> The project would not affect existing public views of the Temettate Ridge to the east. The project would preserve the existing oak ridge within the site. The locations, massing, and density of future on-site development, however, would dominate views along US 101 and limit views of the oak ridge.

4.1.3 Thresholds of Significance

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382 defines a “significant effect” on the environment to mean a “substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or *aesthetic* significance.”

The determinations of significance of project impacts are based on applicable policies, regulations, goals, and guidelines defined by CEQA and the County. In addition to comparing the project to relevant policies and standards, the aesthetic resources assessment identified which specific criteria contribute most to the existing quality of each view and if change would occur to those criteria as a result of the project. If a change in visual criteria was identified, this change was analyzed for its potential effect on the existing scenic character. This analysis was combined with the potential number of viewers, their sensitivities, and viewing duration in order to determine the overall level of impacts. Specifically, the project would be considered to have a significant effect on visual/aesthetic resources if the effects exceed the significance criteria described below:

- a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- b. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.
- c. In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings, or in an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.¹
- d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Each of these thresholds is discussed under Section 4.1.5, *Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures*, below.

¹ The project setting is considered “non-urbanized” based on CEQA Section 15387, which defines “urbanized area” as a central city or a group of contiguous cities with a population of 50,000 or more, together with adjacent densely populated areas having a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile.

4.1.4 Impact Assessment and Methodology

The findings of this study are based on multiple field observations and reviews conducted between October 2021 and March 2022. Field reviews included the project site as well as the areas in and around the community of Nipomo. Resource inventories were conducted both on foot and from moving vehicles. The Specific Plan Area was viewed from potential public viewer group locations throughout the surrounding area. Existing visual resources and site conditions were photographed and recorded. Assessment of potential project elements was based on a comprehensive review of the Draft DRSP and Design Guidelines, the County General Plan, the South County Area Plan, the *Nipomo Community Plan*, the County LUO, and other supporting guidelines applicable to the Specific Plan Area and the community. Planning documents and approved studies relevant to the project and the surrounding area were referenced for gaining an understanding of the project, applicable regulatory requirements, and established aesthetic values. The results of these field reviews were analyzed in order to consider the existing community character and to determine the consistency of visual changes resulting from the proposed DRSP and related entitlements with the surrounding setting.

This section of the EIR also considers whether the alteration of visual character anticipated from the proposed DRSP, General Plan Amendment, Conditional Use Permit (CUP), Development Agreement, or annexation into the Nipomo Community Services District (NCSA) service area, including all identified off-site improvements, would result in a significant adverse effect to existing views and scenic resources.

The DRSP is required by County policy to be consistent with the County General Plan. The General Plan was adopted and is considered a “self-mitigating” document, in that its objectives and policies are designed to mitigate or avoid impacts to the environment resulting from actions adhering to it. Accordingly, the proposed DRSP Design Guidelines controlling development within the Specific Plan Area are also intended to mitigate potential visual impacts associated with project implementation. If the DRSP and/or applicable General Plan objectives and policies were determined not to fully mitigate or avoid impacts, then additional mitigation measures are provided. Each impact discussion includes a determination as to whether the impacts would be mitigated to a less-than-significant level or would remain significant and unavoidable after implementation of the DRSP objectives and policies.

4.1.4.1 Visual Simulations

Visual simulations were prepared to quantify potential project visibility and to assess related visual effects. The layout and appearance of structures and other development features shown in the visual simulations are based on conceptual designs provided by the project applicant, and as identified in the project description and associated development standards and design guidelines.

The visual simulation process began with carefully executed photographs in strategic public viewpoints of the proposed project. The goal was to compare existing conditions and vegetation to visual simulations of the potential proposed build-out of the Specific Plan Area. The entire Specific Plan Area was three-dimensionally (3D) modeled in the computer-generated software SketchUp. The model consisted of all proposed lot layouts for the various proposed land uses, including proposed changes in grading, vegetation removal, and vegetation screening. Photographs were loaded into the model to create a scaled photo-match simulation of the project. Each of the conceptual buildings massed in each land use was modeled to represent the potential maximum density and maximum application of the proposed development standards for height and setbacks, while staying true to the allowed architectural styles. These photo matches were then exported from the 3D model into Adobe Photoshop to add photo-realism.

To understand the potential visual effects of the DRSP implementation over time, simulations were prepared showing the project immediately following construction, and again at a time-period approximately 20 years later. This step in the process was conducted to ensure the accurate disclosure of

removed and proposed vegetation from each viewpoint over time. The landscape maturity and vegetation type shown in the visual simulations is based on conceptual landscape plans identified in the Draft DRSP and related standards and guidelines.

Accuracy of the computer-generated modeling and visual simulations was field-verified using the known heights and scale of existing site and context features in combination with selective reference pole placement.

4.1.4.2 Project Visibility

Because of the Specific Plan Area's proximity to established uses in the surrounding community and the US 101 corridor, the potential for visibility of proposed improvements is high. Determining the extent of the project's visibility is a critical step in analyzing its potential visual impacts. Field studies were conducted throughout the community to identify locations from where the proposed project could be reasonably seen. Emphasis was given to public areas and transportation corridors, both vehicular and pedestrian. As a result of the visual inventory analysis, six Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were selected to represent the extent of project visibility as well as illustrate the appearance of the project as seen from the surrounding community. Locations of these KVAs are listed below in Table 4.1-2 and shown on Figure 4.1-14. Visual simulations from these locations can be seen in Figures 4.1-15 through 4.1-20.

Table 4.1-2. Key Viewing Areas and Photo-Simulation Locations

KVA	View Location	GPS Coordinates	Simulation Figure Number
KVA-1	From US 101 looking northwest	35°2'52" N, 120°29'39" W	4.1-15
KVA-2	From US 101 looking southwest	35°3'4" N, 120°29'50" W	4.1-16
KVA-3	From North Thompson Ave. looking southwest	35°3'13" N, 120°29'15" W	4.1-17
KVA-4	From Willow Road looking southeast	35°2'60" N, 120°30'30" W	4.1-18
KVA-5	From Hetrick Avenue looking northeast	35°2'34" N, 120°30'38" W	4.1-19
KVA-6	From Pomeroy Road looking north	35°2'21" N, 120°30'21" W	4.1-20




KEY:  Location and direction of Key Viewing Area (KVA) and visual-simulation.

Figure 4.1-14. Key Viewing Area (KVA) location map.

4.1.5 Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

WOULD THE PROJECT HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL ADVERSE EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA?

Specific Plan Area

AES Impact 1: The project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

A substantial adverse impact to a scenic vista would occur if the project would significantly degrade the scenic landscape as viewed from public roads or from other public areas. The degree of potential impact on scenic vistas varies with factors such as viewing distance, duration, viewer sensitivity, and the visual context of the surrounding area.

Scenic vistas are often panoramic views that have high-quality compositional and picturesque value. Scenic vistas from the community of Nipomo and the surrounding area primarily include the quality

viewshed composition of hills east of US 101, combined with natural and agricultural land uses in the mid-ground. As seen from the more developed portions of the Nipomo area, much of the surrounding scenic vista is somewhat blocked by intervening structures and landscaping. In those areas, views of the eastern hills are sometimes still available along the axis of the public street or public open areas such as parks. From the perimeter of the community, the views of the Temettate Ridge create a quality scenic vista and provide an attractive backdrop for the community.

The County General Plan identifies the importance of both natural and agricultural viewsheds. The COSE defines scenic corridors as view areas, or “viewsheds,” from popular public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. In addition, the COSE identifies the Temettate Ridge east of Nipomo and US 101 between Arroyo Grande and SR 166 as an “Area Subject to Scenic Protection Standards.”

Implementation of the DRSP project would have little to no effect on existing public views of the Temettate Ridge and the scenic vista to the east. Because of the extensive mature tree cover and topography throughout the northern, southern, and western portions of the site, many of the potential views to the eastern hills are already substantially blocked as seen from adjacent streets and neighborhoods. Due to view angle and elevation, views to the Temettate Ridge from Nipomo Community Park south of the Specific Plan Area would not be affected by implementation of the proposed project. As seen from important commercial corridors, such as US 101, Tefft Street, and North and South Frontage Roads, views of the scenic hills to the east would not be affected since the project site is oriented in the opposite viewing direction, generally to the west.

Within the project site itself, the existing oak-covered ridge contributes to the scenic vista as seen from much of the surrounding area. The Specific Plan proposes to save that landform and associated trees, which would preserve the ridge’s benefit as part of the scenic vista.

Although portions of the Specific Plan Area would be visible from areas in and around the community, the development would not visually encroach onto the most scenic, character-defining elements of the scenic backdrop to the east. From many viewpoints, due primarily to viewing distance and the associated view angle, even the larger and more dense part of the development would not block views of the Temettate Ridge to the east. From many locations, where visible, buildout per the proposed Specific Plan would be visually subordinate to the overall scenic quality of the hillside community backdrop.

As seen from viewpoints outside of the Specific Plan Area, implementation of the project at the maximum allowable building heights and density defined in the DRSP would have minimal effect on views of the surrounding scenic vistas. From most off-site vantage points, the viewing distance and view angle would allow for quality views of the hills to remain above the new development. Previously unavailable suburban and commercial views would be created that inherently limit some views from the more densely developed internal street frontages but would also allow for views of the distant landscape along the street axes and open areas.

The County has adopted policies, ordinances and guidelines that specifically address visual quality and protection of surrounding viewsheds. Implementation of the DRSP would include implementation of DRSP Land Use and Development Standards, Design Guidelines, and other controlling documents, which are required to be consistent with and support the concepts of the General Plan.

Review of the DRSP indicates that its implementation in adherence to the requirements proposed in the following DRSP chapters and appendices, as well as the associated development maps and plans, would result in a *less-than-significant impact* on scenic vistas and would be consistent with related County plans, ordinances, guidelines, and visual policies:

- Chapter 2. Land Use and Development Standards
- Chapter 3. Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation
- Chapter 4. Circulation
- Chapter 5. Infrastructure and Phasing
- Appendix A. Design Guidelines

AES Impact 1 (Class III)
The project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
Mitigation Measures
<i>Mitigation is not necessary.</i>
Residual Impacts
<i>With adherence to the proposed standards and guidelines, residual impacts related to adverse effects on a scenic vista would be less than significant (Class III).</i>

Off-Site Improvements

AES Impact 2: Off-site improvements would not have an adverse effect on a scenic vista. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

Off-site improvements visible from public viewing areas would primarily include modifications to local roadways, water lines, and water treatment facility expansion. Most of these improvements would be either underground or near ground level. Signalization and wastewater treatment elements, although aboveground, would not block or otherwise adversely affect availability of scenic vistas as seen from surrounding public viewpoints. Therefore, potential impacts would be *less than significant*.

AES Impact 2 (Class III)
Off-site improvements would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
Mitigation Measures
<i>Mitigation is not necessary.</i>
Residual Impacts
<i>Residual impacts would be considered less than significant (Class III).</i>

WOULD THE PROJECT SUBSTANTIALLY DAMAGE SCENIC RESOURCES, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, TREES, ROCK OUTCROPPINGS, AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS WITHIN A STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY?

Specific Plan Area

This CEQA threshold does not apply because the DRSP project site is not within the view corridor of any Officially Designated State Scenic Highway. US 101 is identified as “Eligible” in the State Scenic

Highway Program; however, this CEQA threshold applies only to State of California “Officially Designated” Routes.

Off-Site Improvements

This CEQA threshold does not apply because the DRSP project off-site improvements are not within the view corridor of any Officially Designated State Scenic Highway.

IN NON-URBANIZED AREAS, WOULD THE PROJECT SUBSTANTIALLY DEGRADE THE EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER OR QUALITY OF PUBLIC VIEWS OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS, OR IN AN URBANIZED AREA, WOULD THE PROJECT CONFLICT WITH APPLICABLE ZONING AND OTHER REGULATIONS GOVERNING SCENIC QUALITY?

Specific Plan Area

AES Impact 3: The project would substantially degrade the visual character of the site and its surroundings. Impacts would be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

Project-related actions would be considered to have a significant impact on the visual character of the site and surroundings if they altered the area in a way that substantially changed, detracted from, or degraded the visual quality of the site. The degree to which that change reflects documented community values and meets viewers’ aesthetic expectations is the basis for determining levels of significance. Visual contrast and compatibility may be used as a measure of the potential impact that the project may have on the visual quality of the site. If a strong contrast occurred where project features or activities attract attention and dominate the landscape setting, this may be considered a potentially significant impact on visual character or quality of the site.

Although the Specific Plan Area itself is clearly rural, the existing visual context as seen from most surrounding public viewpoints is a product of both built and natural elements. The Temettate Ridge and foothills rising up east of US 101 are primary contributors to the natural and rural visual quality and character of the area. The visual quality and character of the project site is moderately high, due mostly to its mature oak trees, undulating topography, and lack of development. Along the US 101 corridor, the project site provides value in defining the semi-rural appearance of the community. Along the west side of US 101, the large, undeveloped project site establishes a distinct visual boundary between the Nipomo community and the generally open space and agricultural landscape seen to the north.

Existing development along the US 101 corridor has already established certain types of uses that would be visually expanded with implementation of the DRSP. Residential, commercial retail, hospitality, recreational, open space, and roadway infrastructure are currently seen in the general vicinity. Development of the Specific Plan Area is envisioned in the County General Plan, and future development in this area was determined to be consistent with the community aesthetic vision. However, to the casual observer implementation of the Specific Plan would have the visual effect of expanding the perimeter of the community into a currently undeveloped area. This inevitable community expansion would inherently alter the visual character of the site and its surroundings from that of open land to that of mixed development.

Other than from along the freeway and from neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the perimeter of the development, the project would not be easily seen from public viewpoints throughout most of the surrounding community. The exception would be the existing oak-covered ridge, which would remain visible from many surrounding areas.

As seen from US 101 the proposed commercial development along the highway would generally block views to the interior and western portion of the project. The proposed landscape buffer along the highway would help reduce the urban character of the development and would help the project visually blend with the overall rural-suburban character of the community.

The County has adopted policies, ordinances, and guidelines that specifically address visual quality and protection of surrounding viewsheds. Implementation of the DRSP would be subject to those plans and required to be consistent with and support the concepts of the General Plan. The proposed DRSP, along with County policies, would ensure the orderly development and aesthetically appropriate physical form of the site. Proposed land use policies, development standards, design guidelines, and other regulatory requirements would substantially allow implementation of the DRSP to visually fit the established character of the town. Development of the site would likely not be perceived as an unexpected extension of community development patterns. The proposed phasing of development would reduce potential public perception of sudden and inappropriate alteration of visual character.

Only conceptual-level landscaping and planting is shown in the DRSP, and no plan identifying specific tree removal is included. Preliminary grading and layout plans show extensive tree removal along the northern and southern perimeters of the project. The DRSP also shows no planting buffer in these areas, resulting in a visually abrupt transition between the project and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. In particular, DRSP Neighborhoods 3, 7, 9 and 10 would lack a gradual visual interface with the adjacent community along Cherokee Place, Hetrick Avenue, and Sandysdale Drive. However, public views from these locations are limited.

Alteration of visual quality and character would primarily be the result the presence of new development combined with the overall loss of mature trees. The DRSP Design Guidelines provide architectural and design standards that would likely create the framework for an attractive and cohesive built development. However, the loss of so many large oak trees would compound the built appearance of the overall project, remove a main character-defining attribute of the site, and reduce visual continuity with the surrounding community. In spite of preservation of the existing ridge near the middle of the site, the loss of a substantial number of large native oaks elsewhere would inherently reduce the existing visual quality. The proposed landscaping would by necessity be more urban in appearance and would likely take several decades to reestablish the vegetative character and quality of the site.

As a result of the loss of so many mature oak trees, implementation of the DRSP would substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of the project site and its surroundings.

The project would have the greatest amount of public viewing exposure from US 101, with an average of approximately 65,000 vehicles per day (Caltrans 2017) passing adjacent to the project frontage. Existing views from US 101 are also very important in terms of visual quality and character of the highway corridor and the community of Nipomo. From this highway vantage point, thousands of mature oak trees, rolling topography, and passive grazing land and open space can be easily seen and enjoyed by the traveling public. The project proposes the removal of 3,943 ~~4,004~~ of the existing 5,128 ~~97~~ oak trees (equal to approximately 77%) from the site. As seen from US 101, this extensive loss of mature native vegetation and fundamental alteration of this highly visible scenic landscape into a high-density commercial suburban development would result in a permanent loss of visual quality and character.

The project proposes a 10-foot-wide landscape buffer along the highway frontage with oak trees planted approximately 50 feet apart in a straight line. In addition, a 250-foot-wide utility easement would be maintained in which only shrubs would be allowed. This combined planting buffer would provide little value in terms of reducing the developed character of the project or visually blending the project with the rural and natural scenic landscape. Alteration of visual quality and character would primarily be the result of the presence of new large-scale development combined with the overall loss of mature trees and

landform alteration. The loss of so many large oak trees would compound the built appearance of the overall project, remove a main character-defining attribute of the site, and reduce visual continuity with the surrounding community. In spite of preservation of the existing ridge near the middle of the site, the loss of a substantial number of large native oaks elsewhere would inherently reduce the existing visual quality. The proposed landscaping would, by necessity, be more urban in appearance and would likely take several decades to provide meaningful restoration of the vegetative character and quality of the site.

As a result of the loss of so many mature oak trees, extensive grading, and lack of visual screening, implementation of the DRSP would substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of the project site and its surroundings, and impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

AES Impact 3 (Class II)	
The project would substantially degrade the visual character of the site and its surroundings.	
Mitigation Measures	
AES/mm-3.1	<p>The Dana Reserve Specific Plan shall create a U.S. Route 101 Visual Screening Zone along the length of the project adjacent to the utility easement and U.S. Route 101, for the purpose of reducing visibility of the development and minimizing visual impacts to the vegetated visual character of the site and its surroundings as seen from the highway. The U.S. Route 101 Visual Screening Zone shall be a minimum width of <u>230</u> feet. The screening zone shall be in addition to the minimum <u>2050</u>-foot width of the utility easement, <u>totaling a minimum width of 450</u> feet for the <u>U.S. Route 101 Visual Screening Zone</u>. Existing trees in this zone shall be preserved.</p> <p>Where no trees exist in this zone, oak trees and native shrubs shall be planted. This screening zone shall be implemented as part of the first phase of project development. Plantings shall achieve a minimum of 50% visual screening of the development as seen from U.S. Route 101 within 10 years of planting. Trees planted in this zone shall be subject to the <u>following container sized: 45% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 15-gallon container size, 45% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 24-inch box container size, and 10% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 48-inch container size.</u>size and ratio requirement identified in Mitigation Measure AES/mm-3.2.</p>
AES/mm-3.2	<p>Replacement trees shall be planted within the “on-site” project boundaries in areas that maximize their visibility from public roadways and common areas. Replacement trees shall be planted from the following container sizes: 20% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 15-gallon container size, 20% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 24-inch box container size, and 10% of the replacement trees shall be a minimum of 48-inch container size. All replacement trees shall be maintained in perpetuity.</p>
Residual Impacts	
With implementation of Mitigation Measures AES/mm-3.1 and AES/mm-3.2, residual impacts to visual quality and character would be <i>less than significant (Class II)</i> .	

Off-Site Improvements

AES Impact 4: Off-site improvements would not substantially degrade the visual character of the off-site improvement areas and their surroundings. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

Off-site improvements visible from public viewing areas would primarily include modifications to local roadways, water lines, and wastewater treatment facility expansion. The proposed off-site roadway improvements would result in a minor contribution to the developed character of the DRSP. This character change, however, would appear as a logical component of growth in the area and would not

result in a substantial impact to visual quality and character. The proposed underground water lines would be generally unseen, and the water treatment improvements would be visually consistent with the existing industrial facility; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

AES Impact 4 (Class III)
Off-site improvements would not substantially degrade the visual character of the off-site improvement areas and their surroundings.
Mitigation Measures
<i>Mitigation is not necessary.</i>
Residual Impacts
<i>Residual impacts would be less than significant (Class III).</i>

WOULD THE PROJECT CREATE A NEW SOURCE OF SUBSTANTIAL LIGHT OR GLARE WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT DAY OR NIGHTTIME VIEWS IN THE AREA?

Specific Plan Area

AES Impact 5: The project would create a new source of nighttime lighting or glare. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

The project would result in a significant impact if it subjected viewers from public areas or residences to a substantial amount of new point-source lighting visibility at night, or if the collective lumination of the project resulted in a noticeable spill-over effect into the nighttime sky, increasing the ambient light over the region.

Currently, the Specific Plan Area is undeveloped and has no lighting of any kind. Substantial night lighting and glare is however found in the project vicinity. Existing commercial lighting is seen along Tefft Street, North Frontage Road, and throughout the business district. Although street and other lighting exists throughout the community, many residential neighborhoods have no street lights.

Buildout under the DRSP would inherently increase the amount of light in the Specific Plan Area due to street lighting, commercial and residential lights, lit signage, landscape and security lighting, automobile headlights, etc. The DRSP contains specific objectives and policies intended to minimize light and glare impacts. DRSP Design Guidelines include standards that address commercial, residential, and nonresidential outdoor lighting. The DRSP requires all lighting design and fixtures to be “dark-sky” compliant, consistent with the International Dark-Sky Association and/or County requirements.

Review of the DRSP indicates that its implementation in adherence to these objectives and policies and requirements proposed in the DRSP Design Guidelines would result in a *less than significant* impact on night lighting or glare, and the DRSP would be consistent with related County plans, ordinances, guidelines, and visual policies.

AES Impact 5 (Class III)
The project would create a new source of nighttime lighting or glare.
Mitigation Measures
<i>Mitigation is not necessary.</i>
Residual Impacts
<i>With adherence to the proposed standards and guidelines, implementation of the DRSP would result in a less-than-significant impact on night lighting and glare, and residual impacts would be less than significant (Class III).</i>

Off-Site Improvements

AES Impact 6: Off-site improvements would create a new source of nighttime lighting or glare. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

Proposed off-site improvements include signalization at the new Willow Road/Collector A intersection. For safety reasons, traffic signals are shielded to minimize view of the luminaire from areas other than the intended roadway target. General intersection lighting, if required, would be County standard downward-facing “cobra-style” fixtures with cut-off enclosures. As a result, traffic-related lighting would have minimal to no light-trespass and create no substantial glare to the surrounding area. In addition, the proposed off-site wastewater improvements would not increase lighting beyond existing safety and security uses. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

AES Impact 6 (Class III)
Off-site improvements would create a new source of nighttime lighting or glare.
Mitigation Measures
<i>Mitigation is not necessary.</i>
Residual Impacts
<i>Residual impacts would be less than significant (Class III).</i>

4.1.6 Cumulative Impacts

AES Impact 7: The project would contribute to cumulative aesthetic and visual resource impacts. Impacts would be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

The discussion of cumulative impacts relates to the potential for the project to contribute to an aggregate change in visual quality from surrounding public viewing areas, taking into consideration existing and proposed development. The project’s proximity to US 101 increases its potential to influence the aesthetic quality and character of the area. This change in visual character, if experienced along with other recent and proposed projects, would potentially contribute to an emerging perception that the community of Nipomo is undergoing a visual change toward increasing urbanization.

Other projects considered in conjunction with the proposed project in terms of potential cumulative effects on the visual environment are identified in Chapter 3, *Environmental Setting*, of this EIR. The DRSP project description, site design, and architectural and landscape design guidelines include concepts and measures intended to create an aesthetically pleasing development. Implementation of these concepts and measures, in combination with the visual quality protection policies found in the County General Plan, LUO, and other guidelines, would substantially reduce potential visual impacts. Additionally, the DRSP includes a set of detailed Objective Design Standards (DRSP Appendix A). These standards are objective (not open to interpretation) and mandatory for all development within the Specific Plan Area. Implementation and compliance with these mandatory Objective Design Standards, in combination with the architectural and landscape design guidelines and visual quality protection policies in the County General Plan, LUO, and other guidelines, would ensure future development within the Specific Plan Area reduce cumulative impacts related to visual impacts. ~~However, the DRSP provides only preliminary design guidance and does not ensure adherence by subsequent project development. The DRSP, by necessity, allows for interpretation and influence by future trends and factors, such as economics, resources, and construction realities.~~ Although implementation of the DRSP would, to some viewers, appear as a logical extension of community development patterns, and would be required to adhere to the DRSP's Objective Design Standards, it would also be perceived as a significant alteration of scenic quality and loss of desired visual character to other viewers. Therefore, the DRSP, even with the consideration of applicable County visual protection policies and implementation of Mitigation Measures AES/mm-3.1 and AES/mm-3.2 ~~and AES/mm-7.1~~, would result in a *significant* incremental contribution to visual impacts.

AES Impact 7 (Class II)	
The project would contribute to cumulative aesthetic and visual resource impacts.	
Mitigation Measures	
Implement Mitigation Measures AES/mm-3.1 and AES/mm-3.2.	
<i>AES/mm-7.1</i>	<i>The Dana Reserve Specific Plan shall require preparation of a Visual Impact Assessment for each subsequent implementing development. The Visual Impact Assessments shall analyze the proposed subsequent development prior to its occurrence with the goal of minimizing project noticeability from areas outside Dana Reserve boundaries.</i>
Residual Impacts	
<i>With adherence to Mitigation Measures AES/mm-3.1 and AES/mm-3.2, and AES/mm-7.1, in combination with DRSP Objective Design Standards, County policies and regulations, implementation of the proposed DRSP would result in a less-than-significant cumulative effect on the visual environment (Class II).</i>	



Figure 4.1-15. Key Viewing Area 1: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from US 101 looking northwest.



Figure 4.1-16. Key Viewing Area 2: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from US 101 looking west.



Figure 4.1-17. Key Viewing Area 3: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from North Thompson Avenue looking southwest.

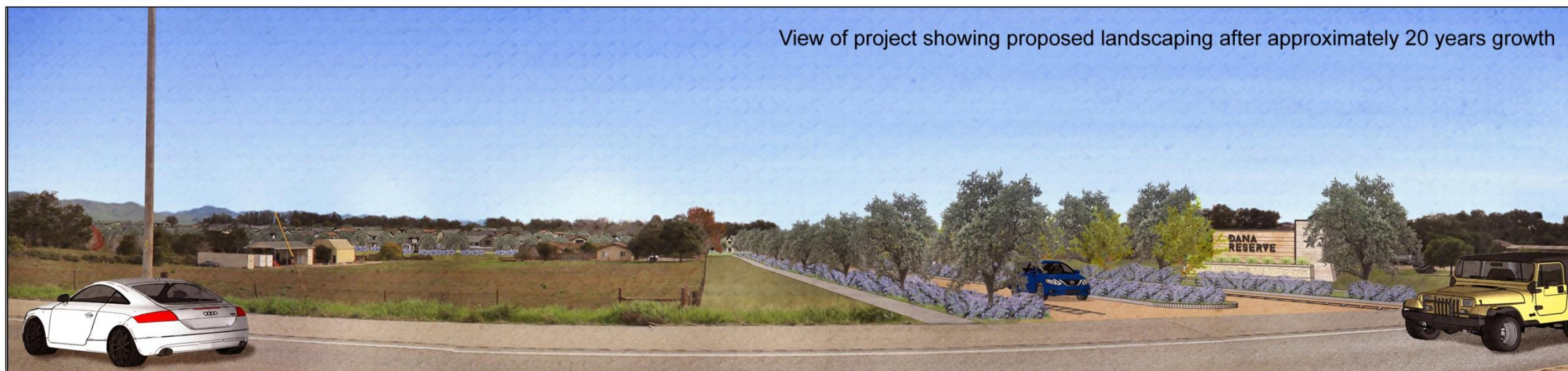


Figure 4.1-18. Key Viewing Area 4: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from Willow Road looking southeast.



Figure 4.1-19. Key Viewing Area 5: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from Hetrick Avenue looking northeast.



Figure 4.1-20. Key Viewing Area 6: Existing view and visual simulations of the Specific Plan Area as seen from Pomeroy Road looking north.