

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section contains an analysis of the impacts the Draft General Plan may have on aesthetics and visual resources in and surrounding the planning area. The section provides a description of the existing visual resources, and an evaluation of how implementation of the Draft General Plan would affect scenic vistas, scenic resources, visual quality and visual character.

4.1.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws pertaining to visual resources are applicable.

STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

California Scenic Highway Program

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. For designated highways, Caltrans requires that local jurisdictions implement a monitoring program that reviews and enforces scenic-corridor protection measures to preserve scenic views.

There are no officially designated scenic highways in or near the planning area. State Route (SR) 74 is an eligible State Scenic Highway, but it has not been designated.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

Riverside County General Plan

The Riverside County General Plan contains several policies related to visual resources. These policies apply to portions of unincorporated Riverside County outside the City of Hemet.

- ▶ **LU 4.1** Require that new developments be located and designed to visually enhance, not degrade the character of the surrounding area.
- ▶ **LU 11.1d** Restrict development on visually significant ridgelines, canyon edges and hilltops through sensitive siting and appropriate landscaping to ensure development is visually unobtrusive.
- ▶ **LU 13.1** Preserve and protect outstanding scenic vistas and visual features for the enjoyment of the traveling public.
- ▶ **LU 13.2** Incorporate riding, hiking, and bicycle trails and other compatible public recreational facilities within scenic corridors.
- ▶ **LU 13.3** Ensure that the design and appearance of new landscaping, structures, equipment, signs, or grading within Designated and Eligible State and County scenic highway corridors are compatible with the surrounding scenic setting or environment.
- ▶ **LU 13.4** Maintain at least a 50-foot setback from the edge of the right-of-way for new development adjacent to Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways.

- ▶ **LU 13.5** Require new or relocated electric or communication distribution lines, which would be visible from Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways, to be placed underground.
- ▶ **LU 13.6** Prohibit offsite outdoor advertising displays that are visible from Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways.
- ▶ **LU 13.7** Require that the size, height, and type of on-premise signs visible from Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways be the minimum necessary for identification. The design, materials, color, and location of the signs shall blend with the environment, utilizing natural materials where possible.
- ▶ **LU 13.8** Avoid the blocking of public views by solid walls.
- ▶ **C 19.1** Preserve scenic routes that have exceptional or unique visual features in accordance with Caltrans' Scenic Highways Plan.
- ▶ **OS 22.1** Design developments within designated scenic highway corridors to balance the objectives of maintaining scenic resources with accommodating compatible land uses.
- ▶ **OS 22.2** Study potential scenic highway corridors for possible inclusion in the Caltrans Scenic Highways Plan.
- ▶ **OS 22.3** Encourage joint efforts among federal, state, and County agencies, and citizen groups to ensure compatible development within scenic corridors.
- ▶ **OS 22.4** Impose conditions on development within scenic highway corridors requiring dedication of scenic easements consistent with the Scenic Highways Plan, when it is necessary to preserve unique or special visual features.
- ▶ **OS 22.5** Utilize contour grading and slope rounding to gradually transition graded road slopes into a natural configuration consistent with the topography of the areas within scenic highway corridors.

4.1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Hemet planning area encompasses an area of about 62,000 acres at an average elevation of about 1,600 feet above mean sea level with the highest point being above 2,000 feet. Hemet is located in a valley at the foot of Mount San Jacinto. Long known as a prime agricultural area, Hemet has developed into a major trading area for western Riverside County and is well established as a retirement center. The existing visual character of the planning area is dominated by a mix of urban development in the central and eastern portions, with agricultural uses and natural open spaces in the western and southeastern portions. The north easternmost portion of the planning area consists largely of undeveloped land associated with the San Jacinto River watershed.

The Hemet area contains and is surrounded by numerous examples of natural topographic beauty. The San Jacinto Mountains, the San Bernardino National Forest and Mountains, and the San Gabriel Mountains provide a scenic background and contribute to the visual character of Hemet. These mountains provide a visual backdrop for views in the planning area, highlight distinguishing landmarks, and offer orientation points as people move about the community. Views of these resources are important to the visual character of the planning area.

Hillsides and hilltops shape the visual character of the planning area. Many also offer spectacular outward views and vistas. Unique landforms and hillsides include the Domenigoni Mountains at Diamond Valley Lake, Santa Rosa Hills, Lakeview Mountains, Tres Cerritos Hills, and Park Hill. The Santa Rosa Hills rise from the southeastern section of the planning area, reaching more than 2,300 feet elevation above mean sea level. They contain Simpson Park, the Ramona Bowl, and recreational opportunities including hiking. The Lakeview Mountains border the western edge of the planning area; the highest point is more than 2,600 feet above mean sea

level. Tres Cerritos Hills are a series of three peaks located in the northwest quadrant of the planning area. The hills are a well-known landmark that enhance the visual character of the City and provide a sense of direction for residents. Park Hill is a mountain summit located along the northern edge of the planning area, mostly within the City of San Jacinto. The summit climbs to about 1,900 feet above mean sea level and provides scenic vistas for Hemet residents.

In addition to views of mountains and hillsides, the planning area's canyons, including Bautista Canyon and Reinhardt Canyon, also contribute to Hemet's visual character. The canyons offer opportunities for recreation and residential development, and Bautista Canyon is a migration corridor for birds connecting the Anza-Borrego region to the San Jacinto Valley. The canyon and waterways also provide habitat links for bobcats and mountain lions. Reinhardt Canyon is located on the east side of the Lakeview Mountains, in the western portion of the planning area. Reinhardt Canyon consists of ranches and estate properties, and is the site of the Hemet Maze Stone, a prehistoric petroglyph.

The Hemet area also contains numerous rock outcroppings of various sizes that provide natural beauty and are a regionally unique asset. Many have been incorporated into parks, residential developments, and open space areas.

4.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Visual Resources

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact on visual resources is considered significant if the proposed project would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees and rock outcroppings;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

This aesthetics impact analysis evaluates visual changes that would occur with implementation of the Draft General Plan using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. The aesthetic impacts of the Draft General Plan were evaluated by comparing existing land uses with future land uses proposed within the Draft General Plan. The assessment of visual quality is a subjective matter. What is visually pleasing to one person may not be considered so by another, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether an alteration would be considered a substantial degradation of visual character. For the purposes of this analysis, a conservative approach was taken in analyzing the potential for degradation of visual resources, so permanent alterations of a visual resource are considered significant.

There are no state-designated scenic highways in Hemet (although SR 74 is eligible), so this EIR does not evaluate the potential for substantial damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

ANALYSIS APPROACH

The analysis of impacts is based on the likely consequences of adoption and implementation of the Draft General Plan, including future land uses consistent with the Land Use Plan, and supporting roadways, infrastructure, and public services; along with implementation of Draft General Plan policies and programs.

For visual resource impacts, compliance with existing regulations presented in Section 4.1.1, "Regulatory Framework," and/or implementation of Draft General Plan policies and programs listed below would result in reduced visual impacts. Visual resource policies and programs include:

Policies

- ▶ **OS-2.2 Resource Conservation** Conserve view corridors and ridgelines, the San Jacinto River and mountains, slopes, significant rock outcroppings, historic and landmark trees, and other important landforms and historic landscape features through the development review process.
- ▶ **OS-2.9 County Hillside Development** Coordinate with Riverside County on the development of hillside and other sensitive areas outside of the City jurisdictional boundaries in the planning area and Hemet's sphere of influence.
- ▶ **LU-1.6 Open Space Preservation.** Recognize and preserve open space, prominent landforms, natural beauty and critical environmental areas through creative design and integrate open space and trail networks within the urban fabric to enhance the character and quality of life.

Programs

- ▶ **OS-P-1 Update Zoning Standards.** Include appropriate restrictions within the Open Space zoning and the Hillside Overlay to effectively preserve the natural open space character of the city and respond to other requirements of the designations.
- ▶ **OS-P-10 View Corridors.** During project review, analyze the project's impact on view corridors of the mountains, slopes, significant rock outcroppings, historic and landmark trees, and other natural features for both the project location and neighboring properties.
- ▶ **OS-P-11 Riverside County Hillside Development.** Coordinate with Riverside County on hillside preservation policies and project review.
- ▶ **CD-P-11 Hillside Protection.** Throughout the ongoing development review process, the City shall employ the following hillside preservation and protection techniques:
 - Enforcing the City's Hillside Development Ordinance and updating the Ordinance to reflect policies of the General Plan not already contained in the ordinance and to reflect hillside development patterns and trends.
 - Adopting design standards and guidelines specific to hillside development that address, for example, site architecture, building heights, location, grading, materials, and street layout.
 - Encouraging clustering of dwelling units as an acceptable hillside preservation technique. Clustering units should not result in a density that exceeds the maximum density established by the Hillside Residential land use designation.
 - Developing roadways, driveways, and other access points in a manner that enables adequate emergency access.
 - Strictly enforcing provisions in the Hemet Municipal Code for Wildland Interface Areas (Chapter 14, Article IX, Division 2) to ensure hillside development proceeds in a fire safe environment.
 - Identifying, preserving, and protecting prominent ridgelines, canyons, and other natural land forms such as rock outcroppings.
 - Ensuring new development is consistent with all applicable regulations, including but not limited to, the City's Municipal Code and the Western Riverside County Multiple-Species Habitat Conservation Plan.

- ▶ **CD-P-14 Downtown Viewsheds.** The City shall update the zoning code to restrict future building heights along Florida Avenue within the downtown core to two stories to maximize views of the San Jacinto Mountains and place a height overlay restriction on both sides of Florida Avenue within portions of the Downtown District outside the downtown core. Through the development review process, the City shall maximize views toward Idyllwild, the San Jacinto Mountains, and other scenic resources.
- ▶ **CD-P-8 Hemet Scenic Highway Setback Program.** The City shall update and revise the Scenic Highway Setback manual to include California Friendly Landscape Palette and other design considerations.
- ▶ **CD-P.20 Light Pollution and Reflective Materials.** Require lighting practices that reduce light pollution in new development areas. New lighting fixtures shall cast light downward toward the ground and reduce spillover light. Existing light fixtures requiring replacement or repair shall be upgraded so they also cast light downward. Exterior building materials in new development shall be composed of a minimum 50% low-reflectance, nonpolished finishes, and bare metallic surfaces found on infrastructure such as pipes and poles shall be anodized or painted to minimize reflectance and glare.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 4.1-1 *Adverse Impacts on a Scenic Vista. Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in new urban development that would permanently alter and block some views of scenic vistas within the planning area, including views of the San Gabriel Mountains, San Jacinto Mountains, and San Bernardino National Forest and Mountains, as well as views of hillsides and other topographic features. As a result of implementing General Plan policies and programs that reduce the loss of views, this impact would be less than significant.*

Scenic vistas in Hemet include views of the San Jacinto Mountains, the San Bernardino National Forest and Mountains, and the San Gabriel Mountains, as well as views of the Domenigoni Mountains at Diamond Valley Lake, Santa Rosa Hills, Lakeview Mountains, Tres Cerritos Hills, Park Hill, Bautista Canyon, and Reinhardt Canyon.

These scenic vistas are typically viewed from publicly accessible areas, including parks and roadways. Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in substantial new development within and surrounding the existing developed area of Hemet. Development of new urban uses would block some public views of these scenic vistas that are currently available along public rights-of-way and other publicly accessible portions of the planning area, including views along SR 74 and SR 79.

However, Draft General Plan policies and programs would reduce impacts on scenic vistas. Policy OS-2.2 uses the development review process to conserve view corridors, rock outcroppings, ridgelines, and other landscape features. Policy OS-2.9 directs the City to coordinate with Riverside County to protect hillside views outside the planning area. Program OS-P.1 changes the City's Zoning Ordinance to include restrictions in the Open Space zone and Hillside Overlay to preserve the natural open space character in parts of the city. Program OS-P-10 would require project reviews to consider impacts to view corridors of mountains, rock outcroppings, and other visual resources. Program CD-P-11 employs hillside preservation and protection techniques through the development review process, including the adoption of hillside development design standards for building height and material selection, grading, and street layout. CD-P-14 directs additional Zoning Code updates regarding building heights along Florida Avenue to maximize views of the San Jacinto Mountains and other scenic resources.

Implementation of these policies and programs would reduce the impact associated with scenic vistas to a less than significant level because the City's Zoning Ordinance would be amended to include restrictions to preserve natural open space character, and specific view corridors would be considered in review of projects. Furthermore, new development consistent with the Draft General Plan would be required to employ hillside development

standards, and building height standards along Florida Avenue would be amended to maximize views into the San Jacinto Mountains. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**. No mitigation measures are required.

IMPACT 4.1-2 Degrade Existing Visual Character. *Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in new urban development that would substantially alter the current visual character present within and surrounding the planning area. As a result of implementing General Plan policies and programs, this impact would be less than significant.*

The overall visual character of Hemet can be described as a mix of suburban and rural residential land uses. Large, undeveloped parcels are distributed throughout the planning area, contributing to open views toward the surrounding mountains and hillsides. Agricultural uses, including vineyards, grazing and animal keeping, and farming, are also located within the planning area. Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in conversion of land within the planning area from agricultural and open landscapes to urban development. Areas identified for new urban development in the Draft General Plan include portions of west Hemet and areas in the southern portion of the planning area. The character of new development would be similar to that which is already present throughout urbanized portions of the planning area. This change from a visual environment where rural residential, agricultural, and open space uses are predominant to a mix of housing, shops, schools, parks, and other urban land uses would constitute a substantial change. Development in previously undeveloped areas could also result in the destruction of scenic resources (such as rock outcroppings and landmark trees) through site grading, trenching, and other construction activities.

Draft General Plan policies and programs seek to maintain and enhance the quality of the visual character in and around Hemet. Policy OS-2.2 uses the development review process to conserve view corridors, rock outcroppings, ridgelines, and other important landscape features. Policy OS-2.9 directs the City to coordinate with Riverside County to protect hillside views that are outside of the planning area. Program OS-P.1 changes the City's Zoning Ordinance to include restrictions in the Open Space zone and Hillside Overlay to preserve natural open space character in parts of the city. Program OS-P-10 would require project reviews to consider impacts to view corridors of mountains, rock outcroppings, and other visual resources. Program CD-P-11 employs hillside preservation and protection techniques through the development review process, including the adoption of hillside development design standards for building height and material selection, grading, and street layout. CD-P-14 directs additional Zoning Code updates regarding building heights along Florida Avenue to maximize views of the San Jacinto Mountains and other scenic resources.

Implementation of these policies and programs would reduce the impact associated with visual character to a less than significant level because the City's Zoning Ordinance would be amended to include restrictions to preserve natural open space character, and specific view corridors would be considered in review of projects. Furthermore, new development consistent with the Draft General Plan would be required to employ hillside development standards, and building height standards along Florida Avenue would be amended to maximize views into the San Jacinto Mountains. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**. No mitigation measures are required.

IMPACT 4.1-3 Create New Sources of Light or Glare. *Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in the development of new urban uses, which would create substantial new sources of light and glare in areas that are currently agricultural or natural in character. As a result of implementing General Plan policies and programs, this impact would be less than significant.*

Hemet is surrounded by open and agricultural lands that contain few major sources of light and glare. By contrast, urban land uses generate light and glare, which affect the brightness of the night sky. Urban uses in the planning area already generate substantial light and glare that affect nighttime views in rural areas. However, new urban uses that would occur as a part of implementation of the Draft General Plan would increase existing levels of light and glare. Implementation of the Draft General Plan would extend areas affected by nighttime sky glow to include areas currently void of significant sources of glare or nighttime lighting, particularly in western Hemet. These

additional sources of nighttime skyglow could potentially obscure nighttime views of stars. Furthermore, urban development would create additional reflective surfaces and cause additional glare, including glare affecting motorists traveling along SR 74 and SR 79 during both night and day.

The Draft General Plan provides programs to reduce new sources of light and glare. Program CD-P-20 requires lighting practices that reduce light pollution in new development areas, and requires new lighting and existing lighting upgrades to cast light downward and reduce spillover lighting. This program would also reduce the amount of reflective surfaces used in new construction to minimize new sources of glare. Implementation of these programs would reduce the increase in light and glare from urban development within previously undeveloped areas. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**. No mitigation measures are required.

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