

## **5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE**



This section describes the existing aesthetic resources in the Project area and discusses potential impacts associated with implementation of the proposed Project. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the existing visual characteristics resulting from the proposed Project and includes discussions of existing City regulations intended to reduce or avoid these impacts. The analysis of aesthetic resources presented in this section is based on a review of the Project Description (Section 2.0 of this Draft EIR), City regulations, and the existing visual character of the Project area.

### 5.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

#### PROJECT AREA

The Project area is located in the southern portion of Elk Grove, in southern Sacramento County. Elk Grove is approximately 14 miles southeast of downtown Sacramento and approximately 12 miles north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin county boundary. The site is generally bounded by State Route (SR) 99 and a future, undeveloped road to the east, Poppy Ridge Road to the north, with Bilby Road making up the northern extent of the panhandle portion of the site, an area proposed to be an extension of Big Horn Boulevard and Bruceville Road to the west, and Kammerer Road, which coincides with the City boundary, to the south. The area south of Kammerer Road and west of Bruceville Road is in unincorporated Sacramento County.

The Project area is primarily flat agricultural land, with rural residences and various agricultural buildings. Trees are sparsely distributed, located primarily along driveways and property lines. A channelized drainage runs roughly east-west in the southern half of the Project area. There is also a telecommunications facility with an approximately 100-foot antenna near the southeast corner of the Project site.

There are no existing paved roads located within the Project area, but unpaved portions of Bilby Road and McMillan Road and several unpaved roadways and driveways are located in the interior of the site. Telephone poles are located along the roadways lining the Project area, both within the Project boundary and on the opposite side of the road. There are several roadside ditches along the boundary of the Project area.

The current nighttime lighting conditions on the Project area can be characterized as primarily unlit and natural. There are currently no streetlights located within the Project area. Some streetlights are located adjacent to the developed apartment complex on the northeast corner of the intersection of Bilby Road and Bruceville Road.

#### SURROUNDING LAND USES

Approved development plan areas surround the Project area on all sides, except to the south. The Laguna Ridge Specific Plan (LRSP) area is located north the Project area, the East Franklin Specific Plan (EFSP) area is located to the northwest, and the Elk Grove Promenade and approved Sterling Meadows development are located to the east.

The EFSP area has already been developed with urban uses, and portions of the LRSP area have begun to be developed, but the portions of the EFSP area immediately adjacent to the Project area are primarily undeveloped at this time, although there is an existing large apartment complex located at the northeast corner of Bilby Road and Bruceville Road. The areas immediately adjacent to the Project area are planned for primarily residential uses of varying densities, but are currently vacant lands with no major agricultural uses present. An elementary school, fire station, and community park are planned north of Poppy Ridge Road, but this area is currently occupied by rural residential uses on large lots.

## 5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

---

Construction of the Elk Grove Promenade has begun, but was halted, in the area located between the approved, but undeveloped, Sterling Meadows project and SR 99. The Elk Grove Promenade site currently contains unfinished commercial buildings, and the Sterling Meadows site is currently being used for agriculture.

The character of the area south of the Project area is very similar to the Project area itself, largely agricultural with scattered rural residences and agricultural buildings. At this time, no development is planned for areas south of the Project area.

Lighting in the surrounding areas includes illumination of SR 99 to the east and developed areas in the LRSP and the remainder of the City beyond.

### 5.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

#### LOCAL

##### Elk Grove General Plan

The City of Elk Grove General Plan contains the following policies and actions related to visual resources and aesthetics that apply to the proposed Project. These policies and goals are contained in the Conservation and Air Quality Element as well as the Land Use Element (Elk Grove 2003a). The Project does not include any actions or components that conflict with these General Plan policies. However, it should be noted that the final authority for interpretation of a policy statement, determination of the Project's consistency, ultimately rests with the Elk Grove City Council.

**"Policy CAQ-8:** Large trees (both native and non-native) are an important aesthetic (and, in some cases, biological) resource. Trees which function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat should be retained to the extent possible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks, drainage channels, and other uses and structures.

If trees cannot be preserved onsite, offsite mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee may be required by the City. Where possible, trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees that were removed.

Trees that cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City."

**"Policy LU-35:** The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development—including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development—is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment."

**"Policy LU-38:** Reduce the unsightly appearance of overhead and aboveground utilities. (Further implemented through LU-38 Action 1-2)."

**"Policy LU-38-Action 1:** To the extent possible, new utility facilities should be located underground. Facilities to be placed underground should include electrical transformers (where consistent with the guidelines of the electrical utility), water backflow preventers, and similar items."

**“Policy LU-38-Action 2:** Require that development on sites with existing overhead utilities be required to place these facilities underground where consistent with the guidelines of the electrical utility.”

### **Elk Grove Zoning Code**

The Elk Grove Zoning Code (Elk Grove Municipal Code Title 23) provides development standards that address building mass, setbacks, landscaping, lighting, and signage to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Chapter 23.56 addresses lighting specifically, and the following excerpt is relevant to the proposed Project:

#### **23.56.030 Multifamily and nonresidential outdoor lighting standards.**

Except as otherwise specified herein, outdoor lighting standards listed below apply to all new multifamily residential and nonresidential development. The designated approving authority may grant exceptions to the shielding requirements, maximum level of illumination, and height of outdoor light fixtures for outdoor recreation facilities on park sites with the finding that the light impacts do not create a public nuisance for abutting residential property.

- A. **Shielding Required.** Except as otherwise exempt, all multifamily and nonresidential outdoor lighting shall be constructed with full shielding. Where the light source from an outdoor light fixture is visible beyond the property line, shielding shall be required to reduce glare so that the light source is not visible from within any residential dwelling unit.
- B. **Level of Illumination.** During hours of darkness, the minimum and average maintained foot-candles of light shall be consistent with the provisions listed below. A point-by-point photometric calculation listing the number, type, height, and level of illumination of all outdoor lighting fixtures shall be required in conjunction with the development permit application and prior to issuance of a building permit or site improvement plans to ensure compliance with these provisions.

Parking lots, driveways, trash enclosures/areas, public phones, and group mailboxes shall be illuminated with a minimum maintained one (1 fc) foot-candle of light and an average not to exceed four (4 fc) foot-candles of light.

Pedestrian walkways shall be illuminated with a minimum maintained one-half (0.5 fc) foot-candle of light and an average not to exceed two (2 fc) foot-candles of light.

Exterior doors of nonresidential structures shall be illuminated during the hours of darkness with a minimum maintained one (1 fc) foot-candle of light, measured within a five (5' 0") foot radius on each side of the door at ground level.

In order to minimize light trespass on abutting residential property, illumination measured at the nearest residential structure or rear yard setback line shall not exceed the moon's potential ambient illumination of one-tenth (0.1 fc) foot-candle.

- C. **Maximum Height of Freestanding Outdoor Light Fixtures.** The maximum height of freestanding outdoor light fixtures for development abutting residential property shall be twenty (20'0") feet. However, the designated approving authority may grant

## 5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

---

exceptions to this height restriction in conjunction with design review if the proposed lighting plan has negligible light glare and spill impacts on adjoining residential properties. Otherwise, the maximum height for freestanding outdoor light fixtures shall be thirty (30'0") feet.

- D. Type of Illumination. All new outdoor lighting fixtures shall be energy efficient with a rated average bulb life of not less than ten thousand (10,000) hours.
- E. Hours of Illumination. Automatic timing devices shall be required for all new outdoor light fixtures with off hours (exterior lights turned off) between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. However, outdoor lights may remain on during the required off hours when:
  - 1) The hours of operation of the associated use extend into the required off hours (lighting may stay on during the hours of operation of the use);
  - 2) Illuminating flags representing country, state, or other civic entity (also see EGMC Section 23.62.090(B)(4)); and
  - 3) Functioning as security lighting (e.g., illuminating a pathway, building entry, etc.).
- F. Outdoor Sports Field/Outdoor Performance Area Lighting.
  - 1) The mounting height of outdoors sports field and outdoor performance area lighting fixtures shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the designated approving authority.
  - 2) The hours of operation for the lighting system for any game or event shall not exceed one (1) hour after the end of the event.
- G. Architectural/Landscape Lighting. Outdoor light fixtures used to illuminate architectural and landscape features shall use a narrow cone of light for the purpose of confining the light to the object.
- H. Sign Lighting. The artificial illumination of signs, both from an internal or external source, shall be designed to eliminate negative impacts on surrounding rights-of-way and properties, and shall comply with EGMC Chapter 23.62, Signs on Private Property. "

### **"23.56.040 Lighting prohibited.**

The following outdoor light fixtures shall be prohibited as specified below. Existing light fixtures legally permitted or authorized prior to adoption of this chapter may be maintained.

- A. Neon tubing or band lighting along building structures as articulation.
- B. Searchlights.
- C. Illumination of entire buildings. Building illumination shall be limited to security lighting and lighting of architectural features authorized by the designated approving authority in conjunction with the required development permit(s).
- D. Roof-mounted lights except for security purposes with motion detection and full shielding so that the glare of the light source is not visible from any public right-of-way.

- E. Any light that imitates or causes visual interference with a traffic signal or other necessary safety or emergency light.”

### **Elk Grove Design Guidelines**

In March 2003, the City Council adopted a Design Review Ordinance (City of Elk Grove Municipal Code Section 23.16.080) and corresponding Elk Grove Design Guidelines. Section 23.16.080 established an expanded design review process for all development requiring additional site and design consideration beyond conformance with minimum standards of the Zoning Code. The Design Guidelines include design provisions for site planning, architecture, lighting, and landscaping. Adopted guidelines also include provisions regarding the preservation of significant natural features and compatibility with surrounding property. The City strongly encourages project design that incorporates existing significant natural features of project areas, including but not limited to trees/tree clusters, topography, and creeks. The guidelines encourage the use of landscaping to reduce potential impacts of lighting from parking areas on both the project area and on adjacent vacant land. In addition, the guidelines specify that perimeter landscaping be designed to maximize screening and buffering between adjacent uses. The proposed Project would be required to comply with all of the relevant policies found in the Design Guidelines.

### **5.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

#### STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The impact analysis provided below is based on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Appendix G thresholds of significance. A project is considered to have a significant effect on the environment if it will:

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

#### METHODOLOGY

Evaluation of potential aesthetic, light, and glare impacts of the proposed Project was based on review of relevant planning documents, including the City of Elk Grove General Plan, Design Guidelines, and Zoning Code, review of aerial photographs of the area, and field review of the Project area and the surrounding area.

It is important to note that what one person may consider a scenic resource, another may not find so. Similarly, what one person may feel is a significant adverse impact on scenic resources may be considered to be an improvement in character to another person. Due to the subjective nature of this type of analysis, this section assumes that any permanent substantial change from the existing visual character of an area is considered to be significant.

## 5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

---

### Sports Complex

The proposed Project includes a Sports Complex Overlay; however, a location for the overlay is not defined by the Project. While designation of the Sports Complex Overlay does not guarantee the future development of a large-scale sports complex, if a sports complex were to be constructed, the character of that area would change from an agricultural field to sports fields, associated buildings, parking lots, bleachers, and lighting. Because the location and design of the sports complex is not currently known, the potential impacts associated with light and glare cannot be accurately determined at this time. Generally, lighting from a stadium or athletic fields would be brighter and be cast wider than lighting associated with typical office or light industrial uses. Typical mitigation to address lighting associated with a large-scale sports complex would include preparation of detailed lighting plans designed to minimize adverse impacts and spillover lighting onto adjacent properties and subject to City review and approval. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15145, if the impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact. No further discussion is feasible at this time.

### PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### Scenic Vistas and Highways (Standards of Significance 1 and 2)

**Impact 5.1.1** The Project area is not located in the vicinity of, or within view of, a scenic vista or designated state scenic highway. There is **no impact**.

No scenic vistas or designated state scenic highways are visible from the Project area. Similarly, the Project area is not within view of any scenic resources. Therefore, there is **no impact**.

#### Mitigation Measures

None required.

#### Change in Existing Visual Character (Standard of Significance 3)

**Impact 5.1.2** The proposed Project would develop the Project area and permanently alter the character of the area from agricultural uses to a developed urban character with office, light industrial, housing, commercial, and park uses. This impact is **significant and unavoidable**.

The Project area is occupied by open agricultural land with relatively few buildings and trees. The site is flat and has little topographic variation. Several large parcels within the site contain row crops or are fallow. Due to the flat nature of the site, views from the Project area are largely of agricultural land, and in some areas with fewer trees, mountains can be seen in the distance to the west and to the east on clear days. Views to the northwest of the Project area are dominated by residential development. The northeast corner of the Project area is visible from SR 99, and the highway can be seen from that portion of the Project area.

The development of the proposed Project would convert the visual character of the site from agricultural and rural residential in nature to a developed character with an array of urban uses. Views of open agricultural areas would be replaced by views of office, light industrial, residential, and commercial uses.

All new development within the Project area would be required to comply with the City's Design Guidelines, the Southeast Policy Area Community Plan policies, and development guidelines from the Southeast Policy Area Special Planning Area (SPA) document, which would ensure that the visual character is consistent with existing development outside of the Project area and with the City's long-term vision for project design. In addition, the proposed land plan has been designed to provide buffers between uses that may be visually incompatible, such as the office and light industrial uses in the southern portion of the Project area, which would be separated from the largely residential uses to the north by the drainage channel and associated drainage basin. The land plan provides further buffering in some areas by gradually transitioning from higher density uses to lower density uses, such as the high density and mixed use residential in the village center, which would be separated from the low density residential to the north by medium density residential and parkland. These buffers would protect views and minimize visual impacts within the Project area.

While mandated compliance with the City's Design Guidelines, Southeast Policy Area Community Plan policies, and development guidelines from the Southeast Policy Area SPA document is intended to ensure the appealing visual character of future development, development of the site with urban uses would substantially change the visual character of the site from its current rural form. Elk Grove General Plan EIR Impact 4.13.1 concluded that urbanization of the City would fundamentally change its visual character, specifically in its southern agricultural portion, which includes the Project area, and that the impact would be significant and unavoidable. The proposed Project would implement the planned development of the Project area in accordance with the General Plan and would not worsen this previously identified impact.

Regardless, because development of the proposed Project would permanently alter the existing visual character of the Project area from rural residential and agricultural land with open views to urban and developed, this impact is considered significant. Because any development of the site would alter the undeveloped nature of the site, there are no feasible mitigation measures that would meet the objectives of the Project while maintaining the existing visual character of site. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

### Mitigation Measures

None available.

### **Light and Glare (Standard of Significance 4)**

**Impact 5.1.3** Implementation of the proposed Project would introduce new sources of light and glare in and around the area. This impact is **potentially significant**.

Development of the proposed Project would introduce new sources of light and glare by adding urban development to the Project area. The addition of new light sources on such a large scale would contribute to skyglow effects in the region and could introduce local light impacts if not properly designed.

While all new development that would occur under the proposed Project would be required to comply with Chapter 23.56 of the Elk Grove Municipal Code for lighting standards, the addition of more than 7.6 million square feet of nonresidential uses and over 4,700 new dwelling units in an area that is currently without major light sources would be **potentially significant**.

## 5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

---

The following mitigation measures would reduce impacts resulting from lighting and glare in the Project area and reduce impacts on adjacent properties.

### Mitigation Measures

**MM 5.1.3a** Each subsequent residential and nonresidential project shall develop a lighting plan that demonstrates consistency with the requirements of Chapter 23.56 of the City Municipal Code along the property lines of adjoining land uses.

*Timing/Implementation:* Prior to approval of improvement plans for all subsequent public and private projects

*Enforcement/Monitoring:* City of Elk Grove Planning Department; Elk Grove Unified School District

**MM 5.1.3b** Nonglare glass shall be used in all nonresidential buildings to minimize and reduce impacts from glare. Buildings that are allowed to use semi-reflective glass must be oriented so that the reflection of sunlight is minimized. This requirement shall be included in subsequent development applications.

*Timing/Implementation:* Prior to approval of final development plans

*Enforcement/Monitoring:* City of Elk Grove Planning Department

Elk Grove General Plan EIR Impacts 4.13.2 and 4.13.3 concluded that while urbanization of the City would create significant new sources of light and glare, compliance with the Elk Grove Design Guidelines and implementation of the mitigation measures contained in the General Plan EIR would reduce the impacts to a less than significant level. Consistent with the General Plan EIR, compliance with the Elk Grove Design Guidelines would minimize the Project's light and glare effects by requiring outdoor lighting fixtures to be shielded/directed downward and screened and by minimizing the use of reflective building materials. Implementation of mitigation measures MM 5.1.3a and MM 5.1.3b would further reduce the Project's light and glare effects. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

### 5.1.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for aesthetics, light and glare impacts is Sacramento County including the cities of Elk Grove, Sacramento, Rancho Cordova, Folsom, and Citrus Heights and all existing, approved, proposed and reasonably foreseeable development projects within these jurisdictions. This includes those projects identified in **Table 5.0-1** as well as the General Plans of each jurisdiction and other large regional projects such as Folsom's SOI Annexation project and the Capital Southeast Connector project. The Folsom SOI Annexation project would annex 3,585 acres located south of Highway 50 into the Folsom city limits for future development. The Capital Southeast Connector project is a planned 35-mile parkway that would span from I-5, south of Elk Grove, to Highway 50 in El Dorado County.

Sacramento County is characterized by several cities and unincorporated communities containing urban and suburban development with an array of residential, commercial, industrial, and civic land uses surrounded by open space and agricultural land. The Project area

is located in southern Elk Grove in an area that is primarily undeveloped and characterized by agricultural land and rural residential uses.

The Project area is located adjacent to several planned and approved development projects, including the Laguna Ridge Specific Plan, Sterling Meadows, and Elk Grove Promenade. The LRSP has been approved and is in the process of being developed. The Elk Grove Promenade has also been approved, and construction began but was halted due to economic conditions. The Sterling Meadows development has been approved, but construction has not yet begun. Most of the necessary infrastructure, such as lighting, roadways, and traffic signals, needed to accommodate those developments has already been constructed. These projects, in addition to the proposed Project and other planned projects listed in **Table 5.0-1** and described above, would add residential and commercial development to the area, changing the visual character and creating new sources of light and glare.

The cumulative impact analysis herein focuses on the Project's contribution to cumulative visual changes in the cumulative setting area.

### CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Because there is no impact associated with scenic vistas or state scenic highways, the Project would not contribute to a cumulative impact, so these standards of significance are not evaluated in a cumulative context.

#### **Cumulative Visual Resource Impacts (Standard of Significance 3)**

**Impact 5.1.4** Development of the proposed Project, in addition to other reasonably foreseeable projects in the region, would introduce new development into an undeveloped agricultural area and contribute to a cumulative increase in urban uses that result in changes in visual character. This is a **cumulatively considerable** impact.

Continued urbanization of the region in accordance with applicable land use plans as well as those approved and proposed development projects described previously, would convert agricultural and open space land to urban uses with residential and commercial buildings and associated roadways and other infrastructure. Although individual development projects would be responsible for incorporating mitigation to minimize their visual impacts, the net result would still be a general conversion of areas with an open, rural character to a more urban and developed character. The change in character associated with this development would be a significant cumulative impact.

The proposed Project would be a continuation of planned development in the City and extend the City's developed area to the City boundary at Kammerer Road. While it is the City's intention to develop these areas, development of the proposed Project, in combination with other development in the region, would permanently change the character of lands with rural and agricultural visual character to urban developed uses. Therefore, the Project's contribution to the cumulative change in character is **cumulatively considerable**.

#### Mitigation Measures

None available.

## 5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

---

### Cumulative Light and Glare Impacts (Standard of Significance 4)

**Impact 5.1.5** Development of the proposed Project, in addition to other reasonably foreseeable projects in the region, would introduce new development into an agricultural area and increase nighttime lighting and glare and contribute to regional skyglow. This is a **cumulatively considerable** impact.

Continued urbanization of the region in accordance with applicable land use plans as well as those approved and proposed development projects described previously would introduce sources of light and glare to areas that currently contain few light sources. While individual development projects would be required to comply with the development standards and design guidelines of the applicable jurisdiction, which would have a mitigating effect on light and glare impacts, the adverse effects of adding new light and glare sources to areas that currently have little to no on-site lighting cannot be fully mitigated. Therefore, the cumulative addition of light sources to the region would be a significant cumulative impact.

Currently, there are no significant light sources located in the Project area. Project lighting, in addition to lighting from other cumulative development, could create a new source of light that would affect nighttime views in the area. Because the Project area currently contains few light sources, the new light sources in the Project area, combined with existing and future light sources, would be substantial. Thus, the proposed Project's contribution to the cumulative increase in ambient light that would exist in combination with other development would be **cumulatively considerable**.

#### Mitigation Measures

Implementation of mitigation measures **MM 5.1.3a** and **MM 5.1.3b** would reduce the Project's contribution to cumulative impacts resulting from increased light and glare in the City and on regional skyglow effects. However, these impacts cannot be fully mitigated, and this impact would be **cumulatively considerable** and **significant and unavoidable**.

**REFERENCES**

City of Elk Grove. 2003a. *Elk Grove Design Guidelines*.

———. 2003b. *City of Elk Grove General Plan*.

———. 2003c. *City of Elk Grove General Plan Environmental Impact Report*.

———. 2012. *Elk Grove Zoning Code*.

## **5.1 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE**

---

This page intentionally left blank