
3.1 AESTHETICS

Introduction

This section describes the existing aesthetic resources and visual characteristics of the project area and its immediate vicinity, along with existing plans and policies that are relevant to visual resource issues within the City of Menlo Park. This section also evaluates the effect on visual resources associated with implementation of the proposed project. Potential impacts to aesthetic and visual resources due to implementation of the proposed project are evaluated based on a review of photographs, visual simulations, site reconnaissance, and project data. The specific impacts examined in this section pertain to the proposed project's potential to change the visual quality and character of the project area and create new sources of light or glare.

Other visual quality issues, such as the potential effect on scenic vistas and the degradation of scenic resources within a State scenic highway, have been determined to have no project-related impacts and are addressed in the Initial Study (see Appendix B), which states that the project area is not within a scenic vista and that there are no scenic resources, or designated scenic highways, within the project vicinity. Therefore, the degradation of scenic vistas or resources within a State scenic highway is not addressed in this section.

Comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix C) raised concerns associated with increased building heights, potential for shadows on nearby properties, and a desire to see a building design that can stay current and avoid appearing dated in the future. These issues are addressed in this section with the exception of a shadow analysis. A shadow analysis was not conducted because it was determined that shadows would not be a factor for this project. The angle of the sun varies, depending on the time of the year and time of day. Because the sun is always in the southern portion of the sky, there will be no shadows cast by the proposed project on areas to the south. During the winter months, the sun is lower in the southern sky and, during summer months, the sun can be nearly directly overhead at midday. In winter, as the sun rises in the east, a shadow would be cast to the west. As the sun travels from east to west, the shadow would travel easterly; as the sun rises higher in the sky, the shadow would shorten. At midday, the shadow would extend to the north and be at its shortest. The pattern of shadows would be similar in the summer, but, because the sun is higher in the sky in the summer, shadows would not extend as far in the summer. A shadow analysis is usually conducted in urban areas where there is a lot of pedestrian activity or near residential areas where people may be affected by shadows.

Buildings on the Constitution site include two eight-story office buildings and two parking structures between four- to five and one-half-stories tall. Due to the location and set back of the buildings on the site and the distance to Bayfront Park shadows would not be an issue. The only concern would be for buildings located to the south along Constitution Drive. During the winter months, the roadway and possibly some of the building frontages would experience shadows in the morning or later in the

afternoon during the winter months when the sun is lower in the sky. Buildings on the Independence site include an eleven-story hotel, eight-story office building and a five-story (or possibly six-story) parking structure. Buildings to the north and east located along Independence Drive and Chrysler Drive could experience some shadows. During the winter months, the buildings to the north may experience shadows during the morning or afternoon hours. During the summer months the buildings located to the east may experience some shadow effects. The City of Menlo Park does not require shadow analysis for projects and, because there are no sensitive receptors nearby, it was determined a shadow analysis was not required for this project for purposes of CEQA.

Setting

Visual Quality

An area's visual quality is based on the physical appearance and characteristics of the built environment; the proximity and balance of man-made structures with open space or landscaping; and views of public open space or of more distant landscape features such as hills, water bodies, or built landmarks, such as bridges. These elements help define a sense of place and a physical orientation in a larger visual setting.

Regional Setting

The City of Menlo Park is a 19-square-mile municipality situated approximately 30 miles south of San Francisco and about 20 miles north of San Jose on the San Francisco Peninsula. Menlo Park is one of over a dozen cities located on the flatter portions of the western margin of San Francisco Bay, east of the San Andreas Fault zone. The municipalities of Atherton and Redwood City border Menlo Park to the north, and Palo Alto and East Palo Alto border Menlo Park to the south. Skyline Ridge is the principal topographic feature visible from south of Menlo Park and adjacent cities, rising over 2,400 feet in height, located approximately 15 miles south of the project area. Coastal fog spilling over the coastal ridgeline is a frequent occurrence that contributes to the regional setting's visual character. Urban development is largely concentrated south and west of the San Francisco bay and north and east of the Interstate 280 corridor.

Local Setting

The approximately 16-acre project area is on the north side of US 101, bordering the Marsh Road/US 101 interchange to the west, US 101 to the south, Chrysler Drive to the east, and Bayfront Expressway to the north. North of the project area, just across Bayfront Expressway, is the hilly open space of Bedwell Bayfront Park (Bayfront Park) and the San Francisco Bay beyond. Glimpses of the salt marshes and the Dumbarton Bridge to the northeast can be seen from the northernmost portion of the project area.

The project area is within an urbanized, largely built out portion of Menlo Park, characterized by free-standing buildings in an industrial business park setting (see Figures 3.1-1 through 3.1-3). The project



a. Existing building on Independence Drive



b. Existing Undeveloped Parcel



a. Existing Site at the Corner of Independence Drive and Constitution Drive



b. Existing Uses Constitution Drive Looking North to Bayfront Park



a. Existing Buildings



b. Existing Uses

vicinity is characterized by one- to two-story mostly tilt-up construction with several two- to three-story office buildings adjacent to the project area along Commonwealth Drive, Constitution Drive, Independence Drive, and Jefferson Drive. The two- to three-story buildings both within and adjacent to the project area are surrounded by landscaped setbacks, tree-lined streets, and surface parking lots (see Figures 3.1-4 and 3.1-5). Overhead utility lines are visible in some areas and sidewalks are largely absent. The project area is relatively flat with few long-range vistas from within the site due to the prevalence of existing buildings that block views. No scenic resources, such as rock outcroppings, cliffs, or knolls are present in the project vicinity, although many mature trees are present that provide a visual separation between existing buildings and provide screening from US 101.

Project Area Characteristics

On-Site Topography/Vegetation. The project area is relatively flat and is approximately ten feet above mean sea level. Most streets within the project area are planted with a variety of trees. Lush vegetation and green lawns create visual borders and enhance the separation between streets and buildings.

Visual Character. The project area is characterized by a developed environment with a mix of buildings ranging from single story to two stories in height. The buildings are primarily white or beige in color set back on deep lots surrounded by green lawns and trees, roads, surface parking lots and overhead utility lines. Surface parking lots with islands that contain trees and other landscaping are adjacent to most buildings, either at the street frontage or between the buildings. There are parcels on both sites within the project area that are undeveloped and are characterized as vacant, dirt lots. Figures 3.1-1 to 3.1-3 portray the existing visual character of the Constitution and Independence sites that comprise the project area. A 60 kV electrical transmission line bisects the northern portion of the Constitution site, parallel to Bayfront Expressway.

Lighting. Light sources include vehicular lights, street and parking lot lighting, buildings lights, and outdoor security lighting.

Independence Site Characteristics

The approximately 7-acre Independence site is bounded by Marsh Road/US 101 interchange to the west, US 101 to the south, Chrysler Drive to the east, and Independence Drive to the north.

On-site Topography/Vegetation. Most of the Independence site is flat and planted with 30- to 50-foot-tall street trees lining Chrysler Drive. There is one vacant, undeveloped parcel between two office buildings that is exposed dirt and contains little if any vegetation.

Visual Character. The Independence site is largely built out (except for one undeveloped parcel) with one- and two-story commercial buildings, surface parking, and landscaping. Mature trees are present throughout the site adjacent to roads and in parking areas. The buildings are primarily beige or white



101 Jefferson Drive



101 Jefferson Drive



135 Commonwealth Drive



Commonwealth Drive

in color and some tenant signs are displayed either as freestanding signs or attached to the buildings. Overhead utility and telephone lines and utility poles are visible throughout the site. The streets have curbs and storm drains but lack sidewalks. A chain link fence and vegetation separate the site from the shoulder of US 101 to the south. Automobiles and trucks are a prominent daytime visual feature of the site, occupying spaces along the street and in large surface parking areas in front of or adjacent to the buildings. Long range views off-site to the north are blocked by two-story buildings that line both sides of Independence Drive. Figure 3.1-1A provides a view of existing development along Independence Drive. The undeveloped parcel on-site (see Figure 3.1-1B) has vacant land in the foreground, while the middle ground presents views of passing vehicles on US 101 to the south. Further south are distant views of Skyline Ridge.

Lighting. Light sources on the site include automobile headlights, street and parking lot lighting, and light from existing buildings.

Constitution Site Characteristics

The approximately 9-acre Constitution site is located on Constitution Drive. The site is bounded by Marsh Road/US 101 Interchange to the west, Bayfront Expressway to the north, Chrysler Drive to the east, and Constitution Drive to the south.

On-Site Topography/Vegetation. The northwestern portion of the Constitution site is relatively flat and undeveloped with exposed dirt and little or no vegetation. The remainder of the site to the east is developed, surrounded by green lawns, mature trees, and other low-growing plants. Constitution Drive and Marsh Road (to the west of the Constitution site) are partially lined with 30- to 50-foot tall street trees. Figure 3.1-2A depicts the existing visual nature of the Constitution site.

Visual Character. The visual character of the Constitution site is comparable to the visual character described above for the developed portion of the Independence site. With the exception of one parcel, the remainder of the site is developed with low-rise buildings surrounded by green lawns, mature trees, and surface parking lots. The streets have curbs and storm drains but lack sidewalks. Overhead utility lines are visible along with automobiles parked along roadways and in adjacent parking lots. An overhead electric transmission line runs the northern length of the Constitution site. Figure 3.1-2B shows the northward view from Constitution Drive between existing buildings.

Lighting. Light sources on the site include vehicular lights, street and parking lot lighting, and building lights.

On-site and Off-site Project Area Views

Due to the relatively flat topography of the project area and the prevalence of existing buildings surrounding almost any viewpoint, views are largely restricted to short-range views of nearby buildings and associated landscaping. There are, however, some longer-range views available from several

locations within the project area, such as from street-level parking lots adjacent to US 101 or Bayfront Expressway and from the undeveloped parcels on both sites.

Looking south from the Independence site, there are views of passing cars on US 101 in the mid-range, and glimpses of Skyline Ridge in the far distance. Views from within existing buildings on the Independence site would have the same, if more elevated, viewshed. Views looking north from the undeveloped portion of the Constitution site are slightly blocked by the center divider on Bayfront Expressway because the site is at a lower elevation than the roadway. However, views of the roadside salt marshes and rolling hills of Bayfront Park are visible in the near distance. The Dumbarton Bridge and San Francisco Bay are visible from some second floor windows of buildings on Constitution Drive.

Although portions of the project area are visible from public vantage points, the whole project area is not visible in its entirety from a single, ground-level vantage point due to its large size, flat topography, and surrounding low-rise buildings. Three prominent public vantage points of the project area, as discussed below, are from 1) Bedwell Bayfront Park (looking south), 2) Bayfront Expressway (looking southeast from the Haven/Bayfront intersection and southwest from the Chrysler Drive/Bayfront intersection), and 3) US 101 (looking northeast from Marsh Road), as shown in View Points of the Independence and Constitution Sites, Figure 3.1-6. The visual simulations are shown in Figures 3.1-7 through 3.1-12.

View 1, Bayfront Park. Bayfront Park, located on the north side of Bayfront Expressway, was built on the site of a former landfill that has been redeveloped into a park that contains grass-covered hills, bushes, and scattered eucalyptus and pine trees.¹ The 160-acre park features large open space areas with trails for hiking. The main entrance to the park is at the intersection of Marsh Road and Bayfront Expressway, kitty-corner from the Constitution site, as shown in viewpoint 6 on Figure 3.1-6. Foreground views from within the park looking south towards the project area are of grassy vegetation, a drainage ditch running parallel to Bayfront Expressway on the south, and the six-lane Bayfront Expressway. Views from the top of the low rolling hills of Bayfront Park, looking south toward the project area and across Bayfront Expressway, include low-rise structures of varying height and color within the project area, tall, mature trees and green vegetation. In the background (distant views), Skyline Ridge can be seen merging with views of the open skyline.

View 2, Bayfront Expressway. Bayfront Expressway is one of two major roadways linking the Dumbarton Bridge to US 101. This six-lane roadway runs between the southern boundary of Bayfront Park and the northern boundary of the project area near the Constitution site, intersecting Marsh Road which leads to the US 101 on/off ramp. A pedestrian/bike path parallels Bayfront Expressway's north side, along the southern perimeter of Bayfront Park. A concrete median approximately four feet high separates the eastbound and westbound lanes, as shown in viewpoints 4 and 5 on Figure 3.1-6. As a result, views of the project area from passing automobiles traveling either eastbound or westbound are somewhat obscured by both the median and existing trees. From the eastbound lanes looking south,

¹ Association of Bay Area Governments, Menlo Park Trails, <http://baytrail.abag.ca.gov/vtour/map2/access/Menlo/Menlo.htm#Hilltrails>, accessed August 31, 2008.



Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, April 2009.

FIGURE 3.1-6
View Points of the Independence and Constitution Sites

D411048.01

Menlo Gateway Draft EIR

views of the project area include paved roads, low-rise buildings, trees, and lawn areas, along with utility lines; the same view as described above from Bayfront Park looking south. The northwest corner of the Constitution site can be seen from the intersection of Bayfront Expressway and Marsh Road. From the Marsh Road/US 101 interchange on/off ramp, views of the project area between the Independence site and the Constitution site and of the west end of the Constitution site are to the east, approximately 200 feet away. These views are obscured by tall trees planted along Marsh Road.

View 3, US 101. The northbound lanes of US 101 follow the southern edge of the Independence site portion of the project area, as shown in viewpoints 1 and 3 on Figure 3.1-6. Views from the highway are generally low-quality, affording motorists only a fleeting view of developed areas, low-rise buildings, trees, and a chain link fence.

Regulatory Setting

City of Menlo Park General Plan Policy Document.² The *General Plan Policy Document* includes goals, policies, standards, and implementation programs that constitute the formal policy for guiding Menlo Park's land use, development, and environmental quality. The following policies relate to visual and aesthetic resources and would apply to the proposed project:

- **Land Use Policy I-E-4.** The policy requires that new or expanded office uses adhere to accepted architectural standards.
- **Land Use Policy I-G-10.** This policy encourages the inclusion of extensive landscaping in public and private development, including greater landscaping in large parking areas. The City encourages placement of a portion of the required parking in landscape reserve until such time as the parking is needed.
- **Open Space and Conservation Policy Action Program 8.** The City will continue architectural and site review for all development (except single-family dwellings) within the City since this process has improved site planning and building design.

Menlo Park Municipal Code, Chapter 13.24, Heritage Trees. This code protects the health and maintenance of Heritage Trees, those being a tree or group of trees of historical significance, special character, or community benefit; all oak trees native to California (*Quercus*) which have trunks of 31.4 inches or greater circumference and all trees other than oaks which have a trunk with a circumference of 47.1 inches or more, measured fifty-four (54) inches above natural grade.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Aesthetics Analysis Methodology

Visual conditions within the project area are defined by a mix of local roadways and commercial development within a background of urban development. The interplay of these elements of the visual

² City of Menlo Park, *General Plan Policy Document*, Adopted November 30 and December 1, 1994.

setting varies from point to point depending on viewer location. The future appearance of the Independence site and the Constitution site, the entire project area, and the surrounding community, would differ with implementation of the proposed project, which would allow greater FARs, a mix of uses, and taller buildings. The visual analysis considers the proposed development in the project area that would occur in the near future under the proposed Menlo Gateway project. Buildout of the project area is evaluated to determine if any of the standards of significance would be affected by the project.

To illustrate the general appearance of the development proposed for the project area, photomontages or visual simulations from six vantage points were prepared, as shown in Figure 3.1-6. A photomontage is a photograph of the existing conditions with an image of the project superimposed over the photograph through the use of computer imaging techniques. The photomontages have been constructed in a photo-realistic fashion to show how the proposed development would look inclusive of buildings, parking structures, and landscaping. The photomontages are used to illustrate the development (in massing, scale, and height) that is proposed by the Menlo Gateway development proposal and provide a good representation of the buildings' general massing, scale, and height once the project would be completed. They are included here for informational purposes, to give the viewer an idea of the scale and height of the proposed development relative to the existing conditions.

Prior to preparing the photomontages, field investigations were conducted to determine those locations that would offer maximum visual exposure of the proposed project from public vantage points (see Figure 3.1-6). The photomontage locations selected include both "before" (without project) and "after" (with project) views.

Standards of Significance

The project would result in a significant impact if it would:

- **Impact Criterion #1:** Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project area and its surroundings.
- **Impact Criterion #2:** Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Project Evaluation

This section discusses the potential impacts of the site-specific Menlo Gateway development proposed for the project area.

Impact AE-1: Development proposed for the project area would substantially alter the existing visual character. However, compliance with the City's design review and landscaping requirements would help reduce the potential aesthetic degradation to the visual character of the surroundings. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant. (LTS)

The most distinctive aesthetic difference between existing and proposed development on the Independence and Constitution sites would be taller buildings and increased building mass and density

proposed by the Menlo Gateway project. The project area is currently developed (with the exception of two parcels) with low-rise (one- to two-story) office structures that were constructed more than 20 years ago. The project proposes to demolish the existing buildings in order to construct the new uses. The project proposes to introduce buildings from 8 to 11-stories in height that would be considerably taller than the existing buildings. While the new structures would be similar in building design to some of the newer buildings recently constructed along Constitution Drive adjacent to the Constitution site, they would be considerably taller and represent a visually prominent new feature on the generally flat visual landscape.

The project area is located in a developed area of the City and is primarily visible to motorists along US 101, Bayfront Expressway, and the Marsh Road/US 101 interchange overpass. Motorists and commuters are not generally considered visually sensitive receptors, because roadway views are typically fleeting and motorists are focused on the road, and thus their attention to views, especially in the highly developed US 101 corridor near the project area, is generally low. The project sponsor is proposing to plant trees and add landscaping along Bayfront Expressway, Constitution Drive, and Independence Drive that would help to block street-level views of the buildings. More limited landscaping is proposed along US 101, and the new buildings, particularly those on the Independence site, would be visible from a distance along US 101. Trees adjacent to these roadways would help to provide a visual buffer or screen for motorists traveling on these roadways. The Constitution site is also visible from Bayfront Park to the north as well as Constitution Drive to the south. The Independence site is visible from Independence Drive along the northern boundary of the project area.

A more detailed description of project views from each of these vantage points is provided below.

Independence Site

The project sponsor is proposing a mix of office/R&D, a 230-room hotel, a health club, a parking structure, and a restaurant/café at the Independence site. Rezoning the Independence site to M-3 would allow up to 140-foot-tall buildings and up to 137.5 percent FAR, compared to the one- and two-story buildings, 45 to 55 percent FAR, and 30- to 80-foot setbacks of the existing development. Final architectural plans have not been prepared at this time; however, visual simulations of the Independence site show buildings approximately 140 feet tall that are representative of the proposed design, scale, and mass of the Menlo Gateway project. Figures 3.1-7 through 3.1-9 illustrate existing project conditions, and conditions following proposed development, including conceptual building and landscape design. The visual simulations are designed to illustrate the proposed Menlo Gateway development (in massing, scale, and height) that is currently proposed by the project sponsor.

Figure 3.1-7 depicts views traveling southbound on US 101 just north of the Marsh Road overpass. As shown in this figure, the proposed office building on the Independence site is visible just beyond the overpass. US 101 can be seen in the foreground with both northbound and southbound lanes visible. The proposed office building on the Independence site would be in full view of motorists along US 101 and from the Marsh Road/US 101 overpass, as indicated in Figure 3.1-7.



FIGURE 3.1-7
Visual Simulation - 101 Southbound

Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.

D411048.01

Menlo Gateway Draft EIR

Figure 3.1-8 shows a view of the proposed office building and adjacent parking garage from the eastbound lanes of the Marsh Road overpass looking to northeast. As shown, development on the Independence site would be highly visible from this viewpoint. The vacant lot on the west side of the Independence site (i.e., left side of the photograph) along with the low-scale buildings would be replaced with an eight-story building that would dominate the immediate skyline, while the east side of the site (right side of photo) would step down to a six-story parking structure. Only limited views of the proposed hotel are visible from this viewpoint. Views onto the site from US 101 or Marsh Road would be limited due to the proposed landscaping, and the siting of the office building, parking structure, and hotel that would essentially block views of the interior portions of the project area and beyond. The visual character of the site would be considerably changed relative to existing conditions, but would not be out of character relative to the existing development within the project vicinity. Even though the new buildings would contrast visually with the existing uses and the surrounding area, it is a developed, urbanized area and the taller, more intensive development would not degrade the visual character, which is simply an older, developed business park. That character would not change for motorists and users of the area, particularly if the City's Architectural Control and landscaping requirements continue to require visual coherence and compatibility along street frontages and high quality views along streetscapes.

Figure 3.1-9 includes views of the Independence site from northbound US 101 looking north. Due to the existing mature trees, only the upper portion of the proposed hotel is visible from this viewpoint. The existing urban, developed area would be intensified, with an increased scale and density of buildings under the Menlo Gateway proposal. This difference in building intensity is somewhat diminished by trees in the right-of-way, the articulation and design of the building, which reduce its apparent mass, and by the relatively high speed of travel on the US 101 corridor, in excess of 55 miles an hour, such that near- to mid-range views of the Independence site are available from the roadway for approximately five to ten seconds. As a result, development of the Independence site in accordance with the proposed Menlo Gateway project would be highly visible, but the alteration to the visual character of the area would be less than significant.

Constitution Site

Development proposed on the Constitution site includes two office/R&D buildings, two parking structures, two surface parking areas, and ground floor retail/community facilities.³ The proposed M-3 zoning would allow buildings up to 140 feet tall, up to 137.5 percent FAR, and with zero-foot setbacks, compared to the one- and two-story buildings, 45 to 55 percent FAR, and 30- to 80-foot setbacks of existing development. Figures 3.1-10 through 3.1-12 show views of the proposed development on the Constitution site. Figure 3.1-10 is a view looking south from the intersection of Haven Avenue and Bayfront Expressway. The parking structure and office building would be visible to vehicles traveling along Marsh Road and Bayfront Expressway. As shown in Figure 3.1-10, views of a 60 kV overhead transmission line and tower along with the top of a building are currently visible. As shown in the site plan (see Figure 2-2 in Chapter 2, Project Description), a landscape feature is

³ Providing there was a corresponding decrease in the amount of office space.



FIGURE 3.1-8
Visual Simulation - Marsh Road Overpass

D411048.01

Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.



FIGURE 3.1-9
Visual Simulation - Northbound 101

D411048.01

Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.



FIGURE 3.1-10
Visual Simulation - Haven Avenue Southbound

Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.

D411048.01

Menlo Gateway Draft EIR

proposed at corner of the Marsh Road/Haven Avenue/Bayfront Expressway intersection. A second landscape feature is proposed adjacent to Bayfront Expressway in the center of the site. These landscape features would help break up the mass of the buildings and bring some visual relief for motorists. However, the visual character of the site would be considerably changed relative to existing conditions, but the change would not be out of character with the existing development in the project vicinity.

Figure 3.1-11 shows a view from Bayfront Expressway at the intersection with Chrysler Drive. Views of the parking garage in the foreground and the office buildings more in the background would be visible to motorists. As shown in the Figure, views of the site currently include the rooftops of existing buildings along with a mix of trees and shrubs. The visual character of the site would be significantly changed compared to existing conditions, but the change would not be out of character with existing development in the project vicinity.

To assess views of the Constitution site from Bayfront Park, a visual simulation was prepared looking south directly onto the Constitution site from Bayfront Park. As shown in Figure 3.1-12, views of the Constitution site currently include the 60 kV overhead transmission lines and tower with low-scale single-story buildings visible in the mid-ground. Due to the lack of glass and building articulation, the existing buildings are very unobtrusive and appear to blend into the horizon. As shown in the figure, the proposed project includes four multi-story structures that would range in height from four to eight stories. Development of the site with more intense uses would change the existing visual character of the immediate project site, but the change would not be out of character with existing development in the project vicinity.

The specific development proposed for the project area would be required to adhere to the City of Menlo Park's architectural standards and would be required to meet City standards for landscaping. Sidewalks would also be constructed throughout the project area and adjacent to Constitution Drive, Chrysler Drive, and Independence Drive, outside of the project area to facilitate a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The City's architectural/design review process would ensure project compliance with applicable aesthetic policies and landscaping requirements.

As discussed above and as indicated in Figures 3.1-7 through 3.1-12, the project would change the existing visual character of the project area and its surroundings by increasing the mass, density and height of the existing built environment. Although future development would include mid-rise buildings ranging from four to eleven stories, the building height, mass, design, and signage elements would be in keeping with some of the newer office buildings constructed in the project vicinity. It is anticipated that the project would not degrade the visual unity of the existing older, developed business park. Similar to the Independence site, the new buildings would contrast visually with the existing uses and the surrounding area; however, it is a developed, urbanized area and the taller, more intensive development would not degrade the visual character, which is simply an older, developed business park. That character would not change for motorists and users of the area.



Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.



FIGURE 3.1-11
Visual Simulation - Chrysler Intersection

D411048.01

Menlo Gateway Draft EIR



FIGURE 3.1-12
Visual Simulation - Path at Base of Mound

D411048.01

Source: DES Architects/Engineers and Dahlin Group Architecture Planning, June 2009.

Existing buildings would be demolished and mature landscaping removed to accommodate the project. The addition of new trees and more formal landscaping and streetscape/sidewalk improvements throughout the project area would improve the aesthetics of the overall area and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The taller buildings would be more visible to people recreating in Bayfront Park, as well as motorists along US 101 and Bayfront Expressway. However, the project area is currently developed and located in an urban area of the City where current views of the site include views of buildings, trees, and parking lots. Although the long-term visual characteristics of the project area would be altered with development under the proposed project, the project would provide more design continuity within the project area by creating contiguous landscaped areas and buildings that reflect a similar architectural design. As a result, the development of new buildings and the addition of new landscaping would not be considered a substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the project area and its surroundings; rather, the alteration is considered visually to be an urbanization of portions of a suburban business park resulting in a less-than-significant impact.

The proposed project would comply with the City's architectural control process and landscaping standards to ensure future development would be visually compatible with the visual character of the surrounding area. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project area and the impact would be considered less than significant. No additional mitigation is required.

Impact AE-2: Implementation of the proposed project would create new sources of light or glare that could adversely affect day or nighttime views. Therefore, under Criterion #2, this impact would be potentially significant. (PS)

As discussed previously, the entire project area is currently developed, so that nighttime light from vehicles, street lights, security lights, and building lights, as well as interior lighting, are all already present in the project area and visible from surrounding areas and roadways. Proposed development within the project area would result in an increase in building heights and density, as well as activities. The proposed hotel, along with health club, restaurant and retail/community facilities, could increase nighttime traffic in an area currently occupied by offices that produce mostly daytime traffic. These uses and the attendant traffic would increase the total amount of ambient light emanating from the project area. The increase in building heights would make building lights more visible to motorists along US 101, Marsh Road, and Bayfront Expressway, but some of the interior lights would be screened by the window overhangs proposed on the office buildings. The ground level uses would also generate more light, but would be somewhat screened or diffused by landscaping and tree coverage. Due to the urbanized nature of the surrounding area to the south, east and west, a significant amount of ambient nighttime light currently exists, affecting views of the nighttime sky. North of the Constitution site is Bayfront Park, which does not include lights. The north building elevation of the proposed office buildings and the parking structures would introduce a source of light. The parking structures include metal screens and trees that would help to block vehicle lights from shining towards the park. It is anticipated that, due to the existing developed area, the increase in nighttime light that would occur under the proposed project would not significantly affect nighttime views of the sky, because such views are already limited in urban settings.

Glare is caused by light reflections from pavement, vehicles, and building materials, such as reflective glass and polished surfaces. During daylight hours, the amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight. Glare can create hazards to motorists and nuisances for pedestrians and other viewers. As discussed above and in Chapter 2, Project Description, the project includes buildings with substantial amounts of glass or other reflective materials on the surfaces of facades. Highly reflective surfaces could pose the most significant impact along major road corridors, such as US 101, Marsh Road, and Bayfront Expressway. The buildings currently do not include highly reflective mirrored glass walls. All windows would use Low-E glass, which reduces reflectivity and is more energy efficient. Because the buildings are not clad in reflective or mirrored façade materials, it is not anticipated that glare would be an issue. Therefore, impacts associated with glare would be less than significant. However, the increase in lighting could result in a potentially significant impact.

MITIGATION MEASURE. Implementation of the following measure would serve to reduce light impacts to less-than-significant levels. (LTS)

AE-2-1 Design Lighting to Meet Minimum Safety and Security Standards. The project sponsor shall incorporate lighting design specifications to meet minimum safety and security standards. The following measures shall be included in all lighting plans to reduce the impact of introduced light to less-than-significant levels:

- Luminaires shall be designed with cutoff-type fixtures or features that cast low-angle illumination to minimize incidental spillover of light onto adjacent private properties. Fixtures that shine light upward or horizontally shall not spill light onto adjacent private properties.
- Luminaires shall provide accurate color rendering and natural light qualities. Low-pressure sodium and high-pressure sodium fixtures that are not color-corrected shall not be used, except as part of an approved sign or landscape plan.
- Luminary mountings shall be downcast and pole heights minimized to reduce potential for back scatter into the nighttime sky and incidental spillover light onto adjacent properties and undeveloped open space. Light poles shall be no higher than 20 feet. Luminary mountings shall be treated with non-glare finishes.

Cumulative Impacts

The geographic context for the cumulative aesthetics analysis of the proposed project is the surrounding project area. This cumulative analysis examines the effects of the proposed project and potential future developments under the General Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment (GPA/ZOA), in combination with other current projects, probable future projects, and projected future growth within the City in the next 20 years.

Impact AE-1CM: The proposed project, in combination with surrounding development, would not result in significant cumulative visual, light or glare impacts. (LTS)

The project area is bounded by four roadways, US 101, Bayfront Expressway, Marsh Road/US 101 interchange, and Chrysler Drive. Because of this configuration, the project area is relatively isolated, both physically and visually.

There are no known projects expected to be developed in the foreseeable future in the project vicinity. No projects that would visually combine with the proposed project are expected to occur in close proximity to the project area. However, if new commercial development were to occur, it is not anticipated it would be out of scale with what is currently proposed for the project area.

As discussed above, additional development within the areas surrounding the project site would constitute further intensification of an already urban and nearly built-out area and would generally occur through infill development. No new development is anticipated at this time and nighttime lighting currently exists in the surrounding area. Although cumulative new development or redevelopment could include direct illumination of project structures, features, and/or walkways, the increase in ambient nighttime lighting levels in these areas would only rise minimally, because a significant amount of ambient lighting currently exists due to the urbanized nature of the area. Cumulative development within the area surrounding the project area, in combination with development under the proposed project, is not anticipated to result in the creation of new sources of light that could negatively affect nighttime views or result in a cumulative effect. The project's contribution would not be considerable; therefore, cumulative impacts associated with ambient nighttime lighting would be less than significant.

The cumulative context for glare effects would be other glare-generating development adjacent to roadways potentially affected by glare produced from development in the project area. There are no other projects currently contemplated to the south, west or east of the project area that could contribute to the cumulative glare within the area. Therefore, there is no cumulative effect and the project's contribution would be less than significant.