

## **CHAPTER 2.0 – SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

This chapter of the EIR provides a detailed discussion of those subject areas for which Proposed Project implementation would result in either: (1) significant impacts that cannot be avoided and/or (2) significant impacts that can be avoided, reduced or minimized through mitigation measures required to be implemented as part of the Proposed Project. The Proposed Project would result in significant and unmitigable impacts for Aesthetics, Air Quality and Transportation/Traffic.

In order to assist the reader in tracking between impacts and related mitigation measures, individual impacts and the associated mitigation measures have been given correlating numbers and letters. For example, for the issue of aesthetics, the first significant impact is identified in text in the analysis portion of the discussion as AE-1, representing aesthetics impact number 1. The measure designed to attenuate that impact is identified as M-AE-1 (i.e., mitigation for aesthetics impact number 1).

### **2.1 Aesthetics**

The following sections address aesthetics evaluation summarized from the Visual Impact Analysis (VIA) prepared by HELIX (2015a), and presented in its entirety in Appendix B of this EIR. The VIA was prepared in conformance with the County Requirements for Format and Content for Visual Analysis (2007) and the County Requirements for Format and Content for Dark Skies and Glare (2007, as modified in 2009). The reader is referred to text below for evaluation of all issues related to aesthetics for the Project.

#### **2.1.1 Existing Conditions**

The following sections address the current conditions at the Proposed Project site, including the existing environmental setting, viewer sensitivity with regard to visibility of the Project site, and the regulatory framework currently in place. The reader is referred to Figure 1-2 in Chapter 1.0 for an overview of the site location related to cultural and natural features discussed below.

##### **2.1.1.1 *Existing Setting***

###### **Project Site**

The Project site is located in an unincorporated area of San Diego County, west of the City of Escondido and south of the City of San Marcos. Regional and local access to the site is provided from SR-78, Nordahl Road, and Country Club Drive, from which a number of smaller surface streets (e.g., Hill Valley Drive, Eden Valley Lane, and Mt. Whitney Road) extend along or near the northern and eastern property boundaries. Refer to Figures 1-1 and 1-2 of this EIR, and Figure 2.1-1, *Project Location Map*.

Overall, the Proposed Project area consists of the sloping and rolling valley floor with some relatively low hill features being locally notable. Ridgelines are located west of the Project site,

and are associated with the higher hills around Mt. Whitney. Estate single-family homes, agricultural uses, and undeveloped properties are located along the hillsides to the west and semi-rural development is present on the lower hilltops and in the valley area to the east of the Proposed Project area.

On-site topography is generally characterized by a north-south trending ridge in the main portion of the property and a large knoll in the southeastern-most area, with several larger drainages flanking these upland features. The southeastern parcel is relatively flat. On-site elevations range from approximately 1,013 amsl along the ridge top near the northwestern site boundary, to 614 feet amsl along the southeastern property boundary. Surface drainage from most of the Proposed Project site flows primarily to the east and south, with some variability due to local topography. Associated off-site flows continue generally south before ultimately entering Escondido Creek. A steep slopes analysis was performed for the Project site. Approximately 105 acres (50 percent) of the site are comprised of slopes with a gradient of less than 15 percent, approximately 51 acres (24 percent) of the site have slopes with a gradient between 15 and 25 percent, approximately 49 acres (23 percent) of the site have slopes with a gradient between 25 and 50 percent, and approximately 5 acres (3 percent) of the site have slopes with a gradient greater than 50 percent. Natural steep slopes, i.e. natural slopes exceeding 25 percent slope with a vertical rise of 50 feet or more in elevation, are primarily located in the western portions of the Project site, among the hillsides rising above the valley floor. Figure 1-33 of this EIR illustrates the existing steep slopes on site.

The Proposed Project site has very low levels of existing local night-lighting. No street lights exist along Country Club Drive or the smaller roads trending into the Project from the east. Some down-lights are present on the valley floor associated with the existing developed uses.

The Proposed Project site is currently used for commercial agriculture, with extensive areas of active avocado orchards occurring on the hillsides in the western portion of the site. A few structures occur within the hillsides and valley floor that supports the agricultural use. An equestrian center is located in the southeastern portion of the site and includes several outbuildings, a ranch house, stables/corrals, a pond, well tanks, a rose garden, and apiary uses (beekeeping). Several unpaved roads traverse the site to provide access to agricultural and equestrian uses. In addition, overhead electrical power lines cross the southern portion of the site within an east-west easement that contains two large electrical transmission towers.

Biological resources within the Proposed Project boundaries are generally disturbed due to the existing development and agricultural operations. The majority of the Project is mapped as orchard or agriculture; with the next largest category being non-native grassland (see Figures 2.4-1a and 1b). Vegetation communities consist of freshwater marsh, southern riparian forest, southern riparian woodland, southern willow scrub, freshwater marsh, mulefat scrub, herbaceous wetland, disturbed wetland, tamarisk scrub, Diegan coastal sage scrub, coast live oak woodland, southern mixed chaparral, eucalyptus forest and woodland, non-native vegetation, and pond—situated within larger non-native grassland and extensive agriculture communities in the more eastern parcels. Extensive agriculture is wholly located in the southeastern parcel, which is also where the eucalyptus forest, pond, and some of the coast live oak woodland habitats are situated.

## Surrounding Area

Grove agricultural operations and single-family homes on flat building pads comprise the majority of the property abutting the Proposed Project site, interspersed with some open space. Undeveloped land associated with Mt. Whitney, a major visual resource in the Project area, abuts the property to the west. Immediately south of the Project site, the 468-acre Harmony Grove Village is actively building out, with mass grading already completed. Figure 1-2 illustrates the various land uses of the surrounding area.

Estate, rural and semi-rural residential developments, with some equestrian and agricultural uses, are located in the vicinity of the Proposed Project site. The houses in this area are generally one or two-story single-family detached structures ranging in size from relatively small (1,600 s.f.) to larger estate homes located on lots ranging from 0.33 to 1.0 acre in size (though some lots in the area are much larger). Larger lots in the area generally are used for horse-keeping and grazing purposes, or for small agricultural operations such as fruit orchards or groves. Landscaped yards provide verdant settings, including (primarily non-native) trees such as palm, pepper, pine, and eucalyptus that provide a dominant element in the visual character of the area due to their age, size, and quantity. Some natural, dense vegetation exists, including native oak trees.

Denser residential subdivisions east of Country Club Drive in the City of Escondido are located between 0.25 and 0.5 mile east of the Proposed Project as shown on Figure 1-2. Lot sizes in this area are much smaller; with up to approximately eight houses an acre. Landscaped yards and large street trees are present, but the denser housing tends to dominate the visual landscape from these areas.

Industrial and commercial development and mobile home communities are located northerly of the Proposed Project, extending to SR-78 and I-15 and beyond. Large parking lots and plain concrete buildings set the visual character of the industrial areas; much less landscaping and vegetation exists around the businesses. The majority of the Project site is not visible from these areas due to area topography. The relatively recent Palomar Hospital medical facilities are located to the northeast of the site, at a slightly elevated position. Views from east-facing portions of the structure encompass portions of the Project site as part of a larger view. Views from an exercise circuit/walking path between the hospital and adjacent residential uses currently are possible to the site based on topography, but are largely blocked by screening vegetation planted by the hospital on intervening slopes.

The surrounding area has varying levels of existing night-lighting. As noted, no street lights exist along Country Club Drive or the smaller roads such as Seeforever Drive. All area homes exude some level of night-lighting, however, and the effect is more noticeable in the denser residential areas to the east. The Palomar Hospital complex provides night lighting which is notable due to its height.

The closest listed scenic highway to the Proposed Project site is the segment of Elfin Forest Road/Harmony Grove Road between the San Marcos city limits and the Escondido city limits. This roadway segment is located, at its closest point, approximately 0.5 mile from the Project site. It is identified as a scenic corridor in the Conservation and Open Space (COS) Element and

is included as part of the County Scenic Highway System. Several peaks and intervening topography and structures prevent any views to the location of the Proposed Project from this scenic highway.

The closest large public park or recreation facilities to the Proposed Project site include the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve (Reserve) and Del Dios Highlands. At their closest points, the Reserve is located approximately 1.5 miles to the south in the County, and the Del Dios Highlands County Preserve (largely in the City of Escondido and extending from Del Dios Highway to meet trails in the Reserve), is located approximately 1.4 miles to the south. The Reserve maintains approximately 7.5 miles of trails transecting 750 acres overlaying portions of the ridgeline separating the Escondido Creek valley and the area surrounding Lake Hodges, and hosts an estimated 60,000 visitors per year, including hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. The Project site is visible from north-facing slopes within the Reserve and to the east along the Del Dios Highlands Trail within the Del Dios Highlands County Preserve, although at a distance. A circuit-training trail is open to the public in the vicinity of the Palomar Hospital medical center in the City of Escondido, but visibility to the site is restricted (and is expected to become more so as intervening vegetation matures). No additional existing official or designated trails are adjacent to the Proposed Project.

A total of seven additional public parks within the cities of San Marcos and Escondido are located within the computer-generated Proposed Project viewshed described below. In order of distance from the Project, they include (1) Montiel Park, located approximately 1.25 miles northeast of the Project site; (2) Knob Hill Park, located approximately 1.3 miles northeast of the Project site; (3) Hollandia Park, located approximately 1.5 miles north of the Project site; (4) Woodland Park, located approximately 1.8 miles to the north; (5) Helen Bougher Memorial Park, located approximately 2.25 miles to the north; (6) Rod McLeod Park, located approximately 2.5 miles to the northeast; and (7) Grape Day Park, located approximately 2.5 miles to the east. Views of the Project site are either: (1) not available from these public parks due to intervening topography and built uses (including highways and structures), as well as the distance from the Project site; and/or (2) available only to the very highest points on the western and northern property boundaries, where development is not proposed. This includes Rod McLeod Park, Grape Day Park, and the lower portions of Montiel Park. Particular attention was paid to the northern extent of Montiel Park, where Frisbee golf areas are located higher in elevation than most of the facility. The uppermost reaches of the park would provide some sight-lines to the northeastern most homes in Neighborhood 4 (as well as open space areas) from the Frisbee golf area. Under best-case viewing conditions, approximately 30 lots would be within the sight-line of these viewers.

A circuit-training trail is open to the public in the vicinity of the Palomar Hospital medical center in the City of Escondido, but visibility to the site is restricted (and is expected to become more so as the intervening vegetation matures). No additional existing official or designated trails are adjacent to the Proposed Project.

Figure 2.1-2, *Photo Location Map*, is an aerial photograph of the Proposed Project site and the surrounding area, and shows the location from which each photograph was taken. On-site visual elements are illustrated in Figures 2.1-3a through 2.1-3e, *On-site Visual Elements*, followed by

pictures to the site from off-site locations (Figures 2.1-4a through 2.1-4e, *Off-site Vantage Points*).

### On-site Visual Elements

Figure 2.1-3a, Photograph A looks directly into the Proposed Project from the western extent of the northern east-west portion of Eden Valley Lane. Behind the three-rail fence, the field slopes slightly up to the northwest.

Figure 2.1-3a, Photograph B is taken on site, on the slight crest of the slope shown in Photograph A. The view looks at the field west of, and in between, Eden Valley Lane and the private road north of Eden Valley Lane in the northern portion of the Proposed Project. The viewpoint is looking westerly and shows the open nature of the existing field and the rise in topography at the western extent of the Project. The field consists of mainly grasses with some taller vegetation in the background of the Project site. The single-family residential uses on the east-facing slopes of the hillside in the background are off site.

Figure 2.1-3b, Photograph C was taken from the intersection of Country Club Drive and Mt. Whitney Road, looking south-southwest into the northeastern portion of the southeastern Proposed Project parcel. An open field is visible in the foreground with eucalyptus trees edging the on-site pond in the background. Utility lines are visible overhead and the winding nature of Country Club Drive as it curves around a hill can be seen.

Figure 2.1-3b, Photograph D depicts the existing pond located adjacent to the equestrian facility in the southeastern Proposed Project parcel. The surrounding trees (primarily eucalyptus) and a narrow access road in the background are both visible.

Figure 2.1-3c, Photograph E depicts an existing residential use located adjacent to and north of the equestrian facility in the southeastern Proposed Project parcel. Fencing for the paddocks that are part of the horse barn and corral structures are in the background.

Figure 2.1-3c, Photograph F was taken from a private road that intersects Country Club Drive at the southernmost boundary of the Proposed Project site, looking northeast. The on-site equestrian facility is visible in the foreground and the mid-ground. In the background an off-site hill (east of Country Club Drive) with residences can be seen, as well as tall trees. The major utility line corridor that bisects the site is visible.

Figure 2.1-3d, Photograph G was taken from the same private road as Photograph F and looks northwest along the southernmost boundary of the Proposed Project. This photo also illustrates the rolling topography in this area. A portion of the equestrian facility is visible on the right. Construction activities associated with buildout of the northernmost portion of the Harmony Grove Village project is visible on the left side of the photo. Existing facilities, including the well tank and a dilapidated barn, are visible through the on-site vegetation. A large on-site field is in the mid-ground, with utility lines and two on-site lattice towers visible. These high voltage transmission line towers are silhouetted and visible from a number of locations in this area due to

their size and right-of-way, which follows the rising topography to the west. They provide an industrial note to an otherwise predominantly rural scene.

Figure 2.1-3d, Photograph H was taken just east of the existing rose garden (of which a portion is visible) in the southeastern portion of the Proposed Project site, looking southwest. This photo shows the undeveloped nature of the site in this area. This area of the site is mostly an empty field with little to no vegetation. The photograph shows the low rolling topography of the site, and the increase in elevation of the off-site hills and ridgeline in the background. The high voltage power lines and towers are highly visible as they trend through the Project site, contrasting with other more rural elements in the photograph. Taller and somewhat dense vegetation is located to the right of the power lines. To the left of the power lines is a mostly empty field, with a couple structures. In the far background, power lines also can be seen on the distant hills.

Figure 2.1-3e, Photograph I through L, depicts several different elements associated with the existing equestrian facility on the southeastern Proposed Project parcel. The photos depict an existing well tank, as well as some farming equipment; an existing dilapidated barn; and some additional perspectives of the existing barn structures.

#### Off-site Vantage Points

Off-site vantage points surround the Proposed Project site, and provide the basis for a number of photographs (Figures 2.1-4a through 2.1-4e, Photographs A through J).

Figure 2.1-4a, Photograph A was taken from Hill Valley Drive, east of the Proposed Project's northernmost parcel. The photo looks southwest toward the Project site. The foreground consists of the driveway/property of a private residence. The left side of the mid-ground shows some dense vegetation, as well as some additional residences on a small hill, which shield a portion of the Project. A lot with an open field and some vegetation is visible in the mid-ground. The valley-floor home in the center of the photograph and densely vegetated Project hills are visible in the background.

Figure 2.1-4a, Photograph B depicts the view from the corner of Country Club Drive and an unnamed street just south of Dinara Drive. The photo overlooks an empty field with some structures in the mid-ground. Utility poles are visible along the unnamed street. The low rolling topography of the Proposed Project is visible from this location with more prominent off-site hills in the background.

Figure 2.1-4b, Photograph C was taken along the eastern boundary of Harmony Grove along northbound Country Club Drive and shows the large, graded area of Harmony Grove, located immediately south of the Proposed Project site. The Project is located just north of the graded area in this photograph.

Figure 2.1-4b, Photograph D was taken from Seeforever Drive in the City of San Marcos (slightly north and west of Mt. Whitney Road) looking southeast. The photo shows the dense vegetation located both on site and adjacent to the site. A grove is visible looking east, along the

right side of a path. In the distance existing development can be seen to the north. The Harmony Grove Village project, currently under construction, is to the south, with the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, Mt. Israel, and the Del Dios Highlands Preserve in the distance.

Figure 2.1-4c, Photographs E and F were taken east of Country Club Drive within a residential tract on the west-facing slopes of the hills east of Country Club Drive. “Peek views” of the Proposed Project site are visible to developable portions of the site on the east-facing hillside. Mature residential vegetation and the number of houses render visibility to the Project site low.

### Trails

More distant vantage points are available from trails in the area. These include a publicly accessible circuit training trail adjacent to the Palomar Hospital that provides some views to the Proposed Project site, as well as publicly identified trails in preserved open space with a primary purpose of recreation and access to area views.

Figure 2.1-4d, Photographs G and H depict potential views from the Palomar Hospital circuit training trail. As shown in these photographs, where unobstructed, views to the Proposed Project site would be clear due to the topography in the area (i.e., it falls away to the west of the hospital, thereby minimizing intervening uses, and then goes up in elevation at the western edge of the Project property). These photos show views toward the Project site where screening planting is not yet tall and/or dense (such locations are fairly isolated along the western boundary). These views are atypical along the path due to the increasing density of the landscaping that screens views to the west and keeps the viewer’s focus toward the path and the hospital, the latter of which has substantially less vegetation between it and the path. Photograph G is a location where some views potentially would be expected to remain—looking straight ahead takes the eye along a utility access road, which it is expected would be kept in an open condition and not ever fully vegetated. The trail along the west side of the hospital, however, is located to the left (see the direction in which the team member’s arm is extended). Photograph H is taken from just around the corner and illustrates some of the maturing vegetation (variety and density) as well as an existing open spot where views to the west are possible. As can be seen in this photograph, however, the view will not persist. The young tree that obscures part of the Project site will increase in height and the sparse branches of the vegetation on the right-hand side of the photograph (and through which the site currently can be seen) will increase in number and foliage, substantially, if not wholly, ultimately closing off the western view. Similar vegetation is located the length of the hospital property. The density of the landscaping indicates that it is part of a mitigation program shielding planned between nearby residences and the hospital; which varies in scale, mass and type from the residential uses abutting the property line. For these reasons, as well as the fact that the primary purpose of the path is health-related (circuit training) rather than recreational, this trail is not chosen as appropriate for simulation and views from this trail are not further discussed in this VIA.

Figure 2.1-4e, Photographs I and J represent views to the Proposed Project site from locales along recreational trails in the open space reserves to the south, and depict views to the Project from the Del Dios Highlands and Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve trails, respectively. As shown, the site would be within the viewshed of viewers from these locations. Although it is not

expected to be very distinguishable following development due to intervening Harmony Grove Village (shown as largely graded area in these photographs) combined with existing land uses surrounding the Project, it would contribute to the cumulative view.

As illustrated by photographs within this study, although panoramic views are possible from surrounding ridgelines, the topographic and landscape conditions noted above constrict views to and from the site, limiting primary visibility of the Proposed Project site features from the public and private streets in the area.

#### **2.1.1.2 Project Site Visibility/Viewshed**

A “viewshed” is an analytical tool to aid in identification of views that could be affected by a potential project. The viewshed is defined as the surrounding geographic area from which the on-site elements of the Proposed Project are likely to be seen, and mostly is delineated based on topography (see Figure 2.1-5, *Project Viewshed Map*). The viewshed boundary for the Proposed Project was determined through the computer analysis of local topographic maps, and was field verified by Project analysts. The viewshed boundary represents the geographic limits for this visual assessment.

For the Proposed Project area, views within a three-mile radius were considered close enough to allow viewers to visually “read” Proposed Project elements such as landform modifications, and (potentially) the spatial mass and form of proposed structures. Beyond even one mile, topographic modifications and residential structures begin to become visually muted and distinguishable only as facets of the larger regional landscape. Using these criteria, the Project viewshed covers approximately 24,148 acres. Figure 2.1-5 illustrates the Project viewshed on an aerial photographic base. This area was delineated using spatial models that analyze the topographic data and determine which portions of the Project site are potentially visible from surrounding areas. As shown, based on topographic information alone, approximately 26 percent of the acreage within three miles of the Project potentially would have views to some part of the Project.

Shielding as a result of intervening structures or landscaping is not taken into account. Because of intervening structural or vegetation elements, the entire Proposed Project site would not be visible from all of the points within the viewshed area. Even under conditions in which topography or other intervening elements do not obstruct views, views to any given point within a viewshed may not be clear due to levels of humidity or haze. Features can lose sharpness at approximately one-half mile depending on these atmospheric conditions.

The computer-generated map was field checked by project analysts and specific sensitive locations (parks, trails) were visited to confirm or eliminate visibility. Specifics related to visibility and intervening uses are provided as relevant within analyses below.

#### **2.1.1.3 Visual Character**

Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that are neither good nor bad in themselves. A change in visual character cannot be described as



having good or bad attributes until it is compared with the viewer response to that change. If there is public preference for the established visual character of a regional landscape and a resistance to or a preference for a project that would change or contrast with that character, then changes in the visual character can be evaluated.

The visual character of the Proposed Project locale encompasses visually diverse forms, including numerous hills, valley open areas, and notable hilltop development, with geometric and rectilinear structures skylined from off-site views. This juxtaposition of the natural and the engineered (man-made) environment is notable. Roadways wind along the hillsides in response to the topography and are more grid pattern in nature in the valley between the hillsides. Views from roadways in this area can provide dramatically different visual experiences. Along the public roadways (generally located at lower elevations) and from areas in the valley bottoms, views are fairly restricted. This is because the topography bottoms out and intervening residential land uses and associated structures and landscaping result in views being fairly focused and localized. From private roadways, public trails and private residential lots at higher elevations, views are panoramic in nature—with a viewshed often extending miles.

In general, area grading reflects the natural topography; in that it steps up and down the original gradient, following increases and decreases in elevation. The ultimate result, however, is that the ridgelines (which draw the eye from lower elevations) are developed with large-scale structures that are skylined to viewers from below, or at, similar elevations. Immediately south of the Proposed Project (in some instances the projects have a common boundary), the 468-acre Harmony Grove Village is actively building out, with mass grading already completed.

Depending on the season, the non-irrigated non-native grass fields of the Proposed Project parcels may be tan to a light to emerald green. Darker greens associated with the groves, and oak and eucalyptus stands are all primary elements in area views. Interspersed with these colors are the brighter white or stronger color blocks of painted structures. For foreground viewers, vivid colors associated with flowering plants in residential landscaping are also seen. The tans and/or greens, however, are the dominant colors. The greens in particular are visually “soft,” with topographic ridgelines and hilltops providing harder edged and dominant forms at the skyline.

The off-site but prominent hospital provides a dominant geometric, hard edged element to easterly views. For viewers looking more westerly, roads and structures, which are smaller in scale, provide some variety of form and line. Shrubs and trees can also provide bulbous or vertical elements in a largely horizontal valley floor viewscape when they are isolated from more dense vegetation. When vegetation is dense and viewed at a distance, it merges into a softer image. All of these visual elements, however, are visually overpowered by the dominant scale of the westerly hills.

#### **2.1.1.4 Visual Quality**

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the viewshed. This approach to evaluating visual quality can help identify specific methods for

mitigating specific adverse impacts that may occur as a result of a project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality can be defined as follows:

- **Unity** is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. It frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the landscape.
- **Intactness** is the visual integrity of the natural and man-made landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. It can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- **Vividness** is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns.

The visual unity of the landscape unit is moderate. Although the result of individual development on multiple parcels, the setting locates varied rural, semi-rural, and estate residential uses with large expanses of retained open space on hillsides. These homes have some architectural unity as well. Residential uses in the immediate area typically exhibit one-story ranch-style features with wooden or stucco exteriors and dark brown shake shingle or tile roofing. The residential elements show a level of compositional harmony, even among the variety of features. Agricultural groves or scrub habitats cover the hills, and are largely visible. Residential and agricultural uses are located within the valley floor. These uses can be closer to the viewer, but the viewshed is generally more restricted given screening by vegetation or structures at these lower levels. Variation between structures (size, type, color, etc.) is more apparent at these closer distances.

The intactness of the area currently is moderately low. The existing setting includes small to large homes, some with visible agricultural or equestrian elements. Dirt roads are visible, as are open fields. Mature vegetation edges many of the residences and other structures and some stands of trees are notable. Groves are clearly visible on eastern-facing hillsides, with native scrub slopes above them interspersed with large lot and estate residential uses. The large graded area associated with Harmony Grove Village to the south will be subject to construction anticipated to continue for approximately five years based on the 2007-certified Final EIR, following which a village center and up to 742 homes would be present in the southern portion of the valley.

The site setting is not particularly vivid due to its relatively small size and varying nature. The open nature of this northern part of the valley floor, combined with the higher topography of the ridgelines rimming the larger valley, however, results in a moderate rating.

#### **2.1.1.5 Viewer Response**

Viewer response, or awareness, is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by a project's implementation.

Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis.

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of the view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer.

A viewer's response is also affected by the degree to which he/she is receptive to the visual details, character, and quality of the surround landscape. A viewer's ability to perceive the landscape is affected by his/her activity. A viewer on vacation in San Diego County would probably take pleasure in looking at the landscape, and an individual may be strongly attached to the view from his home, but a local County resident commuting to work may not "register" those same visual resources on a daily basis.

The following discussion of viewer groups addresses both public and private views. With regard to private views, the majority of these are from residences or streets that are not accessible to the general public but are expected to have views to the Proposed Project.

#### Motorists

As noted, the primary roadway in the vicinity is Country Club Drive. Travelers on this roadway would constitute the largest viewer group in the area, and would have direct views onto the site at the southeastern parcel, where the road abuts the Proposed Project. Other east-west roadways east of the Project provide limited views to the Project. They are narrow, often edged with obscuring vegetation, and subject to few viewers as the right-angle views necessary for motorists passing these roads are acute and brief, and the number of viewers actually traveling these roads is low given how few homes are located west of County Club Drive and east of the Proposed Project. Other small and publically accessible roads are located east of Country Club Drive, such as Chardonay Way and Live Oak Place; and west of the Proposed Project, such as portions of Seeforever Drive. The Elfin Forest Road/Harmony Grove Road scenic corridor identified in the COS Element is located within the viewshed, but does not provide views to the Project. Motorist on Country Club Drive would have a moderately high sensitivity to change based on the direct "close-in" views available into the Project site.

Motorists on smaller, residential roads in the area are presumed to generally have moderately high sensitivity. A high percentage of the viewers along these roads are presumed to be residents, others may be present specifically for the scenic nature of the roads in this area given the surrounding topography. Residents' sensitivity (discussed below) generally would be high; however, the winding nature of the roads in the residential areas of the viewshed would require that motorists in these areas be more sensitive to the immediate roadway rather than wider views. This may not be the case with passengers, who would be able to pay more attention to the surrounding scenery.

Country Club Drive is posted at 45 miles per hour and carries approximately 5,710 average daily traffic today and is projected to carry approximately 9,952 ADT in 2035 (LLG 2014). In some areas, speeds would be expected to be slower where the road is narrow and winding or where through drivers slow for cross traffic. This could result in longer exposure to any one view than would occur at higher speed roads. As a result, motorists along Country Club Drive would have high exposure. Excluding the southernmost parcel, screening vegetation and/or off-site residences obscure views to the Proposed Project in many areas. Along other roads, views are additionally attenuated by distance, the curving nature of the roadways, and/or vegetation. The brief duration of views and relatively low number of viewers indicates that motorists on these roads in the residential areas have moderate exposure.

### Residents

A number of homes are located within the Proposed Project viewshed. Large, estate-style single-family residences and smaller residential uses are located in the Project vicinity and on the surrounding hills. For these viewers, the Project site can provide an often-seen and intimately known view that contributes to the sense of home or the broader community. Although home orientation or screening vegetation would obstruct many views, residential viewers are expected to be highly sensitive to changes in the immediate viewscape.

Residential views to the site currently are of a generally semi-rural residential area, with some equestrian and agricultural uses and a hilly backdrop. A substantial amount of local topographic variation (small hills, bumps, and gullies located on the larger hill forms) is present throughout the viewshed, and residential landscaping also provides frequent shielding of view elements, both from the home where the landscaping is installed as well as for adjacent structures. In other cases, residential (or related) structures themselves block views. Therefore, not every structure encompassed in the viewshed limits has uninterrupted views from the entire property. Regardless, where views exist, they can be expansive, and many homes are sited specifically to take advantage of these open views. In these instances, open views encompass adjacent developed uses, and both hillside and hilltop residential development. Where residents in the viewshed have long-term, stationary views, they are rated as experiencing high exposure.

### Recreationalists

The Del Dios Community Park (at the north end of Lake Hodges) is in the vicinity, but has no views to the site. The Del Dios Highlands County Preserve (accessed from Del Dios Highway and Date Lane) includes a trail that accesses the Reserve. Views to the Proposed Project are largely not available until the viewer is adjacent to/in the Reserve.

The Reserve offers approximately 11 miles of hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails, as well as picnic areas and scenic mountain viewing points. Based on car counts made by Reserve staff, an average of 2,800 to 3,500 cars accesses the Reserve per month. Reserve staff assume 2.5 individuals per car, so that an estimated 60,000 visitors a year come to the Reserve. Trail use can therefore be heavy, with the most heavily used trail being the "Way Up Trail," which is used to access others in the system. The farther away from the Reserve entrance a trail is located, the fewer hikers use the trail. In other words, the majority of Reserve visitors focus their visit on

areas closer to the visitor center, with fewer visitors visiting locales miles in from the entrance and away from the trail head (HELIX 2015a). A number of trails are on the northeastern slopes of the Reserve, with views oriented toward the Harmony Grove community and the Proposed Project site.

Individuals using the cited trail system generally would be expected to be highly sensitive to changes in the immediate viewscape. Viewers using these trails would be moving at pedestrian rates of travel, or could be stationary at overlooks. Although they would be expected to be sensitive to changes in the foreground, in this instance, the Proposed Project would be located at the back of the mid-ground view, and would appear visually distant. Because of this distance, although changes from open fields or solid grove to dispersed housing would be visible, they would not be notable following development. Rather, from this distance, the Project site would blend more seamlessly into uses to the west and east than the Project parcels currently do. As a result, viewers from these locales are not expected to be highly sensitive to Project changes. Sensitivity is assessed as moderately low due to distance and consistency of the Proposed Project with adjacent uses.

Current residents may walk, or ride bikes and/or horses along the valley floor roadways for recreational purposes. Although there are no designated trails at this time, the County trails map also shows that designated community trails are planned for this area. Individuals walking or riding along the local roadways would be expected to be sensitive to Project-related changes and would be anticipated to have expectations of existing conditions retention. They would move at a relatively slow rate of passage, with high exposure levels.

Despite the opportunity for expansive views of the Proposed Project site and surrounding area, recreationalists in the nearby Reserve lands and hiking on nearby trails are anticipated to have moderately low exposure. Open views to the Project are available from existing public trails, as noted above. The number of hikers also would be highest within these recreational areas on the north-facing slopes. The distance of the Project from these viewers, however, diminishes the amount of detail that could be perceived and results in a lowered exposure rating.

Individuals walking or riding adjacent to the Proposed Project along the local roadways would move at a relatively slow rate of passage, with high exposure levels.

#### **2.1.1.6 Regulatory Setting**

The Proposed Project is subject to a number of regulations applicable to the protection of visual resources, as well as plans and policies that ensure adequate consideration is given to preserving and/or enhancing the visual qualities of an area. These policies aid in evaluation of the planning agency/community perception of visual qualities within an area, as well as providing guidance as to whether Proposed Project modifications would be visually compatible with County and/or community goals. The Proposed Project is subject to the following guidelines and policies.

## State of California

California adopted a Scenic Highway Program (Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq.) in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the visual quality of areas that are adjacent to highways.

## County of San Diego General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element

The 2011 COS Element of the County General Plan combines what formerly were four separate elements (Open Space, Conservation, Scenic Highway, and Energy) and describes the natural resources within the County and goals and policies to preserve them. The COS Element provides direction for future growth and development in the County with respect to the conservation, management, and utilization of natural (biological, water, agricultural, paleontological, mineral, visual [including scenic corridors and dark skies]) and cultural resources; protection and preservation of open space; and provision of park and recreation resources. In the vicinity of the Proposed Project site, Elfin Forest Road/Harmony Grove Road, from the San Marcos city limits to Escondido city limits, is identified as a scenic corridor in the COS Element and is included as part of the County Scenic Highway System. This roadway segment is located, at its closest point, approximately 0.5 mile from the Project site. Specific goals and policies in the COS Element are addressed in Section 3.1.4, *Land Use*, of this EIR.

## Resource Protection Ordinance

The County's RPO provides special regulations applicable to certain types of discretionary applications, including tentative maps. The ordinance focuses on the preservation and protection of the County's unique topography, natural beauty, diversity, natural resources, and quality of life. It is intended to protect the integrity of sensitive lands including wetlands, wetland buffers, floodplains/floodways, sensitive habitats, cultural resources, and steep slopes (lands having a natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 vertical feet, unless said land has been substantially disturbed by previous legal grading), all of which are components of visual quality and community character. There are approximately 35.6 acres of slopes on the property which meet the definition of steep slopes under the County's RPO. This represents approximately 15 percent of Proposed Project site. Refer to Figure 1-33 of this EIR for a map of the slopes on site.

## Dark Skies/Glare

The County of San Diego Light Pollution Code (Title 5, Division 1, Chapter 2, Sections 51.201-51.209 of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances; LPC) seeks to control undesirable light rays emitted into the night sky in order to reduce detrimental effects on astronomical research. Zone A, defined as the area within a 15-mile radius centered on the Palomar Observatory and within a 15-mile radius centered on the Mount Laguna Observatory, has specific light emission restrictions. The unincorporated portions of San Diego County not within Zone A fall within Zone B, and are subject to lesser restrictions. The Proposed Project site is located approximately 25 miles from the Palomar observatory and even farther from the Laguna Observatory, and is therefore, within the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance Zone B. Outdoor

lighting, such as security or parking lot lighting, must be less than 4,050 lumens and fully shielded within Zone B.

### San Dieguito Community Plan

The San Dieguito Community Plan augments the 2011 General Plan and contains goals and policies specific to the San Dieguito community planning area. The Proposed Project site is located in the northernmost portion of the San Dieguito community planning area. The community of Eden Valley, within which most of the Project site is located, was added to the San Dieguito community planning area from the North County Metropolitan Subregional Area (August 2011). Guidance related to aesthetics is contained in several elements of the San Dieguito Community Plan, including the Community Character, Land Use, Circulation, Conservation, Scenic Highways, and Open Space elements. Because the southern portion of the Project site falls within the Harmony Grove community, goals and policies related to aesthetics contained within the Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove Community Plan portion also apply.

## **2.1.2 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination as to Significance**

### **2.1.2.1 *Potential Conflict with Important Visual Elements or Inconsistency with Applicable Design Guidelines***

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

1. Introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.

#### Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (2007a).

#### Analysis

Visual character is composed of the visual environment “as a whole,” and includes both existing natural and developed uses within a seen area.

The Proposed Project would construct a semi-rural residential community with associated park and recreational uses located on sloping hillsides and bench area, as well as valley floor; surrounded by existing and developing residential uses and hillsides and off-site steep ridgelines. The design configuration would continue the pattern of residential development currently located primarily east of Country Club Drive and within 1,000 feet northeast of the Proposed Project, as

well as the variety of densities in the Harmony Grove Village project that is currently under construction to the south. Single-family residences would vary in specific residential design, specific lot size, and in some cases, would also contain views to horses or other large market animals, as further discussed below. Residential lots would be grouped in five distinct neighborhoods to limit the impact footprint and provide large areas of open space and retention of on-site visual resources, such as large mature tree stands, steep hillsides, avocado orchards, a pond, and an existing equestrian complex.

Approximately 115 acres (or approximately 48 percent of the site) would consist of visual open space. This includes the biological open space, retained orchard/agricultural preserve, common space and landscaped areas shown on Figure 1-13 with the following clarifications. A total of 32 acres has been deleted from the overall total relative to visual open space. The 115 acres would not visually read as “developed” following Proposed Project completion and installation landscaping, and/or would not change from existing conditions (Figures 1-11 and 1-13 of this EIR). For this reason, it excludes the community center park with its structures and pool, as well as over an acre of the Neighborhood Park, which would contain parking or restrooms. The transmission line easement in the southern portion of the Project is also excluded. Although part of the existing condition, this right-of-way is primarily a broad swath of grasses with intermittent large lattice towers that provide an industrial note inconsistent with open space. The visual open space acreage number also conservatively excludes the limited building zone (LBZ) as it may contain uninhabited structural improvements such as sheds, gazebos, pools and patios. (Although likely within some of the LBZ, it is also likely that much of it would be vegetated. The 48 percent is therefore likely to be a conservative number.) Taken altogether, it is expected that approximately half of the Project site would provide visual relief from the Project built elements.

Proposed Project development would be grouped within the open space areas. Where abutting existing developed uses, the Project would provide buffering landscaping and privacy walls (see Figures 1-26a-c and 1-28, respectively). The community identity/privacy walls are addressed in more detail below in this discussion. The landscape buffer widths along external site boundaries are shown on Figure 2.1-6, *Landscape Buffers*. As depicted, they are generally 50 feet in depth. In a few areas, they may be less than 50 feet deep. In these areas, the landscaping would never be less than 18 feet in depth and there are extenuating circumstances that additionally provide the equivalent of the deeper width. These include the presence of existing mature landscaping, larger distances between the Project and residences on abutting parcels, and/or grade differentials.

In Neighborhood 1, one small area approximately 100 feet in length would be located immediately north of Mt. Whitney Road on a parcel just west of the Community Recreation Area and Street A. In this area, the buffer would be 80 percent of the optimal depth, or 40 feet. The existing residence on the abutting lot is oriented north-south in alignment, with the end of the structure closest to the Project containing the garage. An additional small area of approximately 140 feet in length would be located perpendicular to, and just north of, Mt. Whitney Road at the southeastern extent of the neighborhood where a home on one lot is more than 115 feet east of proposed uses with mature trees on the abutting lot between the home and the Project. Along the northern boundary of that southeast portion of the neighborhood there is approximately 420 feet of frontage (separated by 80 feet of 50-foot buffer) where three abutting lots have homes a



minimum of 338 feet from the Proposed Project homes, and where some grade separation also exists. The residences are also separated from the Project boundary by numerous sheds, outbuildings, animal facilities such as corrals, etc. All the rest of the buffering landscape in Neighborhood 1, as well as all the buffer landscape in Neighborhoods 2 and 5, provide a minimum 50-foot depth.

In Neighborhood 3, three Proposed Project home pads would be located along the northern boundary that would not have the full 50-foot buffer. The easternmost of these is located on an angle from the closest home (over 155 feet to the northeast). Where the home looks directly into the Proposed Project parcel, the view would be to the landscaped side of a detention basin berm rather than a structure, and to common and biological open space associated with the trail head area. Two lots to the west (additionally separated from each other by Project open space) abut undeveloped property to the north. Five lots trending north-south along the Proposed Project's Neighborhood 4 eastern boundary are adjacent to this same currently undeveloped parcel. The Proposed Project would provide a vegetated buffer varying from 32 to 43 feet in width in this area, and as noted, there is no abutting developed use. At the very north end of Neighborhood 4, two lots approximately 77 feet from an off-site residence would have between 37 and 42 feet of buffer over a space of approximately 120 feet. This is 74 to 84 percent of the buffer depth that would be optimal. That structure is aligned roughly southwest to northeast, so that a "short side" presents toward the thinner buffer. The thickness of the proposed buffer, combined with the distance from the existing home and its orientation, result in the thinner buffer being appropriate for this area.

Regardless of specific depth, the buffering landscaping has been chosen to provide heavy screening within the first five years of planting; unless otherwise specified. Most of these plants/shrubs would be installed from one- to five-gallon containers. Common names are used here for the reader's convenience; genus/species information is provided in the Proposed Project Specific Plan, in Section 2.2.3, *Landscape Palette*. Identified species include the following plants, with anticipated attainment of visual maturity noted: Matilja poppy and sugarbush (1 year), coffeeberry (1 to 3 years), coast live oak (installed from a 48-inch box; 10 to 25 years), Catalina cherry and hybrid Oregon grape (2 to 5 years), manzanita (5 to 15 years), and coastal scrub oak (low shrub; 5 to 15 years).

This dense buffer would provide substantial screening of the Proposed Project neighborhoods from the abutting residences located along the eastern and northern boundaries of Neighborhoods 1 and 2 and along the southern and eastern boundary of Neighborhood 3. In other instances, such as along the southeastern boundary of Neighborhood 1 and the northern boundary of Neighborhood 5, existing woodland would be retained, and additional trees would be added to the mix.

This area was affected by the May 2014 fires, with some substantial damage indicated throughout the tree crowns. Some sustained only partial damage to their crowns, however, and continued to show green leaves on the upper portion in the second week of June 2014. Excluding some eucalyptus trees and a willow along Mt. Whitney Road, no mature trees were identified as incinerated or charred beyond recovery, although some mortality may still occur due to stress from the fire combined with extended drought conditions. For most of the existing woodland in these two neighborhoods, however, the trees are expected to continue to provide

existing visual elements, as well as future screening. This would be augmented by the Project plantings. Also, although beyond control of the Proposed Project, it should be noted that existing mature vegetation on some of the abutting lots, which currently obscures views of the site from those lots, was protected as part of the fire management efforts going on during the fire. The eastern fire line in this area was largely restricted to on-site areas. The CEQA baseline for assessing impacts is the date of the NOP, June 20, 2013. The wildfire is viewed as a temporary change in the visual environment.

From more elevated view positions from the east or west, it would be seen that residential Neighborhoods within the eastern areas of the Proposed Project site and in the valley (Neighborhoods 1, 3, and 5) have been sited so that they would be adjacent to existing surrounding residential development. Neighborhood 1 would include 96 homes grouped within the Eden Valley area adjacent to the existing homes along Mt. Whitney Road, Romance Road, Calico Lane, and Eden Valley Lane. Existing single-family residential development extend eastward to and across Country Club Drive. Neighborhood 3 would include 41 homes adjacent to existing homes along Eden Valley Lane, Surrey Lane, and Hill Valley Drive, with 21 wider and deeper lots to allow horse and market animal keeping. Additionally, a privately maintained trail head would be provided in Neighborhood 3 to reinforce the existing equestrian elements within the Project area.

Neighborhood 5 would include 55 homes adjacent to existing homes along Mt. Whitney Road and Country Club Drive, and future homes within the Harmony Grove Village project that is currently under construction. A total of 33 of these lots also would be wider and deeper to allow horse and market animal keeping. As the most visible neighborhood to the greatest number of viewers, the lots in Neighborhood 5 are similar to those abutting Mt. Whitney Road to the north as well as the majority of lots located in the hills to the east of Country Club Drive and north of Kauana Loa Drive. Large stands of mature eucalyptus and oak trees, riparian areas, and an existing equestrian complex would be retained. A public neighborhood park and equestrian facility also would be sited next to Country Club Drive. Roadside landscaping would additionally shield potential views to residential and WTWRF structures.

Regarding the WTWRF specifically, a schematic of the treatment features is provided in Figure 1-14a. The schematic representation is the most conservative, as it identifies the greatest number of anticipated facility elements on the 0.4-acre site (during design, buildings may be combined and basins may be located adjacent to each other, thereby using a smaller footprint). Conservatively, the WTWRF could include three buildings and four basin areas. At a number of like facilities, however, services provided in the three buildings are combined into one, and the basin facilities are all set together, as depicted on Figure 2.1-7, *Typicals for WTWRF*. As shown, the small building can combine the headworks, residual solids processing, and operations/laboratory uses. All of the basin uses have also been sited together. These two facilities were chosen for depiction for two reasons. The Santa Fe facility is local to San Diego County, and both of these facilities are sited similarly to the Proposed Project, with the facility being somewhat below abutting topography, and shielded by landscaping. The relatively small scale of the buildings is apparent against the adjacent trees and shrubs and walkway guards within the basins. Any peep views to the facility through the roadside and facility landscaping

would appear similar to agribusiness uses historically or currently in the vicinity (ponds, tanks, equipment sheds, barns, etc.).

Residential lots in the western portions of the Proposed Project site (Neighborhoods 2 and 4) would occur on the sloping hillsides. In Neighborhood 2, the most westerly homes would be located on a bench feature located east of the western Project boundary, and downslope of existing residences. The northwestern area of the Project site is currently used for avocado production. The Proposed Project would retain the character of the existing groves within this area by incorporating approximately 37 acres of the avocado groves into open space, along with the development of some of the larger lots within the Proposed Project. Lots within this portion of the site (Neighborhood 4) would average 14,850 s.f. Residential lots along the western Project boundary (Neighborhood 2) would be adjacent to the existing estate residences in San Marcos and would be some of the largest lots within the Project, averaging 19,200 s.f. Placing the larger lots within the sloping hillsides and downslope from the interface with existing large lot residential development would visually blend the transition between existing and proposed uses in this area relative to lot size.

The Proposed Project would not introduce a new land use that does not currently exist in the immediate area. Proposed residential neighborhoods have been designed and sited to be adjacent to existing residential development, and in keeping with the area, existing on-site semi-rural visual elements, including some equestrian and agricultural elements, would be retained on open space, community use and some residential lots (a total of 64 percent of the Project). As a result, the proposed development would extend the primary visual patterns of development of the surrounding neighborhoods onto the Proposed Project site. Taking all of the above into consideration, the development overall would be visually consistent with the existing and developing surrounding landscape and development as a whole, and the Project site design and layout would not substantially contrast with the existing visual character and quality of the Project vicinity. Most of the proposed elements, including placement of homes adjacent to areas where homes already exist; retention of a substantial amount of open space, often along Project edges; lack of direct visual access to the site by the majority of potential viewers; and the amount of screening provided as part of Project design; result in **less than significant impacts being identified based on Proposed Project contrast with existing character or conflict with the visual quality of the area.**

The amount of grading required to create pads on the slopes would, however, create manufactured slopes exceeding those currently visible in the immediate vicinity. Particularly along the western edge of the Proposed Project, where currently vegetated slopes are present, the raw soil could draw the eye due to its differentiation from the vegetated slopes in the vicinity. This would be exacerbated if this is an area where blasting is required, as the rock exposed by blasting would not be weathered, and would vary from other outcrops in the Proposed Project areas. Although Project-installed vegetation would ultimately obscure the grading footprint through hydroseeding or landscaping, additional mitigation to reinforce landscaping efforts in these areas would be required in order to ensure adequate screening (see Section 2.1.5, *Mitigation*, below). It is noted that there are some small sliver areas along the western and southern Project boundaries where 50 percent vegetative clearing required for conformance with the FPP would be required, and the additional planting could not occur. Initially, these areas

may have an unnatural linear appearance from a distance. As noted, however, these are would read as “sliver” areas and most of the manufactured slope areas are sited within locations proposed for irrigation as part of the Project. They could, therefore, feasibly be enhanced. The manufactured slopes, however, would expose raw soil and broken rock that would not appear aged for a substantial period of time, and landscaping of the slopes through hydroseeding and/or landscaping to standards identified for more level portions of the Project in the Landscape Concept Plan is not expected to obscure those areas within the five years assumed for overall Project landscaping. As a result, mitigation would be required to address **a significant impact relative to Proposed Project contrast with existing visual elements. (Impact AE-1)**

### Architectural Design

Architectural design of structures within the surrounding area is varied, due to a mixture of land uses. Residential uses in the immediate area typically exhibit one-story ranch-style features with wooden or stucco exteriors and dark brown shake shingle, whitish, or red tile roofing; the latter two design options visually stand out and draw the eye from elevated viewing positions. Residential neighborhoods east of Country Club Drive are generally denser (i.e., on smaller lots and closer together) and consist of one- and two-story homes with more variation in architectural styles and decorative features. The estate residences on the hillsides to the west of the Proposed Project generally are large two-story homes with varied architectural styles and design elements. Nearby commercial and industrial uses, to the north in the city of Escondido, generally exhibit more utilitarian features with minimal architectural design. Therefore, there is not a single or unified architectural theme within the Project area, although the California ranch-style homes (i.e., single-family homes longer than they are wide, some with equestrian uses) west of Country Club Drive are the most distinctive element immediately adjacent to Project parcels.

Conceptual architectural design is described in the Specific Plan. Although specific choice among the noted options of design elements is not identified because they would be left to the Proposed Project development, the Project would provide architectural styling that is consistent with other development in this part of the County. Identified potential styles include Craftsman, European Cottage, Mission, Monterey, Spanish, and Italian vernaculars. These styles provide varied roof and gable lines, window treatments, highlighted entries, exterior cladding materials and textures, articulations, massing, and other architectural design elements. All garages would be set back from the primary house line closest to sidewalk or roadway viewers. Roof colors would be dark browns (as opposed to red tile), and exterior facades and design elements would be painted in earth tones to visually blend with the surrounding area. Houses mostly would be two stories with a height of 35 feet or less and several different floor plans in each Neighborhood. These design elements are all incorporated within the Specific Plan, and implementation of the Project consistent with that Specific Plan would be a Project Condition upon approval.

The WTWRF architectural building design would include details intended to create the impression of an out-building cluster of agrarian barn structures. Design details could include: varied building massing; gable roof profiles with standing-seam materials to provide textural interest; horizontal siding; exposed, simple beams and columns; carriage style stable and man doors; cupolas and weather vanes; and roof dormers, and would be topically consistent with the retained (existing) corral features in this area. The WTWRF would be fenced with coated chain

link fencing approximately eight feet in height and screened with landscape plantings. These design considerations would provide visually compatible features within the visual environment and would mask the otherwise urban or industrial look that is usually characteristic of this type of facility.

The wet weather storage emergency containment location associated with the WTWRF would be located in the northwest portion of Neighborhood 5. It would be a basin contained within berms ranging from 1 to 20 feet in height. From elevated locations in the hills to the east or west, it would be visible as open space. From Country Club Drive, any potential views to the basin would be shielded by more easterly portions of the Proposed Project's Neighborhood 5 or by developed uses along the north side of Mt. Whitney Road. From Mt. Whitney Road and homes across the street, the basin would not be very visible because of its low elevation (in the areas closer to 1 foot in elevation) or by Project screening provided by the Project-required landscaping (trees and shrubs).

Overall, the Proposed Project would result in the construction of elements within the landscape that would be compatible with the existing varied visual character and would provide an updated architectural product with enhanced landscaping to maintain the visual quality of the neighborhood. No architectural features are proposed that would sharply contrast with surrounding visual elements, or that would create a visually dominant feature.

#### Massing and Scale

As discussed above under Site Design and Layout, the Proposed Project proposes to group residential lots to limit the impact footprint and provide large areas of open space and retention of semi-rural on-site visual resources. As a result, residential lot sizes generally would be smaller than those at surrounding residential development and absent design considerations, there is the potential for the development to contrast with the relative scale of existing surrounding development. However, the Project incorporates several site design features to reduce massing effects. By grouping homes, large areas of visual open space would be provided. Approximately 48 percent of the Proposed Project site (approximately 115 acres) would remain in visual open space; including existing on-site elements such as mature tree stands, steep hillsides, riparian areas, native habitat, avocado orchards and a pond. The features within the proposed open space network would provide visual buffers within and between proposed residential neighborhoods to reduce massing effects.

Proposed Project landscaping would also provide screening of the residential development, thereby reducing perceived massing. Extensive landscaping, utilizing species consistent with the existing character of the Project area, would be planted along the site perimeter, along Project roadways, within residential neighborhoods, within parks and recreation uses, and in Project affected visual open space areas, as described below.

The Specific Plan includes a substantial palette of plants for parkway, woodland, orchard hillside, natural hillside, buffer and storm water basin landscape zones. Trees would be routinely planted from 15-gallon or 24-inch box containers (with focused larger sizes as specified below) and shrubs would be planted from one- and five-gallon containers.

The buffer landscape palette, designed to shield much of the Proposed Project from immediately abutting developed uses, is described above. “Woodland” species would be added to existing woodland areas, and are intended to augment the existing woodland through additional species variety, supplementing the existing coloration and form of these areas with new colors and lines. As such, the trees do not need to reach immediate visual maturity – their value is planned for the long term, and for visual interest that is not necessary for screening purposes. Nonetheless, at least four of the identified species would be visually mature within five years. These include white alder (1 to 5 years), evergreen ash and California sycamore (2 to 5 years), and bay laurel (5 to 10 years).

Within the streetscape zone, four trees are identified. California sycamore and oaks would be planted in informal groves occasionally interrupted by limited drifts of California bay laurel, and olive trees would be located at Project entries. Due to their slow growth rate relative to other species noted above, the entry olives would be installed from 36- to 48-inch boxes, so that more mature trees would be installed at the beginning. Oaks also would be planted from 48-inch boxes within streetscape areas.

Where informal groves would be planted as part of the typical orchard hillside zone, at least five of the species would achieve visual maturity within two to five years (strawberry tree, citrus species, Brisbane box, sweet bay and fern pine). Aleppo pine, used in a limited fashion, would require 5-15 years to mature, while the similarly limited stone pine would not visually mature for approximately 30 years (more similar to the oak species).

So many of the noted species would be visually mature within five years, that such landscaping would visually screen and soften views of the development, and would interrupt structure massing effects of the homes.

Within the site topography, homes would be placed primarily in valley areas and on the lower hillsides. In a few instances, homes would be located over the low rolling hills or on an internal topographic bench within the Proposed Project. This occurs in the eastern portion of the Project, such as in the vicinity of the major transmission line corridor across Neighborhood 5, as well as in the portion of Neighborhood 2 below the off-site higher hills associated with Seeforever Drive and higher roads. These homes would be located on lower hills and slopes within the Proposed Project, and not on the higher ridgelines that form such a distinctive backdrop to Eden Valley and draw the eye up and out of the valley to the skyline.

The housing mix within each Neighborhood would include an assortment of several different floor plans and architectural styles to provide visual diversity. Typical levels of architectural detailing relative to structure facing, window style and surrounds, roof pitch, and use of curving or rectangular design elements are provided in Figures 2.1-8a through 2.1-8c, *Typical Architectural Detailing Options*, for each of the housing styles potentially proposed for the Proposed Project. These provide a frame of reference for the variety and level of detail in the future development architecture, although the precise styles would be determined by the Project developer following review by County staff. As a result of these different styles, although most of the proposed homes would be two stories, finished elevations would slightly vary within each Neighborhood to break up the roof line. The variety of scale would interrupt the mass of each structure. Furthermore, on the hillsides, the alignment of Project roadways would meander to

mimic the curvilinear lines of the topography in the visual landscape, to minimize contrast with the undulating visual forms of the western hillsides and ridgelines. These design considerations help to reduce the potential structure massing effects associated with this residential community.

The proposed WTWRF would be located in the southeast portion of the site adjacent to Country Club Drive. This plant would include a few structures, tanks, and treatment and storage facilities within a 0.7-acre parcel. This type of facility, with its various equipment, buildings, and storage facilities, could be expected to introduce industrial features within a semi-rural area that could potentially contrast with the existing visual character of the area. This expectation could be increased based on the location of the proposed WTWRF adjacent to the most-heavily traveled roadway in the immediate vicinity. In this case, however, the presence of three buildings and four basins would not be expected to be out of scale with the surrounding rural visual environment, or to look substantially different from views to agricultural or equestrian facilities in the area. This is the result of the following visual elements. First, the WTWRF would be setback from Country Club Drive by approximately 20 feet and would be sited at an elevation of 626 amsl, while the abutting portion of Country Club Drive is at approximately 634 feet amsl. The buildings would be one story, ranging from 15 to no higher than 20 feet (lower than nearby residential uses on the Proposed Project), and design would reference barn structures, as noted above. All mechanical equipment would be housed within buildings or noise-attenuating covers and the basins would be between four and eight feet in height, which would keep their highest features level with or below the road bed. Incorporation of the above-noted architectural design features would create a facility resembling an out-building cluster of barn structures, which would not be visually dominant. Furthermore, the WTWRF would be partially shielded by Proposed Project landscaping between the facility and Country Club Drive, as shown on Figures 1-24 and 1-25. Lighting for the facility would not be any higher than the height of the equipment and would only activate when workers are present. Based on the design features of the WTWRF, its small footprint (a total of 0.4, or approximately 30,500 square feet total with approximately half of that in ground level parking area), and the landscape screening, the WTWRF would not conflict with important visual elements in the immediate vicinity when viewed from Country Club Drive.

Based on incorporation of site design considerations and features required by the Proposed Project Specific Plan and site plans and required as part of Project Conditions, implementation of the Project residences and WTWRF would not change the relative scale of development in the area. These structures would not result in any new, dominant visual elements within the viewshed. Analysis specific to Project retaining, privacy, and recommended sound walls is addressed below.

### *Retaining Walls*

Due to on-site topography and to minimize grading, numerous retaining walls are proposed along Proposed Project roadways and within lots. These walls are shown on Figure 1-32. Retaining wall heights would range between 2 and 20 feet and lengths would range between 43 and 523 feet. The tallest walls (at 18 and 20 feet in height, respectively) would be located at the back of lots 153 to 156 and 157 to 159, as well as Lot 161. These walls would be largely if not completely, shielded by the homes placed between these walls and the off-site viewers, as well

as by Project landscaping. This would be the result of the homes on the lots where the walls would be sited, as well as homes across the street from them. This double, and in some cases, triple shielding rows of intervening uses would virtually eliminate views to these walls. Most of these walls would be interior to the Project; many would be perpendicular in orientation to off-site viewers, and most would have heights ranging from two to eight feet. These walls would not draw the eye the way that larger, and perimeter, walls would. They also would be largely screened from off-site viewers by Project homes and elements of Project landscaping.

Some retaining walls would be constructed along more visually accessible perimeter portions of the Proposed Project. Walls adjacent to (and visible from) off-site roads include a 192-foot-long and 8-foot-high wall downslope from Eden Valley Lane, a 70-foot-long and 2-foot-high wall on Romance Road and a 97-foot-long and 7-foot high wall extending perpendicularly to the north from Romance Road. Approximately 74 feet of wall 9 feet in height also may be visually accessible from Mt. Whitney Drive in the southern portion of Neighborhood 1, which would be generally shielded by landscaping shown on Figure 1-24. It is expected that the 2-foot-high wall on Romance Road and the 8-foot-high wall downslope from Eden Valley Lane (Neighborhood 3) would both be wholly or partially obscured by the additional 50-foot-wide buffer abutting the Proposed Project development in these areas (see Figure 1-25). This leaves four walls that would edge the Project perimeter, but would not be landscaped based on the Project Conceptual Landscape Plan. These include the 97-foot-long wall abutting Neighborhood 1, as well as two walls in Neighborhood 3 adjacent to an unpaved and unnamed street north of Surrey Lane (10 feet and 11 feet in height) that would be located perpendicular (i.e., along the line of sight) to viewers, which would reduce their visibility, and two walls at the east edge of Neighborhood 4. The two walls in Neighborhood 4 would be eight and six feet in height, respectively and would be “facing” the viewers rather than being along the line of sight. They would be located approximately 675 feet west of the closest off-site residential viewers, with some substantial intervening vegetation. The walls would be 356 and 213 feet in length, however, which is atypical of existing development adjacent to the Project today. **The introduction of these large walls with line elements and rectilinear surface planes would visually contrast with the backdrop of rolling hillsides and steep ridgelines, resulting in associated impacts being identified as significant. (Impact AE-2)**

#### *Community Identity (Privacy) Walls and Fencing*

A series of walls/fences is identified along portions of the Proposed Project boundary to provide either visual or functional separation from abutting uses. These barriers are shown on Figure 1-28. Articulated privacy walls and/or community fences would be provided along Project residential lots in: Neighborhood 1 on both northern boundaries and along the eastern boundary; along the eastern Project boundary extending between Neighborhoods 1 and 3; in Neighborhood 3 along the northern, southern, and eastern boundaries; and in an inverted “L” shape at the northeastern corner of Neighborhood 5. These walls are not anticipated to exceed five feet in height, a normal height for a residential privacy barrier. Within Neighborhood 1, the articulated privacy wall or fencing would total approximately 640 feet, and the community fence/transparent fencing would total approximately 500 feet. Within Neighborhood 3, the articulated privacy wall or fencing would total approximately 2,810 feet, and the community fence/transparent fencing would total approximately 240 feet. Within



Neighborhood 5, the articulated privacy wall or fencing would total approximately 1,900 feet, and the community fence/transparent fencing would total approximately 700 feet. A comparison of these fence locations with Figure 1-24 shows that (although the barriers are expected to be consistent with privacy barriers normally associated with residential uses in terms of height and variety of styles) the great majority of these barriers would be either shielded from abutting land uses by the landscape screening proposed by the Project (such as along the “facing” boundaries of Neighborhoods 1 and 3 in the more southern portion of the Project) or located in an area where no abutting property owner would have a direct view to the barrier, such as along the northern boundary of Neighborhood 3).

As depicted, the walls along the northeastern portion of Neighborhood 5 would also serve as the sound barrier proposed as Project mitigation (and further discussed below). The Community fencing would provide a non-solid barrier, which would stop cross traffic, but allow some visibility to uses until Project landscaping attains maturity in approximately five years. Where vegetation is proposed as opposed to features such as rock facing, vegetation would achieve visual maturity within five years due to a combination of Project irrigation, which would support growth, as well as the type of plants used to screen these features (vines, shrubs and/or fast-growing trees or trees installed at the noted container sizes).

As shown on Figure 1-28, in some instances (e.g., along the Neighborhood 1 eastern and northernmost boundary), the barrier would be the rock wall of varied height on the upslope portion of the abutting lots, and situated west of the Project sidewalk, providing a quaint aspect to the Project boundary area. The solid walls proposed for Neighborhood 3 would provide a permanent barrier between Project and existing uses, but would be obscured by Project landscaping upon vegetative maturity. The variety of walls mimics the different design scenarios found on properties under different ownership, and would minimize the perception of a large-scale single-format development for off-site abutting viewers. Excluding the sound wall(s) discussed below, **the design variety of the community identity walls, combined with the rustic elements proposed and the amount of screening ultimately provided by landscaping, results in these walls having less than significant visual impacts.**

#### *Proposed Sound Walls*

As detailed in the Project Acoustical Assessment Report (HELIX 2014e), an assessment of on-site traffic noise was completed for the Proposed Project. Based on this assessment, a noise wall would be required on the Project site within Neighborhood 5. They would be required along the rear residential lots whose backyards would be adjacent to Country Club Drive. The walls would be five and a half to six feet in height and would extend for varying distances along Country Club Drive. From Mt. Whitney Road to the northern Project entrance on Country Club Drive (approximately 380 linear feet behind lots 291 to 295) and from that entrance southerly behind lots 296 and 297 for approximately 230 linear feet. This totals approximately 610 feet along Country Club Drive. There would be 30-foot long returns perpendicular to Country Club Drive wherever a break or terminus in the wall is required.

Because the walls would be sited downslope at the edge of residential lots (approximately 20 feet from road right-of-way north of the entry and ranging from 10.5 to 29 feet west of road

right-of-way south of the entry), the full height of the walls would not be visible from the road. The noise wall is depicted in Figure 2.6-1, described more fully below, under Illustrative Simulations. As shown, only the upper portions of the wall(s) would be visible, or approximately four feet of their height. Motorists would view the wall and associated landscaping for a maximum of approximately 28 seconds at 30 miles per hour, and approximately 24 seconds at 35 miles per hour—although actual viewing time would probably be less due to the lateral nature of the view and competing visual elements related to the hill on the other side of the road and other road users. Regardless, the cobble design assumed by the Proposed Project landscape architect combined with Project-mandated landscaping would turn this wall into an aesthetically pleasing feature. Coffeeberry and sugar bush shrubs from the buffer landscape palette were simulated in that figure. These shrubs reach visual maturity in one to three years. Although the soundwall would comprise a visually unique configuration along this roadway, its visible scale and screening would result in a **less than significant visual impact related to change in community character**.

#### *Construction-period Sound Barriers*

As stated in Section 2.6 of this EIR, if ripping, drilling, or excavation is required within 180 feet of a residentially occupied off-site or on-site property line, a 12-foot high barrier erected along a length of the property line is recommended for mitigation. This barrier would be of sufficient length to block the line of sight between the occupied property and any ripping operations within 180 feet of the property. Additionally, the barrier(s) would extend at least 10 feet beyond the horizontal line of sight in each direction. Figure 5 of Appendix G to this EIR shows the location where the noise contours would require control. The area is located in the southern portion of Neighborhood 3 for an east-west stretch of approximately 600 feet.

The northern boundaries of four existing residential properties border this site boundary, all of which are accessed from Eden Valley Lane, on the east, or south side of the residences. At the western extent of the barrier, the closest portion of the home would be approximately 225 feet away from the barrier, and would be located perpendicular to it. There is some intermittent existing vegetation along the property line. For the three homes to the east, the structures are much closer to the property line. Two of the residences have screening vegetation, the easternmost home has the least existing screening. Each of these homes may see the barrier, which would be atypical in height from privacy walls that may be associated with private homes. Although atypical, the barrier would have relatively low visibility, and would be removed following Proposed Project ripping activities, and therefore temporary in nature. Also, the barrier may be visible to travelers along Eden Valley Lane, although it would be expected to be visible for a very short period of time as travelers turn south to follow a turn in the road and may see the barrier extending to the west. For these viewers, it is expected that the grading/ripping activities would provide a more substantial element to the view than a thin linear feature.

In addition, as proposed for mitigation in Section 2.4 of this EIR, if raptors are observed nesting or displaying breeding/nesting behavior in the northern and western portions of Neighborhood 3 (in the open space area) during the construction period, a temporary noise barrier or berm may be constructed at the edge of the development footprint to reduce noise levels below 60 dB  $L_{EQ}$  or ambient (if ambient is greater than 60 dB  $L_{EQ}$ ). This assumes that the construction is occurring

during the nesting season, that the birds are observed engaging in the requisite behaviors, and that some other mitigation measure (e.g., modification of equipment operation duration) does not occur—any one of which could render the barrier unnecessary.

If required, however, the location of these potential barriers is less well defined than the barrier described above as they would be dependent upon the precise nesting behavior/location. Nonetheless, since the biological open space within which the birds would be likely to find nest locations (based on the locations of their sightings during biological survey combined with the presence of trees) can be seen on Figure 2.4-10a, some assumptions can be made. First, a number of potential locations would be located within the Proposed Project, away from property lines (e.g., between Neighborhoods 3 and 4, or between residential areas of Neighborhood 3 on the south and the biological open space on the north). These barriers would be subsumed within the larger construction footprint and would not visually stand out given ground disturbance, moving large-scale equipment, etc. If barriers closer to property lines would be necessary, they would be likely to be located either near the westernmost homes at the western extent of Eden Valley Lane on the south side of Neighborhood 3, or near the single residence that abuts the north side of Neighborhood 3. The number of off-site viewers able to see these barriers is expected to be extremely low. The presence of the barriers also would be temporary in nature, and removed when the nesting behavior is concluded or the construction activity in the vicinity of the nest is completed.

The low number of potential viewers, the lack of views to these barriers from a protected view point, and the fact that the barriers would be temporary in nature and removed following Proposed Project construction activities in these locales, result in visual **impacts associated with potential temporary sound barriers being assessed as less than significant.**

### Illustrative Simulations

In order to ensure a full understanding of potential visual effects related to Proposed Project implementation, simulations were created to exhibit projected conditions following construction. The purpose of simulations is to provide the reviewer with a reasonably accurate projection of future conditions based on Project-related changes to current views. The simulations provide future snapshots of specific locations with likely vegetation and maturity shown at five years after installation based on Project uses, lot locations and sizes as shown on Figure 1-4, architectural information currently available, and the potential palette of possible plant varieties provided in the Project Specific Plan.

The simulation point of five years following installation was chosen because vegetative screening provided by the landscape plan in any specific location would adequately minimize potentially significant impacts related to structure placement at that point. Additional vegetation density or height experienced as the decades progress would simply contribute to greater screening, and would therefore be additionally beneficial. It would not be necessary to mitigate potential Project-related visual impacts.

Because simulations can provide views where plants are close enough to be distinguishable, a selection of plants known to be effective streetscape varieties was chosen for simulation from the

potential palette for these locales. At greater distances, the width of the view is increased, which assumes a greater number of species within the view. Visual identification of specific varieties is less important, however, as the mix of heights and breadths combines to form a general impression of mixed growth. This allows for variety in specific species growth rates as naturally, one species will grow faster, or taller, or bushier than another. The important criteria in the more long-distant simulations are the overall planting density as well as the depth of the planted corridor. In all instances, a distance of 20 horizontal feet (or on slopes, 30 vertical feet) from crown edge to crown edge of canopy trees has been maintained, consistent with the Project FPP.

Based on considerations including (but not limited to) the type of views and their sensitivity and exposure, scenic status of local roadways, and the amount of observers exposed to the view, along with consultation among the visual analysis team, the Proposed Project proponent, and County staff, four publically accessible key viewpoints (Key Views 1 through 4, depicted on Figures 2.1-9a, 10a, 11a and 12a, respectively, *Key Views*) were selected that most clearly display the visual effects of the Project from various locations. The selected Key Views used for simulations and discussed in the analysis are briefly described below. Refer to Figure 2.1-4 for the location and direction of these views on an aerial photograph. The simulations were prepared in April 2014, prior to the May 2014 wildfires. General information relative to the fire's effect on vegetation important to visual conditions following buildout is provided in Section 2.1.2.2, *Removal or Substantial Adverse Change of a Valued Feature*. Relevant points specific to Project photosimulations are addressed in the following discussion.

Photosimulations A through D (Figures 2.1-9b through 2.1-12b, *Key View 1/Photosimulation A* through *Key View 4/Photosimulation D*) illustrate views of the Proposed Project post-development from Key Views 1 through 4, and represent a typical view of the residential portion of the Proposed Project from public roadways adjacent to, or in close proximity to the Project site. These simulations are intended to represent the Project at buildout, or when all buildings have been installed and all remedial grading has been completed. As noted above, Proposed Project landscaping is shown in these figures at five years maturity, to depict a conservative (greatest adverse effect) snapshot of how much visual screening would be provided.

The simulations provide an overview of a majority of the Proposed Project; the proposed houses and street trees are shown, replacing some of the existing visual elements visible in the “before” photograph. Most of the houses are placed within the valley, while steeper slopes and hills within and surrounding the site remain undeveloped. Within the simulations, the visual “frame” of the Project site largely remains. The edge of slopes between the viewer and the valley remain, and the hills east and southeast of the Project site visible in the “before” photograph remain as prominent background elements in the “after” photograph. It can clearly be seen that although the land use of the Project site would change, the landform underlying and surrounding the proposed use changes would remain largely the same.

With regard to the developed nature of planned land uses, the visual effects of any one change within the viewshed would be lessened by the viewer's focus on only one portion of the entire scene at a time. Even considering the overall view shown in the simulations, however, when comparing the Proposed Project with surrounding patterns of development on

Figure 3.1.4-1, *Existing Land Uses*, of this EIR it can be seen that the proposed development would extend the visual character of the surrounding neighborhoods onto the Project site; a similar change would occur within views from outlying areas within the Project viewshed (which are discussed in more detail later).

Key view 1, Photosimulation A (Figure 2.1-9b), was prepared using a picture taken from Country Club Drive at the intersection with an unnamed street, looking westerly past an open field to the Proposed Project site. This view would be seen primarily by drivers on Country Club Drive, as well as residents in this area with homes adjacent to the Project site. This simulation illustrates a typical view of Neighborhood 4.

Proposed Project features that would be visible from this viewpoint include homes on the slopes within Neighborhood 4 and Project landscaping in the mid-ground. Foreground views would remain the same as the existing condition (with this vegetation retained during the May 2014 wildfire) and would continue to be dominated by the large open field, which depending on the time of year varies in color from green to the tan that is pictured. Background views of the ridgelines, off-site ridgeline development, and the distant peak would be retained. Although the amount of greenery depicted on the slopes above the Project would vary south of Hill Valley Drive due to burn damage, it is not necessary to revise the simulation. The simulation depicts the distance of the Project buildings from the viewer along the most heavily traveled road in this area (Country Club Drive). The specifics of the existing vegetation are not clear from this location – it is just notable that the slope is vegetated. Scrub natives in this area are fire dependent, and the southern mixed chaparral located west of the Project boundary will regenerate within 3 to 5 years. For the area south of Hill Valley Drive, which is currently in orchard and which was originally stated for retention, the current plan is to continue to designate this for agricultural use. Vineyards or other orchards (e.g., citrus, pomegranates, nuts and/or olives) could be planted. Since the important element to the view is retention of green elements, the growth of any orchard in this area to replace the burned avocado orchard would result in the same perception of open space as is depicted in the simulation and the CEQA baseline of the pre-fire date of the NOP, June 20, 2013. The wildfire is viewed as a temporary change in the visual environment.

Development of the Proposed Project would cause a moderate degree of change to the visual environment of Key View 1. As stated above, foreground and background view elements would remain the same as the existing condition. The change caused by the Project would occur in the mid-ground. Portions of the previously vegetated hillsides and orchards would be replaced with single-family homes. Views are somewhat distant, as the Key View location is approximately 0.5 mile to the east, but direct views to the on-site hillsides where homes would be constructed are available, as illustrated in the photosimulation.

As pictured in the mid-ground, curvilinear rows of homes would be developed on the hillsides in the northern portion of the Proposed Project site and would generally follow the contours of on-site topography. These homes would introduce additional line elements into the viewshed due to the rooflines of the mostly two-story houses. Given the expanse of the view and the number of homes visible, more geometric forms and rectilinear lines, hard textures, and fewer green colors would be visible on the site due to Project development.

Some existing mature trees lower in the valley and off-site would partially screen views of homes (refer to the center of the photosimulation). Proposed Project landscaping also would partially obstruct direct views of some homes. The topography of the hillsides in this portion of the site would generally be retained, resulting in views of the winding rows of homes.

Proposed Project development would introduce a higher diversity of elements visible in this viewpoint, but they would not be visually dominant because from this viewpoint, the dominant foreground element (i.e., the larger open field), as well as the background elements of the ridgelines and distant peak, would remain visible and visually dominant. The visible Project features occur at a distance such that the homes would not, individually or collectively, be at a scale that would create a dominant visual element. The proposed elements also would not be distinctly vivid or create vivid visual patterns in the Key View. The homes would be earth-tone in color, which in combination with the screening trees and physical arrangement to match the existing topographic contours, would somewhat visually blend with existing visual environment.

Viewers of this Key View primarily include motorists along Country Club Drive, which is not a designated scenic highway. Motorists (and passengers) have moderately high sensitivity and high exposure.

The Proposed Project would cause a moderate change within the visual environment of Key View 1, based on the degree of change to the visual environment and the anticipated viewer response. The most vivid elements within the view are the large open field in the foreground and the ridgelines and peak in the background (including the more distant Mt. Whitney, with the radio tower at its peak); all of these elements would remain visible with construction of the Project thereby retaining the existing visual unity. Views of the proposed homes would be provided, but they would be at a distance and located between the dominant elements both in the foreground and background and thus, would not be highly notable. The moderate degree of change to this view would not highly conflict with important visual elements or the quality of the area and **would be a less than significant visual impact under Significance Guideline 1.**

Key View 2, Photosimulation B (Figure 2.1-10b), was prepared using a picture taken from a viewpoint on Country Club Drive at the northeastern edge of the southeastern parcel of the Proposed Project site, and looks southwest into future Neighborhood 5. This view would be seen primarily by drivers on Country Club Drive for a few seconds as they are following the curve in Country Club Drive. The existing open field in the foreground that provides a spatial buffer between the roadway and the area shown pre-fire as containing large eucalyptus grove in the mid-ground would be developed with two-story homes in Neighborhood 5. A Project privacy wall or fence, and perimeter landscaping would be installed along the Project site boundary in this location. Along Country Club Drive, a sound wall would be located in this location. These barriers (for both privacy and noise purposes) would look exactly the same—a 6-foot cobble-faced wall starting at the lot line at an elevation below the road grade. The landscaping is required to retain line-of-sight clearance for travelers along Mt. Whitney Road and Country Club Drive as shown in the simulation, where vegetation is restricted adjacent to the intersection of the two roads. Where not restricted to maintain line of sight, the planting would include an evergreen landscape buffer edge with informal groves of oak trees and other native shrubs to provide screening of homes.

From this viewpoint, visibility to homes is almost non-existent between the perimeter landscaping, which would largely screen open views into the Proposed Project site and the homes. Homes in this portion of the Project site would be at a finished grade lower in elevation than the viewer on Country Club Drive. Project landscaping would be planted at the top of the slope, which would increase the screening effect compared to the lower elevation of the building pads. Additionally, Project privacy fencing that would extend up to six feet above grade at the base of the slope would further screen possible views of the homes. As illustrated in the photosimulation, views would encompass limited views of earth tone-colored residential facades and roofs dominated by the roadside trees in the immediate foreground and the uppermost portion of the privacy wall or sound wall. This wall is depicted with a cobble facing. The larger tree on the left-hand side of the simulation is an existing oak. The smaller oak on the right-hand side of the simulation shows installation of a 10-year old oak from a 48-inch box, with an additional five years of growth. The tree is still small due to the slow growing habit of this species, but it already visually presents as typically “oak” in shape. Other plants in the simulation include rosemary, ceanothus, and toyon. Background views would encompass the upper canopies of the portion of the existing eucalyptus forest that would be retained in Neighborhood 5 and the existing hills to the left and right side of the photosimulation that form the horizon.

Development of the Proposed Project would cause a moderately high degree of change to the visual environment of Key View 2. Houses and fencing/walls would replace open pasture and eucalyptus tree grove against the backdrop of hillsides. Where peep views are possible, the structures would have stronger geometric forms and lines, fewer green or natural colors, and harder textures than the vegetation that currently exists within the view. As shown on Figure 2.1-10b, the undergrounding of the small power lines opens the view to the sky.

As indicated above, the development would include extensive landscaping; providing additional color and texture varieties over those in the current view. The upper reaches of the eucalyptus trees would be visible above and between the street trees in the immediate foreground. As further discussed below, some of these trees came through the fire well, and others are actively re-sprouting and retained green in their highest canopy in October 2014, indicating new growth since the fire. These trees have, therefore, been retained in this simulation as it is believed that the retained trees would continue to survive. Even if they do not, however, it can be seen that these trees would not, in and of themselves, shield modeled Proposed Project elements. The density of the Project on-site and roadside planting is responsible for that, not these trees. As a result, the trees do not play a major role in anticipated visibility of the Project, but are expected to continue to demonstrate a level of variety in scale and density in the future that is currently part of the site.

The scale of the buildings would be larger (having more massing and vertical elevation) than the generally flat pasture. From this important viewpoint, however, the homes, would be sited at a lower grade than the roadway, which would reduce their scale, and trees would extend above the rooflines of the homes. The fencing/walls would be shorter than the houses and also at a lower elevation than the roadway. The structures would not, therefore, obstruct visual elements in the background of this view, including the hills along the horizon. Proposed Project development would introduce a higher diversity of elements visible in this viewpoint, but they would not be

visually dominant due to the screening of the street trees in the foreground and the anticipated retention of existing visual elements in the mid-ground (eucalyptus tree grove) and background (hills). The proposed elements also would not be distinctly vivid or create vivid visual patterns in the Key View. The existing visual distraction of the power lines would be eliminated from this viewpoint. Visible portions of the homes would be earth tone in color, which in combination with the screening trees, would somewhat visually blend with existing visual environment, although they would provide more contrast than currently exists from this viewpoint.

Viewers of this Key View primarily include motorists along Country Club Drive, which is not a designated scenic highway. Motorists (and passengers) are defined as having moderately high sensitivity and high exposure.

The Proposed Project would cause a moderately high change within the visual environment of Key View 2, based on the degree of change to the visual environment and the anticipated viewer response. The most vivid existing elements within the view are the dense eucalyptus groves in the mid-ground (now partially burned) and the hills in the background. Some of these elements (surviving trees and hills where visually accessible) would remain visible with construction of the Project. Additionally, the planting of trees along the site perimeter and adjacent to the roadway from which Key View 2 is taken, would provide additional natural elements similar to those that currently exist in the view, which would increase visual unity. Although views of a pasture would no longer be available, the pasture is not a unique landmark or visual element that exhibits high visual quality. The moderately high degree of change to this view, therefore, would not highly conflict with important visual elements or the quality of the area, **impacts to Key View 2 viewers are identified as less than significant.**

Key View 3, Photosimulation C (Figure 2.1-11b), was prepared from a photograph illustrating views northwesterly from Country Club Drive near the southeastern corner of the Proposed Project site. This view would be seen primarily by drivers heading north on Country Club Drive and/or turning into the Project. It is an important view as it is a primary Project entrance, and would be seen from the most heavily travelled roadway adjacent to the Proposed Project. It would be, however, a transitory view as it would only be seen as (off-site) northbound travelers turn to follow Country Club Drive to the east, or as residents enter the property. (For southbound travelers, this would be a seldom seen view, as it would generally be over the shoulder and behind them as Country Club Drive turns south from the entrance.) Visibility from this road is further discussed below relative to motorists' sensitivity.

As depicted in the photosimulation, most of the existing visual elements would be replaced with developed Proposed Project features. Project features that would be visible from this viewpoint include the Project entry off Country Club Drive in the southeast corner of the site, homes along the southern boundary of Neighborhood 5, homes along a cul-de-sac on one of the small internal hillsides to the north, and fuel management zone plantings on a hillside. The trail and three-rail rustic fencing on the east side of the entrance is just visible from this vantage point on the left-hand side of the simulation.

From this Key View location, the Neighborhood 5 single-family homes would be located in the foreground. The homes would be two stories with earth tone-colored facades and roofs. Fencing



would be provided along the rear lot lines to the west, but would be screened by perimeter landscaping. Landscaping proposed along the southern Proposed Project boundary would consist of an evergreen landscape buffer edge with informal groves of oak trees and other native shrubs to provide screening of homes. The nearest homes also would sit at a lower elevation than the viewer along the roadway, which would slightly reduce the structural mass from this viewpoint.

As noted, also visible in the foreground would be the Proposed Project entry at this location off Country Club Drive. The entry would include a low-profile entry monument, with lighting provided by low can lights (approximately six inches high and two inches in diameter) as depicted on the simulation. Although shown on this simulation for the reader's reference, they may be completely obscured by low grasses. Landscaping would consist primarily of olive trees and grasses. As depicted, the olive trees are assumed to be installed from 36- to 48-inch boxes and show an additional five years of growth following installation. From the time of installation to the point depicted, the primary change in the olive trees is expected to show in the robustness of the trunks and some density of foliage.

In the mid-ground, a hillside containing both existing eucalyptus trees which did not burn in the May 2014 wildfire and fuel management plantings would be visible. Atop the small hill feature, single-family homes along a cul-de-sac in the center of Neighborhood 5 are visible in the simulation, although the existing and installed landscaping would partially obstruct views of these homes as the viewer vantage point changes, with the higher slopes in the background providing additional view elements as the viewer gains distance from the entrance and continues travel along Country Club Drive. Slope plantings between the two rows of homes reflect a conservative level of vegetation management. It is likely that owner-installed groundcover/shrubbery consistent with the FPP would result in a greater level of greenery than shown in the simulation.

The existing slope in the background (and in the left side of the photosimulation) could remain partially visible, but would be somewhat obscured by the buffer landscaping visible in the foreground. The existing overhead electrical lines would be visible, but the large transmission towers would be shielded by Proposed Project landscaping from this vantage point. They would remain dominant visual elements from other sections of Country Club Drive.

Development of the Proposed Project would cause a high degree of change to the visual environment of Key View 3. Semi-rural residential development would replace or obscure elements that contribute to the existing visual character of this specific location, including chicken wire perimeter fencing, mature eucalyptus trees, grasslands in the mid-ground behind the trees, and a vegetated ridgeline in the background. The introduction of grouped homes would create strong geometric forms and lines, planar surfaces, and hard textures that currently do not exist within the view. Project development also would replace soft natural edges of the foreground "horizon" with harder edges associated with the rooflines visible in breaks in the existing and proposed trees.

The scale of the homes would be larger than visual elements in the existing view, and the density and linear visual pattern of homes lining the hillside would create a more developed view.

Landscaping would partially screen views of the homes and other built elements (walls/fencing), but the change in character would be evident. Some background features would remain visible within the Proposed Project views, including a portion of the vegetated hillside and the overhead power lines and large transmission towers from other portions of Country Club Drive. Some existing eucalyptus trees would remain as well. The retention of these existing elements would provide some unity with the existing condition, but there would still be a marked change in the character of this Key View.

A higher diversity of elements would be visible in this viewpoint due to development of the Proposed Project, but they would not be visually dominant due to the combination of the landscape screening of the street trees and existing eucalyptus trees in the foreground and the retention of the existing visual elements, as identified above. Proposed Project elements also would not be overly vivid due to the use of muted earth tone colors on the buildings and additional verdant greens provided by Project landscaping.

Viewers of this Key View primarily would include motorists along Country Club Drive, which is not a designated scenic highway. Motorists (and passengers) have moderately high sensitivity and high exposure since it is the most heavily traveled roadway in the Proposed Project vicinity with direct close-up views of Project features. For viewers moving along Country Club Drive, the view into the heart of Neighborhood 5 provided from this viewpoint would be fleeting. It is only open as a result of the entry road. Travelers moving in line of direction along the road from south to north would have immediate views into the Project shielded by the hill around which County Club Drive curves immediately south of the Project, with views deflected over the developing Harmony Grove Village project and to the northwest. Views into the Project would be possible only when the traveler is directly in front of the entry. Upon passing it moving north, views would turn immediately to the east, in line with the curve in the road. Travelers moving in line of direction along the road from north to south would see the perimeter landscaping and walls in a lateral view to their right. At the point when a northbound traveler would look directly into the Project, the southbound traveler would be looking along County Club Drive and into the Harmony Grove Village project to the south. Fencing would be provided along the rear lot lines of homes to the west of the viewer (and off simulation on the left-hand side), and would be heavily screened by perimeter landscaping. Project landscaping proposed along the Neighborhood 5 southeastern Project boundary would consist of an evergreen landscape buffer edge of trees and shrubs to provide screening of homes.

The Proposed Project would cause a high change to focused views within the visual environment of Key View 3, based on the degree of change to the visual environment and the anticipated viewer response. The elements would contrast with the existing visual environment, especially the introduction of structural elements on the small internal hilltop that would comprise a small window of the horizon view. Landscaping would obstruct a good portion of those homes (as depicted in the photosimulation). Views of the existing vegetated hillside (on the left side of the photosimulation) would remain partially visible in between perimeter landscaping in the foreground and other existing vivid elements would remain visible, including mature eucalyptus trees and the overhead power lines and tall transmission tower. The high degree of change to this view, therefore, would not highly conflict with important visual elements or the quality of the area, and **impacts to Key View 3 viewers are identified as less than significant.**

Key View 4, Photosimulation D (Figure 2.1-12b), was prepared from a photograph taken from Seeforever Drive, looking northeastward over the central portion of the Proposed Project, and over a bench in the hillside below the viewer. Seeforever Drive is a public roadway that provides access to four private driveways. The simulation depicts Neighborhood 2 from this vantage point. This view does not represent a precise viewpoint seen by a traveler as it was necessary to exit the vehicle and stand at a small area of road edge where vegetation was less thick in order to take this photograph. It is considered to be representative of fleeting public views that might be obtained in gaps between homes with no (or only ground-level) landscaping and where the road is oriented toward the Project. It also represents some private views that would be available of the Project from the private residences and streets west of the Project at a higher elevation where homes are oriented in this direction and/or where drivers can visually access this view from the winding streets that edge these western hillsides.

From this viewpoint, portions of approximately 20 homes within Neighborhood 2 would be visible in the near mid-ground. The foreground view would continue to encompass the off-site slopes in the immediate foreground, and distant expansive views of development in the valley below. Proposed Project homes would be sited in a row downslope from the viewer. They would be notable, but not skylined, as their backdrop would be existing development in the valley and up the lower eastern hills in the City of Escondido. Similarly, although not depicted in this eastern-looking simulation, for viewers of this area from the east the higher and notable ridgelines and peaks identified in the Community Plan as view elements would remain in the background.

The vegetation in the foreground of this simulation (chaparral habitat), burned during the May 2014 wildfire. As noted above, however, this habitat is fire dependent and where burned, the scrub is expected to regenerate within three to five years. Regardless, the simulation shows that the scrub habitats provide fairly open views to the backs of the homes on site. The on-site vegetation modeled in the simulation would still be implemented, and future conditions are expected to be fully consistent with this simulation.

Development of the Proposed Project would cause a moderate degree of change to the visual environment of Key View 4. Visual elements in the foreground (following regrowth) and background would remain the same as April 2014 conditions. Views of the dominant hillsides and bench in the foreground would remain as they were, and would largely obstruct views down into the Project site. As shown in the photosimulation, only views of the homes at the top of the on-site lower internal hillsides would be visible. Although views from this vantage point are expansive, the gradient of the topography (primarily the hillsides closest to this view location) combined with the placement of homes and distance from this viewpoint would block views of other Neighborhoods. The expansive views of the valley encompass off-site areas further east that are primarily developed with residential and industrial uses. The visible change created by the Project would occur in the mid-ground of this view, which currently does not contain mid-ground elements, only the foreground and background features discussed above. Therefore, the Project would provide an additional “layer” in the view. However, the homes in the new mid-ground formed by the Project would not be visually dominant; they would be secondary to the memorability and dominance of the foreground and background elements. The most dominant element from this viewpoint is the large hospital building that contrasts with the scale

of the surrounding development and nearly extends to the horizon formed by the distant mountain range. Its size and scale are evident in the photosimulation despite its location approximately 1.25 miles to the northeast.

The homes would introduce more geometric forms and rectilinear lines into the view and although they would be closer to the viewer than the existing structures in the valley, they would be viewed as a visual extension of these elements and overall patterns of development. The scale also would be attenuated by the installation and maturation of Proposed Project landscaping, which would incorporate locally appropriate species to blend with the existing visual environment.

Viewers of this Key View primarily include homeowners on Seeforever Drive, from both their cars and from their homes. This roadway is not a designated scenic highway. Motorists (and passengers) and residents would have moderately high sensitivity and high exposure, although changes to this view would affect a small number of viewers.

The Proposed Project would cause a moderate change within the visual environment of Key View 4, based on the degree of change to the visual environment and the anticipated viewer response. The most vivid elements within the view are the vegetated hillside in the foreground and the hospital and mountains in the background, which would remain visible. Views of the proposed homes would be provided, but they would be seen as an extension of existing homes and other development in the valley below, which would provide visual unity to the view. Project landscaping also would continue unity with the existing condition. The homes would not be particularly vivid since they would be painted in earth tone colors to blend with the colors that are currently in the viewscape. Excluding homes with a combination of directly facing this view and lacking private intervening landscaping, views would be fleeting in nature as viewers move along twisting roadways edged by homes and vegetation. The number of residential viewers with direct views comprises a small viewing population relative to numbers of viewers on public roads or vantage points. The combination of the low number of viewers, the fleeting nature of most views in this direction, and the moderate degree of change to this view, therefore, would not highly conflict with the important visual elements or the quality of the area and **would result in a less than significant visual impact to viewers from Key View 4.**

#### Public Views

Additionally, views from public viewpoints were assessed. Views are available from trails within the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve and Del Dios Highlands Preserve, with these trails located approximately 1.8 to 1.6 miles, respectively, southerly of the Proposed Project site. Some views from these trails include large portions of the Project site. Views also include off-site elements such as surrounding hillsides, neighboring development (including dense ornamental landscaping), and commercial/light industrial development within the City of Escondido to the north. The large Harmony Grove Village development is currently building out in the mid-ground between these trails and the Project, with that project minimizing the visual effect of Proposed Project development (Harmony Grove Village would provide a developed element to the view that would attract the viewer's eye looking north, and to some extent could also obscure the southernmost portion of the Project Site). This intervening development,

combined with distance from the Project site, result in **Project-related impacts to public views from these areas being assessed as less than significant.**

Although views to the Proposed Project site are not available from local identified scenic highways, they are available from public roads in the Project vicinity, with the greatest number of viewers being from Country Club Drive. Viewers traveling along this road would have unrestricted views to some areas of the Proposed Project, particularly where the road abuts the Project, as in Neighborhood 5. At the northeastern end of Neighborhood 5, residential uses would replace existing field and direct views to a eucalyptus woodland, as discussed above in the analysis of Key View 2. At the southeastern end, the WTWRF and homes would replace current views to equestrian sheds and small corrals with metal pipe fencing, as discussed above in the analysis of Key View 3.

The WTWRF would not be highly visible, even though located immediately adjacent to Country Club Drive. Current views to the portion of the site where the WTWRF would be located are limited to a short portion of Country Club Drive (due to the hill around which travelers are curving in this vicinity) or portions of the surrounding area that are at higher elevations. For travelers from the south, this hill substantially interrupts views to Neighborhood 5. The traveler cannot access views to the WTWRF area until within approximately 300 feet, at which point the line-of-site turns northerly again as the hill is rounded. For travelers from the north, the park and associated woodland plantings would obscure possible views to the WTWRF until immediately adjacent to the facility, at which point the WTWRF area could be part of the peripheral view to the east rather than a straight-on view, and would continue to be shielded by Project-installed streetscape. The entrance area to the WTWRF would be located off an internal road branching from the main Project entrance on Country Club Drive. The facilities would be located approximately eight feet below road grade, and the low profile, small-scale building and other equipment proposed for this area would not be visibly dominant. Proposed Project plantings (including both trees/shrubs and the fence-clinging vines) would provide more green foliage in the views than is currently visible. This vegetation would serve to screen the facilities from both potential foreground and long distance views, providing unity with the rest of the landscaping. Where the WTWRF buildings could be visible from Country Club Drive, the barn-like character of the structures would continue the semi-rural quality of the Project area.

While the Proposed Project would change the passive agricultural elements viewed from Country Club Drive and therefore, the visual character of these views to consist of residential neighborhoods and community recreational green spaces, visual impacts would be less than significant due to a number of Project features. These features include: (1) retention of views of the current backdrop of high hills; (2) landscaping along the roadway and street tree plantings within the dense areas of the Proposed Project; (3) landscaped lots and hillsides that would provide a buffer between the road and the proposed homes; (4) multi-use trails along each roadway that would reinforce the existing character of the community; and (5) community recreational areas and the riparian corridors that would soften and unify the buildings within this area. These design features would minimize the perceived dominance of the proposed development from Country Club Drive. As a result, **Project-related impacts to public views from these areas are assessed as less than significant.**

Along other nearby public roadways, views to the Proposed Project currently are—and would continue to be—generally restricted. Views typically would be along narrow street corridors framed by ornamental trees or homes, and generally would be fleeting in nature. This is a result of existing vegetation located along area roadways that frequently confines a traveler’s view to the immediate vicinity of the roadway. The portions of the Project that would be visible from Country Club Drive and Escondido city streets east of Country Club Drive include the landscaping of the Project perimeter and residential areas in Neighborhoods 2 and 4 as they are sited up the east-facing western Project hillsides. No adverse effects to existing views seen from the north would occur due to lack of viewer sensitivity (with the closest viewers being associated with business uses), intervening topography and landscaping, and/or distance. **Visual impacts to viewers on other public roadways are assessed as less than significant.**

Few public roads are located along the ridgelines west of the Proposed Project area. Where views are available along these roads, portions of the Proposed Project would be distinguishable. Roads in this area are generally winding, which results in both requiring the driver’s focus on the roadway, as well as a frequent shifting of a viewer’s viewscape. Also, as described previously in relation to post-Project implementation, the distant viewer would perceive a land use with more continuity than the existing diversity that exists between the existing development and current construction zone associated with abutting Harmony Grove Village. **Visual impacts to viewers on these ridgelines are assessed as less than significant.**

#### Private Views

Additionally, views from private streets and private homes were analyzed. Numerous private homes are located within the Proposed Project viewshed. The severity of the overall change resulting from Project development for most of these viewers would be relatively low due to several factors, including the combination of open space retained by the Project, intervening topography, and intervening vegetation.

The areas included in the viewshed to the west and northwest of the Proposed Project site consist of mainly undeveloped hillsides and steeply sloped lands unlikely to be developed in the future. Approximately 30 to 40 homes with private access roads are scattered along the ridgelines and hilltops in this area. From these areas, the viewscape is expansive and portions of the Proposed Project potentially would be visible (although views for travelers along the roadways would be limited in duration due to the winding nature of the roads). Some of the Project also would be obscured due to the western portion of Project site being below the viewer’s line of sight (i.e., portions of the development for some viewers would be sited below the viewer, with the natural line of sight extending more to the east). Rather than views of the pastures and small buildings that provide diversity between the Project site and the surrounding area that currently are available, the view would encompass a large number of roofs and streets, and include ornamental street trees. Rooftops are proposed to be made of dark colors, rather than red Spanish tile or reflective materials, and this coloration, together with the trees and associated landscaping, parks and riparian corridors would serve to lessen the scale, unify the project elements and provide continuity with the surrounding visual character. Additionally, the winding nature of abutting roads, the limited number of residential viewers, and the larger lots at the edges of the Proposed Project allow the development to visually blend with the surrounding

community. Therefore, although the view would be changed, the change would provide continuity with surrounding viewscape elements for viewers at an elevated distance. Overall, **visual effects from this viewpoint would be less than significant.**

The viewshed areas from the south primarily would include private homes associated with the developing Harmony Grove Village. Views northerly to the Proposed Project could encompass Neighborhoods 1, 2 and 5, containing homes, the general area of the WTWRP, the public park, and community recreation center. Views are expected to be generally restricted, due to approximately 200 to 400 feet of intervening landscaping on the Harmony Grove Village site, including both wind rows and groves between the Proposed Project and the northern-most future homes in Harmony Grove Village. Where visibility is possible, the view would encompass Project elements such as homes, fencing and walls, and landscaping, but would also include the surrounding hillsides in the background. Such views by future Harmony Grove Village residents would be an extension of the development patterns within the Harmony Grove Village project that would include similar visual elements. Due to the **continuity of the Proposed Project elements with planned (approved and developing) neighborhoods, visual impacts to views from the south related to Project construction would be less than significant.**

The eastern areas of the Proposed Project's viewshed contain a large number of potential private viewers. In addition to individually built homes, portions of tracts with single-family residences are included in the viewshed. Due to the topography and dense residential planting, the majority of the Proposed Project would not be visible to the majority of viewers in the eastern viewshed. For most viewers to the north and east along the valley floor, structures and vegetation block the views toward the Project site. Where views are available, they typically would be along narrow street rights-of-way framed by ornamental trees or homes, and generally would be fleeting in nature. Views from these areas, therefore, would not be significantly changed due to the limited number of viewers, the similarity of proposed uses to existing surrounding land uses, and the fleeting nature of most views from this area. **Potential visual effects associated with implementation of the Proposed Project would be less than significant.**

Overall, the Proposed Project has incorporated a number of design measures to ensure that the off-site viewer's experience remains positive in terms of visual diversity and continuity with the character of the area. These measures include varied (i.e., not repetitive and monotonous) structure styles that incorporate rural design elements, large amounts of open space (park areas and retained/enhanced biological set-aside), incorporation of equestrian amenities, and retention of existing grove plantings and a pond. The combination of these elements would result in an overall project that would retain equestrian elements and fit into the overall seen community, while providing housing responsive to its topographic and vegetative setting. Therefore, although implementation of the Project elements would represent a change from existing conditions, no adverse effect is assessed to the combination of all Project elements. **Long-term Project-related visual impacts to visual character associated with the new residential use would be less than significant.**

## Off-site Visual Effects

The Proposed Project would include off-site road improvements to Hill Valley Drive, Eden Valley Lane, and Mt. Whitney Road, consisting of minor road widening and/or surface improvements; as well as installation of turn pockets to provide adequate transitions at the Project entries off Country Club Drive.

Proposed off-site improvements to Hill Valley Drive would include widening roadway pavement to 24 feet where possible and to 20 feet in width for approximately 185 to 195 linear feet in one section. Due to the low-profile nature of these proposed off-site roadway improvements, visually the changes would not be highly noticeable within the viewshed, particularly since a portion of the roadway is already improved to the proposed condition. Any impacts to driveways, fences, or other features within residential lots fronting the roadway would be restored to pre-construction conditions. No other visual resources would be impacted. Associated visual impacts would be less than significant.

Proposed off-site improvements to Eden Valley Lane would include widening a 0.25-mile segment to a graded width of 28 feet with a paved width of 24 feet. This roadway segment is currently paved and the minor widening would not result in a highly noticeable change within the viewshed. Any impacts to driveways, fences, trees, or other features within residential lots fronting the roadway would be restored to pre-construction conditions. Consequently, the proposed changes to this roadway would not substantially change the existing visual character of this roadway. Associated visual impacts would be less than significant.

Proposed off-site improvements to Mt. Whitney Road would include widening the roadway to a graded width of 28 feet with a paved width of 24 feet. The eastern half of this segment abuts the Proposed Project site to the south, and the western half of this segment abuts the Project site to the north. This roadway segment is currently paved and the minor widening would not result in a highly noticeable change within the viewshed. Widening could potentially impact some trees along the roadway; however, some of these trees may be impacted regardless if they are located within the Project site. Loss of these existing on-site trees would be offset by the installation of perimeter Project landscaping. Any impacts to driveways, fences, trees, or other features within residential lots fronting the roadway would be restored to pre-construction conditions. Consequently, the proposed changes to this roadway would not substantially change the existing visual character of this roadway. Associated visual impacts would be less than significant.

**Thus, visual impacts related to all off-site road improvements would be less than significant.**

## Conflict with Area Visual Quality

The visual quality of the Proposed Project site and surrounding area within the landscape unit is moderate in terms of visual unity. Existing residential uses generally have a visual pattern of rural homes interspersed with orchards/groves and open space on hillsides and ridgelines. The homes themselves also have architectural unity in that they are one to two stories with similar design elements. The intactness of the area currently is moderately low due to competing visual



elements of the natural and built environment that encroach upon each other. Existing vividness is moderate because the generally semi-rural nature of the valley floor combined with the higher topography of the hillsides and ridgelines to the west do not result in a visually unique pattern.

The visual quality of the Proposed Project site would be affected during Project construction. The Proposed Project would be constructed in phases with a total duration of approximately 6 years to complete buildout. Views of the site would include grading and construction activities, presence of construction vehicles and workers, and storage of building materials, similar to a number of other nearby development projects (Palomar Hospital, Harmony Grove Village, Nordahl Road Bridge widening over SR-78, Stone Brewing Complex, etc.). While short-term, Project construction would further reduce the existing moderately low intactness of the site during the construction period due to the introduction of additional visual contrasting features, such as raw soil, newly graded building pads, cut/fill slopes, construction fencing, construction equipment and construction materials stockpiling and storage. Viewers would be exposed to these construction-related elements, which would encroach into the existing visual pattern of the site for the duration of the construction period. The existing moderate vividness of the Project site also would be reduced during the construction phases because the character of the valley would be affected by construction activities (as discussed above), which would reduce the existing views of the valley against the backdrop of the hillsides and Mt. Whitney. Project construction would reduce the existing moderate level of unity of the site as well because the contrasting elements would disrupt the existing on-site visual pattern.

In the long term, the Proposed Project site's visual quality would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Project. No changes proposed by the Project would degrade the quality of identified visual resources such as unique topographical features, ridgelines, undisturbed native vegetation, surface waters, and/or major drainages.

The Proposed Project would not degrade the visual coherence of the viewshed. The Proposed Project would include a variety of structures, which would be visible from surrounding roadways, trails, and residential uses. The Project site, however, is generally located in the middle ground or background of expansive views in the vicinity. Existing residential and/or light industrial/commercial development is also currently visible from these areas, and particularly for viewers to the south, these views will be augmented by Harmony Grove Village implementation (which is currently under construction). As a result, it is anticipated that the Proposed Project would expand continuation of the visual patterns of development of the surrounding neighborhoods, which would increase the compositional harmony of the area, potentially increasing the visual unity in the long term. The visual intactness of the area similarly would not be reduced in the long term because the Project, as a whole, would not substantially contrast with surrounding development and visually, would be an extension of existing patterns, as described above. The Proposed Project also would not substantially change the vividness of the area in the long term because views to the notable ridgelines and mountains to the west would be retained, and the Project would not introduce new dominant elements that would obstruct views of these features. Thus, **visual impacts related to conflicts with area visual quality would be less than significant.**

## Conflict with Area Visual Character

The visual character of the Proposed Project site and surrounding area encompasses visually diverse forms, including numerous hills, valley open areas, and notable hilltop development, with geometric and rectilinear structures skylined from off-site views. The area is topographically diverse, with east-facing steep slopes along the western edge of the property. Mt. Whitney is the tallest peak in the background ridgeline. Valley floor slants up to the east on the remainder of the property. Pastures, as well as developed uses such as on-site residences and other equestrian facilities, are located on the valley floor and lower extent of the eastern-facing slope. Individual large-lot homes are located up slope from the Project on the west side. Off-site residential uses also edge the property on its eastern boundaries, both within the valley proper and to the east up the western facing slopes of the hills that edge this small valley. Roadways wind along the hillsides in response to the topography and are more grid pattern in nature in the valley between the hillsides.

The Proposed Project would change the composition of the visual pattern in the existing on-site setting. During Project construction, construction-related activities would visibly contrast with existing conditions due to removal of existing vegetation and the introduction of new, visually dominant elements, including raw soil; newly graded building pads and cut or filled slopes; construction-period fencing; construction equipment (including trucks, graders, and the potential for rock crushing equipment among others; and construction materials stockpiling and storage. Houses in the surrounding area may have views of the grading and other construction elements, although existing vegetation and structures in the surrounding area may block direct views. From some vantage points, such as Seeforever Drive, the Project may be sited at too acute an angle downslope to be very visible. From further distances, grading would not be distinctly visible as intervening hills, structures, and vegetation can block views of the site. As a result, mass grading would not substantially impact views from further distances. As discussed in Section 2.2, *Proposed Project Description*, the Proposed Project would be constructed in phases and is expected to take approximately six years to complete full buildout. Viewers would be exposed to these construction-related elements for the duration of the construction period, although visibility would be diminished with each successive phase due to Project elements that would be the completed in the earlier phases.

Landscaping would be installed within each constructed phase—as an area is graded it would be landscaped—and would help lessen adverse visual impacts of raw slopes and new buildings, ending with general vegetation maturity being attained in five years after installation. (Oaks, comprising part of the landscape plan because of their iconic California nature and wildlife value, are slow to mature, and are not included within this general category of plants reaching visual maturity within five years.) Excluding oaks, until the general landscaping reaches maturity, short-term visual impacts would be adverse. Similarly, Proposed Project effects would result in increased glow from the area over existing conditions. While street trees and internal landscaping, when mature, would help to buffer the homes from views to the Proposed Project from off site, soften sharp edges, and unify the Project, this would not be the case in the short-term. This impact ultimately would be addressed through Project design and landscaping over the long-term, but **short-term adverse visual impacts to the site's visual character associated with Project construction would be significant. (Impact AE-3)**

In the long term, Proposed Project elements would change the visual character of the Project site from individual rural residential, agricultural, and equestrian uses to more standardized single-family residential uses interspersed with open space. Additional developed elements would include Project roadways, manufactured slopes, retaining and sound walls, and parkway landscaping that would further contribute to the change in visual character. As a result, more geometric forms and rectilinear lines, and hard textures would be visible on the site due to Project development. The overall change would be most visible/noticeable from the expansive views available from areas surrounding the Project site that are higher in elevation and encompass the on-site hillsides and valley in their visual context related to surrounding properties.

However, some existing site elements would be retained and incorporated into the Proposed Project design, such as avocado orchards, eucalyptus and oak tree groves, the pond, and an existing barn and corral structures. Additionally, Project design elements to accentuate the rural character of the Project area are proposed and include landscaping that would be compatible with native and locally appropriate plants, multi-use trails, an equestrian staging area, split-rail fencing along public roadways, and large open space areas. These proposed design elements, combined with the existing elements that would be retained, would soften the proposed development structures.

Although the visual character of the site would change from existing conditions, Proposed Project development would not change the relative scale of development planned in the area and would not result in any new dominant visual elements within the viewshed. The Proposed Project would be visually compatible with existing and planned surrounding uses. This is due to the diversity of elements within the site that would be visually consistent throughout the Project site due to the guidelines contained in the proposed Valiano Specific Plan, as well as neighboring development particularly the adjacent Harmony Grove Village project that is currently under construction and will include a similar residential development pattern as the Proposed Project. The scale and contrast between the proposed development and the surrounding area would not be dominant in views toward the Project site, particularly since the Proposed Project would be visually compatible with adjacent planned uses. Additionally, retention of major on-site existing topographic forms, retention of sight lines to surrounding mountains and ridgelines, and landscaping with native and/or locally compatible plants would lessen the visual dominance and scale of the proposed development features. Thus, **visual impacts related to conflicts with area visual character would be less than significant.**

#### Consistency with Applicable Design Guidelines

The proposed Specific Plan for the Proposed Project calls for consistency with design policies contained in the County General Plan COS Element and the San Dieguito Community Plan. Setbacks, density, building size and massing, lot coverage, and relative scale also would be guided by local zoning regulations. Although the details would not be visible in detail from the surrounding area, such design guidelines would ensure that the Proposed Project would not contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community. Therefore, **impacts related to inconsistency with applicable design guidelines would be less than significant.**

### **2.1.2.2 Removal or Substantial Adverse Change of a Valued Feature**

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

2. Result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.

#### Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (2007a).

#### Analysis

On-site topography is generally characterized by a north-south trending ridge in the western portion of the property and gently rolling topography which transition to a valley floor in the eastern and southeastern portions of the site. On-site elevations range from approximately 1,013 feet amsl along the ridge top near the northwestern site boundary, to 614 feet amsl along the southeastern property boundary. There are approximately 35.6 acres of slopes on the property which meet the definition of steep slopes under the County's RPO (i.e., slopes with a natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 feet). This represents approximately 15 percent of the Proposed Project site. There are no prominent or unique rock outcroppings on the site.

The development of the Proposed Project would not impact or block views to any unique landforms or topographic features in the immediate vicinity, such as Mt. Whitney or other prominent ridgelines or hills. The Project site is generally located in a valley, below the viewer's sightline, or at a distance such that the Mt. Whitney range to the west, and surrounding hills to the east and the south, would continue to provide a dominant background.

The Proposed Project would include approximately 928,000 cubic yards of balanced cut and fill, substantially in support of proposed structure pads and Project roadways. The Project would impact a total of approximately 1.1 acres of RPO steep slopes in the western portion of the site, in a total of 16 lots/areas with steep slope encroachment, with an average encroachment of approximately 5.4 percent. With one exception, the encroachments within each lot would be less than 10 percent of the steep slope (substantially below that percentage allowed by the RPO). Lot 214 would have an encroachment of 11.8 percent, which is allowable because this lot exceeds 80 percent steep slopes. All lot grading would conform to the RPO.

Some steep slope impacts would be visible from public viewpoints. This is because cut slopes would surmount some of the retaining walls in the western-most portion of the Proposed Project in Neighborhoods 2 and 4 (with modified slopes ranging from 26 to 76 feet in height), or be

located below pads along the eastern-most slopes in Neighborhood 4 (where reworked slopes would reach 40 feet in height). The Project would construct manufactured slopes ranging in height from 20 feet to 76 feet in steep slope areas (Figure 1-33 of this EIR). Additionally, the creation of manufactured slopes where existing landforms are at road grade or those that would extend above built shielding elements (homes and/or landscaping) would change localized visual character. Although manufactured slopes within steep slopes would be contour graded to follow the natural topography, the resulting landform modification due to the height and visibility of some manufactured slopes would contrast with the adjoining natural hillsides in the short-term. Ultimately, the contour grading, combined with landscaping with native species, would result in the slopes blending with the natural slopes along adjacent hillside and a **less than significant long-term impact**. **However, the valued visual character as discussed under Section 2.1.2.1, above, would be a significant impact assessed to the short-term effects. (Impact AE-1)**

Several detention and bioretention basins are proposed throughout the Proposed Project site to accommodate on-site runoff and would include manufactured slopes around their perimeters. The slopes around the water quality basins would generally follow the edges of the basin and in most cases, would be contoured to visually blend with the adjoining topography. Regardless of whether any contouring is possible, the heights of these slopes would range from three to five feet. Manufactured slopes would be planted with shrubs, trees, and groundcover to control erosion and to visually cover grading scars. The most likely landscaping for these areas would be groundcover and shrubs, which would visually mature very rapidly. Installation of Project landscaping would ensure that these manufactured slopes would blend with surrounding landforms. Please refer to discussion of significant short-term Project visual impacts in Section 2.1.2.1, above; for the issue of these small berms addressed with fast-growing lower vegetation. **Visual impacts related to manufactured slopes of detention and bioretention basins would be less than significant.**

The Proposed Project site contains several dense stands of mature eucalyptus and oak groves, as well as avocado orchards. These groves cover riparian areas and the hillsides within the site and historically constituted a valued visual resource given their localized concentration and maturity. Prior to the May 2014 wildfire, these resources were more dense and extensive than the current condition. The on-site grove area north of Hill Valley Drive did not burn, but grove areas within westerly southern and central portions of the site burned (in Neighborhoods 2 and 4), and a number of oaks in the western and northern-most portion of Neighborhood 5 appear to be substantially burned or damaged. Neighborhoods 1 and 2 also burned, but those areas contained fewer mature trees.

Coast live oak woodland was preserved by firefighters at the northeast and eastern boundary of the southern sector of Neighborhood 1, as was disturbed coast live oak woodland and eucalyptus forest in the southern portion of Neighborhood 5. Many of the oaks and eucalyptus trees in the northern (burned) portion of Neighborhood 5 still show green leaves in their canopies, with additional saplings noticeable around oaks and major sprouting from lower trunks and isolated branches occurring within the eucalyptus as of an October 29, 2014 field check. Immediately following the fire, it had been anticipated that these trees could fall victim to the ongoing drought in their currently stressed state, but the vibrancy of the new growth indicates that many of these trees are likely to recover. Many of these eucalyptus and oak trees would be retained in open

space lots, particularly along the east side of Neighborhood 1 and in the south and north central portions of Neighborhood 5. In the areas of worst burn on Neighborhood 5, those trees were assumed for removal as part of the development footprint. The trees north of Mt. Whitney Road south of Neighborhood 1 and up into the site west of the primary entrance off of Mt. Whitney Road, burned in the fire but would be replanted in the landscape plan. The area that abuts existing private lots south of Mt. Whitney Road includes private landscaping, as well as planned portions of Harmony Grove Village. Groves and windrows of trees along lot lines were identified for that area (Planning Area 3) between the Harmony Grove Village homes and the Proposed Project.

The eucalyptus forest and oak woodlands that would be preserved would be incorporated into the Proposed Project design to retain some of the rural visual elements within the site that are consistent with the surrounding area. The trees that would remain are not small groupings of isolated trees, but occur in larger/denser stands and groves that would provide a visually dominant feature within the Project and would continue to provide continuity between the Project site and the surrounding hillsides. The Project also would install additional trees, including oak species that would be visually compatible with the existing trees. For these reasons, loss of the some eucalyptus and oak trees due to the fire and resulting drought conditions **would be considered less than significant.**

The avocado orchard on the hillsides in the western portion of site substantially burned south of Hill Valley Drive, but was visually dominant, as the trees largely covered the hillsides and could be seen from surrounding public and private roadways.. Implementation of the Proposed Project would develop most of the prior avocado grove that was actively farmed. The avocado grove could be considered a valued visual resource, particularly since this portion of the site has been continuously used for agricultural use since the late 1960s or early 1970s. Viewers in the area have historically been accustomed to the visual patterns of the orchard and the visual diversity it provides within the site and against the backdrop of the natural vegetation on the slopes of Mt. Whitney. Additional orchards also occur off site to the immediate north and south. As a whole, the orchards provide a dominant visual resource in the Project area. Loss of a (largely previous) portion of the on-site orchard would not result in a significant visual impact because (1) the Project would retain approximately 37 acres of the orchard/agricultural preserve in the northwest portion of the site, (2) avocado orchards are not a unique visual resource in the area; (3) the loss comprises only a portion of orchard uses in the area, and (4) the on-site agricultural preserve/orchard to be preserved and adjoining orchards/other agricultural properties would continue to be a dominant visual element in the viewshed. As a result, **retention of a portion of the on-site orchard would continue to provide visual continuity between the Project site and the surrounding hillsides, and associated impacts would be less than significant.**

The Proposed Project site contains existing structures, including two identified existing farm complexes. One of these consists of a farmhouse, foreman's house/equipment shed, and irrigation system, and the other is comprised of a barn, office, house, and foundation at the existing on-site equestrian facility. These sites were evaluated and determined not to be significant resources under CEQA or the RPO (Affinis 2014). Although they are associated with, and contribute to, the equestrian use element of the existing visual character of the Project area, these structures, in and of themselves, do not represent valued visual resources.

Nonetheless, the Project would retain the barn and corral complex at the existing equestrian facility and incorporate it into the Project design to reinforce the existing visual character of the area. Other structures would be removed upon Project construction; for the reasons discussed above, **impacts related to removal or change of valued historic and rural visual elements would result in a less than significant visual impact.**

Although the Proposed Project site currently supports active agricultural and equestrian uses, the Project site also contains sensitive biological habitat, particularly within the drainages and valley floor. Riparian habitat and wetlands occur along the drainages, and non-native grassland primarily occurs within the large open fields in the eastern portion of the site. The locales of the on-site riparian habitat and wetlands generally coincide with the dense mature oak and eucalyptus groves and therefore, these habitats contribute to the overall value of tree groves as a visual resource, as discussed above. Most existing riparian habitat and wetlands would not be impacted by the Project and thus, this existing visual resource would not be adversely impacted. The large open fields covered in grasslands do not constitute a valued visual resource because they are not particularly memorable and are overshadowed by other competing on-site visual elements that are more dominant, such as surrounding hillsides. Project development would impact areas covered by non-native grassland, but because that is not a feature that contributes to the valued visual character or image of the area, associated **impacts would be less than significant.**

### ***2.1.2.3 Substantial Obstruction, Interruption or Detraction from a Valued Vista***

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

3. Substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from:
  - a public road
  - a trail within an adopted County or State trail system
  - a scenic vista or highway
  - a recreational area

#### Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (2007a).

#### Analysis

The discussion of Proposed Project effects in Section 2.1.2.1 above includes potential effects on views from public roads (specifically, Country Club Drive). The following analysis discusses views from the remaining three outlined features in the guideline above, including trails, local

scenic highways, and recreation areas in the viewshed. Views from uses and roadways in outlying areas within the viewshed also are discussed.

With regard to views from scenic highways the closest scenic highway to the Proposed Project site is the segment of Elfin Forest Road/Harmony Grove Road between the San Marcos city limits and the Escondido city limits. At its closest point, it is located approximately 0.5 mile from the Project site. This County scenic highway is located within the Project viewshed, but several peaks, hills, trees, and intervening structures prevent any views of the Proposed Project from this scenic highway segment. Other designated Scenic Highways in the general area include the segment of Via Rancho Parkway between Del Dios Highway and SR-78, which is located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the Project site (at the intersection of Via Rancho Parkway and Del Dios Highway). Intervening topographic features, however, prevent any views of the Proposed Project from this scenic highway and thus, it is not within the Project viewshed (refer to Figure 2.1-5). Therefore, **potential Project-related visual impacts to a view from a designated scenic highway would be less than significant.**

Views of the Proposed Project site are available from public hiking trails along the north-facing slopes within the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve and Del Dios Highlands County Preserve, located south of the Project site. These views are distant, generally expansive, and encompass large portions of the Project site, as well off-site elements such as surrounding hillsides, neighboring development (including dense ornamental landscaping), and commercial/light industrial development within the City of Escondido to the north. The Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, owned by the SDCWA and managed by the Olivenhain Municipal Water District, provides approximately 11 miles of hiking, mountain biking, equestrian trails, and picnic areas within 784 acres surrounding the Olivenhain Reservoir. The Del Dios Highlands County Preserve encompasses approximately 774 acres and is part of the County's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) preserve system; it is also located entirely within the Elfin Forest Recreational Preserve. The Del Dios Highlands County Preserve provides a 1.5-mile multi-use trail (Del Dios Highlands Trail) that connects to other trails within the Elfin Forest Recreational Preserve.

Distant views into the Proposed Project site are provided from the Way Up Trail within the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve. The Way Up Trail, transecting the north-facing slopes within the Elfin Forest Recreational Preserve, is within the Project's southwestern viewshed. The trail offers a variety of experiences and views; in some areas tall vegetation, sometimes consisting of overhanging oak trees, restricts views to the immediate vicinity of the trail, while at higher elevations, after a hiker or bicyclist has navigated multiple switchbacks, expansive views are available where vegetation lining the trail is less dense; the entire Proposed Project would be visible from these areas. The trail is approximately 1.8 miles from the closest portion of the Project site. Current views from the trail include open pastures and groves, and the stand of eucalyptus trees is discernible as a green patch. Views from this trail also include already developed, highly urban portions of the City of Escondido, the dark green vegetation associated with Escondido Creek, and the residential neighborhoods densely planted with ornamental trees east and west of the Project site. Similar views are provided from the Del Dios Highlands Trail within the Del Dios Highlands County Preserve, which is located east of the Way Up Trail at approximately 1.6 miles from the Project site.



The Proposed Project would include additional structures within the Proposed Project site, and the entire development would be visible from multiple vantage points along these trails. As a result of these all-encompassing bird's eye views, the Project's visual pattern and its spatial relationship to surrounding development within the viewshed would be visible. The large Harmony Grove Village development, which abuts the Project site, is currently building out in the mid-ground between these trails and the Project, and will include 742 homes and a village center on 468 acres. The proposed development would expand continuation of the visual character of the surrounding neighborhoods. Additionally, the Project would retain large stands of tree groves throughout the site and a portion of the avocado orchard in the northwestern portion of the site, as well as the pond and barn structure in the southeastern portion of the site. The retention of the vegetative features would result in retention of potentially valued view elements for viewers from these trails. The existing equestrian structures and pond are likely to be obscured by abutting structures upon buildout, but given their scale and orientation within the landscape, they are not expected to be notable features of these broad views, and may not even be currently visible to viewers from these trails. The distance from these trails minimizes views to the site and the scale of the Proposed Project. Landscaping would further soften the geometric built elements within the Project site. Furthermore, the prominent peaks, ridgeline, and hills in the background of views from this area would not be disturbed, and would continue to be dominant visual elements in views for recreationalists. Mt. Whitney and nearby hillsides constitute background topography in both the "before" and "after" visual condition. This, combined with the continuation of surrounding existing patterns, retention of existing on-site rural features, and the distance from the Project site, would provide continuity between existing and proposed conditions. Therefore, although the Project would result in **changes to the views from these trails, the changes would result in less than significant visual impacts.**

As described above, a total of seven public parks within the cities of San Marcos and Escondido are located within the Proposed Project viewshed, including (1) Montiel Park, located approximately 1.25 miles northeast of the Project site; (2) Knob Hill Park, located approximately 1.3 miles to the northeast; (3) Hollandia Park, located approximately 1.5 miles to the north; (4) Woodland Park, located approximately 1.8 miles to the north; (5) Helen Bougher Memorial Park, located approximately 2.25 miles to the north; (6) Rod McCleod Park, located approximately 2.5 miles to the northeast; and (7) Grape Day Park, located approximately 2.5 miles to the east.

Also as discussed above, excluding the northern reaches of Montiel Park, views of buildable portions of the Proposed Project site are not available from any of these public parks due to intervening topography and built uses (including highways and structures), as well as the distance from the Project site. Shielding as a result of intervening structures or landscaping is not taken into account in the viewshed map, and the computer-generated map was field-checked by Project analysts to confirm visibility. At Montiel Park, views to the Project site would encompass the area proposed for approximately 30 lots in the northern section of Neighborhood 4. This would not translate into views of 30 homes, however, even under best-case viewing conditions. The northernmost 11 lots in this area vary in elevation from one lot to the next by one to two feet. The homes closest to the northern boundary would block views of those behind them at similar elevations. Some of the homes south of these drop in elevation, so they would similarly be shielded by structures intervening between the lot and

viewer. Along the most westerly line of homes in the northern portion of Neighborhood 4, there is a 14-foot increase in elevation between lots 156 and 157. The structure on Lot 157 would probably also be visible, and depending on individual structure heights relative to adjacent homes, residences through lots 160 or 161 could also be visible. All of this, however, assumes that weather conditions and sun direction are favorable, and that the recreational users of the facility, actively engaged in Frisbee golf, are gazing in that direction. Although possible, the active nature of the recreational pursuit, combined with the distance from the site, which would soften boundaries and blur specifics, renders the potential effect less than significant. Also, this southerly view, across SR-78 and toward the hospital, mobile home parks and commercial uses, does not comprise a protected view. Therefore, **impacts to viewers at nearby public parks related to detracting from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista would be less than significant.**

With regard to uses in outlying areas of the viewshed, the Proposed Project would be visible from approximately three miles away, as illustrated in the viewshed map in Figure 2.1-5. From the outlying portions of the viewshed, the Project site is a small feature within a larger view that encompasses more of the valley that lies adjacent to existing development and the steep hillsides of Mt. Whitney and surrounding San Marcos Mountains. Single-family residential uses are located immediately to the east, west, and northwest, and additional single-family residential and mobile home communities are located to the north. Industrial and commercial development occurs to the east and northeast and extends beyond SR-78. Agricultural uses currently occur on site and to the immediate south and west as well. Also to the south, the Harmony Grove Village project is under construction, which will include 742 homes and a village center on 468 acres.

The Proposed Project would introduce built elements into the middle ground of panoramic vistas currently viewed from outlying areas, but the Proposed Project buildings and landscaping would be a visual extension of these developed areas. The foreground and background (i.e., horizon) view elements would remain unchanged, and would not be obstructed or interrupted. Although the Project would change the generally rural nature of the valley floor to more developed uses and would reduce the visual open areas within the valley, it would not change large landforms or the overall geographical configuration of the viewshed. The memorability of the area relies on the distinct visual patterns created by the landforms composing the valley. The scale of the Proposed Project's built elements would be minimized by distance, elevation (in some cases), associated landscaping, and contiguous uses at the Project edges. Therefore, **changes to views from these outlying areas would also be less than significant impacts.**

#### **2.1.2.4 Inconsistency with Applicable Goals, Policies or Requirements of an Applicable County Community Plan, and Subregional Plan**

##### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

4. Not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, and Subregional Plan, or Historic District's zoning.

## Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (2007a).

### Analysis

The site is not subject to an Historic District's zoning. Applicable local land use plans governing visual character and quality include the County's General Plan COS Element and the San Dieguito Community Plan. The COS Element and various elements within the San Dieguito Community Plan include specific goals and policies directed at visual quality and community character. These goals and policies are identified in the VIA (HELIX 2015a), and a Proposed Project consistency evaluation of these applicable goals and policies is provided in Appendix A of the VIA.

In addition, the proposed Specific Plan includes design guidelines for the Proposed Project. The Specific Plan establishes the site design and layout, the architecture, and the landscape goals, criteria, and guidance for trails, lighting, walls, and fences, and includes architectural themes, landscape palettes and fuel modification zone treatments.

In summary, the Proposed Project would be consistent with applicable goals and policies related to aesthetics contained within applicable local land use plans, **and associated visual impacts would be less than significant.**

### ***2.1.2.5 Installation of Outdoor Light Fixtures Inconsistent with the County Light Pollution Code***

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

- 5.A. Install outdoor light fixtures that do not conform to the lamp type and shielding requirements described in Section 59.105 and are not otherwise exempted pursuant to Sections 59.108 or 59.109 of the County Light Pollution Code.

## Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Dark Skies and Glare (2007b, as modified January 15, 2009).

### Analysis

Currently, the Proposed Project site and surrounding area are not lit with streetlights. Visible night lighting is associated with private homes and lights associated with equestrian activities.

As described in the VIA (HELIX 2015a), consistent with the existing surrounding area, streetlights are not proposed along the Proposed Project roadways in general; only at intersections where required for safety and directional purposes. Project lighting would include safety and accent lighting at intersections noted above, as well as at the Project entries, the private park in Neighborhood I, and the WTWRF consistent with the LPC. Intersection street lights would be 18 to 20-feet tall with a shielded down light. The Project entry lighting (four entries) would be focused and provided by low voltage can lights placed near to the ground. Additional low voltage accent lighting may be directed off trees, rocks, and other natural features, as well as directed at Project signs, not to exceed what is allowed by the LPC (please refer to discussion of the entry simulation in Section 2.1.2.1, above). Figure 1-29 depicts the rustic nature of the proposed low-pole lighting at intersections as well as the location of private path lighting. This would be provided in one location, in the community recreation area in Neighborhood 1.<sup>1</sup> As shown on Figure 1-29, the light supports would be low (approximately three feet in height and would be downward focused (on the path). Additionally, proposed houses would be illuminated from interior lights or outdoor safety lighting. Although Project lighting would be expected to produce light levels brighter than currently exists on the Project site, all lighting would adhere to the County LPC. Lighting design would include the use of full cut off light fixtures and glare louvers, ensuring that light rays are projected downward and that glare and spillage into the sky or onto adjacent property are restricted to levels permitted by ordinance.

The Proposed Project site is located approximately 25 miles from Palomar Observatory, in Zone B as identified by the LPC. Project lighting would not adversely affect nighttime views or astronomical observations because the proposed lighting would conform to the lamp type and shielding requirements as well as the hours of operation detailed in the LPC.

Based on compliance with the County's LPC, including lighting design that limits glare and spillage, long-term visual impacts associated with Proposed Project-related **nighttime lighting would be less than significant.**

#### ***2.1.2.6 Use of Nighttime Lighting Inconsistent with the County Light Pollution Code or Extending onto Adjacent Property and Exceeding Code Limits***

##### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

- 5.B. Operate Class I or Class III outdoor lighting between 11:00 p.m. and sunrise that is not otherwise exempted pursuant Section 59.108 or Section 59.109 of the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.

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<sup>1</sup> The park in Neighborhood 5 would be open from dawn to dusk, and would not have any night-lighting. Hours would be specified on neighborhood park signs.

## Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Dark Skies and Glare (2007b as modified January 15, 2009).

### Analysis

Class I lighting refers to outdoor lighting uses to illuminate outdoor areas used for business (sales or work), recreational, decorative or signage purposes. Class III lighting refers to outdoor lighting used for decorative effect. These lights are not Class II lights (those used for safety purposes; i.e., walkways, roadways, equipment yards, parking lots and general outdoor security).

The majority of Proposed Project night lighting would consist of Class II lighting. Consistent with Section 59.108, the limited number of streetlights included in the Project (see Figure 1-29) would be low-pressure sodium lights. Project trails and recreational areas generally would be open from dawn to dusk. As these facilities would not be illuminated, there would be no issue relative to night-lighting. This includes the parking area provided for the neighborhood park in Neighborhood 5 (see Figure 1-29 for lack of lighting in this area). The only lighted pathway is associated with the private recreational facility and associated path in Neighborhood 1. Consistent with Section 59.108, if an evening event is occurring at this private recreation area, all lighting would be shut off prior to, or at, 11:00 p.m. There are only three exceptions to all exterior Project-installed lights being off by 11:00 p.m. These include:

1. Holiday decorations, if installed by the HOA, and specifically exempted (Section 59.109[f]).
2. Operational safety lights at the WTWRP, which, in the unusual event of nighttime need, would be activated by operators' arrival, and only be on for as long as operators are present.
3. Identification signs at the Proposed Project entrances, provided for directional and safety purposes.

Based on compliance with the County LPC, **visual impacts associated with Proposed Project-related Class 1 and Class 2 nighttime lighting would be less than significant.**

### ***2.1.2.7 Use of Nighttime Lighting Extending onto Adjacent Property and Exceeding Light Pollution Code Limits***

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

- 5.C. Generate light trespass that exceeds 0.2 foot-candles measured five feet onto the adjacent property.

## Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Dark Skies and Glare (2007b as modified January 15, 2009).

## Analysis

Light spill, or “trespass” is an important issue for the County. This is where light is cast beyond the area requiring lighting, and enters the adjacent property. The standard is stated as light exceeding 0.2 foot candle more than five feet onto the adjacent property.

Lighting is also subject to substantial restriction in terms of light spill per County ordinance; conformance is mandatory. As part of final mapping for the Proposed Project, all lighting must be defined in detail and approved by staff to demonstrate conformance with the ordinance. This plan will be provided. In the meantime, Figure 1-29 demonstrates typical lighting features that would conform and may be used. As noted above, any alternative would equally meet County standards as a matter of law.

As can be seen from Figure 1-29, excluding the entry lighting along Country Club Drive and Mt. Whitney Road, Proposed Project-provided lighting would all be located within the site interior. Intersection safety lights would be housed in a lamp that covers the entire bulb. Given the height of the fixtures, light would spread from the lamp in a circular pattern onto the ground surrounding the light post, and beyond. Based on Figure 1-29, the most “open” fixture to the Project perimeter, however, would be the intersection light sited at the Project intersection of residential streets in the northeast portion of Neighborhood 5 with the primary entry off of Country Club Drive. The light spill from that feature would not exceed the distance to Country Club Drive, and in any event, would be interrupted by landscaping, including trees, associated with that entryway and sited between the light and Project boundary. The private path lighting also would have bulb s entirely covered by the lamp housing. Light would be more focused in direction—toward the bath, and being lower, would be even more limited in terms of spill. As shown, this type of light would be restricted to Neighborhood 1 in the private recreational facility. There would not be any potential for light spill onto adjacent properties. The entry lights would be of two kinds, downward directed lights highlighting the development name and focused on the sign, or up-lights directed toward the sign and isolated Project landscaping foci. Currently, entry sign lighting is expected to be very focused, and provided by small, low can lights (please refer to discussion of the entry simulation in Section 2.1.2.1, above). These lights would be restricted to the entries, and would be directed toward the Project and away from the roadways. Other properties are located on the other side of the roads, which also would provide a buffer between these directed and focused lights and adjacent properties. No adverse impact would occur to adjacent properties based on Project lighting of Project entries.

Light spill could also occur from individual homes backing onto adjacent properties in each of the neighborhoods. To avoid this potential impact, lighting at courtyard homes in Neighborhood 1 would strictly comply with the LPC. Guidelines requiring private home-based light to be directed and shielded to minimize impacts, complying with comply with the County LPC would be provided to homeowners by the HOA. Guidelines/by-laws stating that outdoor residential

lighting should be shielded and pointed away from open space/directed only onto the lot in question would be provided to all homeowners through the HOA and made a condition of the Administrative Permit. Information regarding beam angles of residential floodlights at higher (preferred) versus lower mounting heights will be provided to residents. In addition, the privacy fencing/walls shown on Figure 1-28 and perimeter vegetation shown on Figures 1-24 and 1-25 would contain spill, as it would interrupt the line of light and provide a hard cut-off. The HOA staff responsible for maintenance on site would periodically inspect the residential lot/open space interface to confirm that lighting on private lots conforms to the guidelines. Also, the HOA would receive complaints from neighbors and homeowners in violation of the guidelines would be notified of any problems through the HOA. This also would be a condition of the Proposed Project Administrative Permit. With these measures, no significant impacts are expected.

In conclusion, Proposed Project night-lighting would minimize light spill, would not exceed LPC ordinance limits, and resulting **impacts would be less than significant**.

### ***2.1.2.8 Installation of Highly Reflective Building Materials***

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

- 5.D. Install highly reflective building materials including, but not limited to, reflective glass and high-gloss surface color in areas that would be visible along roadways, pedestrian walkways or in the line of sight of adjacent properties.

#### Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Dark Skies and Glare (2007b, as modified January 15, 2009).

#### Analysis

The Proposed Project would largely consist of residential buildings that would not incorporate the use of highly reflective materials. The residential units would be designed to be “solar ready” and thus, there is also a possibility that a portion of the residences would incorporate solar/photovoltaic panels. These panels are typically constructed of primarily dark absorptive material that is designed to capture as much light energy as possible. Because they are designed to get as much sun exposure as possible, they are routinely placed on roofs, which would have visibility to viewers from off-site elevated viewpoints. Current technology results in these panels being less reflective than prior models. To be conservative, however, it is noted that sun may be reflected during some times of day when the panel is located at a particular view angle. If this should occur, there is a chance that glare may be experienced by a viewer. Because this may occur only for a short duration per day under worst-case conditions (i.e., reflection 365 days per year, assuming no diffusion related to cloud cover or atmospheric conditions), visual impacts related to glare from solar/photovoltaic panels would not be significant; since building materials

incorporated into the **Project design would not be highly reflective, overall impacts would be less than significant.**

### 2.1.2.9 Conformance with Light Pollution Code

#### Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project will result in a significant impact if it would:

6. Not conform to applicable regulations related to dark skies or glare, including but not limited to the LPC.

#### Guideline Source

This guideline is from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Dark Skies and Glare (2007b as modified January 15, 2009).

#### Analysis

Considering the above analysis relative to Proposed Project lighting type, location, and hours of operation and potential for spill onto adjacent properties, the Project would be in compliance with the Light Pollution Code. **No significant impact would occur.**

### 2.1.3 Cumulative Impact Analysis

As noted in CEQA Guidelines Definitions and Section 15130, cumulative impacts are those resulting from combination of two or more individual effects; either: (1) within a single project, or (2) from a combination of multiple projects. Projects within the Proposed Project viewshed (including the Proposed Project) would contribute to regionally cumulative visual effects, and are evaluated in this discussion. Although these projects are all within the Project viewshed, not all would be visible at any one time or from one point; they are not concentrated in one portion of the viewshed, and local topography, vegetation, intervening structures and land uses often block views of the projects. As shown on Table 2.1-1, *Cumulative Projects*, and Figure 2.1-13, *Cumulative Projects for Visual Analysis*, excluding Valiano, the projects within the viewshed include 18 development projects; including 9 residential, 2 commercial/office, 3 industrial, 1 hotel, 1 school, 1 hospital facility, and 1 roadway project. The residential projects range from 3 to approximately 720 residential dwelling units and together with the Proposed Project, would result in a total of approximately 1,790 residences.

All but three of the cumulative projects within the viewshed are located to the north and east within the more developed areas of the viewshed within the County and the cities of Escondido and San Marcos. The other three projects, Harmony Grove Village (E), Rancho Cielo F) and Harmony Grove Village South (G), are large residential projects within the more rural and undeveloped areas within the County to the south, and are additionally discussed below.



Two of the residential projects would subdivide existing private lots for the purpose of building two or nine new single-family residences (A and C, respectively). These proposed minor subdivisions are located northeast of the Proposed Project, within the existing developed neighborhoods. Visual changes associated with these cumulative projects would be minor; these proposed structures would be located within existing developed neighborhoods and would visually blend with similar surrounding uses, resulting in less than significant cumulative impacts.

Four other residential cumulative projects would develop larger numbers of single-family or multi-family residences; one includes 95 single-family residences (B), one includes 8 single-family and 50 condominiums (H), one includes 70 condominiums (E), and one includes 102 condominiums (N). These residential cumulative projects would result in a total of an additional 103 single-family residences and 222 condominiums. These four residential cumulative projects, however, are located within existing developed neighborhoods that are surrounded by existing residential development and would not result in land use changes. These projects, therefore, would visually blend with similar surrounding uses, resulting in less than significant cumulative impacts.

Similarly, the industrial (J, K and M), commercial/office (I and O), and hotel (P) cumulative projects are located within existing developed areas surrounded by similar uses and/or major roadways and Interstate 15. Development of additional uses within a developed area surrounded by the same uses would not result in a substantial change in the viewshed for these cumulative projects.

One cumulative project is a roadway improvement (L) involving the extension of Citracado Parkway that would construct a gap between two existing segments of this roadway. Although the road extension would require crossing Escondido Creek, it would connect two segments of an existing roadway within a developed area. Constructing roadway improvements involves low-lying linear surface elements that are not highly visible, particularly at this locale because of the logical connection of the existing alignment. This improvement would be visual extension of existing uses, and would thus result in less than significant cumulative impacts.

One cumulative project is a small high school (Q) that would be infill development within a residential neighborhood between West Valley Parkway and Citracado Parkway in the City of Escondido. A high school is visually compatible within a residential neighborhood, especially in this case because the proposed high school would be smaller and would not entail a large campus that would contrast with the surrounding uses. Visually, the high school would blend with existing development that flanks this school site, and would thus result in less than significant cumulative impacts.

Rancho Cielo (F) is located more than three miles to the south, but entails approximately 720 large lot estate residences on over 2,815 acres. The homes are built on hilltops at a higher elevation than the Project site, so very distant views of the Project site could be available from the northern extent of this project, as shown on Figure 2.1-13. The project is partially built out. Most are on large lots (approximately 2.4 to 10 acres), along with a village center, fire station, and WTWRF. While most of this cumulative project lies outside of the viewshed due to

distance, the northern portion of Rancho Cielo occurs on hilltops that provide very distant views to the Proposed Project. This developing community is visually consistent with existing visual patterns of its surrounding area, which is similarly characterized by hillside and hilltop estate residential uses. Therefore, it would result in less than significant cumulative impacts.

One cumulative project consists of a hospital facility (R) located approximately 0.5 mile to the east, a portion of which has been constructed. The Palomar Medical Center was constructed in 2012 and includes an 11-story hospital facility. This project is planned to be expanded in phases. Given the size and height of this hospital building, it is a dominant visual element in the Proposed Project area and is visible from various distant vantage points within the viewshed. It is located at a transition point between industrial/commercial and residential development and is adjacent to existing industrial/commercial uses to the east and single-family residences to the west. Despite it being surrounded by existing development, the size contrasts with the smaller industrial and residential buildings in the area. The construction of additional structures at this location would increase the bulk and scale of this cumulative project and would make it more visible and disparate with the visual character. Therefore, it would contribute to cumulatively significant impacts that are occurring relative to changes in development pattern in this area.

An additional utility facility that would be located close to the Proposed Project would be the Rincon MWD water tank proposed for the northern Project parcel as part of the district's Water Master Plan five-year capital improvement program. This tank would be approximately 32 feet high and 138 feet in diameter and would be located on a 3.2-acre site located within existing grove area (even following the May 2014 fires). Water would be delivered to, or taken from, the tank in subsurface pipelines, with a temporary and limited construction period. Visible elements over the long term would relate to the tank itself, as well as a six-foot retaining wall that would support the tank at a bottom elevation of 940 feet amsl. The tank would add a new – and notable – built feature to the north of the Project development footprint. In order to provide the base for the tank, the top of knoll, at approximately 945 feet would be lowered by approximately 5 feet, and flattened to 940 feet amsl. This knoll is lower than the topographic feature to the west of it. That knoll is never lower than approximately 1,000 feet amsl, and goes up to approximately 1,065 feet AMSL. As a result, the tank would be backed by a knoll a minimum of 28 feet higher than its highest elevation, and would not be skylined. The six-foot retaining wall is expected to be obscured from off-site viewers by intervening grove trees. This feature would be visually consistent with other tanks located on higher hills in the vicinity (although somewhat atypical due to the lack of skylining), and also consistent with the grove uses within which it would be located. In addition, the size of the water tank would be similar to a large two-story residence. Its contribution to the cumulative condition is therefore considered visible, but not inconsistent with agricultural or rural uses in the area.

As previously discussed, Harmony Grove Village (E) is located immediately to the south of the Proposed Project site and is currently under construction. Once completed, this large residential development would include up to 742 single-family residences along with a village center, park and recreation areas, and equestrian facilities on 468 acres. Similar to the Proposed Project, but on a larger scale, Harmony Grove Village would develop residential neighborhoods within the valley on land that previously was (on the Harmony Grove Village site) or currently is (on the Proposed Project site) used for agriculture and equestrian uses, which historically contributed to

an existing rural visual character. The agricultural uses were not all visually passive, however. Structures associated with a large-scale chicken ranch were recently located on the Harmony Grove Village property. This agribusiness included 32 long white linear structures that were visible from area roadways and drew the viewers' eye due to their atypical length, width and color. Harmony Grove Village will introduce a large number of buildings and more suburban elements, as well as reintroduce an historic drainage (removed during farming) into these areas. Because the Harmony Grove Village site is undergoing mass grading, the character has already been altered across a large portion of the valley that extends to the north and includes the Proposed Project site. The project currently contributes to cumulatively significant impacts relative to changes in development pattern in this area.

The third proposed project in the Eden Valley/Harmony Grove area is Harmony Grove Village South (G). This project proposes approximately 450 residences on a 111-acre site south of Escondido Creek and contiguous to the Harmony Grove Village equestrian ranch. The project residences would be consolidated on the more northerly and lower elevation portions of the site. Of the total site acreage, approximately 75 acres, or 68 percent of the site, would consist of either biological open space or greensward (i.e., not development pads or roads). This project would expand the village south of Harmony Grove Road and Escondido Creek to incorporate additional development beyond the equestrian ranch, with its boarding, training and show facilities, as well as additional limited commercial and residential uses.

Views to the Proposed Project site and surrounding area from public roads and recreational trails would be affected, especially since these three projects are contiguous. Views of Harmony Grove Village, Harmony Grove Village South, and the Proposed Project site would be visible from public roads in the immediate area and from public trails further to the south. These residential projects would each introduce suburban elements within the valley into a view that previously, or currently, encompasses open grasslands, orchards, and equestrian uses. Additionally, build out of the Palomar Medical Center beyond the hospital currently in view would introduce large scale buildings and parking facilities adjacent to rural residential development and undeveloped land. While some development currently is visible within the valley, the combination of these projects would create a change in visual character of the valley. Together, the existing elements of these projects, as well as build out to come, result in a cumulatively significant change to views in Eden Valley.

Overall, the visual environment of the viewshed within the valley would be modified by the major physical change in composition introduced by the combination of the three residential projects. This change is exacerbated by the contiguous locales of these projects, which, when taken together, creates a larger transformation in the composition and visual pattern of the valley. Combined, approximately 572 acres within these projects would be subject to grading and change from semi-rural residential, agricultural, and equestrian uses to planned residential neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> Although each project would be visually consistent in terms of visual pattern, the collective effect of the change created by these projects would contrast with the existing visual character and quality of the area. The Palomar Medical Center also adds an urban element with the substantial and atypical height and massing changes and contributes to the change in

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<sup>2</sup> This number includes the following grading acreages: Harmony Grove Village (370), Harmony Grove Village South (75), and Valiano (127).

composition and community character . **Therefore, the cumulative visual impact occurring in the valley would be significant.**

The Proposed Project's contribution to this change, however, would not be cumulatively considerable for several reasons. First, the Harmony Grove Village project is approximately double the size of the Proposed Project (468 acres versus 238.8 acres) with a resulting difference in scale between the two projects. When viewed from off-site locations, the Proposed Project would not substantially contrast with visual patterns, particularly since large open space area would be retained along with retention of several existing on-site elements (e.g., orchard uses and dense tree groves) with a resulting difference in visible perception between the two projects. The Proposed Project would essentially be perceived as an extension of existing uses to the east and would visually blend with the emerging visual pattern within the valley. Secondly, as the viewer approaches the Project site from Country Club Drive, views would open up compared to the developed surrounding settings. (The visual environment to the north consists of developed areas with industrial buildings that line the roadway and restrict views to rural elements within the valley.) Views approaching the Proposed Project from the south encompass rural and semi-rural residential development, and would be further reinforced upon buildout of the Harmony Grove Village project. Third, views of the Project from public vantage points that offer expansive views into the valley floor, such as Seeforever Drive and public trails within the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, would not substantially contrast with surrounding development and visually, would be an extension of existing patterns (refer to Figure 2.1-12b as an example). **Therefore, the Proposed Project's contribution to the change in visual character of the valley would not be cumulatively considerable and would therefore be less than significant.**

#### **2.1.4 Significance of Impacts Prior to Mitigation**

The following significant impacts related to aesthetics would occur with Project implementation:

**Impact AE-1** Although manufactured slopes within steep slopes would be contour graded to follow the natural topography, the resulting landform modification due to the height and visibility of some manufactured slopes associated with lack of vegetation and newly exposed rock would contrast with the adjoining natural hillsides.

**Impact AE-2** The introduction of large retaining walls with line elements and rectilinear surface planes could visually contrast with the backdrop of rolling hillsides and steep ridgelines.

**Impact AE-3** Temporary visual effects during the Proposed Project construction period related to grading and ongoing development would be substantial until buildout occurs and all vegetation is installed and attains five additional years maturity.

### 2.1.5 Mitigation

**M-AE-1** The following mitigation measure addresses initial installation of the landscaping and rock staining on the manufactured slopes to ensure long-term visual continuity and screening of the manufactured slopes:

- All manufactured slopes within steep slopes shall be vegetated beyond the minimal erosion control vegetation (one one-gallon shrub per 100 s.f.) to provide one one-gallon shrub per each 75 s.f. in areas of exposed soil (i.e., non-rocky areas) and exposed newly cut rocks shall be stained to soften and screen the appearance of the manufactured slopes.

**M-AE-2** Visual character impacts related to retaining walls that would not be screened by landscaping shown in the Project Landscape Concept Plan as a matter of Project design would be mitigated by the following measure:

- Retaining wall(s) shall be textured and stained or colored to reduce visibility.

#### Significant Unmitigable Impact

Regarding Impact AE-3, as described above, landscaping would be installed within each constructed phase—as an area is graded it would be landscaped—and would help lessen adverse visual impact of raw slopes and new buildings, ending with substantial vegetation maturity being attained in approximately five years. However, while temporary in nature and ultimately addressed through Proposed Project design and landscaping over the long-term, **short-term adverse visual impacts would be significant and unmitigable.**

### 2.1.6 Conclusion

Impacts remain potentially significant for three issues: views of newly exposed soil and rock in manufactured slope areas in areas of steep slopes, views of large and visible retaining walls not shielded by vegetation as a matter of Proposed Project design, and views of the Project during the construction-period/initial development. These impacts and proposed mitigation are summarized below.

Regarding Impact AE-1, impacts to manufactured slopes with exposed raw soil and broken rock would be mitigated to less than significant because, with mitigation M-AE-1, the distant viewers would observe manufactured slopes that would be contour graded to follow the natural topography and bare slopes that appear to be similar to the natural weathered rock. In time, the landscaping plan would provide vegetative cover for these slopes. The visibility of the rocky slopes while the landscaping matures would be stained to soften and screen the appearance of the manufactured slopes, and the increase in plant density at installation as specified in M-AE-1 would aid in a more rapid perception of visual plant maturity. The HOA for the Proposed Project shall have the responsibility to maintain the installed landscaping along the manufactured slopes.

Regarding Impact AE-2, the introduction of large retaining walls with line elements and rectilinear surface planes and their visual contrast with the backdrop of rolling hillsides and steep ridgelines would be less than significant because the viewer's orientation to the Proposed Project reduces views of the 2 to 20-foot walls behind the new houses or rows of houses and because the Proposed Project design features and mitigation measures utilize texture and color, along with landscaping to reduce contrast, and therefore, visibility.

Regarding Impact AE-3 and construction-period/initial installation visual impacts, short-term visual impacts would be adverse. These impacts would relate to the combination of raw valley and slope soils during the construction period, the potential presence of rock crushing activities (with the industrial appearing crusher) and other construction equipment moving about the site, and increased lighting being visible immediately following Proposed Project construction. Ultimately, the landscaping installed within each constructed phase—as an area is graded it would be landscaped—would lessen adverse visual impacts of raw slopes and new buildings, and vegetation maturity would be visually attained in approximately five years. At that point, raw soil would be covered with Project improvements, and street trees and internal landscaping would buffer the homes from views to the Proposed Project from off site, softening sharp edges, unifying the Project, and shading Project lighting and glare. While temporary in nature and ultimately addressed through Project design and landscaping over the long-term, short-term adverse visual impacts would be significant and unmitigable.

<b>Table 2.1-1 CUMULATIVE PROJECTS</b>					
<b>Map Key<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Project Numbers Issued by Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Proposed Improvements</b>
<b>COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO</b>					
<b>A</b>	TPM 20879	Knox TPM	2194 Rockhoff Road, Escondido	--	2 SFR lots; 1 existing SFR to remain
<b>B</b>	TM 5169	El Norte/ Sunset Heights TM	Northeast of the intersection of El Norte Parkway/Rees Road, Escondido	32.6	95 SFRs
<b>C</b>	TM 5269	Vande Vegte	Intersection of Mycorte Drive/ Hilcorte Drive, San Marcos	2.59	9 SFRs
<b>D</b>	GPA 04-007 REZ 04-014 TM 5382	Montiel Heights/ Montiel Road Townhomes	1310 Montiel Road, Escondido	5.01	70 condominiums; 1 existing SFR to be removed
<b>E</b>	SP 04-003 GPA 04-004 REZ 04-010 VTM 5365 MUP 04-012 MUP 04-013 MUP 04-014	Harmony Grove Village	North and south of Harmony Grove Road, and east and west of Country Club Drive	468	Up to 742 SFRs, commercial services, park and community gathering locales, and equestrian facilities
<b>F</b>	TM 4225 TM 5093 TM 5146 TM 5440 TM 5441 TM 5456 S 01-062 S 05-043 S 05-044 S 99-020 S 99-026 SPA 00-003 SPA 05-004 SPA 96-001 REZ 05-010 REZ 05-011 MUP 00-005	Rancho Cielo	8204 Del Dios Hwy, San Diego	2,815	Approximately 720 residences, most on lots ranging from 2.43 to 10 acres; neighborhood community; village center; fire station and heliport; open space; wastewater reclamation facility

<b>Table 2.1-1 (cont.) CUMULATIVE PROJECTS</b>					
<b>Map Key<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Project Numbers Issued by Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Proposed Improvements</b>
<b>COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO (cont.)</b>					
<b>G</b>	Not available at this time	Harmony Grove Village South	South of Harmony Grove Road and east of Country Club Drive	111.1	Approximately 450 attached and detached residences with associated open space and utility improvements
<b>CITY OF SAN MARCOS</b>					
<b>H</b>	MF 1785 TSM 479 MFSCDP 10-51 R 10-146 GV 10-85 CUP 10-835 ND 10-806	Candera	Intersection of Bougher Road/Via Camellia, San Marcos	7.17	8 SFRs and 50 condominiums; 1 existing SFR to be removed
<b>CITY OF ESCONDIDO</b>					
<b>I</b>	SUB 09-0002	Kenny Ray Harmony Grove	Southeast of the intersection of Kauana Loa/ Harmony Grove Road/future Citracado Parkway, Escondido	24.3	10 lots to be developed individually as a business park and 1 open space lot
<b>J</b>	ER 2000-34	Harmony Grove Industrial Park	Intersection of Harmony Grove Road/Pacific Oaks Place, Escondido	13.6	9 industrial use lots
<b>K</b>	PHG 11-0038	Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility (HARRF) Administration Building	1521 South Hale Avenue, Escondido	37	19,224-s.f. administration building for a wastewater treatment facility with 21 parking spaces
<b>L</b>	ER-2006-10	Citracado Parkway Extension	West Valley Parkway to Andreasen Drive, Escondido	--	Improvements and extension of Citracado Parkway from West Valley Parkway to Andreasen Drive



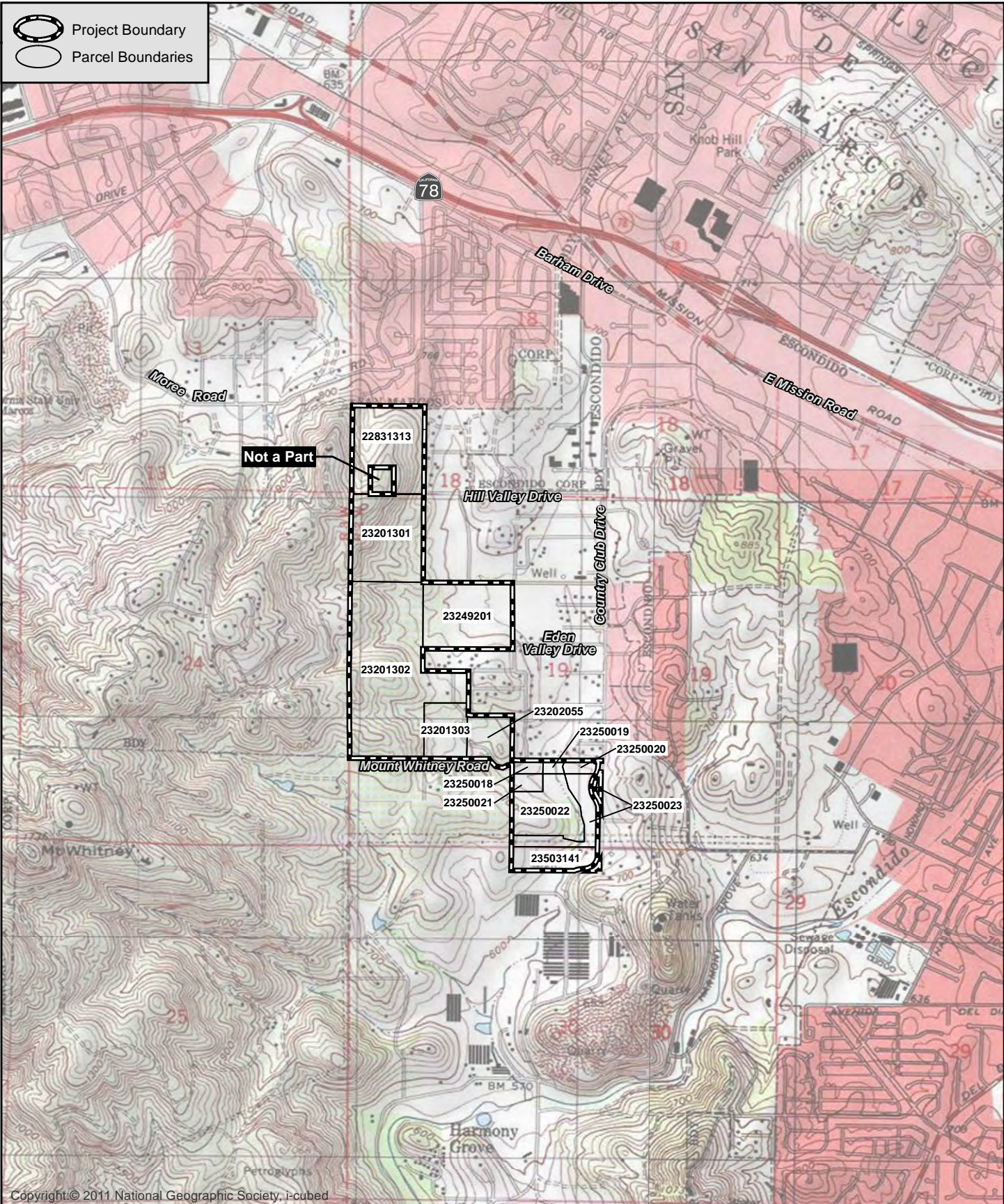
<b>Table 2.1-1 (cont.) CUMULATIVE PROJECTS</b>					
<b>Map Key<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Project Numbers Issued by Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Proposed Improvements</b>
<b>CITY OF ESCONDIDO (cont.)</b>					
<b>M</b>	File No. 0800-40 PHG 10-0014	Escondido Asphalt Plant Expansion	500 North Tulip Street, Escondido	3.72	Four 45-foot-tall, 125-ton vertical asphalt concrete storage/load-out silos and 3 storage tanks; 2 existing 45-foot-tall, 80-ton vertical asphalt concrete storage/load-out silos to be removed on the existing concrete and asphalt recycling facility
<b>N</b>	Log No. ER 2005-20 PHG 11-0009 Tract 921, 2005-28-PD, 2005-06-AZ	Citysquare Downtown Residential	313 South Orange Street, Escondido	3.65	102 condominiums; 4 existing residences and existing commercial use on site to be removed
<b>O</b>	2007-25-PD 2005-20-PD	The Point	350 La Terraza Boulevard, Escondido	1.84	43,107-s.f. office building, 38,121-s.f. health club and 349 parking spaces
<b>P</b>	2007-18-PD ER 86-43	Springhill Suites by Marriott	300 La Terraza Boulevard, Escondido	1.68	105-room hotel
<b>ESCONDIDO UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>					
<b>Q</b>	ADM 10-0001 SCH No. 2009081074	Citracado High School/ Del Lago Academy	South of West Valley Parkway and north of Citracado Parkway, Escondido	34	Specialized small high school for 500 to 800 students
<b>PALOMAR POMERADO HEALTHCARE DISTRICT</b>					
<b>R</b>	2001-01-SPA 2005-81-SPA/DA PHG 11-0034 SCH No. 200112106	Escondido Research & Technology Center (ERTC)	South of Vineyard Avenue, north of Harmony Grove Road and along either side of Citracado Parkway, Escondido	164	Approximately 1,200,000-s.f. hospital/ medical campus with 453 beds

<b>Table 2.1-1 (cont.) CUMULATIVE PROJECTS</b>					
<b>Map Key<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Project Numbers Issued by Agency</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Proposed Improvements</b>
<b>RINCON DEL DIABLO MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT</b>					
<b>S</b>	N/A	Rincon MWD Water Tank	Northern portion of Project site on parcel which is owned by District	3.2	New 3 MG water storage reservoir and 16-inch supply pipeline

Acronyms/abbreviations:

-- = not available	MUP = Major Use Permit	SP = Specific Plan	VTM = Vesting Tentative Map
CUP = Conditional Use Permit	REZ = Rezone	SPA = Specific Plan Amendment	
DU = dwelling unit	S = Site Plan	SFR = single-family residence	
GPA = General Plan Amendment	SCH = State Clearinghouse	TM = Tentative Map	
MFR = multi-family residence	s.f. = square feet	TPM = Tentative Parcel Map	

<sup>1</sup> Letters refer to cumulative projects identified in Figure 2.1-13.

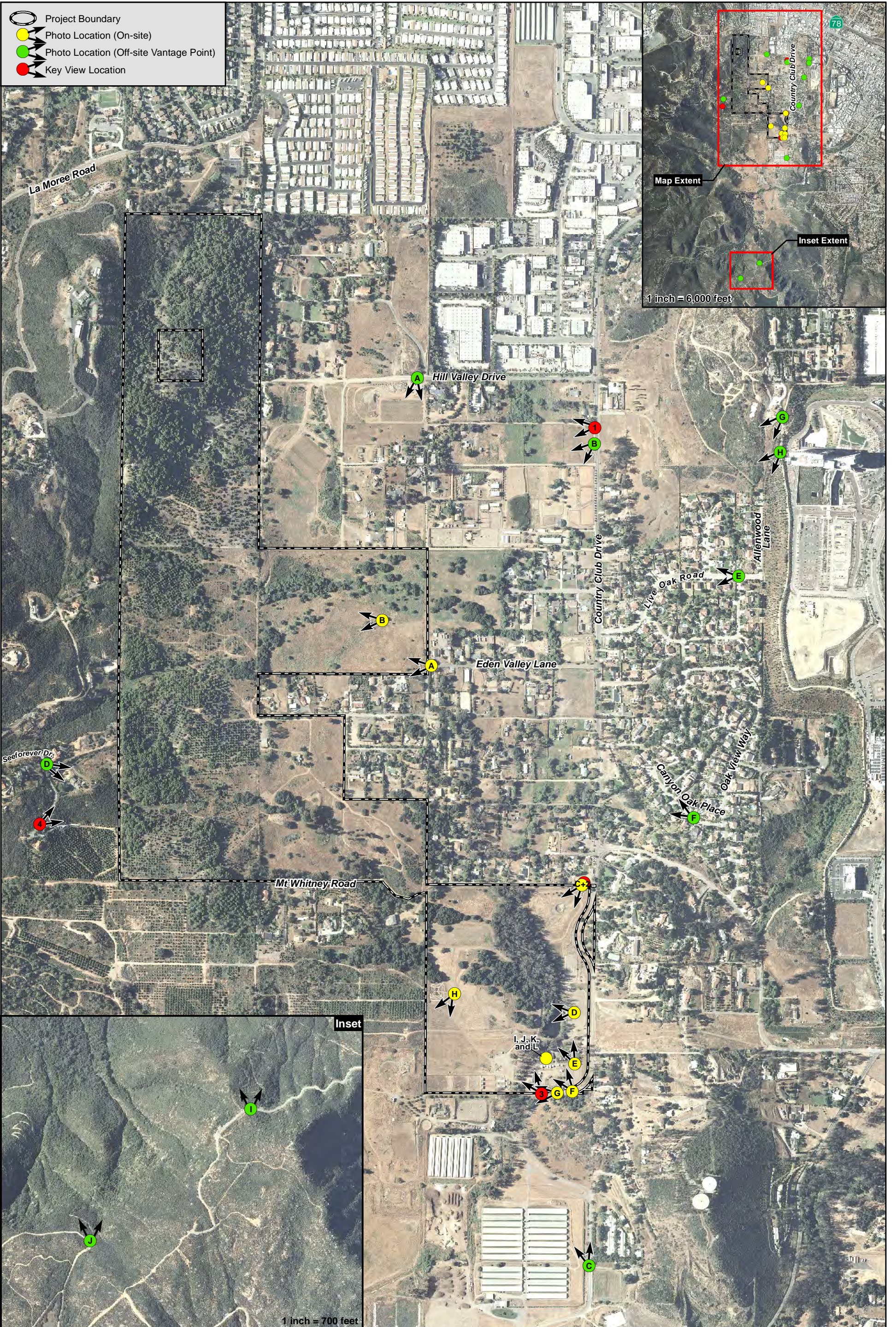


**Project Location Map**

VALIANO

Figure 2.1-1

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**Photo Location Map**

VALIANO

Figure 2.1-2



Photograph A. From terminus of Eden Valley Lane, looking into Neighborhood 3.



Photograph B. View to the west from slight rise in Neighborhood 3.

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## On-site Visual Elements

VALIANO



Photograph A. From terminus of Eden Valley Lane, looking into Neighborhood 3.



Photograph B. View to the west from slight rise in Neighborhood 3.

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## On-site Visual Elements

VALIANO

Figure 2.1-3a