

4.1 AESTHETICS

4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

This section identifies existing visual ~~conditions~~ resources at the project site and in the project vicinity and analyzes the potential for implementation of the proposed Highland Estates project to affect those resources. Information presented in the discussion and subsequent analysis was drawn from site visits, the San Mateo County General Plan, and San Mateo County Zoning regulations. The physical characteristics of the site and surrounding areas are discussed briefly.

Seven computer-generated visual simulations illustrating before (current) and “after” visual conditions from representative public vantage points near the project site are presented as part of this analysis. The ~~locations or vantage points~~ of for the visual simulations ~~vantage points~~ were selected in consultation with County staff and were chosen to represent viewpoints that are ~~both~~ highly accessible to the public, that provide the most direct views of potential site changes, and that show private views from adjacent residential uses.

In response to the Notice of Preparation for this environmental impact report (EIR), a commenter requested a thorough analysis of visual impacts of the proposed project. The scoping comment is addressed in the impact assessment presented below. In response to the draft EIR circulated in December 2008, commenters requested additional analysis of project compliance with Development Review Criteria of the Resource Management (RM) District, the impacts to views from viewing locations along Polhemus Road and from nearby residential viewing locations, and the visual impact of implementing the 100-foot defensible space requirement and constructing the proposed bio-retention planters.

4.1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

4.1.2.1 Regional Location

The project site is located within the San Mateo Highlands neighborhood in an unincorporated area of San Mateo County, west of the San Mateo City limit. Highway 92 and Interstate 280 (I-280) are located to the south and west of the project site, respectively. The project site is bordered by Bunker Hill Drive to the north and northeast, Polhemus Road to the southeast, Ticonderoga Drive and Cobblehill Place to the south, and Lexington Avenue and Yorktown Road to the west and northwest.

4.1.2.2 Surrounding Land Uses

The project site is predominately surrounded by single-family residential uses. Existing homes are located along the southern boundary of the site, including the homes along Cobblehill Place, Sheraton Place, New Brunswick Drive, Lexington Avenue, and portions of Ticonderoga Drive. Single-family

housing is also concentrated to the northwest of the project site, predominantly along Bunker Hill Drive from Bennington Drive to Yorktown Road. Existing homes also front Yorktown Road to the west of the project site. The Lower and Upper Crystal Springs Reservoirs are located to the west of the site. Other surrounding land uses in the project area include the Crystal Springs United Methodist Church and the Crystal Springs Shopping Center east of the site; the Hillsborough West apartments southeast of the site; and the Highlands Recreation Center west of the site. The Highlands Elementary School is located approximately 200 feet northwest of the project site.

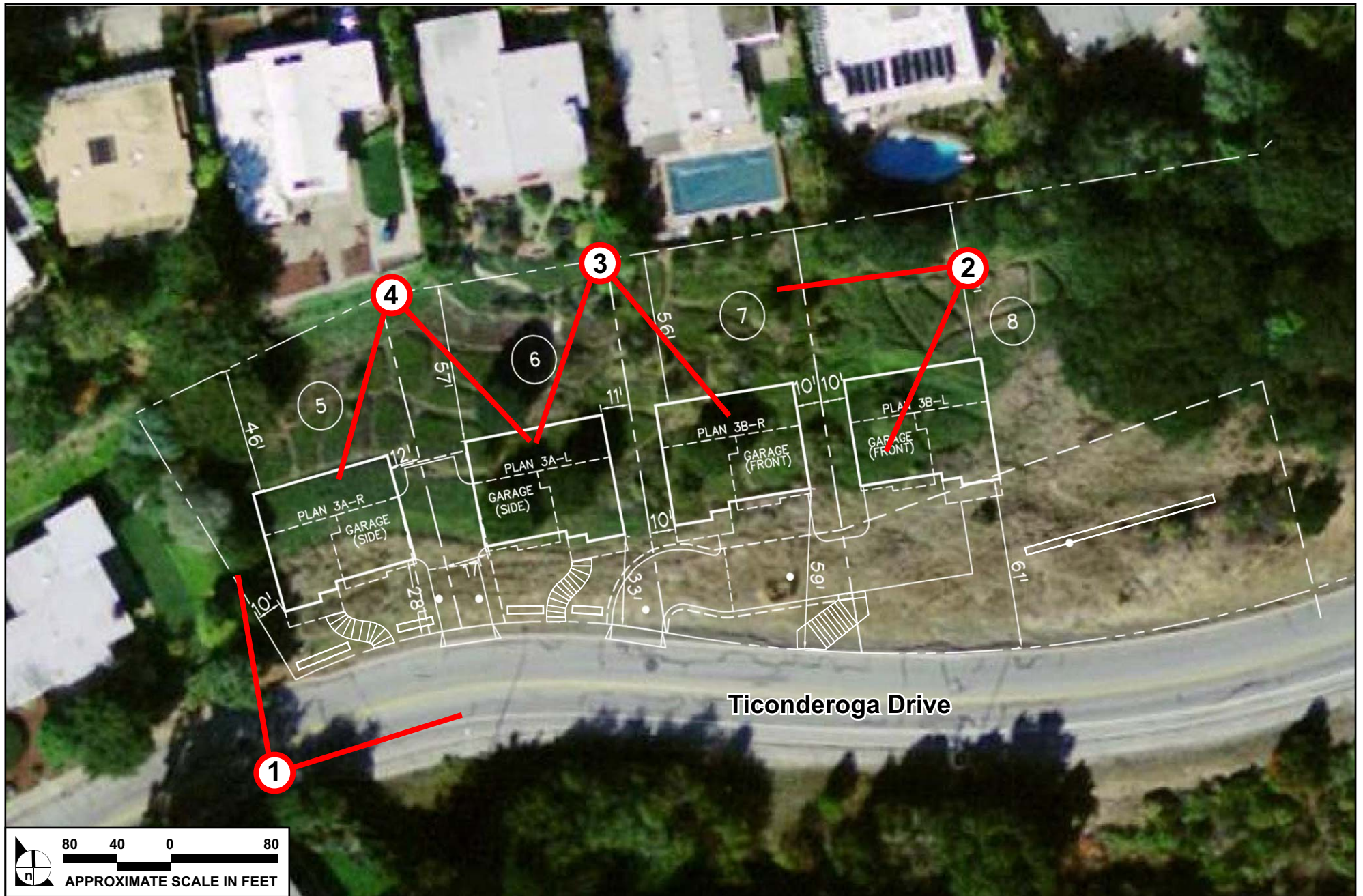
4.1.2.3 Project Site

The site itself consists of undeveloped land with steep rolling hills, extending from the west downhill to the east. The area contains grasslands with dense trees and other vegetation, which in many cases, obscures the view of the site from surrounding areas. Elevations at the site range from 325 to 750 feet above mean sea level (msl). The slope of the project site ranges from 0 to 50 percent in some areas; the average overall slope is 40 percent. Numerous sandstone rock outcrops are present on the site, especially along the upper slopes and ridges. The site is predominately characterized by coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) woodland, coastal scrub, riparian forest, and valley needlegrass grassland.

The site itself does not contain any structures. However, the project site surrounds two parcels owned by California Water Company and water storage facilities are located on these California Water Company parcels located off of Yorktown Road. Access to the open space portion of the site is currently provided by a road located near the intersection of Bunker Hill Drive and Polhemus Road. An access road also extends from Yorktown Road that allows the California Water Company to access the water storage facilities.

4.1.2.4 Existing Residential Views

Views of the project site from surrounding areas consist of expansive open space with dense vegetation. ~~Twelve~~^{Seven} viewpoints of the project site from varying locations and distances were selected for analysis. These viewpoints were determined to be representative views of the site from the surrounding residential neighborhood. ~~Four~~^{Nine} of the viewpoints are located along residential roadways (Ticonderoga Drive, Bunker Hill Drive, Cobblehill Place, ~~and~~ Cowpens Way, Polhemus Road, two views from Timberlane Way, Crown Court, and Lakewood Circle), and the remainder of the viewpoints capture views from neighboring residences on adjacent lots. **Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-4, Viewpoint Locations**, depict the locations of the selected viewpoints for the visual simulations. **Figures 4.1-5 through 4.1-11, Views Pre-and Post-Construction**, are photographs and visual simulations of the viewpoints selected.



SOURCE: Google Earth September 2007, Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2008

FIGURE 4.1-1

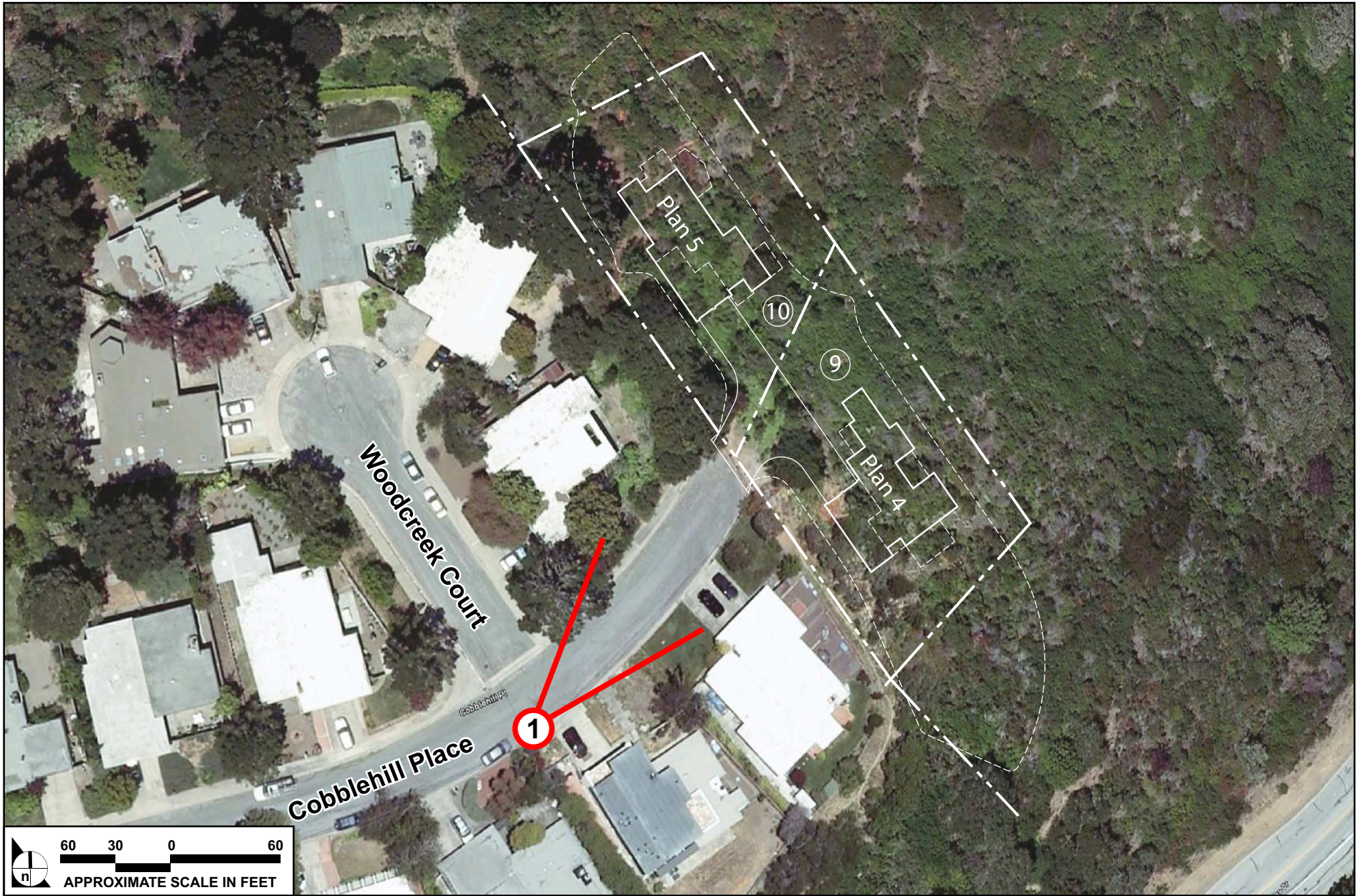
Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint Locations 1, 2, 3 & 4



SOURCE: Google Earth September 2008, Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2008

FIGURE 4.1-2

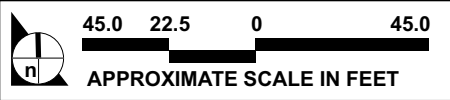
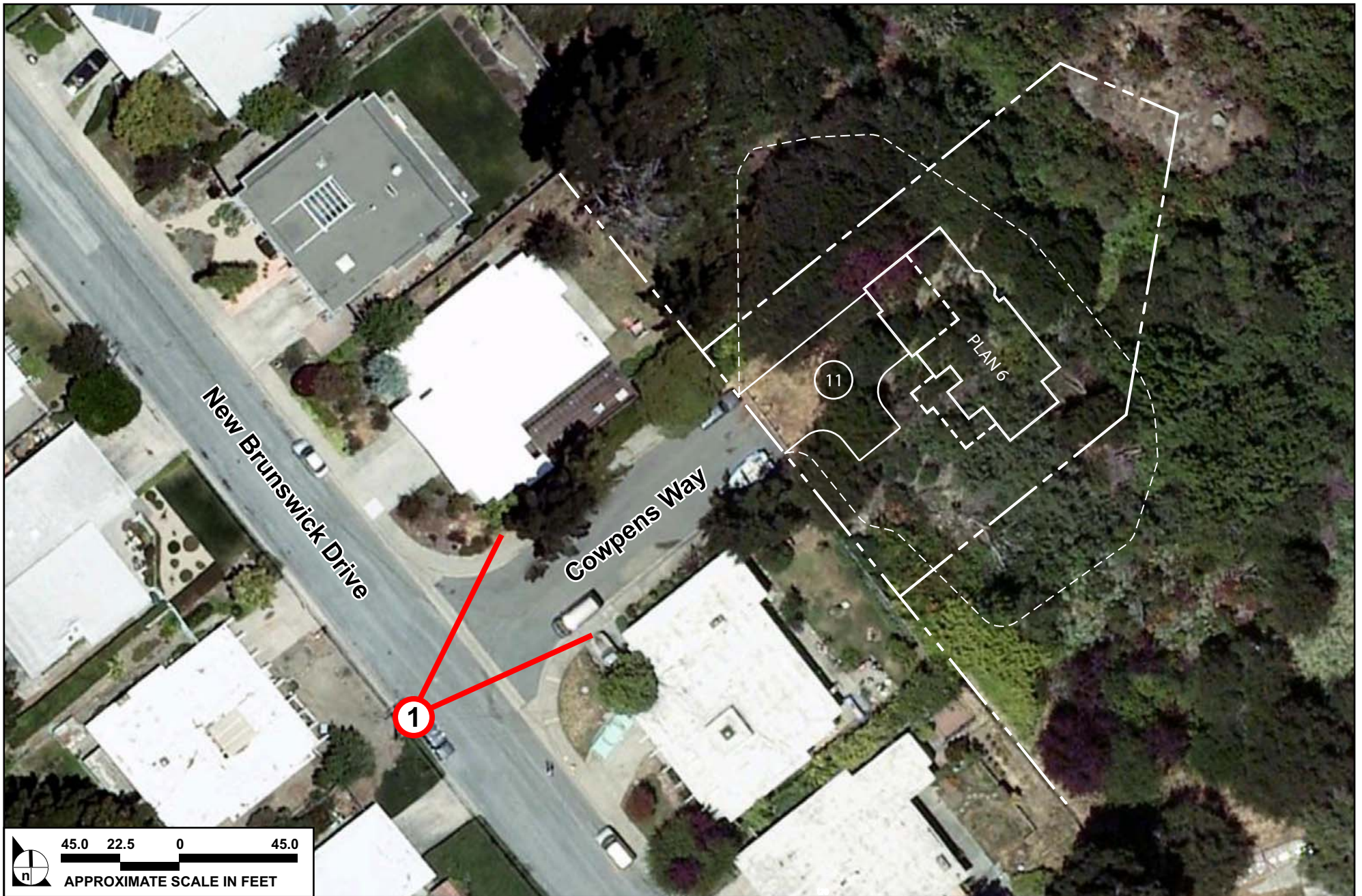
Bunker Hill Drive Site – Viewpoint Location 1



SOURCE: Google Earth September 2008, Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-3

Cobblehill Place Site – Viewpoint Location 1



SOURCE: Google Earth September 2008, Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-4

Cowpens Way Site – Viewpoint Location 1

Pre-Construction



Post-Construction



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-5

Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction

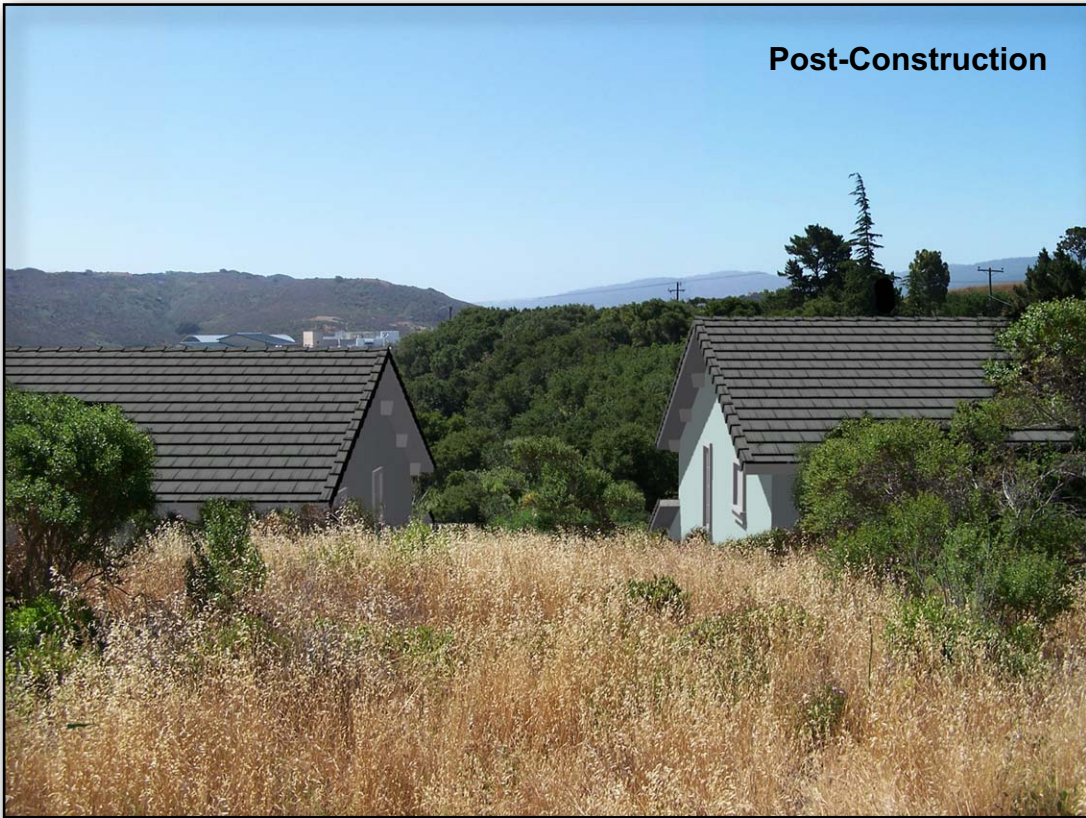


SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-6



Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 2 Pre- and Post-Construction



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-7



Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 3 Pre- and Post-Construction



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-8



Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 4 Pre- and Post-Construction



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-9

Bunker Hill Drive Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction



Pre-Construction



Lot 9 Residence
Lot 10 Not Visible
(Behind Trees)

Post-Construction

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2008

FIGURE 4.1-10

Cobblehill Place – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – September 2008

FIGURE 4.1-11

Cowpens Way – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction

Figure 4.1-12, Viewpoint Locations near Polhemus Road, depicts the locations of off-site viewpoints on residential streets near the Polhemus Scenic Road looking toward the project site, and **Figures 4.1-13 through 4.1-17** show photographs from these viewpoints.

Ticonderoga Drive

Ticonderoga Drive runs in a west-east direction, along the southern and eastern boundaries of the site. The view shown in **Figure 4.1-5, Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction** shows the home sites on Ticonderoga Drive from a viewpoint to the southwest of the proposed homes.

As shown in **Figure 4.1-5**, the view is dominated by open grasslands in the foreground and a cluster of trees and a few bushes in the mid-ground. In general, this portion of Ticonderoga Drive consists of rolling hillsides with medium density clusters of trees. The houses located just beyond the hillside to the north are not visible from this viewpoint, largely because there is an approximately 50-foot uphill slope that characterizes the site from this view. This photograph was taken in the summer, when the hillside grass had dried up and was light brown in color, and interior and portions of the site that were more extensively exposed to the sun contrast sharply with the green trees. The view of this open space interior of the site from the roadway is typically brief, as this segment of Ticonderoga Drive quickly turns into Polhemus Road at one end and rapidly curves northwest and ends at Lexington Avenue traveling the other way. In addition, most motorists are traveling at speeds of approximately 35 miles per hour or more along this stretch and the view is, thus, more likely to be brief.

The view shown in **Figure 4.1-6, Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoint 2 Pre- and Post-Construction**, is facing west, and **Figures 4.1-7 and 4.1-8, Ticonderoga Site – Viewpoints 3 and 4 Pre- and Post-Construction** are facing south from a 500- to 525-foot elevation to the north, above the proposed houses along Ticonderoga Drive.

Similar to View 1 from the Ticonderoga Drive, Ticonderoga Site Pre-Construction Views 2-4 also show open grasslands in the center of the photos, with a few scattered bushes, followed by densely clustered trees receding into the background. Views 3 and 4 capture on-site grasslands in the foreground, while the trees that appear in the background are actually located across Ticonderoga Drive. The roadway itself is not visible from this location because of the influence of the downward slope that obstructs the roadway when facing south from this viewpoint. The photographs in **Figures 4.1-6 through 4.1-8** were taken in the summer, when the hillside grass had dried and was light brown in color. Therefore, the hillside grass portions of the site contrast sharply with the green trees.

Bunker Hill Drive

Bunker Hill Drive runs in a southwest to northeast direction, along the northern and northwestern boundary of the project site. The view illustrated in **Figure 4.1-2, Bunker Hill Drive Site – Viewpoint Location 1**, and shown in **Figure 4.1-9, Bunker Hill Drive Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-Construction** is facing east from Bunker Hill Drive from a viewpoint just west of the proposed houses.

As shown in the photograph in **Figure 4.1-9**, the view from this location is dominated by dense trees that line the roadway in a downhill direction. Some dry grassland is also visible in the foreground, beneath the trees. This portion of Bunker Hill Drive consists of steep hillside followed by a downhill slope covered with trees. Some structures are visible in the background from this view, with hillsides and a tree line visible further in the distance. A building located just northeast of the proposed houses is also visible from this viewpoint. From this perspective, the central open space portion of the project site is visible and is densely covered in green trees. This photograph was taken in the summer, when the grass in the area was light brown. This provides a contrast to interior portions of the site that are covered with green trees. This viewpoint shows a uniquely vast portion of the project site because it captures the roadway as it recedes downhill, allowing the viewer to see further away.

Cobblehill Place

Cobblehill Place is a cul-de-sac that runs in from east to west, located to the northwest of Ticonderoga Drive in the southeastern portion of the project site. The view illustrated in **Figure 4.1-3, Cobblehill Place Site – Viewpoint Location 1**, and shown in **Figure 4.1-10, Cobblehill Place Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre-and Post-Construction** is facing northeast from Cobblehill Place, from a viewpoint just west of the proposed houses.

The view from this location shows an expanse of dense trees and bushes at the terminus of the roadway that continues in a downhill direction. This portion of Cobblehill Place consists of steep hillsides, followed by a downhill slope covered with trees. Some houses are slightly visible in the distant background. From this viewpoint, the project site appears almost canyon-like, as the roadway drops off into a deep valley below. This photograph was also taken in the summer when the grass was visibly dry due to limited rainfall; however, the trees remain largely green.

Cowpens Way

Cowpens Way is another cul-de-sac that runs east to west, due north of Cobblehill Place in the southeastern portion of the project site. The view illustrated in **Figure 4.1-4, Cowpens Way Site-Viewpoint Location 1**, and shown in **Figure 4.1-11, Cowpens Way Site – Viewpoint 1 Pre- and Post-**

Construction, is facing northeast from New Brunswick Drive onto Cowpens Way, from a viewpoint to the southwest of the proposed house on Cowpens Way.

The view from this location shows a canopy of trees along the roadway, thinning out at the terminus of the road. The project site trends downhill at the end of Cowpens Way, but the slope is not visible in this view due to the trees, which provide a screen at the end of the road. Because the road also narrows at its terminus, views into the central portion of the project site are limited from this direction. The main features of the project site from this perspective are hillside trees and vegetation that line the roadway and some grassland visible just beyond the trees. This photograph was also taken in the summer when the soil and grasslands are visibly dry due to limited rainfall, but the trees remain strikingly green.

Polhemus Road

Polhemus Road is a County Scenic Road that runs northwest to southeast, located to the east of the project site. The view shown in **Figure 4.1-13, View from Polhemus Road**, is facing southwest from the intersection of Polhemus Road and Timberlane Way. The view of the project site from this location shows a utility pole with lines in the foreground and mature trees on the slope in the background. Home sites along Ticonderoga Drive, Cobblehill Place, and Cowpens Way are not visible from this viewpoint.

Timberlane Way

Timberlane Way is located to the east of the project site where it runs in a southwest to northeast direction and terminates to the west at Polhemus Road. Views of the project site facing southwest from Timberlane Way, between the intersections with Polhemus Road and Kings Lane, are illustrated in **Figure 4.1-14, View from Timberlane Way – Cobblehill Place Site**, and **Figure 4.1-15, View from Timberlane Way – Cowpens Way Site**.

As shown in **Figure 4.1-14**, the views of the project site from this location on Timberlane Way show an uphill slope densely covered with trees and brush. The top of a utility pole at the terminus of Cobblehill Place is visible in the distant background at the top of the slope. As shown in **Figure 4.1-15**, Cowpens Way is screened by an expanse of mature Eucalyptus trees near the intersection of Polhemus Road and Timberlane Way.

Crown Court

Crown Court is a cul-de-sac that runs north to south, looping one way around a grassy median, located to the east of the project site. The project site is visible from the east side of the median as shown in **Figure 4.1-16, View from Crown Court**.

The view of the project site from this location shows homes on the west side of Crown Court in the foreground and a densely vegetated uphill slope in the background that comprises a portion of the Cobblehill Place and Cowpens Way home sites. The white home in the left background of Figure 4.1-16 is located on Cobblehill Place and Cowpens Way is screened by the canopy of trees in the middle background. Ticonderoga Drive home sites are not visible from this viewpoint.

Lakewood Circle

Lakewood Circle originates to the west at Ralston Avenue (which becomes Polhemus Road), runs uphill to the east and loops through a residential development. The project site is visible from the uphill portion of the road near Ralston Avenue. A view of the project site facing northwest is shown in Figure 4.1-17. From this viewpoint, grasses and shrubs are visible in the foreground on the northeast side of Ralston Avenue, which is visible in the middle of the photograph. Ticonderoga Drive is seen in the left background, and homes on Cobblehill Place are seen in the middle-left background among dense vegetation. This photograph was taken in the summer when the grasses in the area were light brown.

4.1.3 REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1.3.1 County of San Mateo General Plan

The County of San Mateo General Plan includes the following policies related to visual resources in the Highland Estates project area.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| Policy 4.35 | Urban Area Design Concept |
|-------------|---------------------------|
- a. Maintain and, where possible, improve upon the appearance and visual character of development in urban areas.
 - b. Ensure that new development in urban areas is designed and constructed to contribute to the orderly and harmonious development of the locality.



SOURCE: Google Earth - 2009, Impact Sciences, Inc. - July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-12

Viewpoint Locations near Polhemus Road



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-13

View from Polhemus Road



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-14

View from Timberlane Way - Cobblehill Place Site



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-15

View from Timberlane Way - Cowpens Way Site



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-16

View from Crown Court



Ticonderoga Drive

Cobblehill Place

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – July 2009

FIGURE 4.1-17

View from Lakewood Circle

4.1.3.2 San Mateo County Zoning Regulations

RM Development Review

The San Mateo County Zoning Regulations, adopted in 1999, were designed by the County to help guide the physical development of land and future growth within the County. The RM District within the San Mateo County Zoning Regulations contains additional site criteria contained in Chapter 20A, "Development Review Criteria." The purpose of this chapter is to simplify and improve the procedure by which developments are reviewed, by containing all of the required criteria and reviews in a single procedure, incorporating the zoning review, subdivision review and environmental impact review procedures in one chapter. The following criteria are relevant to the analysis of aesthetic impacts:

SECTION 6324.2. Site Design Criteria

- (a) Development shall be located, sited and designed to carefully fit its environment so that its presence is subordinate to the pre-existing character of the site and its surrounding is maintained to the maximum extent practicable.
- (b) All roads, buildings, and other structural improvements or land coverage shall be located, sited, and designed to fit the natural topography and shall minimize grading and modification of existing land forms and natural characteristics. Primary Designated Landscape Features defined in the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the San Mateo County General Plan shall not be damaged.
- (c) Small, separate parking areas are preferred to single large parking lots.
- (d) No use, development, or alteration shall:
 - 1. create uniform, geometrically-terraced building sites which are contrary to the natural land forms;
 - 2. substantially detract from the scenic and visual quality of the County; or
 - 3. substantially detract from the natural characteristics of existing major water courses, established and mature trees and other woody vegetation, dominant vegetative communities or primary wildlife habitats.
- (e) All development shall be sited and designed to minimize the impacts of noise, light, glare and odors on adjacent properties and the community-at-large.
- (h) The development shall employ colors and materials which blend in with, rather than contrast with, the surrounding soil and vegetative cover of the site. In forested areas, all exterior construction materials shall be of deep earth hues such as dark browns, greens and rusts. Materials shall absorb light (i.e., dark, rough textured materials). Exterior lighting shall be minimized, and earth-tone colors of lights used (e.g., yellow, brown toned lights, rather than blue toned fluorescents). In grassland, or grassland/forest areas, all exterior materials shall be of the same earth and vegetative tones as the

predominant colors of the site (as determined by on-site inspections). Highly reflective surfaces and colors are discouraged.

- (i) Wherever possible, vegetation removed during construction shall be replaced. Vegetation for the stabilization of graded areas or for replacement of existing vegetation shall be selected and located to be compatible with surrounding vegetation, and should recognize climatic, soil and ecological characteristics of the region.

4.1.4 CONSISTENCY WITH APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

CEQA requires an analysis of consistency with plans and policies as part of the environmental setting (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15125). The General Plan Guidelines published by the State Office of Planning and Research define consistency as follows: “An action, program, or project is consistent with the General Plan if, considering all its aspects, it will further the objectives and policies of the General Plan and not obstruct their attainment.” Therefore, the standard for analysis used in the EIR is based on general agreement with the policy language and furtherance of the policy intent (as determined by a review of the policy context). The project does not have to be in exact agreement with a policy for a project to be consistent with it.

4.1.4.1 County of San Mateo General Plan and Zoning Regulations

The proposed project would construct single-family homes consistent with development in the surrounding neighborhoods and would maintain the general character of ~~for~~ the remainder of the site for open space uses. ~~The proposed project would also, in some cases, provide views of the San Francisco Bay.~~ Housing would be designed to be in character with current development in the surrounding areas.

~~The project would also be subject to the Development Review Criteria of the RM District, which would further ensure consistency with RM uses.~~ The project complies with the applicable site design criteria of the RM District Zoning Regulations, as the project minimizes the need for imported fill at the subject site, by avoiding a raised building pad and proposing foundation designs that step up or down with the existing topography. As discussed in Section 4.3, Geology and Soils, with the implementation of mitigation measures, the development will not contribute to the instability of the parcel or adjoining lands and the project will be designed to adequately compensate for adverse soil engineering characteristics and other subsurface conditions. As discussed in Section 4.2, Biological Resources, the removal of living trees with trunk circumference of more than 55 inches (17.5” diameter) measured 4-1/2 feet above the average surface of the ground is prohibited, except as may be required for development permitted under the RM District regulations, or permitted under the timber harvesting ordinance, or for reason of actual or potential danger to life or property. The Project Applicant proposes to remove 7 trees that meet or exceed the size threshold. The trees to be removed are located within the proposed building

footprints and are included in the RM permit application. Therefore, the project would be considered to be consistent with applicable General Plan policies and zoning regulations.

4.1.5 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

4.1.5.1 Significance Criteria

According to the County of San Mateo's Environmental Checklist and Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, a project would normally have a significant environmental impact if it would:

- Be adjacent to a designated Scenic Highway or within a State or County Scenic Corridor, or substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- Obstruct scenic views from existing residential areas, public lands, public water body, or roads, or have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Involve the construction of buildings or structures in excess of three stories or 36 feet in height;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area; or
- Visually intrude into an area having natural scenic qualities.

Issues Not Discussed Further

The Initial Study determined that the project would not involve the construction of structures in excess of three stories or 36 feet in height, and would not result in a significant increase in light or glare. Additionally, the proposed project is not adjacent to a scenic highway, nor would it affect trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a scenic corridor or a State scenic highway. ~~Polhemus Road, located to the north of the project site is considered a County Scenic Road, per the County General Plan. However, the project would not involve any visible changes from this viewpoint or involve work within Polhemus Road right of way. Therefore, there would be no project impact to this scenic roadway. These~~ issues are not discussed further in this section.

4.1.5.2 Project Impacts

Impact AES-1: **The proposed project would alter project views but would not obstruct scenic views from existing off-site and residential areas or adversely affect scenic views from a designated scenic route. (*Less than Significant*)**

A scenic view or vista is generally considered scenic because it includes a picturesque ridgeline, open bay waters, distinctive urban skyline or major landmarks within the sight distance. A scenic view also tends to be a very sensitive resource and any development, especially that which is insensitive to design and inappropriate buffering/screening, could interfere with these viewsheds. The County General Plan does not specifically define or identify any scenic vistas within the County. Views of the project site from surrounding areas consist of an area of open space characterized by dense vegetation. The construction of 11 homes on a currently undeveloped site could potentially alter the existing off-site views presently available from surrounding areas.

As discussed in Section 4.4.2.4, property owners of the lots adjacent to the open space parcel on Bunker Hill Drive, Cobblehill Place, and Cowpens Way would be required to maintain a fuel break up to 100 feet wide around the perimeter of each home, per **Mitigation Measure HAZMAT-2**. Property owners would be authorized to clear this space of dead vegetation and lower limbs, but not trees. Because only the understory vegetation would be removed, the fuel break would not be visible from off-site locations and would therefore not affect scenic views. The fuel break is therefore not discussed further in the evaluation of project impacts on scenic views.

Off-site views from various residential locations surrounding the project site pre- and post-construction are shown in the visual simulations on **Figures 4.1-5** through **4.1-11**. The visual effects of the proposed development reflect a change from undeveloped open space to a residentially occupied area. Upon completion, the project would introduce two-story structures, landscaping, and associated driveways and infrastructure to the project site. The following provides a brief discussion of how the project would alter the existing views of the site and its surroundings, followed by a discussion of how this would ~~impact~~ affect the quality of these views.

View from Ticonderoga Drive - Facing Northeast

The project would alter the views of the site from Ticonderoga Drive from its current open space character to views of a developed residential neighborhood. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-5**, include the introduction of new two-story structures with a height of up to approximately 28 feet, ornamental grasses and trees, bio-retention planters, stairs, as well as pavement and retaining walls associated with driveway development. The simulation in **Figure 4.1-5**, along with simulations in **Figures**

4.1-6 through 4.1-11, is representative and does not depict the exact design of the proposed development. However, the simulation illustrates the likely form, mass, and appearance of the homes as they would appear on the site based on the most accurate information available to the preparers of this document. Most residential homes that would be constructed for the project would be partially obscured from surrounding residences by the slope of the hill. However, proposed houses would be visible from Ticonderoga Drive along with an existing house located to the east, as shown in the aerial view illustrated in **Figure 4.1-1**.

View from Rear of Ticonderoga Drive Residences - Facing West

Implementation of the project would alter the views of the site from the backyards of residences along Ticonderoga Drive, from its current open space features to a developed residential neighborhood. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-6**, mainly consist of the introduction of two new two-story structures with a height of up to approximately 28 feet. The other features, such as landscaping and trees would not be visible from this perspective. Only one story of the structures can be seen from this western viewpoint and the view is mostly dominated by the rooftops of the proposed new houses. From the west, residential homes that would be constructed for the project would be partially obscured by the slope of the hill, and much of the open space that originally characterized the site would remain visible.

View from Rear of Ticonderoga Drive Residences - Facing South

The project would alter the views of the site from the backyards of residences along Ticonderoga Drive, from its current open space features to a developed residential neighborhood. This viewpoint demonstrates the alteration of views from the perspective of the existing residential lots to the north. The visual changes, as shown in **Figures 4.1-7** and **4.1-8**, mainly consist of the introduction of new structures with a height of up to approximately 28 feet, and the view is mostly dominated by the rooftops of the new houses. Some residences are already present within this viewshed and the pre-construction views of the distant tree line and surrounding hills would remain uninterrupted following development. Similar to the west facing viewpoint, from the adjacent residences to the south, much of the open space area that originally characterized the site would remain visible.

View from Bunker Hill Drive – Facing East

Implementation of the project would change the views of the site from its current features dominated by a pronounced tree line along the roadway, to views of a developed residential neighborhood. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-9**, include the introduction of new two-story structures with a height of up to approximately 32 feet, landscaped areas, trees, as well as paved driveways. The new single-family homes would recede along the roadway and follow the existing hillside slope downhill. Existing homes

are visible in the background from this viewpoint and would become even more discernible following tree removal for the proposed project. Post-construction with the removal of trees for the proposed project, views along Bunker Hill Drive would be expanded to include a distant view of the San Francisco Bay. From this viewpoint, all of the proposed homes would be visible along the roadway in addition to the existing residence located immediately to the northeast. However, the residences would appear to be 1-story as viewed along Bunker Hill Drive, as the bulk of the residences would follow the existing hillside slope downhill. Following construction, the tree line and the open space area behind the proposed houses would become more visible from Bunker Hill Drive. However, only one storyies of the proposed residences would be located in the foreground of these views.

View from Cobblehill Place – Facing Northeast

With implementation of the proposed project, some additional existing residential structures would be slightly visible from this viewpoint, but new development would not infringe upon existing views of open space. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-10**, include the introduction of new two-story structures with a height of up to approximately 32 feet, landscaped areas trees, as well as paved driveways. Only one of the two proposed houses would be slightly visible from this perspective, and only a segment of the roof and a small portion of the left wall of the house would be seen. Existing homes are visible in the background from this viewpoint and would become even more discernible following tree removal for the proposed project. The removal of trees for the proposed project would expand views along Cobblehill Place to include a view of the distant mountains. Following construction, the tree line and the open space area behind the proposed houses would also become more visible from Cobblehill Place.

View from Cowpens Way – Facing Northeast

The proposed project would add an additional residential structure that would alter the existing off-site views of trees from Cowpens Way. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-11**, include the introduction of a new two-story structure, of which the rooftop and final story of the garage would be visible. An existing residential structure and cars along the roadway are currently visible from this viewpoint. The removal of trees for the proposed project would reduce views of the open space including the trees from Cowpens Way. However, views of the surrounding hills in the distance would be expanded due to project-related tree removal. Following construction, the tree line and the open space area behind the proposed houses would become more visible from Cowpens Way. However, the roof of the proposed residence would be present in the foreground of these views. Off-site trees would remain visible on both sides of the proposed home following construction.

View from Polhemus Road – Facing Southwest

Polhemus Road, located to the north of the project site is considered a County Scenic Road, per the County General Plan. Visual Quality policies of the General Plan apply only to the area of the roadway (right-of way) unlike a designated scenic corridor, where policies would apply to all properties within the area of the corridor. The project would not involve changes that would be visible from viewpoints along Polhemus Road nor would the project involve work within the Polhemus Road right-of-way. As shown in **Figure 4.1-13**, the proposed homes would not be visible from Polhemus Road near the intersection with Timberlane Way due to topography and intervening vegetation, nor would they be visible along Polhemus Road between Bunker Hill Drive and Tower Road for the same reasons. The proposed homes on Ticonderoga Drive and Cobblehill Place would be partially visible from Ralston Avenue (which becomes Polhemus Road north of Tower Road), but the homes would be adjacent to existing homes that are currently visible from this viewpoint. In summary, the project's impact to this scenic roadway would be less than significant.

View from Timberlane Way – Facing Southwest

The proposed project would add two residential structures at the terminus of Cobblehill Place that would be visible from locations on Timberlane Way between Polhemus Road and Kings Lane. Due to the topography and intervening vegetation, only the rooftops of homes on lots 9 and 10 would be visible. As shown in **Figure 4.1-14**, the existing homes adjacent to lots 9 and 10 are not currently visible from Timberlane Way. The proposed home on Lot 11 at the terminus of Cowpens Way would be screened from view at this location by mature eucalyptus trees in the open space area (see **Figure 4.1-15**).

View from Crown Court – Facing Southwest

With implementation of the proposed project, the homes on lots 9, 10, and 11 would be partially visible from portions of Crown Court. Lots 9 and 10 would be adjacent to the white residence in the left background of the image shown in **Figure 4.1-16**. The rear elevation of the proposed home on Lot 11 would be visible from residences on Crown Court due to tree removal for the proposed project. The proposed homes on lots 9 through 11 would be compatible with the size and scale of the existing Cobblehill Place residence that is currently visible.

View from Lakewood Circle – Facing Northwest

Implementation of the proposed project would alter views of the project site from Lakewood Circle near Ralston Avenue. The front elevations of the proposed homes on lots 5 through 8 on Ticonderoga Drive would be visible where open space grassland is currently seen. Lots 9 and 10 would be located adjacent to

the homes currently visible in the center-left background of the image in Figure 4.1-17. The proposed homes on lots 9 and 10 would be screened by vegetation, similar to the homes currently at the terminus of Cobblehill Place. Lot 11 on Cowpens Way would not be visible from this viewpoint.

Conclusion

Views of the open space portion of the project site currently available from off-site locations and from surrounding residences would be altered as a result of project implementation. It is anticipated that proposed homes would obstruct existing views of on-site open space from Ticonderoga Drive, Bunker Hill Drive, and Cowpens Way. However, views of the open space area of the project site would remain visible from all of these viewpoints, with the exception of the view facing northeast on Ticonderoga Drive and views from Ralston Avenue and Lakewood Circle. Views from existing residences would still include views of expansive open space, but would now incorporate residential structures. Views from Polhemus Road, Timberlane Way, and Crown Court would not be affected because as viewed from these locations, most of the proposed development would either not be visible, or would be partially screened by intervening topography and vegetation, or would be next to existing development. In some cases, such as views from Bunker Hill Drive and Cowpens Way, the proposed project would enhance views of the surrounding hillsides and San Francisco Bay.

Nevertheless, the proposed project would alter existing off-site project views from Ticonderoga Drive, Ralston Avenue, and Lakewood Circle, changing the ~~northeast~~ views from these roadways from a view of ~~dense natural~~ vegetation to a developed residential site. In this case, the existing open space quality of the view would be replaced by a developed residential area. Although off-site views of the project site would be altered, the trees and grassy hillside areas of open space visible along Ticonderoga Drive do not include the characteristics that define a scenic view (e.g., a picturesque ridgeline, open bay waters, distinctive urban skyline or major landmarks within the sight distance). Therefore, views of the project site along Ticonderoga Drive, Ralston Avenue, and Lakewood Circle would not constitute a scenic view. In addition, the surrounding area is largely developed in residential uses and houses are located directly adjacent to the proposed development as shown in the aerial photographs in **Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-4**. Therefore, the proposed project would offer views consistent with the current landscape available from these off-site locations. Since no scenic views would be altered by the proposed project and because the project site is located in an area that is already developed in residential uses, the proposed project would not have an adverse ~~effect~~ on scenic views. Therefore, the impacts would be considered less than significant. The following improvement measures would further reduce this impact.

Improvement Measure AES-1a: The Project Applicant shall provide “finished floor verification” to certify that the structures are actually constructed at the height shown on the approved plans. The Project

Applicant shall have a licensed land surveyor or engineer establish a baseline elevation datum point in the vicinity of the construction site. Prior to the below floor framing inspection or the pouring of concrete slab for the lowest floors, the land surveyor shall certify that the lowest floor height as constructed is equal to the elevation of that floor specified by the approved plans. Similarly, certifications of the garage slab and the topmost elevation of the roof are required. The application shall provide the certification letter from the licensed land surveyor to the Building Inspection Section.

Improvement Measure AES-1b: The Project Applicant shall plant a total of four (4) trees (minimum 24-gallon each), one directly in front of each home on lots 5 through 8 to soften and screen views of the new homes from off-site locations. These trees will be in addition to the seven (7) 15-gallon replacement trees included in the proposed project.

Impact AES-2: **The proposed project would construct single-family residences on an undeveloped site in a residential neighborhood but would not degrade the existing visual character of the site. (*Less than Significant*)**

The proposed project would alter the existing visual character of the project site by introducing residential homes, landscaping, bio-retention planters, paving, and a 100-foot fuel break, to some undeveloped portions of the Highland Estates neighborhood. The visual character of the site would change, as shown in the visual simulations in **Figures 4.1-5 to 4.1-11**, as brush and trees in the foreground and mid-ground would be replaced by low-density residential development. Visual changes associated with the project would occur during site grading, building construction, and project ~~operation~~occupancy, as discussed below.

Construction

Prior to construction, approximately 5 acres of the site would be graded and infrastructure would be installed to support single-family residential uses. During construction of the single-family homes, graded lots would transition to single-family framed structures and then to finished buildings, with landscaped yards. Construction activities associated with the project would include earth moving, paving, and landscape installation. Visual impacts associated with construction would vary, depending on the work and equipment being used at the site. Although motorists using Ticonderoga Drive and Bunker Hill Drive would see construction equipment, piles of dirt, pipes, fencing, and structural materials, instead of the undeveloped brush and trees that currently exist, the visual effects of construction activities are temporary and would be similar in character to other residential development that typically occurs in San Mateo County. Therefore this impact would be considered less than

significant. However, implementation of **Improvement Measure AES-2** would further ensure that the impact would be less than significant.

Project Completion and Occupancy

Upon project completion, the long-term visual characteristics of the project site would be established, including the final size and bulk of the structures, landscaping, and the project's compatibility with the surrounding land uses. The following provides a brief discussion of how the project would alter the existing visual character of the site and its surroundings.

View from Ticonderoga Drive

The project would change the visual character of a portion of the northwest side of Ticonderoga Drive along the southern edge of the project site. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-5**, include grading of the grassy slope and removal of trees, the construction of four new two-story homes, and new ornamental grass and landscaping. The primary features visible from Ticonderoga Drive would be the two-story homes, driveways, and landscaping in front of the homes. Bio-retention planters, which are boxes that detain and filter storm water runoff through engineered soils, are included in the proposed project to provide storm water quality and volume control. Two approximately 160 square-foot bio-retention planters (40 feet long and 4 feet wide) would be placed in the front yards of lots 5 and 6, and a 400 square-foot planter (80 feet long and 5 feet wide) placed east of the proposed dwelling unit on lot 8 would treat stormwater runoff from lots 7 and 8. Each planter would be between 4 and 5 feet high depending on depth of planting material. The planters would be painted green to blend with the grass and would be planted with vegetation that matches the natural features of the surrounding neighborhood, such as grasses and ferns. The visual character of the area behind the homes would not be altered due to the existing topography of the site, but would no longer be visible from the roadway.

View from Bunker Hill Drive

The visual character along a portion of the southeast side of Bunker Hill Drive near Yorktown Road, which currently consists of dense brush, would be altered to include four new homes under the proposed project. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-9**, include the introduction of new two-story structures (one-story visible from street level) with a height of approximately 32 feet, ornamental grass and landscaping, as well as more expansive views of the existing residential development and surrounding open space in the background to the south. Four bio-retention planters, similar to the ones described above, would be placed in the rear yards of lots 1 through 4. The primary features visible from Bunker Hill Drive would be the driveways and garages of the homes.

Property owners of lots 1 through 4 on Bunker Hill Drive would be required to maintain a fuel break up to 100 feet wide around the perimeter of the structure per **Mitigation Measure HAZMAT-2**. Property owners would be required to clear this space of dead vegetation and lower tree limbs, but not trees. The defensible space guidelines do not encourage cutting down live, healthy trees and shrubs or creating a bare ring of earth around the property. Therefore, implementation and maintenance of the 100-foot fuel break would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site.

View from Cobblehill Place

Development of two single-family homes at the terminus of Cobblehill Place would result in minimal changes to the visual character of the project site. The visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-10**, include a view of a portion of the roof of the structure proposed on lot 9 and the removal of trees, which would reveal additional existing homes in the background to the northeast. The proposed homes would be mostly screened from the street by existing trees and the topography of the site. Two approximately 220 square-foot bio-retention planters, described above, would be placed in the rear yards of lots 9 and 10 along the existing slope contours.

Property owners of lots 9 and 10 on Cobblehill Place would be required to maintain a fuel break up to 100 feet wide around the perimeter of the structure as required by **Mitigation Measure HAZMAT-2**. As noted above, property owners would be authorized to clear this space of dead vegetation and lower tree limbs, but not live, healthy trees. Therefore, implementation and maintenance of a 100-foot fuel break would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site.

View from Cowpens Way

Development of a single-family home at the terminus of Cowpens Way would result in visual changes, as shown in **Figure 4.1-11**, including removal of existing trees in the foreground to reveal a view of a portion of the roof of the home and a view of the Diablo Range in the background. An approximately 205-square-foot bio-retention planter, described above, would be placed in the rear yard of lot 11. The character of the view in this area would remain largely unchanged.

The property owner of lot 11 would be required to maintain a fuel break up to 100 feet wide around the perimeter of the structure as required by **Mitigation Measure HAZMAT-2**. For the same reasons noted above, the installation and maintenance of the fire break would not adversely affect the visual character of the area.

View from Polhemus Road

Polhemus Road is an off-site location that would not be altered by the proposed project. As discussed under **Impact AES-1**, changes to the visual character of the project site would not be visible from Polhemus Road.

View from Timberlane Way

Timberlane Way is an off-site location that would not be altered by the proposed project. As viewed from Timberlane Way, the visual character of the project site would change to include development at the terminus of Cobblehill Place. This would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site as only the rooftops of the two proposed homes would be visible from this location.

View from Crown Court

Crown Court is an off-site location that would not be altered by the proposed project. As viewed from Crown Court, the visual character of the project site would change to include development at the terminus of Cobblehill Place. This would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site as the two proposed homes would be located adjacent to existing homes that are currently visible from this location and portions of the homes would be largely screened by intervening vegetation.

View from Lakewood Circle

Lakewood Circle is an off-site location that would not be altered by the proposed project. As viewed from Lakewood Circle, the visual character of the project site would change to include development along Ticonderoga Drive and at the terminus of Cobblehill Place. ~~This~~The development of new homes on Cobblehill Place would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site as the two proposed homes would be located adjacent to existing homes that are currently visible and the lower portions of the homes would be screened from views by intervening vegetation. Similarly, although the visual character of the home sites along Ticonderoga Drive would change from an open space grassland to single-family homes, the change would not be significant as other residential development exists around the home sites.

Conclusion

Although the proposed project includes changes to the visual character of the area, development would occur on less than 5 acres of the 99-acre project site and the proposed project would be designed to reflect the existing character of the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed project would be subject to

development standards for the RM District and General Plan policies, where design standards are not applicable (e.g., in the residentially zoned portions of the project site).

Landscape features, such as the bio-retention planters, would be placed along the existing contours of the slopes and would be designed to blend with the landscaping of the homes. Maintenance of the 100-foot fuel break for lots 1 through 4 and 9, 10, and 11 would not substantially degrade the visual character of the site as property owners would not be authorized to remove live, healthy trees or shrubs, but only to clear dead vegetation and lower tree limbs.

In terms of its exterior appearance, the new homes would display characteristics that are similar to the nearby residences. The project architects have confirmed that the front elevations and facades of the single-family homes would be varied to create visual interest and consistency with the existing residential neighborhood and that the exterior colors of the homes would be in muted, natural tones to integrate the homes with the existing neighborhood.¹

~~Additionally landscape features such as bio-retention planters would be painted green to blend with the grass and would be designed to be integrated with the natural features of the surrounding neighborhood.~~

As the new homes would be built adjacent to existing residences, these changes would result in a noticeable visual effect on the site's existing visual character both during construction and upon project occupancy. However, given that the site is mostly surrounded by existing residential development and that the project would be required to conform to existing development standards, the proposed project would not degrade the visual character of the site or detract from its visual quality. Therefore, this is considered a less than significant impact.

Improvement Measure AES-2: Construction contractors shall minimize the use of on-site storage and when necessary store building materials and equipment away from public view and shall keep activity within the project site and construction equipment laydown areas.

Impact AES-3: **The proposed project would construct new homes on a site that is currently undeveloped but would not visually intrude into an area having natural scenic qualities. (*Less than Significant*)**

The introduction of new homes would constitute a visual change to the project site as seen from the surrounding area. As discussed under Impact AES-1, the proposed project would alter off-site views of the project site and would convert portions of the site from open space to developed uses. However,

¹ Doug McBeth, Mark Gross & Associates, Associate AIA, personal communication with Impact Sciences, October 7, 2008.

development would occur on less than 5 acres of the 99-acre project site and the majority of the site would be maintained as open space. For purposes of this study, an area that is considered to have natural scenic qualities is an open and expansive public view encompassing valued landscape features such as a ridgeline, open bay waters, or forested area. As shown in **Figures 4.1-5 to 4.1-11 and 4.1-13 to 4.1-17**, the portions of the existing project site that are currently visible include roadside trees and grasslands that characterize open space, but would not be considered scenic. In addition, many of the trees and grassy hillside portions of the site would remain visible following project construction and portions of the project would be largely screened by existing buildings and intervening vegetation. Although the project represents a change in the current landscape of the site, the proposed project would not obscure views of scenic landscape features such as the Bay or a scenic ridgeline. Therefore, the proposed project would not visually intrude into an area with natural scenic qualities, and this is considered a less than significant impact.

Mitigation Measure: No mitigation measures required.

4.1.5.3 Cumulative Impacts

Impact AES-4: **The proposed project would not result in a significant cumulative impact on visual resources. (*Less than Significant*)**

The project site is located in a largely urbanized portion of San Mateo County and the development proposed on the project site would be consistent with existing housing in the surrounding neighborhood. There are currently other housing developments located in the proposed project viewsheds, as viewed from public roadways such as Bunker Hill Road, Ticonderoga Drive, Polhemus Road, Ralston Avenue and residential streets off of Polhemus Road and Ralston Avenue. ~~and the~~The combination of the proposed project with existing development surrounding the site would not substantially alter views or the visual character of the project area. Additionally, it is not expected that the proposed project would create significant cumulative impacts to scenic views or areas with natural scenic qualities because proposed development would not conflict with these scenic areas. Lastly, the proposed project would not create significant cumulative light or glare impacts because the project is proposed in an area that already contains existing light sources. Therefore, cumulative impacts to visual resources would be considered less than significant.

Mitigation Measure: No mitigation measures required.