

## 3.7 AESTHETICS / VISUAL RESOURCES

### 3.7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

#### Regional Setting

The City of Lodi is located in the San Joaquin Valley between Stockton, which is 6 miles to the south, and Sacramento, located approximately 35 miles to the north, and is bordered on the eastern side by U.S. Highway 99. The City is located on the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad and is within five miles of Interstate 5 (refer to Exhibits 2-1 and 2-3). The City population is approximately 58,950 and is contained in an area of 12 square miles.

The project site is located adjacent to, and north of, Kettleman Lane/Highway 12, at the corner of Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road within the City of Lodi. The unincorporated lands of San Joaquin County lie beyond the proposed project site to the west. The area to the north, east, and south of the proposed project site are within the City of Lodi. The area surrounding the project site and the City of Lodi are generally flat, and vacant, or developed in rural residential uses (to the north) or relatively high intensity retail commercial (to the east).

Highway 12 is not designated as a scenic highway, nor are any other roadways designated as such in the City of Lodi. No scenic vistas are apparent from the site, and none are identified in adopted City documents.

There are open and expansive views of generally flat or slightly rolling, mostly undeveloped land west of the site. However, these views are apparent to drivers along Highway 12 who are traveling to cities such as Fairfield, some 45 miles away from the project site. Because of the intensive shopping immediately east of the site, these large expansive views in the project vicinity are not apparent until a few miles west of the site. This is because the intensive retail shopping uses are still within visual range of the site, as larger undeveloped properties are coming into view.

#### Local Setting and Visual Character

The vacant project site is clearly visible to passersby on along Highway 12. The project is proposed adjacent to Highway 12 at the juncture of undeveloped, largely vacant or rural areas and intensive urban development, largely characterized by retail and shopping center uses. The largely vacant, rural areas are situated west of the site, along both sides of Highway 12. The intensive retail/shopping areas are situated on both sides of Highway 12 to the east of the project site. Consequently, both types of land uses are within the visual range of any vehicles passing along Highway 12.

There are no large trees, buildings, rock outcroppings, or other visually distinguishing features on the project site. It is characterized by non-native grasses and forbs.

Uses along Lower Sacramento Road transition from a Safeway shopping center at the northeast corner of the intersection of Lower Sacramento Road/Highway 12, to rural residential/agriculture located further to the north (directly adjacent to the proposed project site on the northern boundary, a 33-unit

residential plan, G-REM residential project, was approved by the Lodi City Council on November 6, 2002)<sup>1</sup>. No site activity related to construction of this residential project has taken place on that site, and it remains vacant and ungraded.

Highway 12 runs the length of the southern boundary of the proposed project site. Beyond Highway 12, to the south, is a large vacant parcel, which currently has a General Plan designation of Neighborhood Community Commercial with a corresponding zoning designation of Commercial Shopping. Currently, a large retail/shopping center is being proposed for the site, which is awaiting environmental review by the City of Lodi.

### **Relevant General Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

The Lodi General Plan includes elements that address a broad and evolving range of issues. Each element of the plan identifies and describes goals, objectives, and policies that provide direction for decision-making and formulation of public policy. The General Plan contains nine elements that guide development within the City. The goals, objectives, and policies related to aesthetics and visual resources that are relevant to the proposed project are provided below:

#### **Urban Design and Cultural Resources Element**

- ❖ Goal A: To provide a strong and clear definition to the edges and overall urban form of the City.

Policy 1: The City should designate a continuous open space greenbelt around the urbanized area of Lodi to maintain visual definition and a clearly delineated edge to the City's urbanized area within its agricultural and rural setting, and to protect the scenic resources of the surrounding rural, agricultural, and natural landscape (including the Lodi Lake Park and the Mokelumne River corridor).

- ❖ Goal B: To establish identifiable, visually appealing, and memorable entrances to the City

Policy 1: The City shall upgrade the principal roads entering the City at strategic entry points through landscaping, signage, light standards, and other physical elements that identify and enhance them as gateways to the community. Entry points should be identified and designated on SR 99; SR12; Kettleman Lane; Lodi Avenue; Lower Sacramento Road; Pine Street; Turner Road, and Hutchins Street, and screening of visually unattractive commercial and industrial uses.

- ❖ Goal F: To preserve existing community character and fabric, and promote the creation of a small-town atmosphere in newly developing areas.

Policy 1: The visual impact of automobiles shall be minimized in all new development.

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<sup>1</sup> The City Council later rescinded the growth management allocation given to this project and the applicant subsequently withdrew the application. Currently there are no pending applications for development of this 5.6-acre property. (J.D. Hightower, pers.comm.. Feb.'03).

### 3.7.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### Thresholds of Significance

The following thresholds of significance are based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. For the purposes of this analysis, an aesthetics/visual resource impact is considered significant if the project would:

- ❖ Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- ❖ Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway.
- ❖ 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.

**IMPACT 3.7-A. Effects on Scenic Vistas: The project would alter views of the site from the surrounding public roadways and publicly accessible properties. Expansive views of undeveloped or rural open space areas are visible from Highway 12, but are not apparent until a few miles west of the site because the intensive retail shops along Highway 12 are still within visual range. There are no scenic vistas from the project site and Highway 12 is not a designated scenic highway. While the project would alter views of the site as seen from Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road, it would not result in substantial and adverse visual changes to expansive views of undeveloped, rural lands, scenic vistas, or scenic routes and, consequently would result in a less than significant impact to scenic vistas. (Less Than Significant Impact).**

The proposed project is not located in the vicinity of any established or designated scenic vistas or scenic resources. There are no visually distinguishing resources on the project site (Exhibit 3.7-1). The proposed project site is not visible from any established or designated scenic vistas or scenic resources.

The project is located within the City of Lodi and is proposed across Lower Sacramento Road, along Highway 12, adjacent to intensive retail land uses that are similar in size and character to those of the project proposal. While there are expansive views of undeveloped, rural lands along Highway 12, these are visible further west of the project site. This is because the existing, intensive retail uses are within visual range of the undeveloped parcels and, therefore, expansive and uninterrupted views are not apparent to travelers along Highway 12 until a few miles west of the project site (Exhibit 3.7-2).

**Mitigation 3.7-A: The project would result in less than significant impacts to scenic vistas and scenic resources therefore no mitigation is required. (Less Than Significant Impact).**



Viewing southeast towards Sunwest shopping center from northeast corner of project site.



Viewing west along north side of Kettleman Lane (S.R. 12) from intersection with Lower Sacramento Road.

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Viewing southeast away from the project site towards Kettleman Lane and Lower Sacramento Road intersection.



Viewing east along north side of Kettleman Lane (S.R. 12) from easterly edge of project site.

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**IMPACT 3.7-B. Damage to Scenic Resources:** The proposed project site would be visible from both State Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road, and to a lesser degree Taylor Road. None of these roads are designated, or currently being considered, for State, County, or Local scenic highway status. There are no scenic or visually distinctive resources located on the site. The proposed project would alter views of the site from surrounding roadways but would not alter existing scenic resources and, therefore, a less than significant impact would result. (Less Than Significant Impact).

The proposed project site would be visible from both State Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road, and to a lesser degree Taylor Road. The project site would not be visible from Interstate 5 or U.S. Highway 99. There are no roads in the project vicinity that are designated, or currently being considered for scenic highway status on the State, County, or local level. There are no designated scenic resources on the property or in the project vicinity that would be affected by development of the proposed project. Therefore, while development of the project site on the property would alter views of the site, it would not result in adverse effects to on-site scenic resources and a less than significant impact would result.

**Mitigation 3.7-B:** The proposed project would result in less than significant impacts to scenic resources and scenic highways and, therefore no mitigation is required. (Less Than Significant Impact).

**IMPACT 3.7-C. Degradation of Visual Character:** The proposed project would alter the existing visual character of the site by changing it from a vacant land use to an urban/commercial land use, but the development would not be a substantial departure from the existing visual quality of the site or surroundings, which are already retail in character. The proposed project would further contribute to the existing visual character of the surrounding neighborhood. (Less Than Significant Impact).

The project site is relatively flat and primarily characterized by non-native grasses with no distinguishing visual features (Exhibit 3.7-3). There are a few scattered almond, walnut, and non-native ornamental trees. These trees do not contribute substantially to the visual character of the site nor do they help define it. Removal of these trees would not result in a substantial change in the visual character of the site or its surroundings. The sites surroundings are largely defined by retail centers of similar size and design as the proposed project, which line the eastern side of Lower Sacramento Rd. (See Exhibit 3.7-1, -2). Across State Highway 12, to the south of the proposed project site, is a vacant parcel that is currently designated Neighborhood Commercial in the General Plan and currently has an application for a retail center pending approval. To the north exists a rural residential neighborhood.

A planned 33-unit residential development was recently approved by the Lodi City Council on the parcel located directly to the north, and adjacent to the proposed project site. Rural residential homes exist further to the north of this planned residential area and these homes have a view of the project site. However, these rural residential homes face onto Taylor Road and would be separated from the project site by the recently approved 33-unit residential development<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The City Council later rescinded the growth management allocation given to this project and the applicant subsequently withdrew the application. Currently there are no pending applications for development of this 5.6-acre property. (J.D. Hightower, pers.comm.. Feb.'03).



Viewing east across project site (Kettleman Lane is to the right).



Viewing northeast across project site.

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These rural residential homes, and potential future homes developed as part of the 33-unit residential development<sup>3</sup>, would be separated from the proposed project by an eight-foot high, sound wall. These homes exist within the Lodi city limits and are already in visual proximity to intensive retail development. The proposed project would further contribute to the existing visual and retail character of the surrounding neighborhood along Highway 12.

**Mitigation 3.7-C: The proposed project result in less than significant impacts to degradation of existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings and, therefore, no mitigation is required. (Less Than Significant Impact).**

**IMPACT 3.7-D. Light and Glare: The proposed project site is located adjacent to existing urban and commercial land uses that generate light (generally during the nighttime) and glare (generally during the daytime hours). The proposed project would contribute incrementally to the amount of light and glare produced in the general area due to: vehicle headlights on adjacent roadways and in parking areas, interior and exterior building lights, and incremental degradation of nighttime atmospheric conditions. Of these project effects, the incremental degradation of nighttime atmospheric conditions would be less than significant, because the proposed project would not result in a perceptible change beyond existing conditions. However, project effects regarding vehicle headlights and interior and exterior building lights would be significant and, therefore would require mitigation. (Less Than Significant with Mitigation).**

Vehicle headlights would potentially shine onto Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road. This could potentially cause an increase in the amount of light and glare that would be visible from vehicular traffic on the Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road, as well as on surrounding roadways at the intersections. Vehicles circulating through the parking lot areas would be a new source of light and glare at the site.

There are existing rural residences located across Taylor St. to the north of the proposed project site. In addition, there is a planned 33-unit residential development approved for the property adjacent to the northern project boundary. The loading docks for the two major retailers are proposed at the rear of the buildings on the northern end of the project site. Potential light spillover could result onto the rural residential properties to the north of the project site, as well as to the adjacent planned 33-unit residential development from delivery vehicles accessing these loading docks. Deliveries would regularly, but infrequently, occur during nighttime hours, as is the industry standard. An eight-foot high masonry sound wall would be constructed along the northern project boundary that would also serve to separate the proposed retail uses from the planned residential development on the adjacent property. This wall would block light generated by vehicles circulating the parking lot from view of the residences. The proposed eight-foot high sound wall would serve to effectively block any temporary spillover of lighting from truck headlights while they approach and leave these loading docks. The primary source of potential spillover in this area would be from diesel trucks utilized to deliver goods. Diesel truck lights range in height of 3 to 5 feet, and are not positioned in a way that would direct light vertically beyond the eight-foot wall. Typically, large size delivery trucks do have a

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<sup>3</sup> The City Council later rescinded the growth management allocation given to this project and the applicant subsequently withdrew the application. Currently there are no pending applications for development of this 5.6-acre property. (J.D. Hightower, pers.comm.. Feb.'03).

set of running lights commonly positioned on the top of the cab or trailer. These running lights are low-voltage and do not cast light beyond the dimensions of the truck itself.

The proposed project would generate new sources of light stemming from parking lights, streetlights, illuminated sign night lighting, and light generated by vehicles. Given the existing urban land uses that generate similar levels of light that line the eastern side of Lower Sacramento Road, it is anticipated that light generated by the proposed project would have a negligible effect on night sky atmospheric conditions. The lighting would incrementally degrade night sky conditions, but given the adjacent urban land uses the increase would not be a perceptible change beyond existing levels when viewed from a distance. Onsite, and from adjacent properties, the light generated by the project may be viewed as substantial.

The proposed project includes a road that would run north/south along the western boundary of the project site that would connect State Highway 12 and Taylor Rd. Construction of this road would introduce light generated by vehicles traveling the road. The residences on Taylor Road in the direct vicinity of the proposed road would experience increased light being directed or 'spilling-over' onto their properties. The proposed road would be a two-lane roadway with median, two bicycle lanes, and sidewalk within a 74-foot right-of-way. Construction of the proposed road was identified in the adopted Westside Facilities Plan, and is labeled as 'Road A'. The plan identifies the road as traveling beyond Taylor Road to Vine Street. The current alignment of the street is such that lights would not be directed directly onto any residences. Glow from vehicles traveling on the road would be present but would not be considered substantial.

**Mitigation 3.7-D.1: To reduce light and glare effects from automobiles passing through and parking in parking areas, the project proponent shall install, and maintain throughout the life of the project, landscaping along the eastern and southern project boundaries of sufficient height to block light generated by vehicles utilizing the parking lot and drive-thru facilities prior to occupancy of any of the buildings. (Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation).**

**Mitigation 3.7-D.2: The applicant has incorporated into the proposed project an eight-foot high wall that will line the northern boundary. This wall is of sufficient height to effectively prevent substantial spillover and would result in a less than significant impact. (Less Than Significant Impact).**

**Mitigation 3.7-D.3: The project proponent shall prepare a detailed lighting plan specifying location and intensities of all proposed light sources. The plan shall include measures, including but not limited to downcast lighting and shielding, to reduce the spillover of light onto adjacent properties to the maximum extent feasible. The plan shall be reviewed and approved by the City Planner, or his/her designee, prior to the issuance of building permits. (Less Than Significant Impact).**

**IMPACT 3.7-E. Consistency with General Plan Visual Resource Policies: The project would result in the conversion of approximately 29 acres of currently vacant land on the western fringe of the City, at the corner of State Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road. These roads have**

been identified in the General Plan as strategic entry points. Approximately 1,428 parking spaces will be constructed. The City has General Plan policies addressing the maintenance of a clearly delineated edge to the City's urbanized area and its agricultural/rural surrounding, as well as policies regarding the strategic entry points to the City and the minimization of visual impacts of automobiles. The project complies with these goals and policies, and a less than significant impact would occur. (Less Than Significant Impact).

The proposed project would be developed on a vacant lot on the western fringe of the Lodi city limits. The goal to provide a continuous open space greenbelt around the City's urbanized area is being met through implementation of the City's Westside Facilities Master Plan. The plan calls for a linear park that will serve as open space as well as a detention basin that will be established approximately 1,000 feet to the west of the project site. In addition, the City is actively pursuing agricultural preservation techniques through various plan activities, such as those described in the Westside Facilities Plan. Goal A, Policy 2 of the Urban Design and Cultural Resources Element of the City's General Plan is being implemented and development of the proposed project would not result in any conflicts.

The City has also included measures in the adopted Westside Facilities Master Plan to meet Goal B, Policy 3 of the General Plan, which is to establish identifiable, visually appealing, and memorable entrances to the City. The planned linear park will serve as the gateway to the City of Lodi when traveling from the west on Highway 12. The proposed development would be constructed in an attractive manner that would be consistent with other commercial/retail developments on adjacent properties and throughout the City of Lodi.

The vacant project site is clearly visible to passersby on along Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road. The project is proposed at the corner of Highway 12 and Lower Sacramento Road, at the juncture of undeveloped, largely vacant or rural areas and intensive urban development, largely characterized by retail and shopping center uses. The proposed project includes approximately 1,428 parking spaces. The City's General Plan Goal F, Policy 1 of the Urban Design and Cultural Resources Element calls for the visual impact of automobiles to be minimized in all new developments. The previously described mitigation measure, Mitigation 3.7-D.1, requires that the project proponent install and maintain border landscaping of sufficient height to block light generated by vehicles. This landscaping will be of sufficient height to screen the bulk of the automobile and reduce the parking lots visual impact to a less than significant level.

**Mitigation 3.7-E: The proposed project would not conflict with the implementation of the goals, policies, or objectives of the City's General Plan therefore no mitigation is required. (Less Than Significant Impact).**