

4.1 AESTHETICS

This chapter describes the regulatory framework and existing conditions of the City of San Mateo Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Study Area and evaluates the potential aesthetics impacts from adopting and implementing the proposed General Plan 2040 and proposed Climate Action Plan (CAP), and from future development and activities that could occur under the proposed project. A summary of the relevant regulatory framework and existing conditions is followed by a discussion of potential impacts and cumulative impacts related to implementation of the proposed project.

4.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

4.1.1.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

State Regulations

California State Scenic Highways Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the State of California legislature in 1963. Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. The State laws governing the Scenic Highways Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Sections 260 through 263. The California Scenic Highway Program is maintained by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Caltrans has not designated any highways within the City of San Mateo as a State Scenic Highway. However, to the west of the City Limits, Interstate 280 (I-280) is a Caltrans-designated State Scenic Highway, and State Route (SR-) 35 and SR-92 are eligible for designation.¹

California Building Code

The State of California provides a minimum standard for building design through Title 24, Part 2, of the California Code of Regulations, commonly referred to as the California Building Code (CBC). The CBC is updated every three years. It is generally adopted on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis, subject to further modification based on local conditions. The City of San Mateo regularly adopts each new CBC update under the San Mateo Municipal Code (SMMC) Chapter 23.08, *Building Code*. The CBC includes standards for outdoor lighting that are intended to reduce light pollution and glare by regulating light power and brightness, shielding, and sensor controls.

The California Building Standards Commission adopted the California Green Building Standards Code, also known as CALGreen. As part of the CBC, CALGreen is in Part 11 of Title 24. CALGreen establishes building standards aimed at enhancing the design and construction of buildings using building concepts that reduce negative impacts and increase positive environmental impacts by encouraging sustainable

¹ California Department of Transportation, 2018, California State Scenic Highway System Map, <https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>, accessed August 3, 2022.

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construction practices. Specifically, Section 5.106.8, *Light Pollution Reduction*, establishes backlight, uplight, and glare ratings to minimize the effects of light pollution for nonresidential development. The local building permit process enforces the mandatory provisions of CALGreen. The City of San Mateo regularly adopts each new CALGreen update under the SMMC Chapter 23.70, *Green Building Code*.

Senate Bill 743

As described in Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR, Senate Bill (SB) 743, which became effective on January 1, 2014, amended the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by adding California Public Resources Code Section 21099 regarding analysis of aesthetics impacts for urban infill projects, among other provisions. CEQA Section 21099(d)(1), states, “Aesthetic and parking impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project on an infill site located within a transit priority area (TPA) shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment.”

Accordingly, these topics are no longer to be considered in determining significant environmental effects for projects that meet all three of the following criteria:

- Is located on an infill site which is defined as “a lot located within an urban area that has been previously developed or on a vacant site where at least 75 percent of the perimeter of the site adjoins, or is separated only by an improved public right-of-way from, parcels that are developed with qualified urban uses.”
- Is a residential, mixed-use residential, or an employment-center project.
- Is in a transit priority area, which is defined as “an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop that is existing or planned, if the planned stop is scheduled to be completed within the planning horizon included in a Transportation Improvement Program adopted pursuant to Section 450.216 or Section 450.322 of Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations.”

As described in further detail in Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*, and Chapter 4.10, *Land Use and Planning*, of this Draft EIR, the EIR Study Area includes the TPA located along El Camino Real and surrounding the three Caltrain stations in San Mateo (San Mateo, Hayward Park, and Hillsdale). Accordingly, in compliance with SB 743, no significant aesthetic impact findings can be made in this environmental analysis for potential future development in the TPA.² Aesthetic impacts are not discussed further in this EIR with respect to potential future development in the TPA. As appropriate, aesthetic impacts are only considered for potential future development outside of these areas.

Regional Regulations

Bay Conservation and Development Commission

In 1969, the McAtteer-Petris Act designated the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) as the agency responsible for the protection of the San Francisco Bay and its natural resources. BCDC fulfills this mission through the implementation of the *San Francisco Bay Plan* (Bay Plan), an enforceable

² Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2021, Transit Priority Areas, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=370de9dc4d65402d992a769bf6ac8ef5>, accessed August 8, 2022.

plan that guides the future protection and use of San Francisco Bay and its shoreline.³ The Bay Plan includes a range of policies on public access, water quality, project design, and dredging and fill. The Bay Plan also designates shoreline areas that should be reserved for water-related sports, industry, and public recreation; airports; and wildlife areas. The City of San Mateo is within BCDC's jurisdiction. Impacts related to biological resources, water quality, land use and planning, and recreation are discussed in Chapter 4.3, *Biological Resources*, Chapter 4.9, *Hydrology and Water Quality*, Chapter 4.10, *Land Use and Planning*, and Chapter 4.12, *Parks and Recreation*, of this Draft EIR, respectively.

BCDC has jurisdiction within 100 feet of the San Francisco Bay's shoreline, and proposed development in its jurisdiction is subject to BCDC *Public Access Design Guidelines*, which is intended to ensure that maximum feasible public access is provided.⁴ BCDC defines "public access" to include physical public access to and along the shoreline of the San Francisco Bay and visual public access to the San Francisco Bay from other public spaces. Physical improvements, as defined by BCDC, may include waterfront promenades, trails, plazas, play areas, overlooks, parking spaces, landscaping, site furnishings, and connections from public streets to the water's edge.

County of San Mateo General Plan

In 1986, the County of San Mateo adopted its general plan to guide decision-making for the unincorporated area of San Mateo. Policies that are most relevant to visual resources are primarily in Chapter 4, *Visual Quality*.

Local Regulations

City of San Mateo Municipal Code

The SMMC includes various directives pertaining to aesthetics. The SMMC is organized by title, chapter, and section and, in some cases, articles. Most provisions related to visual impacts are included in Title 13, *Parks and Recreation*, Title 23, *Building and Construction*, Title 25, *Signs*, and Title 27, *Zoning*.

- Chapter 13.40, *Protected Trees*, establishes regulations for the protection of trees within the city in order to preserve scenic beauty, among other reasons. A permit from the Director of Parks and Recreation is required to plant a street tree or to prune or remove a protected tree, unless associated with construction of an accessory dwelling unit. Any person who owns, controls, or possesses property within the city is required to use reasonable efforts to maintain and preserve all protected trees in a state of good health, structure, and form.
- Chapter 23.40, *Site Development Code*, was adopted to ensure the maximum preservation of natural scenic character of the City, ensure that development of each site relates to adjacent lands so as to maximize visually pleasant relationships, and preserve the natural settings of the hillsides. Unless

³ San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 2020, *San Francisco Bay Plan*, <https://bcdca.gov/pdf/bayplan/bayplan.pdf>, accessed August 31, 2022.

⁴ San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 2005, *Public Access Design Guidelines for the San Francisco Bay*, https://bcdca.gov/planning/reports/ShorelineSpacesPublicAccessDesignGuidelinesForSFBay_Apr2005.pdf, accessed August 31, 2022.

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such work is exempted, any site development on slopes 15 percent or greater requires a site development planning application and a site development permit.

- Section 23.54.060, *Exterior Security Lighting*, regulates security lighting to limit both light spill beyond property lines and the light source viewable from off site. The lighting plan requires review by the Police Department and the Building Official.
- Title 25, *Signs*, provides standards for the regulation of signs in order to protect and enhance visual and aesthetic character of residential neighborhoods, business areas, and all zoning districts by prohibiting the visual clutter of obtrusive and incompatible signs. Section 25.06.050, *Signs Allowed*, illustrates the City's establishment of a sign program intended to create design standards and provisions to regulate signs used for larger complexes, commercial centers, or buildings with multiple tenants, to achieve aesthetic compatibility between all signs proposed in a project, and with signs on adjacent properties. These standards include design continuity that requires all signs be of a common design theme and placement and use common materials, colors, and illumination. Section 25.06.070, *Zoning Regulations Applicable to Signs on Private Property*, further restricts the type of signs that may be permitted. This section minimizes the allowance of signs illuminated by an artificial source so as to influence light and glare on adjacent properties. This section also outlines specific design criteria and restrictions for these signs, including an outline of which types of illuminated signs are prohibited within the city.
- Title 27, *Zoning*, includes the Zoning Ordinance which is the primary tool that shapes the form and character of physical development in San Mateo. The Zoning Ordinance contains all the Zoning Districts, and identifies land use standards, site development regulations, and other general provisions that ensure consistency between the General Plan and proposed development projects. Section 27.02.020, *Intent – Purpose*, states that the San Mateo Zoning Ordinance is, among other things, intended to protect the character and stability of residential, commercial, and manufacturing areas, and to provide for the elimination of incompatible and nonconforming uses of land, buildings, and structures that are adversely affecting the character and value of desirable development in each district. The Zoning Ordinance sets forth the development standards, including those related to visual resources, as follows.
 - Chapter 27.66, *Historic Preservation*, is relevant to the preservation of structures, sites, and areas of special character or special historical, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value that contribute to the visual setting in San Mateo. Among other requirements, this chapter requires the protection, enhancement, perpetuation, and use of structures, sites, and areas that are significant examples of architectural styles of the past or are landmarks in the history of architecture. The alteration of a structure on a landmark site or in a historic district may be subject to a certificate of appropriateness and review by the Planning Commission.
 - Chapter 27.71, *Landscape for Planning Applications*, requires landscaping to be a major component of all site design in order to create a city that has a strong landscaped character. Landscaping is to be installed and maintained to provide aesthetic quality while promoting building security. This chapter regulates plant coverage and tree sizes, as well as street trees, parking area, and right-of-way landscaping.
 - Chapter 27.83, *Slope and Hillside Development Standards*, applies to all lots and sites that have a footprint slope of 25 percent or greater. It is intended to establish regulations for managing the

development of hillside areas to ensure that future development displays sensitivity to the natural hillside setting and compatibility with nearby hillside neighborhoods.

San Mateo Design Guidelines

The City has adopted several design guidelines for residential structures in the Downtown and Mid and South El Camino Real areas to ensure the design of new buildings and additions is compatible with their surroundings. Aspects of building design addressed by design guidelines include, but are not limited to, scale, building height, roof shapes, and lighting. As of publication of this Draft EIR, the City is in the process of developing Objective Design Standards for Multi-Family Projects that will regulate future development; this section covers the design guidelines that are currently adopted and in place.

The *Single-Family Dwelling Design Guidelines* require the construction of new single-family dwellings or the addition of a second story to a single-family dwelling to be compatible with the architectural character of the neighborhood.⁵ The *Multi-Family Design Guidelines* were created to preserve San Mateo's neighborhood character and building scale while also considering the style and materials that will be used and the amount of parking, open space, and protection available for each multi-family unit.⁶ The *Small Lot Multi Family Design Guidelines* apply to all multi-family zoned parcels that are less than 10,000 square feet and are proposed to have 3 or more dwelling units built on them.⁷ These guidelines were set forth to retain and improve the visual quality of the San Mateo's multifamily neighborhoods and represent the minimum criteria for acceptable development. The *Duplex Design Guidelines* were created to address certain visual design issues concerning duplexes and two-family dwellings.⁸

The *Downtown Retail Core & Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines* apply to all property in the retail core of San Mateo including the historic district.⁹ It outlines the minimum criteria for acceptable development and highlights visual aspects that should be preserved to retain the traditional small downtown character of San Mateo. The *Mid and South El Camino Real 40-55 Foot Building Height Design Criteria* set building heights in the Mid and South El Camino Real areas to encourage taller buildings that would be visually appealing and integrate well into the surrounding city fabric.¹⁰ It also lays out the criteria for increased pedestrian and visual amenities within the Mid and South El Camino Real areas.

⁵ City of San Mateo, 2006, *Single-Family Dwelling Design Guidelines*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/1854/Single-Family-Dwelling-Design-Guidelines?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

⁶ City of San Mateo, 1994, *Multi Family Design Guidelines*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/2497/Multi-Family-Guidelines?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

⁷ City of San Mateo, 1992, *Small Lot Multi Family (less than 10,000 square foot lot area) Design Guidelines*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/2498/Small-Lot-Multi-Family-Design-Guidelines?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

⁸ City of San Mateo, 2004, *Duplex Design Guidelines*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/2481/Duplex-Design-Guidelines?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

⁹ City of San Mateo, 1993, *Downtown Retail Core & Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/42557/Downtown-Retail-Core-and-Downtown-Historic-District-Design-Guidelines?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

¹⁰ City of San Mateo, 2015, *Mid and South El Camino Real 40-55 Foot Building Height Design Criteria*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/47529/ECR-Building-Height-Design-Criteria>, accessed August 19, 2022.

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The *Bay Meadows Phase II Design Guidelines and Development Standards* were developed for the construction of the Bay Meadows neighborhood in San Mateo.¹¹ These design guidelines were prepared to provide guidance and visual inspiration for the parts of the development that are seen and used by the public.

Street Lighting Standards

The City of San Mateo Public Works Department's standard drawings for street light and electrical improvements provide standards for the installation of street lights. The standard mounting height for standard aluminum street lights on residential streets is 25 feet, and for collectors and arterials is 30 feet. The standards also include specifications for beautification street lamps.¹²

Other Plans

San Mateo General Plan 2030

In 2010 the City of San Mateo adopted the General Plan 2030. The goals, policies, and actions that are relevant to visual resources are primarily in the Conservation, Open Space, Parks and Recreation Element. As part of the proposed project, some existing General Plan goals, policies, and actions would be amended, substantially changed, or new policies would be added. Applicable goals, policies, and actions are identified and assessed for their effectiveness and potential to result in an adverse physical impact later in this chapter under Section 4.1.3, *Impact Discussion*.

Hillsdale Station Area Plan

The City of San Mateo adopted the *Hillsdale Station Area Plan* in April 2011 to provide the regulatory framework for compact and sustainable development in the area surrounding the Hillsdale Caltrain Station.¹³ The Urban Design chapter establishes development guidelines and streetscape standards to promote vibrant attractive new development, streetscape improvements, and public gathering places.

Downtown Area Plan

In May 2009, the City of San Mateo approved the *Downtown Area Plan*.¹⁴ The plan provides a framework for future decision making on private development projects. Concerning aesthetic qualities, it focuses on Central Park and maintaining visual continuity in neighborhoods and streetscapes.

¹¹ City of San Mateo, December 12, 2006, *Bay Meadows Phase II Design Guidelines and Development Standards*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/3250/Bay-Meadows-Phase-II-Design-Guidelines>, accessed July 12, 2023.

¹² City of San Mateo, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/1193/Street-Lighting-and-Electrical?bidId=>, accessed July 13, 2023.

¹³ City of San Mateo, April 18, 2011, *Hillsdale Station Area Plan*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/59484>, accessed July 12, 2023.

¹⁴ City of San Mateo, 2009, *Downtown Area Plan*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/55327/2009-Downtown-Area-Plan?bidId=>, accessed August 19, 2022.

San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit Oriented Development Plan

Adopted June 2005, the *San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit Oriented Development Plan* provides guidance for the creation of transit-oriented development within a half-mile radius of the Hillsdale and Hayward Park Caltrain station areas.¹⁵ The Community Character and Design Guidelines chapter includes specific design guidance for neighborhoods, site planning, and building design to ensure that the vision for the plan area is realized through the creation of highly transit supportive, walkable, and attractive places and buildings to live, work, and visit.

El Camino Real Master Plan

In 2001, the *El Camino Real Master Plan* was adopted by the San Mateo City Council.¹⁶ The plan lays out the framework for development occurring at El Camino Real south, from SR-92 to the Belmont city border. Aesthetic values such as the use of landscape medians, street trees, light fixtures, and street furniture are discussed in the streetscape plan section. The design guidelines section lists aesthetic values to pursue, including well-sited buildings, visually interesting facades, more transparent storefront windows, increase building reveals, and vertical signage.

Detroit Drive Specific Plan

Adopted in April 1984 and last amended in June 1990, the *Detroit Drive Specific Plan* outlines the framework for development in the Detroit Drive Area.¹⁷ The plan discusses aesthetic urban design elements such as development characteristics, area patterns, and the pedestrian environment. The plan also outlines visual amenities required for every project design.

Mariner's Island Specific Plan

The City adopted the *Mariner's Island Specific Plan* in June 1973 and last revised it in May 1995.¹⁸ The plan provides developmental framework for Mariner's Island and has aesthetic design criteria related to design quality, landscaping, and signs.

¹⁵ City of San Mateo, June 6, 2005, *San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit Oriented Development Plan*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/1899/Rail-Corridor-Transit-Oriented-Developme>, accessed July 12, 2023.

¹⁶ City of San Mateo, 2001, *El Camino Real Master Plan*, cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/5111/0-Executive-Summary?bidId=, accessed August 19, 2022.

¹⁷ City of San Mateo, 1984, *Detroit Drive Specific Plan*, <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/64607/Detroit-Drive-Specific-Plan---last-updated-1990#:~:text=The%20Detroit%20Drive%20Specific%20Plan,to%20insure%20compatibility%20of%20development.>, accessed August 19, 2022.

¹⁸ City of San Mateo, 1995, *Mariner's Island Specific Plan*, cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/64608/Mariners-Island-Specific-Plan-SCANNED, accessed August 19, 2022.

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Shoreline Parks Specific Plan

The *Shoreline Park Specific Plan* was adopted in May 1971 and was last revised in July 1990.¹⁹ It expands upon concepts in the general plan for the shoreline area of San Mateo and establishes architectural standards for visual quality. The plan focuses on the Shoreland, Seal Point, Seal Cove, Marina Lagoon and San Mateo Creek areas.

4.1.1.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Visual Character

Key elements that contribute to the visual character of the EIR Study Area include ridgelines, hillsides, and the waters of the San Francisco Bay. San Mateo extends from the ridge of hills on the west to the waters of the San Francisco Bay on the east.

Several water features define the EIR Study Area, particularly along the eastern edge. San Mateo City Limits include roughly 1,200 acres of bay waters and some three miles of shoreline. The City and San Mateo County own most of the Bay frontage, with some properties held in private ownership. The 185-acre Marina Lagoon in northern San Mateo serves as flood control, recreation, and wildlife habitat, but it also has aesthetic value.

The aesthetic value of San Mateo's creeks as a natural feature varies, as many have been channelized, culverted, or subjected to development well within their riparian corridors. Highly visible above ground creeks are intermittent throughout the city and vary in aesthetic value, ranging from vegetated visible creeks to fully culverted or covered creeks. Examples of highly visible creeks include Borel Creek in the eastern part of the city and San Mateo Creek in the northern part of the city.

Sugarloaf Mountain is considered a key scenic resource, both for views of its hillsides from San Mateo, and for views over San Mateo, Foster City, and the Bay from its peak. The City's 37-acre Laurelwood Park is part of Sugarloaf Mountain and occupies the upper reaches and north side of Laurel Creek. Extensive woodlands in and around the College of San Mateo continue the open spaces of Hillsborough into the city.²⁰

Within the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI), there are roughly 400 acres of open space, grasslands, and woodlands in the unincorporated Highlands area that contribute to the scenic value of the EIR Study Area. The SOI also includes the Peninsula Gold and Country Club, which offers views of the golf course and wildlife to residents who live nearby.

¹⁹ City of San Mateo, 1990, *Shoreline Park Specific Plan*, cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/2486/Shoreline-Park-Specific-Plan?bidId=, accessed August 19, 2022.

²⁰ City of San Mateo, amended April 2011. *General Plan 2030, Conservation, Open Space, Parks and Recreation Element*.

Scenic Views and Corridors

San Mateo is set between two dominant physical features: San Francisco Bay and the ridge of hills along the western edge of the city. The Bay and western hills are important natural views from many places in the city.

As shown in Figure 4.1-1, *Scenic Corridor Designated in San Mateo County General Plan*, San Mateo County's General Plan designates the area surrounding I-280 as a scenic corridor.²¹ The scenic corridor area lies to the west of the San Mateo City Limits and is almost entirely outside of the EIR Study Area, with the exception of a sliver of the hillside area in the extreme southwestern corner of the San Mateo SOI, near the interchange of SR-92 and I-280.

Scenic Highways

There are no officially designated State scenic highways within the EIR Study Area.²² However, immediately west of the EIR Study Area is I-280, an officially designated State scenic highway.

Light and Glare

Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky around and above developed urban areas, including glare, light trespass, sky glow, and over lighting. Views of the night sky are an important part of the natural environment. Excessive light and glare can also be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species, and often reflects an unnecessarily high level of energy consumption. Light pollution has the potential to become an issue of increasing concern as new development contributes additional outdoor lighting installed for safety and other reasons.

The EIR Study Area includes several urbanized areas with a variety of residential, commercial, and public uses. Existing sources of light and glare in the EIR Study Area are similar to those that would be found in any urbanized area, and include streetlamps, parking lot lighting, storefront and signage lighting, car headlamps, and interior lighting visible through windows. Light pollution is primarily limited to urban areas of the EIR Study Area.

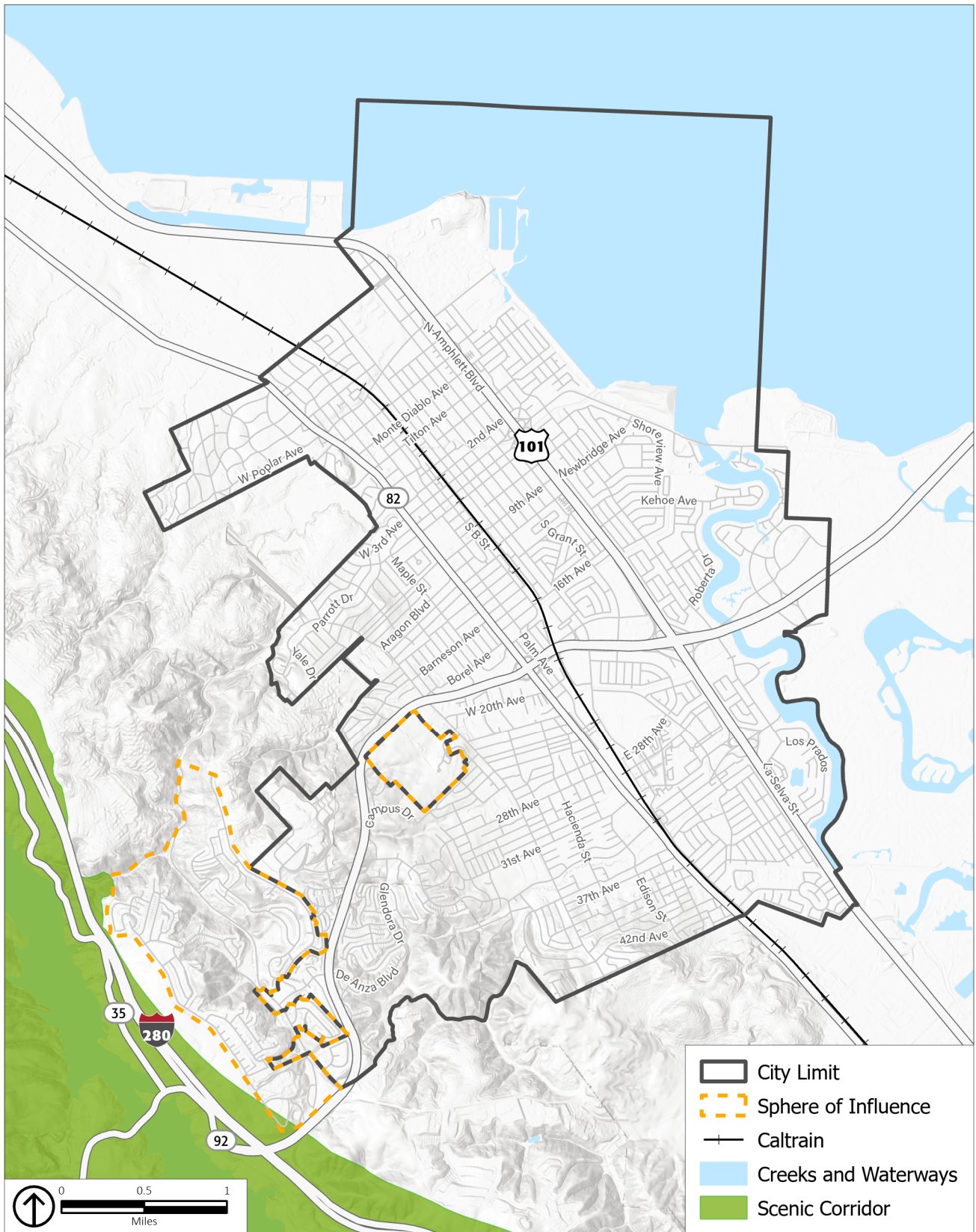
Transit Priority Areas

As described in Section 4.1.1.1, *Regulatory Framework*, under subheading "Senate Bill 743," the TPA that includes a 0.5-mile buffer along El Camino Real and around the three Caltrain stations are areas where no significant aesthetic impact findings can be made in this or future environmental analysis, pursuant to SB 743.

²¹ County of San Mateo, November 1986, *General Plan*, <https://www.smcgov.org/media/101521/download?inline=>, accessed August 3, 2022.

²² California Department of Transportation, 2018, California State Scenic Highway System Map, <https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>, accessed August 3, 2022.

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Source: County of San Mateo, 1986; PlaceWorks, 2023.

Figure 4.1-1

Scenic Corridor Designated in the San Mateo County General Plan

4.1.2 STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

1. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
2. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.
3. In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
4. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
5. In combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, result in cumulative aesthetics impacts in the area.

With respect to standard number three, CEQA Section 21071, Urbanized Area Definition, has several metrics by which a city can be defined as an urban area. CEQA Section 21071(a)(1) states that a city can be classified as an urban area if the city has a population of at least 100,000 people. As shown in Table 3-1, *Proposed General Plan 2040 Buildout Projections in the EIR Study Area*, in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, of this Draft EIR, the population of the EIR Study Area (including unincorporated areas in the Sphere of Influence) is 108,020. Therefore, San Mateo is considered an urban area under CEQA Guidelines Section 21071 and impact discussion AES-3 is based on the second half of the CEQA standard number three.

4.1.3 IMPACT DISCUSSION

As described in Section 4.1.1.1., *Regulatory Framework*, under subheading “Senate Bill 743,” potential future development in the TPA along El Camino Real and the three Caltrain stations in San Mateo would be exempt from aesthetics evaluation. As discussed in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, of this Draft EIR, potential future development under the proposed project is expected to largely occur in ten General Plan Land Use Study Areas that are near transit; contain aging shopping centers; or are areas where property owners have expressed interest in considering redevelopment of the property through the General Plan Update process. As shown on Figure 4-1, *Priority Development Areas and Transit Priority Areas*, in Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR, much of the General Plan Land Use Study Areas are located within the TPA and are exempt from aesthetics evaluation. Accordingly, aesthetic impacts are only considered for potential future development outside of the TPA, including those in the Campus Drive and Bridgepoint Study Areas, as well as portions of the Peninsula Avenue, North Shoreview and Shoreview Study Area, and Hillsdale/Norfolk Study Areas.

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AES-1 **The proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.**

Future development under the proposed project would have the potential to affect scenic vistas and/or scenic corridors if new or intensified development blocked views of areas that provide or contribute to such visual resources. Potential effects could include blocking views of the San Francisco Bay and ridge of hills along the western border of the city from publicly accessible vantage points or the alteration of the overall scenic vista or I-280 corridor itself. Such alterations could be positive or negative, depending on the characteristics of individual future developments and the subjective perception of observers.

General Plan Land Use Study Areas outside of the TPA may offer or be part of intermittent or views of the Bay and hills. Potential future development outside of the TPA would be concentrated in existing urban areas on a limited number of vacant parcels and in the form of infill/intensification on sites either already developed and/or underutilized, and/or in close proximity to existing development, where future development would have a lesser impact on scenic vistas.

The Community Design and Historic Resources (CD) Element of the proposed General Plan includes goals, policies, and actions that require local planning and development decisions to consider impacts to scenic vistas and resources. The following General Plan 2040 goals, policies, and actions would serve to minimize potential adverse impacts related to scenic vistas:

- **Goal CD-1:** Preserve and enhance San Mateo’s natural setting as an irreplaceable asset that is the physical foundation of the community.
 - **Policy CD 1.1: Respect for the Landscape.** Encourage new development to respect and respond to the natural topography of San Mateo.
 - **Policy CD 1.2: Preservation of Natural Views.** Preserve and enhance, to the extent feasible, publicly accessible views to the undeveloped foothills and the San Francisco Bay through the design of new development.
 - **Policy CD 1.3: Scenic Corridors.** Require new development adjacent to designated scenic corridors within San Mateo County’s General Plan to protect and enhance the visual character of these corridors.
- **Goal CD-2:** Minimize the impact of hillside development on the natural environment and public safety.
 - **Policy CD 2.1: Hillside Development Principles.** Require hillside development to minimize impacts by preserving the existing topography, limiting grading or cuts and fills, clustering development, and identifying opportunities for restoration or re-wilding. Limit development on steep hillsides with a 30 percent or higher slope.
 - **Policy CD 2.2: Minimal Impacts.** Require new development to preserve natural topographic forms and to minimize adverse impacts on vegetation, water, soil stability, and wildlife resources.
- **Goal CD-3:** Protect heritage trees, street trees, and tree stands and maintain the health and condition of San Mateo’s urban forest.

- **Policy CD 3.1: Tree Preservation.** Continue to preserve heritage and street trees throughout San Mateo, where feasible.
- **Policy CD 3.2: Replacement Planting.** Require appropriate replacement planting or payment of an in-lieu fee when protected trees on public or private property are removed.
- **Policy CD 3.3: Tree Protection During Construction.** Require the protection of trees during construction activity; require that landscaping, buildings, and other improvements adjacent to trees be designed and maintained to be consistent with the continued health of the tree.
- **Policy CD 3.4: Public Awareness.** Pursue public awareness and education programs concerning the identification, care, and regulation of trees.
- **Goal CD-6:** Develop and maintain an attractive urban fabric that reflects San Mateo’s unique visual and architectural character.
 - **Policy CD 6.1: Community Cohesion.** Design new private development, streets, and public spaces to enhance social connection by providing human-scale street-fronting uses and community spaces, as appropriate.
 - **Policy CD 6.2: Gateways.** Develop gateways that visually announce key entrances to San Mateo by maintaining or establishing distinctive architectural, art, or landscape features.
 - **Policy CD 6.3: Sustainable Design.** Encourage integration of sustainable design features and elements into the design of new buildings, including locating and orienting buildings to access solar exposure, preserving mature vegetation to the extent feasible, and using green building materials.
 - **Policy CD 6.4: El Camino Real (SR-82) Corridor.** Strive to make El Camino Real a destination, not just a corridor for people to pass through, by encouraging improvements to the public right-of-way and private properties along El Camino Real that will make the corridor safer and more attractive for all users. Examples of such improvements include redesigned transit stops, an improved pedestrian realm, and updated/improved building façades. Incorporate the Guiding Principles of the Grand Boulevard Initiative into future plans for the El Camino Real corridor in San Mateo.
 - **Policy CD 6.5: US Highway 101 Frontage.** Encourage upgrading of the appearance of US Highway 101 and properties adjacent to the freeway through design treatment, screening, and right-of-way landscaping.
 - **Policy CD 6.6: Signage.** Maintain signage controls that appropriately regulate the design, size, type, illumination, and quantity of signs visible from corridors and create consistent signage that reinforces San Mateo’s unique identity.
 - **Policy CD 6.10: Nighttime Lighting.** Require nighttime lighting to be energy efficient, be designed to minimize light pollution and light spillage to adjacent properties, while protecting public safety.

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- **Goal CD-7:** Balance the growth and evolution of residential neighborhoods with the need to maintain and enhance their existing characteristics and physical qualities through the appropriate design of new development.
 - **Policy CD 7.1: Low-Density Residential Development.** Require new homes in the Low- and Very Low-Density residential designations, including single-family dwellings, duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to be consistent with objective design standards as outlined in the City’s Residential Design Standards.
 - **Policy CD 7.2: Single-Family Design.** Encourage single-family additions and new dwellings that address the preservation and enhancement of neighborhood visual and architectural character through context-sensitive building scale, materials, architectural style and details, and privacy.
 - **Policy CD 7.3: Multifamily Design.** Encourage architectural design of new multifamily developments that enhances a neighborhood’s visual and architectural character by providing context-sensitive building and pedestrian-scale elements, high-quality materials and construction, open space, and resident amenities.
 - **Action CD 7.6: Objective Design Standards.** Develop and adopt objective design standards that clearly outline the City’s design expectations for new single-family and multifamily projects.

All potential future development that is subject to discretionary approval within City Limits would be required to comply with SMMC regulations as described in Section 4.1.1.1, *Regulatory Framework*. The City has also adopted several design guidelines for residential structures and the Downtown, Mid, and South El Camino Real areas to ensure the design of new buildings and additions are compatible with their surroundings. Furthermore, potential future development in the city would be subject to the various planning documents that govern scenic quality in the city, as described in Section 4.1.1.1, *Regulatory Framework*. This includes the Hillsdale Station Area Plan, Downtown Area Plan, San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit Oriented Development Plan, El Camino Real Master Plan, Detroit Drive Specific Plan, Mariners Island Specific Plan, and the Shoreline Parks Specific Plan.

Any potential future development in the SOI would be required to comply with the San Mateo County General Plan and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance.²³ Zoning designations in the SOI include Residential Estates, One Family Residential, and Resource Management districts.²⁴ Development in the Resource Management District would be required to adhere to San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance Section 6324.2, *Site Design Criteria*, to ensure compatibility with existing character and visual quality. Because the SOI does not have a Design Review district designation, design review is not required.

Compliance with SMMC regulations, San Mateo Design Guidelines, San Mateo County General Plan, and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance, along with implementation of the proposed General Plan goals, policies, and actions, would ensure any impacts to scenic vistas and/or corridors would be less-than-significant.

²³ County of San Mateo, Planning and Building Department, January 2022, *Zoning Regulations*, <https://www.smcgov.org/media/101461/download?inline=>, accessed May 19, 2023.

²⁴ County of San Mateo, 2023, Planning and Building Map Viewer, https://gis.smcgov.org/Html5Viewer/Index.html?configBase=https://gis.smcgov.org/Geocortex/Essentials/REST/sites/publicplanning_sql/viewers/HTML52110/virtualdirectory/Resources/Config/Default, accessed May 19, 2023.

Significance without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AES-2 The proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

As described in Section 4.1.1.1, *Regulatory Framework*, there are no State-designated scenic highways within the EIR Study Area. However, I-280 is a state designated scenic highway and parts of the SOI are visible heading northbound. Land use changes in the unincorporated County that would affect I-280 views would be subject to the regulations of San Mateo County, including those in the San Mateo County General Plan and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance, until the land is annexed to the City. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not damage existing scenic resources within a state scenic highway and a *less-than-significant* impact would occur.

Significance without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AES-3 The proposed project would not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

The proposed General Plan is the primary planning document for the City of San Mateo. The proposed update is intended to ensure consistency between the General Plan, land use changes, and State law. The proposed General Plan is the overriding planning document for the City, and it involves amending the General Plan 2030 and the land use designations to improve consistency, adoption and implementation for the proposed project. Due to the necessity of these documents to be consistent with each other, there would be no impact with respect to these documents being inconsistent with policies or regulations governing scenic quality.

In addition to the goals, policies, and programs listed in Impact Discussion AES-1, the Community Design and Historic Resources (CD) Element of the proposed General Plan contains goals, policies, and actions that require local planning and development decisions to consider impacts that development could have on existing visual character. The following General Plan 2040 goals, policies, and actions would serve to minimize potential adverse impacts on scenic quality:

- **Goal CD-8:** Improve the visual and architectural character, livability, and vitality of mixed-use and commercial areas.
 - **Policy CD 8.1: Objective Design Standards.** Provide clear, objective, and quantifiable design standards to guide new mixed-use and commercial development.
 - **Policy CD 8.2: Human-Scale Design.** Cultivate pedestrian activity in commercial and mixed-use areas by providing adequate sidewalk widths, activating ground-floor street façades with active uses, windows, plantings, and awnings, using high-quality construction materials, and including human-scale details and architectural features.
 - **Policy CD 8.3: Respect Existing Scale and Rhythm.** Encourage new mixed-use and commercial development to respect the scale and rhythm of surrounding buildings, including by providing

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breaks in the building face at spacings common to buildings in the area and by stepping back upper floors.

- **Action CD 8.6: Objective Design Standards.** Develop and adopt objective design standards for new mixed-use and commercial development to provide a clear understanding of the City's expectation for new project design, including pedestrian-friendly design.
- **Action CD 8.7: Commercial Development Adjacent to Residential.** Develop and adopt objective design standards that define and require appropriate design transitions from commercial to residential zones.

Furthermore, as described in impact discussion AES-1, all potential future development that is subject to discretionary approval within City Limits would be required to comply with SMMC regulations and the San Mateo design guidelines, as well as neighborhood-specific design guidelines and planning documents. Potential future development in the SOI would be subject to the regulations of the San Mateo County General Plan and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance. While development resulting from implementation of the proposed project could potentially impact scenic quality in the EIR Study Area, development projects would be required to adhere to these regulations, along with the proposed General Plan goals, policies, and actions. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not conflict with applicable zoning or other regulations governing scenic quality and the impact would be *less than significant*.

Significance without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AES-4	The proposed project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
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Nighttime illumination and glare impacts are the effects of a development's exterior lighting on adjoining uses and areas. Nighttime uses associated with potential future development may increase light intensity levels and may have the potential to affect existing and future nearby sensitive receptors. If lighting in new development is not designed to reduce upwardly directed light, nighttime lighting could obscure views of the night sky or intrude into neighboring properties. Potential future development would also incrementally increase glare due to the new building surfaces, parked cars, and solar panels if exterior glazing (i.e., windows and doors) and site planning (i.e., landscaping and solar panel placement) are not carefully considered. Light and glare impacts are determined through a comparison of the existing light sources with the lighting plans or policies incorporated in development proposals.

As discussed, potential future development is expected to largely occur within ten General Plan Land Use Study Areas, most of which are located within TPA. Future development in General Plan Land Use Study Areas within the TPA are exempt from aesthetics evaluation pursuant to SB 743. However, General Plan Land Use Study Areas outside of the TPA may offer intermittent or full views of the Bay and hills. Potential future development outside of the TPA would occur in existing urban areas and would be concentrated on a limited number of vacant parcels and in the form of infill/intensification on sites

either already developed and/or underutilized, and/or in close proximity to existing development, where future development would have a lesser light and glare impact.

Currently, the EIR Study Area contains many existing sources of nighttime illumination. These include street and parking area lights, building-mounted lights, illuminated signage, security lighting, and interior and exterior lighting on existing residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. Glare is primarily from building materials and parked cars. Additional on-site light and glare is caused by surrounding land uses and traffic on US Highway 101, I-280, SR-82, and SR-92.

Future development and activities under the proposed project could intensify lighting sources throughout the EIR Study Area. Future lighting would involve uses similar to the existing downtown, urban, and suburban uses in the EIR Study Area and sources of light and glare associated with these uses would be similar in intensity and nature to the existing source of light and glare. In addition to new lighting for buildings, security, and parking areas, buildout of the EIR Study Area would also include lighting that would illuminate future development locations. The proposed project also encourages the use of solar photovoltaic panels through proposed General Plan Policy CD 6-3, *Sustainable Design*. The potential for glare impacts as a result of photovoltaic panels would depend on the placement and angle of the panels, and the materials with which the panels are composed.

The proposed Community Design and Historic Resources (CD) Element of the proposed General Plan contains goals, policies, and actions that require local planning and development decisions to consider impacts related to an increase in light and glare. The following General Plan 2040 goals, policies, and actions would serve to minimize potential adverse impacts as a result of new sources of light and glare:

- **Goal CD-6:** Develop and maintain an attractive urban fabric that reflects San Mateo’s unique visual and architectural character.
 - **Policy CD 6.10: Nighttime Lighting.** Require nighttime lighting to be energy efficient, be designed to minimize light pollution and light spillage to adjacent properties, while protecting public safety.

As described in Section 4.1.1.1, *Regulatory Framework*, in addition to general best management practices that require lighting that is context sensitive in style and intensity required under CALGreen, potential future development within City Limits, including the installation of solar panels, would also have to comply with the City’s lighting standards as outlined in the SMMC, San Mateo Design Guidelines, and other adopted plans (e.g., *Downtown Area Plan*). Potential future development in the SOI would be subject to the regulations of the San Mateo County General Plan and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance. Potential future development would be reviewed for consistency with the lighting standards regarding the appropriate use of lighting and avoidance of glare from lighting and other sources.

Compliance with these standards to reduce light spill and glare, combined with the proposed General Plan goal and policy listed above, would ensure potential future development does not generate excessive light levels or glare. Therefore, the lighting and glare from implementation of the proposed project would not substantially increase nighttime light or glare within the EIR Study Area or its surroundings. Impacts would be *less than significant*.

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Significance without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AES-5 **The proposed project would not, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, result in cumulative aesthetics impacts in the area.**

As discussed in Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR, the cumulative setting includes growth within the EIR Study Area in combination with projected growth in the rest of San Mateo County and the surrounding region. The cumulative setting for visual impacts includes potential future development under the proposed project, combined with effects of development on lands adjacent to the EIR Study Area. Significant impacts, including those associated with scenic resources, visual character, and increased light and glare would generally be site-specific and would not contribute to cumulative impacts after implementation of the proposed General Plan goals, policies, and actions.

Compliance with the SMMC regulations and San Mateo Design Guidelines, along with implementation of the proposed General Plan goals, policies, and actions, would ensure any impacts to scenic vistas and/or corridors would be less-than-significant. While there are no officially designated State scenic highways within the EIR Study Area, portions of the SOI are visible from State scenic highway I-280 and potential future development would be subject to the regulations contained in the San Mateo County General Plan and San Mateo County Zoning Ordinance to avoid damage to scenic resources within State scenic highways. The proposed project is intended to ensure consistency between the General Plan, Land Use Changes, and State law; therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not conflict with applicable zoning or other regulations governing scenic quality. Light and glare from potential future development under the proposed project would be regulated through the City's lighting standards in the SMMC, the San Mateo Design Guidelines, and other adopted plans, as well as implementation of proposed General Plan goals and policies.

With adherence to existing local and regional regulations, potential future development under the proposed project would not create substantial impacts to visual resources in San Mateo or the surrounding communities. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a cumulatively considerable impact to aesthetic resources and cumulative impacts would be *less than significant*. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance without Mitigation: Less than significant.