

4.1 Aesthetics and Visual Resources

This section describes current visual conditions in and around the City of Santa Barbara and evaluates potential aesthetic and visual resource impacts associated with implementation of the Housing Plan, including impacts to scenic vistas, scenic resources, visual character and quality, and light and glare.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

a. Existing Visual Conditions

As described in Section 2, *Environmental Setting*, the City of Santa Barbara is located on Santa Barbara County's South Coast, and the city limits extend into the Pacific Ocean. The majority of Santa Barbara is developed, with the densest development and largest buildings located within the City's downtown area. The primary arterial roadways in the city include U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101), U.S. Highway 192 (U.S. 192), and State Route 154 (SR 154). Views south of U.S. 101 include beaches, coastal bluffs, and the Mesa. North of U.S. 101, the downtown cityscape and the Santa Ynez Mountains and surrounding foothills, with single-unit residential development scattered in the Riviera on the lower elevations, provide a backdrop for the city. East of the City limits, Santa Barbara abuts the wooded, semi-rural community of Montecito, while to the west, suburban residential, commercial, and agricultural uses comprise Hope Ranch and the Goleta Valley. The city-owned and operated Santa Barbara Airport is located in the Goleta Valley, approximately eight miles west of the city proper. Most of the beaches and undeveloped coastal land along the southern edge of Santa Barbara and the foothills within northern Santa Barbara are designated as open space.

b. Scenic Resources

Scenic resources are important visual assets that form community identity. Scenic resources can be natural or man-made features such as trees, rock formations, historic buildings, and public art.

Important Visual Resources and Views

The City's Program Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan Update (General Plan EIR) identifies ridgelines and foothills; ocean, beach and harbor; and substantial open space areas as Important Visual Resources (City of Santa Barbara 2010). Surrounding steep hillsides, peaks, and rocky outcrops of the Santa Ynez Mountains contribute to the scenic quality of the city. Parks located in the foothills, such as Parma and Skofield Parks, support miles of scenic trails and provide views of the Pacific Ocean and City (City of Santa Barbara 2010). Three creek systems, Sycamore, Mission, and Arroyo Burro, provide natural corridors that contrast with existing urban development. Large groves of mature sycamore and oak trees along Sycamore and Mission Creeks provide contrast with developed areas of the City, and woodlands along Arroyo Burro Creek are important natural features in the San Roque, Hitchcock, and Hidden Valley neighborhoods. In addition, the City contains approximately 35,000 street trees, more than 9,000 public trees in developed parks and landscaped areas of public facilities, and around 30,000 trees within City-managed open spaces (City of Santa Barbara 2022a). These trees soften the appearance of buildings, roads, and parking lots which provide visual contrast to building masses in addition to pleasant scenery for residents, employees, and tourists. The City's tree inventory contains 456 different varieties of trees (City of Santa Barbara 2014). These include specimen trees which are identified by the City's Parks and Recreation Commission to be of high value because of their type, size, and/or age.

Santa Barbara's shoreline extends approximately seven miles from Montecito on the east to Hope Ranch on the west and includes beaches, some with existing residential and commercial developments. Public beaches and waterfront and blufftop parks allow for public access to the area's natural scenery, including wide, sandy beaches and steep coastal bluffs. The waterfront provides panoramic ocean and mountain views and the line of palm trees within Chase Palm Park contributes to the scenic character of the area.

Sweeping views of the city are available within certain neighborhoods and on certain public streets that are elevated within the foothills. The Riviera and Eucalyptus Hill neighborhoods, and the north side of the Mesa and TV Hill, offer views of the city, Pacific Ocean, and surrounding hillsides. Roads located within the foothills, such as Alameda Padre Serra and Mountain Drive, provide views of downtown and the Pacific Ocean.

Views from downtown Santa Barbara are characterized by foreground views of the urban environment, including buildings, roads, sidewalks, street trees, and parking areas. The downtown streetscape includes a street grid with short blocks and active transportation facilities (sidewalks/bicycle lanes). The architecture, scattered parks, and surface parking lots provide a sense of openness through the downtown area. Views of the Santa Ynez Mountains, hillsides, and the Rivera occur intermittently throughout the downtown urban core, primarily along roadways, intersections, and across larger parking lots and lower buildings. These views are interrupted by taller buildings and street trees. Open spaces, such as Plaza De la Guerra and Alameda Park, provide public mountain views. Surrounding views can also be seen from the upper stories of buildings such as the County Courthouse and on top of parking garages. Notable structures, such as the County Courthouse and Main Post Office, contribute to the visual character of downtown Santa Barbara.

Scenic Highways

California's Scenic Highway Program designates scenic highways with the intention of protecting these corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of adjacent lands. California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) defines a scenic highway as any freeway, highway, road, or other public right-of-way that traverses an area of exceptional scenic quality. Suitability for designations as a State scenic highway is based on the vividness, intactness, and unity of their view corridors, as described in Caltrans' Scenic Highway Guidelines (Caltrans 2008). A highway is designated as an eligible scenic highway when Caltrans determines that the roadway corridor qualifies for official status. An eligible scenic highway becomes officially designated when the local governing body applies to Caltrans for scenic highway approval, adopts a Corridor Protection Program (CPP), and receives notification that the highway has been officially designated (Caltrans 2018). According to the Caltrans California State Scenic Highway System Map, there is one officially designated scenic highway (SR 154) and one eligible scenic highway (U.S. 101) in the city (Caltrans 2018).

The City's General Plan Circulation Element contains the Scenic Highways Element which provides planning, design, and maintenance standards for roads within the city including Cabrillo Boulevard, and Sycamore Canyon Road. The Local Coastal Program identifies the segment of U.S. 101 within the Coastal Zone (from Mission Creek to Olive Mill Road) as providing a distinct visual gateway to the city with its landscaping, views of the mountains and ocean, and unique highway structures (City of Santa Barbara 2019). In addition, the Local Coastal Program recognizes Cabrillo Boulevard and Shoreline Drive for their visual qualities such the ability to view the Santa Barbara Channel and shoreline (City of Santa Barbara 2019).

c. Visual Character

The character-defining features of Santa Barbara vary within the City, generally dependent on building density, height, massing, location of buildings on a lot, lot size, architectural style, exterior colors and materials, and year in which the structures were built. Descriptions of areas that contribute to the visual character of Santa Barbara are provided below.

Downtown and El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District

The California Adobe, Monterey Revival, and Spanish Colonial Revival architectural styles are central to the visual character of the downtown and El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District. Traditional Mission-style architecture with low-lying, whitewashed stucco structures with outdoor courtyards, patios and arcade-styled arched passageways dominate the El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District. Downtown building heights are primarily two and three stories. The downtown area includes wide sidewalks, open courtyards with fountains and public seating, public art, and the absence of blank vertical facades. A substantial variety of mature street trees are also present within the downtown area which provide unique scenery.

Upper State Street Corridor

Upper State Street is a four-lane commercial corridor from Calle Crespis to U.S. 101 that is characterized by one to two story buildings, including banks, offices, and a regional shopping center. The south side of the street is characterized by a linear strip of shopping plazas with off-street parking between the sidewalk and buildings, two larger neighborhood shopping centers, and a regional mall. The north side of the street supports small individual shops built to the sidewalk, transitioning to two and three-story office and hotel uses to the northwest, and residential areas beyond. A substantial number of mature street trees are present along the corridor.

Haley and Gutierrez Street Corridors

Haley and Gutierrez Streets are east to west oriented one-way arterials that run for two miles from U.S. 101 to Milpas Street. These areas are characterized by one to two story buildings, with larger structures near the intersection with Chapala Street. Medium-density residential, light industrial, and service commercial uses are distributed throughout these streets. Sidewalks are generally five to eight feet wide and street trees are intermittent, with aboveground utility lines that run along the streets.

Milpas Street

Milpas Street is a four-lane commercial corridor that extends for 1.5 miles from the Santa Barbara Bowl to U.S. 101, and south to East Beach. The northern end of the corridor currently contains residential development northwest of Canon Perdido. The rest of the corridor supports one to two story, street-oriented businesses built to the sidewalk, and a couple of larger shopping areas with surface parking lots in front. Milpas Street contains intermittent street trees and supports pedestrian traffic from residents living in the surrounding neighborhoods accessing the areas shops and businesses. South of U.S. 101, Milpas Street passes through light industrial areas, the Cabrillo Ball Park, and ends at the ocean front hotel zone of East Beach.

Coast Village Road

Coast Village Road is located between Hot Springs and Olive Mill roads and is surrounded by the unincorporated community of Montecito. Buildings are generally one to two stories with a limited number of three-story structures, including the historic Coast Village Inn. Coast Village Road contains intermittent street trees and has several multi-unit condominium and apartment complexes two to three stories tall on the north side with an unincorporated single-unit residential neighborhood beyond.

Residential Neighborhoods

As described in Section 2.2.2 of Chapter 2, *Environmental Setting*, Santa Barbara's 32 residential neighborhoods are generally organized into three neighborhood planning areas. Described fully in the *Environmental Setting*, these three planning areas are listed as follows:

- **Hillside Low Density Neighborhoods.** Includes the neighborhoods of Cielito, Foothill, Riviera, Eucalyptus Hill, Lower Riviera, Campanil, Bel Air, and Alta Mesa.
- **Low and Medium Density Neighborhoods.** Includes the neighborhoods of Hope, San Roque, East San Roque, Hidden Valley, Hitchcock, Samarkand, Eastside, Westside, Upper East, East Mesa, West Mesa, and Coast Village.
- **Medium and High Density Neighborhoods.** Includes the neighborhoods of Lower West, West Beach, East Beach, Lower East, Milpas, Oak Park, Laguna, West Downtown, Upper State, Waterfront, Downtown, and Lower State.

d. Light and Glare Conditions

Light and glare from indoor and/or outdoor uses can reduce visibility of the night sky, create potential hazards to drivers, and be a nuisance to residential areas. The City has typical light conditions found in developed areas (e.g., roadway lighting, commercial parking lot and building lighting, residential buildings, headlights from motor vehicles, decorative landscape lighting, lighted signs, and streetlights). Neighborhoods in the hillside, San Roque, and areas of the Mesa have minimized night lighting, providing views of the night sky. The most substantial nighttime illumination is generated by streetlights and commercial centers such as La Cumbre Plaza. Other sources of nighttime light include the State Street corridor and surrounding downtown, the Earl Warren Showgrounds, and sports fields/parks with nighttime lighting.

Sources of daytime glare include direct beam sunlight and reflections from building materials, paving materials, glass, and other shiny reflective surfaces. The primary source of mobile nighttime glare is generated from motor vehicle headlights. Spanish Colonial Revival architecture with deep window recesses, as well as wood and other non-reflective surfaces are largely present in the City's downtown area which minimizes glare. In addition, the City's Outdoor Lighting Ordinance reduces nuisance lighting by requiring outdoor lighting within and adjacent to residential zones to be designed, installed, and operated compatible with the ambient lighting of the neighborhood in which it is located (City of Santa Barbara 2022b; City of Santa Barbara 2010).

4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

a. Federal Regulations

No current federal regulations address the environmental conditions surrounding the aesthetics or visual resources in the City.

b. State Regulations

California Coastal Act and California Coastal Commission

The California Coastal Act of 1976 (Public Resources Code Section 30000) and the California Coastal Commission, the State's coastal protection and planning agency, were established by voter initiative to plan for and regulate new development, and to create policies to protect public access to and along the shoreline. Section 30251, Scenic and Visual Qualities, of the Coastal Act mandates that scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas be considered and protected as resources of public importance. Pursuant to the Coastal Act, permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas designated in the Department of Parks and Recreation California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan (CCPRP) and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.

California Scenic Highway Program

Recognizing the value of scenic areas and view from roads in such areas, the State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program in 1963 (Streets and Highways Code Sections 260 et seq). This legislation preserves and protects scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. Under this program, a number of State Routes have been designated as eligible for inclusion as scenic routes. Once the local jurisdiction through which the highway passes have established a Corridor Protection Program (CPP) and the Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee recommends designation of the highway, the State may officially designate it as a scenic route. Scenic highways must have an approved CPP and remain in compliance to maintain scenic highway status. Interstate highways, State Routes, and county roads may be designated as scenic under the program.

California Public Resources Code Section 21099

California Public Resources Code Section 21099(d)(1) states that aesthetic and parking impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project on an infill site and within a transit priority area shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment. A transit priority area is defined by Section 21099(7) to mean "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 or applicable regional transportation plan". Section 21099(2)(A) states that the subdivision created by Section 21099(d)(1) does not affect, change, or modify the authority of a lead agency to consider aesthetic impacts pursuant to local design review ordinances or other discretionary powers provided by other laws or policies. Section 21099(B) states that aesthetic impacts do not include impacts on historical or cultural resources for the subdivision created by Section 21099(d)(1).

The lower State Street, downtown, most of west downtown and portions of surrounding neighborhoods are within two transit priority areas: the MTD Transit Center at 1020 Chapala Street and the Santa Barbara Amtrak Station at 209 State Street. Transit priority areas in Santa Barbara are shown in Figure 4.1-1.

Figure 4.1-1 Transit Priority Areas



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c. Local Policies and Regulations

City of Santa Barbara General Plan

The City's General Plan contains several goals and policies related to aesthetics and visual resources within the Land Use Element, Circulation Element, and Environmental Resources Element.

The Land Use Element (2011) guides the physical and socioeconomic character of the City through environmental protection, nonresidential growth management, community design, and neighborhoods. The Land Use Element's goal related to aesthetics and visual resources is to protect and enhance the community's character with appropriately sized and scaled buildings, a walkable town, useable and well-located open space, and abundant, sustainable landscaping. Land Use Element policy LG12 aims to strengthen and enhance design and development review standards and process to enhance community character, promote affordable housing, and strive towards community sustainability principles. Possible implementation actions include preparing design overlay areas for specific areas of the City (LG12.1); developing building size, bulk, and scale standards, including floor area ratios and design guidelines to ensure that the proposed development would not eliminate or preclude preservation of visual assets (LG12.2); and developing multi-unit design guidelines to address unit sizes, setbacks, open space, landscaping, building size, bulk, and scale, and site planning (LG13) (City of Santa Barbara 2011a). Several of these actions have been or are being implemented, including adoption of Infill Design Guidelines in 2017 and Objective Design Standards for Streamlined Housing Projects in 2021 and adoption of Objective Design and Development Standards for multi-unit housing in 2025.

The Circulation Element (1997 with a several new goals, policies, and implementation actions in 2011) contains the Scenic Highways Element (1974) which provides goals for development, establishment, and protection of scenic highways. Within the City, State Route (SR) 154 is the only officially designated scenic highway and U.S. 101 is eligible for official designation. The Scenic Highways Element contain goals for the following potential State Scenic Highways, but the City has not pursued official designation:

- Cabrillo Boulevard (no longer a State Highway)
- Sycamore Canyon Road (SR 144) from Stanwood Drive (SR 192) to Mission Ridge Road where it intersects with Mountain Drive, and Mountain Drive to the Santa Barbara Mission on Los Olivos Street

The Scenic Highways Element also includes Shoreline Drive for potential designation as a Scenic Route, recommending landscaping on then vacant parcels that are now landscaped parking lots for the harbor, and on the City College parking lots on the north side of Shoreline Drive. It also recommends a speed limit lower than 30 miles per hour, which was accomplished along with reducing the street from two lanes to one lane on the portion of Shoreline Drive past Loma Alta (City of Santa Barbara 2011b).

The Environmental Resources Element (2011), which includes the 1979 Conservation Element, addresses visual resources, including hillsides, shorelines, trees, and open space throughout the City. The Conservation Element's Scenic Resources Map specifically designates scenic resources as:

- Creeks (Mission, Arroyo Burro, San Roque, and Sycamore);
- Hillsides (slope of 30% or greater);
- Shoreline;

- Specimen and Street Trees; and
- Open Space (including Douglas Family Preserve, Montecito Golf Course, Andree Clark Bird Refuge, Clark Estate, Child's Estate, and the "Kim Nursery" property on the westside as significant areas of open space and/or visual features) and City Parks.

Most of these resources are mapped in the City as Visual Unique, Visual Hillside, and Visual Shoreline. Trees are not specifically mapped except for historic and specimen trees protected by the Municipal Code.

The Environmental Resources/Conservation Element incorporates goals and policies which intend to maintain the scenic character of the City. Implemented policies limit the alteration of natural topography and vegetation on hillsides, protect setback trees, limit the obstruction of scenic view corridors, and prevent degradation of creeks or their riparian environments (City of Santa Barbara 2011c). Aesthetic and Visual Resources possible implementation actions not yet implemented include ER29.1 to document important public views and prepare related development standards to protect views as seen from public viewpoints, ER29.5 to incorporate visual guidelines as part of project design and environmental review guidelines, and ER30.1 to establish a list of priority locations to underground as many overhead utilities in the City by 2030.

Local Coastal Program

The California Coastal Act requires all local governments located within the Coastal Zone to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP). LCPs regulate future development within the Coastal Zone and define where public access and urbanization will occur, where industrial facilities will be placed, and how sensitive species and habitats, open spaces, and recreational areas will be protected. The City is located within a Coastal Zone, and, as such, adopted a Coastal Land Use Plan (Coastal LUP) in 2019.

Chapter 4.3, *Scenic Resources & Visual Quality*, of the City's Coastal LUP addresses scenic resources and methods for evaluation of impacts and implements development standards to minimize scenic resource impacts and protect the visual quality of the Coastal Zone. The City's Coastal LUP standards include, but are not limited to, requiring site-specific visual evaluations for residential development, prohibiting obstruction of scenic view corridors, and requiring new development to be visually compatible with existing surrounding development (City of Santa Barbara 2019).

Chapter 6.2, *Highway 101*, addresses the visual quality of Highway 101 and references the Highway 101 Coastal Parkway Design Guidelines for review of aesthetics, design, compatibility, landscaping, and cultural resources for the Highway 101 corridor design district.

City Charter

The City's Charter authorizes the Architectural Board of Review or Historic Landmarks Commission to review and approve applications for building permits as specified by ordinance. The Charter also contains the City's building height limitation of 30 feet in areas zoned for single unit and two-unit residences, 45 feet in areas zoned for three or more units, and 60 feet in areas zoned for industrial, manufacturing, and other commercial uses. The Council may, by ordinance, set up reasonable methods of measuring the heights set in the Charter.

City of Santa Barbara Municipal Code

The City of Santa Barbara Municipal Code Title 28 and Title 30 (each referred to as the “Zoning Ordinance”) jointly implement land use designations established within the LCP and General Plan. While land use designations are more generalized in nature, the Zoning Ordinances and zoning maps provide specific controls on land use, density or intensity of development, and development standards to implement the City’s LCP and General Plan goals and policies. The Zoning Ordinances provide standards for protection of visual resources, compatible design, and illumination for new development associated with particular zoning. Title 28 and Title 30 establish height restrictions consistent with or more restrictive than the City Charter for both residential and non-residential development. The maximum height of 60 feet is only allowed for a Community Benefit Project or Community Benefit Housing Project which can only be approved with specific findings. Chapter 30.180 sets performance standards for buildings, including standards for glare reduction. Chapter 30.57 includes the design review process and standards for projects within Landmark District (LD) and Historic District (HD) overlay zones and subject to review and approval by the Historic Landmarks Commission.

Title 22 sets forth standards for development and construction throughout the City. Chapter 22.68 includes the design review process and standards for projects subject to the Architectural Board of Review and Chapter 22.69 includes the design review process and standards for projects subject to the Single Family Design Board. Standards for light and glare are implemented through Chapter 22.75 and all projects for which design review is required are reviewed for consistency with the City’s Outdoor Lighting Design Guidelines.

The Tree Preservation Ordinance in Chapter 15.24 prohibits the removal or alteration of Street Trees and other protected trees visible from the public right-of-way, without a permit.

Title 25, Objective Design and Development Standards (ODDS), implements the 6th Cycle Housing Element Program HE-7: Objective Design Standards. They are included as a new Title 25 of the Municipal Code to provide detailed objective design and development review standards and a process for developers seeking streamlined design review in accordance with State law. The ODDS apply to all areas of the city currently zoned for two or more residential units

Design Review Boards

The City’s Architectural Board of Review, Historic Landmarks Commission, and Single Family Design Board are responsible for ensuring applicable standards of design are maintained in Santa Barbara. The Architectural Board of Review is responsible for review and approval of all applications for commercial, industrial, and multi-unit residential, two-unit residential, or mixed-use development, with the exception of projects within the El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District or other landmark districts which fall under the purview of the City’s Historic Landmarks Commission. The City’s Single Family Design Board reviews visual compatibility for applicable single-unit projects (e.g., within Special Design Districts, new buildings or two or more stories or 17 feet or taller in height, and other triggers as described in Chapter 22.69) .The Architectural Board of Review and Historic Landmark Commission considers Project Compatibility Criteria when reviewing the design of a proposed project including whether the design of the project responds appropriately to established scenic public vistas. The Single Family Design Board makes neighborhood preservation findings that the development, including proposed structures and grading, preserves significant public scenic views of and from the hillside.

Design Guidelines

The City's Design Guidelines establish a set of goals, values, and qualities by which projects are evaluated in design review. The Design Guidelines provide detailed direction for specific areas and types of projects. Not all guideline techniques or approaches are appropriate or practical for every project. In cases where sets of multiple design guidelines apply, the guidelines are viewed as "layers" where the most specific guidelines take precedence. The Design Guidelines include several references to preserving public scenic vistas and views in terms of project compatibility with the existing environment. The City does not regulate private views.

While the guidelines listed below are mainly subjective, the City has adopted architectural design criteria for ADUs in the Title 28 and Title 30 Zoning Ordinances and Objective Design and Development Standards for multi-unit housing.

Board and Commission Guidelines: The Architectural Board of Review, Historic Landmarks Commission, and Single Family Design Board each have General Design Guidelines and Meeting Procedures documents. They are intended to clarify the goals and policies. Infill Design Guidelines were added to the HLC and ABR Guidelines in 2017. Other guidelines specific to residential development include the following:

- **El Pueblo Viejo (EPV) Landmark District Guidelines.** These guidelines clarify the design criteria and procedures for the EPV district.
- **Haley-Milpas Design Manual.** The purpose of these guidelines is to assist developers in the Haley-Milpas area to improve the appearance of their properties, provide a more human-scale and pedestrian environment, and encourage mixed-use.
- **Lower Riviera Special Design District Guidelines.** These guidelines direct development within and adjacent to the Bungalow District to be compatible with the existing architectural character.
- **Upper State Street Area Design Guidelines.** These guidelines describe different neighborhoods and provide guidance for compatibility and landscaping.
- **Urban Design Guidelines.** These apply to the urban grid to ensure that traditional design principles and pedestrian friendly design concepts are incorporated into development.
- **Single Family Residence Design Guidelines.** These guidelines assist the public in designing compatible single unit residential development.
- **Historic Resources Design Guidelines.** For owners of historic resources, these guidelines assist in development of successful alterations, additions, and new construction next to a historic resource.

The City also implements several building and site features guidelines which assist in ensuring development is compatible with the visual character of Santa Barbara, including Fence, Screen, Wall, Hedge Guidelines; and Outdoor Lighting Design Guidelines. These guidelines explain the application of Municipal Code standards for fences, screens, walls, and hedges; and itemize acceptable design standards for outdoor lighting installations throughout the City to avoid excessive glare.

4.1.3 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds

The assessment of potential environmental impacts related to aesthetic and visual resources involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to views and environmental conditions related to aesthetics differently. This evaluation measures the existing visual environment, described above, in comparison to the reasonably foreseeable physical changes that may result from implementation of the Housing Plan programs, analyzing the nature of the anticipated change. As a programmatic document, this Program EIR presents a regionwide assessment of residential growth and does not evaluate development proposals for individual projects.

The City's environmental checklist and Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines* state, except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, that a project may have a significant adverse 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. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public view of the site and its surroundings (Public view are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
4. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect surrounding areas or important public day or nighttime views in the area.

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Threshold 1: Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

Impact AES-1 THE HOUSING PLAN WOULD NOT HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL ADVERSE EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA. COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING MUNICIPAL CODE STANDARDS AND GENERAL PLAN/ COASTAL LAND USE PLAN POLICIES WOULD ENSURE THIS IMPACT WOULD BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT.

The City has designated ridgelines and foothills; ocean, beach, and harbor; and substantial open space areas identified as Important Visual Resources (City of Santa Barbara 2010).

The Housing Plan programs prioritize new residential development in mixed-use zones downtown and along transit corridors, which are typically already developed and not in areas identified as Important Visual Resources. Individual projects would continue to be subject to applicable design guidelines, the Santa Barbara Municipal Code, zoning standards, and applicable General Plan and Coastal LUP policies.

Under Public Resources Code Section 21099, residential development in transit priority areas is not considered a significant visual impact pursuant to CEQA. However, these projects in transit priority areas must still comply with City policies and undergo design review, as Public Resources Code Section 21099 does not alter or limit the ability of the City to enforce local design ordinances. Some residential development enabled by Housing Plan programs may be subject to ministerial and administrative processes such as AB 130 (2025) but would still undergo zoning plan check or design

review per City Council adopted objective standards. Other projects may require discretionary design review. At a minimum, development must generally demonstrate compliance with local zoning requirements. Projects that qualify under the “builder’s remedy” provisions of the Housing Accountability Act would still be subject to project-specific CEQA review if discretionary approval is triggered.

The Housing Plan programs do not propose changes to the height restrictions established in the City’s Charter and Municipal Code Title 28 and Title 30 (City of Santa Barbara 2022b). Although residential development may cause a change in existing views, existing City building height requirements limit the potential for new residential development to substantially obstruct scenic vistas beyond what is permitted by the City. State density bonus projects have the ability to request height waivers; however, any potential impacts from such development is speculative and would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis when an application is submitted to the City.

Figure 2-4 in Section 2, *Environmental Setting*, shows the City’s inland land use map, including residential areas of Santa Barbara characterized as “Hillside” (Low Density Residential, up to three du/ac), portions of which are considered important visual resources. The Housing Plan programs do not change the existing development potential in the “Hillside” areas.

Programs within the Housing Plan would be developed to be consistent with the Coastal LUP and related visual resource policies. New residential development requiring a Coastal Development Permit is required to adhere to Coastal LUP policies to minimize potential impacts to scenic vistas.

- LUP Policy 4.3-6 aims to preserve views of Important Visual Resources by prohibiting new development that would obstruct public scenic view corridors of scenic resources, including those of the ocean viewed from the shoreline and of the upper foothills and mountains viewed respectively from the beach and lower elevations of the City (City of Santa Barbara 2019).
- LUP Policy 4.3-5 requires new development to be sited and designed to avoid impacts to public scenic views, and requires the City to approve project alternatives that would result in the least adverse impact to views if there is no feasible alternative that can avoid impacts to public scenic views (City of Santa Barbara 2019).
- LUP Policy 4.3-8 states that project alternatives, including re-siting or reducing the height or bulk of structures if feasible, is preferred over landscape screening as a means of mitigation (City of Santa Barbara 2019).

Residential development in accordance with implementation of the Housing Plan programs may result in an increase in residential density in some areas of the city, which has the potential to change views. However, individual development projects would be required to be consistent with existing Municipal Code requirements, design review guidelines, and other applicable City regulations that would limit the potential for new residential development to substantially impact views of Important Visual Resources in the city. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Threshold 2: Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

Impact AES-2 THE HOUSING PLAN WOULD NOT SUBSTANTIALLY DAMAGE SCENIC RESOURCES WITHIN A STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY. COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES, MUNICIPAL CODE STANDARDS, AND GENERAL PLAN/ COASTAL LAND USE PLAN POLICIES WOULD ENSURE THIS IMPACT WOULD BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT.

According to the Caltrans California State Scenic Highway System Map, there is one officially designated scenic highway (SR 154) and one eligible scenic highway (U.S. 101) in the City (Caltrans 2018). State Route 154 is only within a small section of the northwest city limits. The Coastal LUP identifies the segment of U.S. 101 within the Coastal Zone (from approximately Olive Mill Road to Bath Street) as providing a distinctive visual gateway to the community (City of Santa Barbara 2019). However, due to existing walls and vegetation lining U.S. 101 and the speed at which vehicles travel on U.S. 101, scenic resources are obscured and only visible for a short, temporary period. The majority of residential development facilitated by the Housing Plan is anticipated to be infill development within urban areas and on previously developed sites, with limited visibility along State Routes.

In addition to City-wide programs and policy restrictions, residential development in the Coastal Zone is required to adhere to Coastal LUP policies to protect scenic resources along the eligible segment of U.S. 101. These policies would be compatible with programs within the Housing Plan.

Development facilitated by Housing Plan implementation would also be required to be consistent with the City of Santa Barbara Tree Preservation Ordinance within Chapter 15.24 of the Municipal Code. Continued implementation of this ordinance would ensure the protection of scenic trees visible from the public right-of-way.

Compliance with applicable Municipal Code requirements, design review guidelines, the General Plan, and the Coastal LUP would ensure that residential development would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Threshold 3: Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public view of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from 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?

Impact AES-3 THE HOUSING PLAN WOULD NOT SUBSTANTIALLY DEGRADE THE EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER OR QUALITY OF PUBLIC VIEWS IN A MANNER THAT WOULD CONFLICT WITH APPLICABLE ZONING AND OTHER REGULATIONS GOVERNING SCENIC QUALITY. COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING MUNICIPAL CODE STANDARDS AND DESIGN REVIEW PROCEDURES WOULD ENSURE THIS IMPACT WOULD BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT.

The City of Santa Barbara is an urbanized area (as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15387, as a city with a population of 50,000 or more). Distinct architectural styles, such as the California Adobe,

Monterey Revival, and Spanish Colonial Revival are central to the city's visual character (City of Santa Barbara 2010).

The Housing Plan programs may result in an increase in residential density compared to existing conditions in some areas, such as the La Cumbre Plaza Planning Area, areas within the Priority Housing Overlay, and transit priority areas. Increased residential density, including development up to the City's zoning and Charter height limits, and massing as compared to the existing setting, may alter the visual character of portions of the city. Implementation of zoning standards, design review guidelines, or applicable General Plan and Coastal LUP policies would minimize or avoid adverse effects.

Under Public Resources Code Section 21099, aesthetic and parking impacts resulting from new developments within a transit priority zone are exempt from being considered significant under CEQA for any project that would be considered a residential development, mixed-use development, or employment center. According to the California Public Resources Code Section 21099(a)(7), a transit priority area means an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop that is existing or planned (refer to Figure 4.1-1). Forecasted development under the Housing Plan would be primarily infill, and residential mixed-use developments would be encouraged in proximity to existing transit and established transit priority areas. If a project is located within a transit priority area, it would continue to be subject to local design review processes and guidelines, as Public Resources Code Section 21099 does not limit the City's authority in this regard.

Residential development that requires discretionary review, would be evaluated for consistency with adopted design guidelines by the Architectural Board of Review (ABR), Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), or Single Family Design Board (SFDB). Together, these boards and commissions evaluate development plans for discretionary projects prior to the issuance of building or grading permits. These boards and commissions also consider and review consistency with the City's design guidelines and criteria; architectural character of the surroundings; appropriate size, mass, bulk, height, and scale; sensitivity to adjacent landmarks and historic resources; public views of the ocean and mountains; and use of open space and landscaping. Their responsibilities include evaluation of exterior color, landscape plans, accessory buildings, and minor zoning changes. This ensures development aligns with the local visual character.

The Housing Plan Program HE-1 would facilitate the conversion of non-residential buildings to residential uses. Development projects enabled by this program would continue to be subject to Municipal Code regulations and would not result in a change to the building height or massing beyond minimal additional development allowed within the current zoning envelope. If exterior alterations are proposed, projects under Program HE-1 would be subject to applicable design guidelines and review by the applicable Board or Commission.

The Housing Plan Program HE-7 supports the development of City-wide ODDS for multi-unit housing development projects. These standards would provide alternatives to discretionary design review processes to accommodate infill development in existing neighborhoods and are intended to apply to all areas of the City that are zoned for two or more units. The ODDS were adopted in February 2025 and include objective standards for building types, massing, form, and architectural style intended to ensure appropriately scaled infill residential and mixed-use development that promotes high quality community design compatible with existing neighborhoods and historic resources. Further, the ODDS include additional massing and height requirements that limit height on portions of corner parcels to preserve public views along street corridors. Projects using the objective design review process, including potential future development in the R-2 zone or downtown buildings, would be limited to ministerial determinations of compliance with the objective standards. Project

applicants who opt-in to using the ODDS would continue to be required to abide by other applicable objective Municipal Code standards.

Housing Plan programs may facilitate an increased amount of mixed-use and multi-unit residential development. Larger, discretionary projects would continue to be subject to design review (City of Santa Barbara 2022c). For these projects, mandatory compliance with existing review procedures, policies, guidelines, and design standards would ensure that reasonably foreseeable development under the Housing Plan would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings, or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. For smaller development projects approved administratively, compliance with the Santa Barbara Municipal Code and zoning standards would ensure that development is generally compatible with the size and scale of the surrounding built environment. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Threshold 4: Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect surrounding areas or important public day or nighttime views in the area?

Impact AES-4 THE HOUSING PLAN WOULD NOT CREATE NEW SOURCES OF SUBSTANTIAL LIGHT OR GLARE WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT SURROUNDING AREAS OR IMPORTANT PUBLIC DAY OR NIGHTTIME VIEWS IN THE AREA. COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING MUNICIPAL CODE STANDARDS AND DESIGN REVIEW PROCEDURES WOULD ENSURE THIS IMPACT WOULD BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT.

Development forecasted in accordance with the Housing Plan programs would primarily occur in urbanized areas with existing sources of light and glare. New sources of light (security lighting, parking lot lighting, ornamental lighting, lighting from ground floor storefronts, and signs) would increase overall lighting levels in areas where residential development is forecasted to occur.

The city is characterized by existing residential, commercial, and other land uses that already generate high ambient levels of nighttime lighting, and any additional sources of lighting from reasonably foreseeable residential development under the Housing Plan would be incremental. Residential development would be required to comply with all applicable provisions of the City's Municipal Code, including Chapter 22.75 which sets outdoor lighting requirements to preserve and enhance the unique qualities of Santa Barbara's residential neighborhoods and its visual environment (City of Santa Barbara 2022b). Section 22.75.030 prohibits specific lighting fixtures that are mounted to aim light toward a property line, mounted to illuminate a roof or awning, mounted in a way that is distracting to motorists, among other restrictions. Section 22.75.050 requires projects subject to design review to be reviewed for consistency with the City's Outdoor Lighting Design Guidelines (City of Santa Barbara 2022b).

Glare is a common occurrence in the city, primarily due to the high number of days per year with direct sunlight and the highly urbanized nature of the city. Daytime glare can result from sunlight reflecting off glass, other structural fixtures of buildings, and windshields of parked and moving vehicles within the roadways in the city. Development forecasted in accordance with the Housing Plan would be required to comply with Section 30.180.070 of the Municipal Code, which states that no use shall be operated such that significant, direct glare, incidental to the operation of the use is visible beyond the boundaries of the lot where the use is located. Title 30 and Title 22 states that

any project involving exterior lighting with apparent potential to create significant glare on neighboring parcels is required to undergo a noticed design review hearing (City of Santa Barbara 2022b). Section 22.75.060 sets standards to control nuisance lighting and glare in and adjacent to residential zones through enforcement measures applied by the Community Development Department. Such measures could include the preparation and implementation of a professional lighting plan, and control through the use of vegetation, or use of appropriate shielding.

The ODDS (Program HE-7) includes standards to reduce light pollution, glare, and light trespass including requirements that all exterior lighting shall be designed, located, and lamped with the light directed downward and that glass guardrails for rooftop decks be treated to reduce glare.

Exterior lighting installed for residential development would be regulated by the energy efficiency standards of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations which includes, but is not limited to, installation of automatic shutoff lights. Reasonably foreseeable development under implementation of the Housing Plan programs would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect surrounding areas or important public day or nighttime views in the area. Therefore, potential light and glare impacts would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

4.1.4 Cumulative Impacts

Regional cumulative impacts consider the city-wide impacts together with similar impacts of reasonably anticipated regional projects/programs including the City's Safety Element Update, Open Space Element Update, the City's State Street Master Plan, and the California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans') South Coast Highway 101 High-Occupancy Vehicle Lanes project. Cumulative projects also include planned and pending residential development projects that contribute to the City's RNHA. The general approach to cumulative impact analysis used in this Program EIR is discussed in Section 4, *Environmental Impact Analysis*.

Cumulative development would contribute to the gradual change in the City's urban character, incrementally contributing to regional urbanization and altering the aesthetic character of the City. While additional development within the City may result in new structures with increased height, massing and density, cumulative impacts would be minimized through existing zoning and height restrictions, design guidelines and design review processes overseen by HLC, ABR, and SFDB, and ODDS for applicable multi-unit developments. These local regulations are in place to ensure infill development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Forecasted growth in the Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta and in the County encourage infill development, prioritizing new medium- and high-density housing near existing transportation corridors. Given the predominantly developed nature of the region, extensive protected open space in and around the city, and existing zoning standards to ensure appropriate siting, massing, and building envelope for structures, visual changes from increased residential development would not result in sprawling land development patterns. Consequently, the potential to substantially degrade the existing visual character or scenic quality of the city would not result in a cumulatively significant impact.

Ongoing new multi-unit and mixed-use residential development would have the potential to alter views. However, existing development review procedures in compliance with the Municipal Code, design review requirements, and the ODDS (Program HE-7) would substantially reduce potential

impacts to scenic views from reasonably foreseeable residential development forecasted in accordance with the Housing Plan. As a result, the Housing Plan programs would not result in a cumulatively considerable impact to regionally important views or vistas.

Residential development forecasted in accordance with implementation of the Housing Plan programs would introduce new sources of light and glare that would contribute to a cumulative increase in sources of light and glare. However, new sources of light and glare would be introduced primarily within urbanized areas where sources of light and glare exist, thereby minimizing the introduction of sources of light and glare that could affect day or nighttime views. The City's Municipal Code sets standards to control nuisance lighting and glare in and adjacent to residential zones. Reasonably foreseeable future residential development would be required to comply with all applicable State and local regulations concerning the protection of visual resources and minimization of light and glare generating sources. Consequently, the potential to create a new source of substantial light or glare in the city which would adversely affect surrounding areas or important public day or nighttime views would not result in a cumulatively significant impact.

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