



Section 5.3:

# Aesthetics



## 5.3 AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE

This section evaluates the City's and the Sphere of Influence's visual quality and assesses the potential for visual impacts associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035. Because of its inherent subjectivity, difficulties arise in the evaluation of visual quality and the degree of impact that may result from visual change. Additionally, there are limited objectives or quantitative standards to analyze visual quality and individuals respond differently to changes in the visual environment. What may be considered an adverse visual condition to one person may represent an improved visual condition to another.

### 5.3.1 REGULATORY SETTING

#### CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAYS AND HISTORIC PARKWAYS PROGRAM

The California Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program was created in 1963 to preserve and protect highway corridors located in areas of outstanding natural beauty from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the adjacent lands. The State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) maintains its State Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program, through which segments of the State highway system are designated as being of particular scenic value or interest. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. Interstates, state highways, byways, and parkways are eligible for designation or for recognition as eligible for designation. The Program is governed by the regulations found in the *California Streets and Highways Code*, Section 260 et seq.

*California Streets and Highway Code* Section 261 requires local government agencies to take the following actions to protect the scenic appearance of the scenic corridor:

- Regulate land use and density of development;
- Provide detailed land and site planning;
- Prohibit offsite outdoor advertising and control of on-site outdoor advertising;
- Pay careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and,
- Scrutinize the design and appearance of structures and equipment.

*California Streets and Highway Code* Section 263 allows the California State Legislature the authority to identify highways as eligible for designation as a scenic highway. The government with jurisdiction over land abutting a highway considered to be scenic is required to adopt a



“scenic corridor protection program” that restricts development, outdoor advertising, and earthmoving activities along the affected segment or corridor (“Corridor Protection Program”). Caltrans must also indicate that the highway segment meets established criteria in order for the roadway or segment to be designated as scenic.

There are presently no officially designated State Scenic Highways that traverse Murrieta.<sup>1</sup> However, Interstate 15 (I-15), which traverses the southwestern portion of Murrieta, is an “Eligible State Scenic Highway.” The status of a proposed State scenic highway can change from Eligible to Officially Designated when the local governing body applies to Caltrans for scenic highway approval, adopts a Corridor Protection Program, and receives notification that the highway has been officially designated a Scenic Highway.

## COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE GENERAL PLAN

Foothills and mountainous areas are visible from many locations within the County of Riverside (County) and create a varied visual background within many local communities, including Murrieta. The *County of Riverside General Plan (CRGP)* acknowledges that hillside development requires careful siting, grading, and/or design measures to maintain and enhance the scenic quality of the County’s aesthetic resources. The *CRGP* identifies the importance of the County’s natural visual resources, including low-lying valleys, mountain ranges, rock formations, rivers, and lakes, and acknowledges that views of these features are frequently experienced by travelers along the County’s roadways. The *CRGP* more specifically addresses the regulation of scenic corridors within the Circulation, Land Use, and Multipurpose Open Space Elements.

The *CRGP* Circulation Element officially recognizes several County roadways as either Eligible or Designated State or County Scenic Highways. Figure C-9 (Riverside County Scenic Highways) of the Circulation Element depicts the locations of these recognized roadways. As depicted in Figure C-9, I-15 is recognized as an Eligible State Scenic Highway and Interstate 215 (I-215) is recognized as an Eligible County Scenic Highway. The *CRGP* establishes policies to conserve the County’s significant scenic resources along designated scenic highways for the long-term and to guide future development along these roadways to avoid disruption of or detract from the existing scenic quality. It is the County’s policy to preserve scenic routes that have exceptional or unique visual features in accordance with Caltrans’ Scenic Highways Plan (Circulation Element Policy C 19.1).

The *CRGP* Land Use Element includes goals, objectives, and policies aimed at hillside protection to ensure that the design and appearance of proposed landscaping, structures, equipment, signage, and grading are compatible with the surrounding visual setting, and to provide long-term protection of the County’s hillsides as an important aesthetic resource. The Element identifies various policies, in order to conserve significant scenic resources along

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<sup>1</sup> State of California Department of Transportation, *California Scenic Highway Mapping System Website*, [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic\\_highways/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm), December 20, 2010.



designated scenic highways for future generations and to manage development along scenic highways and corridors so as not to detract from the area's scenic quality.

## CITY OF MURRIETA GENERAL PLAN

Murrieta's current General Plan was adopted in June 1994. The Murrieta General Plan includes goals, objectives, and policies intended to protect significant scenic resources and reinforce the importance of maintaining such resources that contribute to the unique visual and historic character of the Planning Area and surrounding environment, as future development occurs.

Regarding scenic corridors, the Conservation and Open Space Element recognizes that I-15 is an Eligible State Scenic Highway and that the City would need to process a submittal through CalTrans for finalization of the Official Scenic Highway Designation. The Element recognizes that I-215 is depicted in Figure C-9 of the County Circulation Element as an Eligible County Scenic Highway; refer to County of Riverside General Plan section above. The City would need to process a submittal through the County for finalization of the Official County Scenic Highway Designation. Additionally, the current Conservation and Open Space Element recognizes that a number of roads exist within the area which, possess individual qualities or historical significance. To this end, the Conservation and Open Space Element recommended that a focused study be conducted, in order to recognize the roads and develop conservation programs to preserve their character. The historic value of Los Alamos Road was recognized by the Murrieta City Council on July 16, 1991. In March 1992, the Riverside County Historical Commission recommended that a four-mile segment of Los Alamos Road (between Via Santee and Winchester Road) be designated as a County Historic Route. However, Los Alamos Road was removed from the City of Murrieta Circulation Plan in 2006. There is no record that the designation was made by the Historical Commission.

## CITY OF MURRIETA DEVELOPMENT CODE

While the General Plan provides long-range and broad categories of land use, *Title 16* of the *Murrieta Municipal Code, Development Code (MDC)*, provides specific development standards that influence the City's scenic vistas and visual character, and restrict lighting. The *MDC* implements the broad Murrieta General Plan goals and policies by classifying and regulating the specific uses of land and structures within the City. Among its many objectives, the *MDC* is intended to:

- A. Implement the goals, objectives, policies and programs of the Murrieta General Plan, and to manage future growth and development in compliance with that plan;
- B. Provide standards for the orderly growth and development of the City that will maintain the community's rural/nonurban characteristics in appropriate locations;



- C. Require high quality planning and design for development, that enhances the visual character of the City, avoids conflicts between land uses, and preserves the scenic qualities of the City;
- D. Conserve and protect the natural resources of the City, its natural beauty and significant environmental amenities;

## **Scenic Vistas and Visual Character**

The following *MDC* chapters or sections provide regulations and standards influencing the City’s scenic vistas and visual character.

### **MDC Chapter 16.08, *Residential Districts***

This chapter provides regulations applicable to development and new land uses in the residential zoning districts, including MDC Section 16.08.020, *Residential Districts General Development Standards*, Section 16.08.030, *Single-family Residential Design Standards and Parameters*, and Section 16.08.040, *Multi-family Residential Design Standards*.

### **MDC Chapter 16.10, *Commercial Districts***

This chapter provides regulations applicable to development and new land uses in the commercial zoning districts, including MDC Section 16.10.020, *Commercial District General Development Standards*, and Section 16.10.030, *Commercial Districts Design Standards*.

### **MDC Chapter 16.12, *Industrial Districts***

This chapter provides regulations applicable to development and new land uses in the Business Park and Industrial Districts, including MDC Section 16.12.020, *Industrial Districts General Development Standards*, and Section 16.12.030, *Industrial Zoning Districts Design Standards*.

### **MDC Chapter 16.14, *Special Purpose Districts***

This chapter provides regulations applicable to development and new land uses in the special purpose zoning districts, including C/I (Civic/Institutional) District, P&R (Parks and Recreation) District, PR (Private Recreation) District, OS (Open Space) District, and SP (Specific Plan) District.

### **MDC Chapter 16.16, *Combining and Overlay Districts***

This Chapter provides guidance for development and new land uses in addition to the standards and regulations of the primary zoning district, where important area, neighborhood, or site characteristics require particular attention in project planning.



**MDC Section 16.16.10.C.1, LAD (*Los Alamos District*) Overlay District.** The LAD overlay is applied to the historic district east of 1-215 and south of Los Alamos Road, including the right-of-way, to preserve the historic rural character of the neighborhood, in terms of architectural, landscape, and roadway design.

**MDC Section 16.16.10.C.2, MPO (*Master Plan*) Overlay District.** The MPO designation is applied to appropriate parcels with unique characteristics or circumstances that require additional development review. The MPO district is subject to the density of the base zoning district and provides for clustering of residential dwelling units (DU) within projects in compliance with the master development plan process. Certain projects in a MPO may require the preparation of a Specific Plan when the project site is of sufficient size to effectively utilize density transfers to protect and preserve significant open space areas, among other conditions.

**MDC Section 16.16.10.C.3, SHO (*Scenic Highway*) Overlay District.** The SHO designation is applied to the 1-15 and 1-215 corridors, as defined in the Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation, to provide protection for scenic qualities of historic significance with appropriate conservation plans.

### **MDC Chapter 16.18, *General Property Development and Use Standards***

The purpose of this chapter is to ensure that all development produces an environment of stable and desirable character that is harmonious with existing and future development, and protects the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties, consistent with the General Plan. The standards specified in this section that influence the visual character of a development site address the following issues, among others:

- Access;
- Equestrian and Agriculture Preservation;
- Hazardous Materials Storage;
- Height Measurement and Height Limit Exceptions;
- Lighting (refer to the *Lighting* section below);
- Mount Palomar Lighting Standards (refer to the *Lighting* section below);
- Screening and Buffering;
- Separation and Privacy Standards for Residential Structures;
- Setback Regulations and Exceptions;
- Solid Waste/Recyclable Materials Storage;
- Street Design and Improvements; and
- Undergrounding of Utilities.



### MDC Chapter 16.24, *Hillside Development*

This Chapter provides regulations for the development of areas in the City that, because of their topography, require special consideration to ensure that they are developed in a way that substantially maintains their natural character and environmental and aesthetic values to implement the General Plan, among other factors, by:

- Providing guidelines and standards for development in visually sensitive hillside areas to minimize the adverse impacts of grading and to promote the goals and objectives of the General Plan;
- Maintaining an environmental equilibrium consistent with existing vegetation, wildlife, soils, geology, slopes, and drainage patterns, and to preserve natural topography and scenic character, including canyons, creeks, knolls, rock outcrops, and ridgelines whenever feasible;
- Encouraging sensitive development through flexible design and innovative arrangement of building sites by utilizing variable lot sizes, clustering, and setback variations;
- Encouraging developments that incorporate desirable existing features of land (e.g., natural vegetation, viewsheds, topographic features); and
- Providing for appropriate intensity of development (e.g., density, massing, etc.) in hillside areas through a variety of design techniques to ensure that development intensity decreases as slopes become steeper (e.g., lot sizes appropriate for steeper topography and separation of structures sufficient to preserve the viewshed).

This Chapter also provides measures for the long-term protection of existing natural topography and scenic character whenever feasible through the regulation of grading activities, intensity, and density of development proposed, structural massing, building height, and other characteristics, in order to minimize potential impacts on the existing viewshed.

**MDC Section 16.24.030, *Definitions.*** This Section defines prominent ridges as a ridge or hill location that is visible from I-15, I-215, or from an arterial or secondary street, that forms part of the skyline or is seen as a distinct edge against a backdrop of land.

**MDC Section 16.24.060, *Hillside Development Standards.*** This Section specifies the minimum standards that would apply to a use, development, or alteration of land in compliance with MDC Section 16.24.020, *Applicability.*

**MDC Section 16.24.070, *Hillside Development Guidelines.*** This Section specifies the guidelines that are intended to illustrate and amplify the appropriate development concepts for hillside areas. The guidelines are intended to be policy statements to encourage development that is sensitive to the unique characteristics common to hillside properties.



## MDC Chapter 16.26, *Cultural Resource Preservation*

This Chapter is intended to establish a mechanism by which community resources such as buildings, structures, and sites within Murrieta, which are of pre-historic and historic interest or value, or which exhibit special elements of the City's architectural, cultural, or social heritage, are identified, protected, enhanced, perpetuated, and used in the interest of the public's health, safety, welfare, and enrichment. This Chapter is also intended to implement the provisions of the General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element.

## Lighting

The following *MDC* sections regulate lighting within the City.

### MDC Section 16.18.100, *Lighting*

Pursuant to this Section, exterior lighting shall be:

1. Architecturally integrated with the character of adjacent structure(s);
2. Directed downward and shielded so that glare is confined within the boundaries of the subject parcel;
3. Installed so that lights not blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness.
4. Appropriate in height, intensity, and scale to the uses they are serving. Outside and parking lot lighting shall not exceed 0.3 footcandles at residential property lines.

As specified in MDC Section 16.18.100.C, *Shielded Lighting*, light sources shall be shielded to direct light rays onto the subject parcel only. The light source, whether bulb or tube, shall not be visible from an adjacent property. This section does not apply to residential uses, sign illumination, traffic safety lighting, or public street lighting.

### MDC Section 16.18.110, *Mount Palomar Lighting Standards*

The purpose of this Section is to restrict the use of certain light fixtures emitting into the night sky undesirable light rays that have a detrimental effect on astronomical observation and research. The Dark Sky Zone is defined as the circular area 30 miles in radius centered on the Palomar Observatory. The Ordinance establishes general requirements that apply within the Dark Sky Zone pertaining to the preferred source, shielding, hours of operation, and outdoor advertising display. The Ordinance also identifies three classes of lighting (Class I, II, III) and requirement for each lamp source and shielding of light emissions for outdoor light fixtures.



**MDC Section 16.34.070.I, *Development Standards for Off-Street Parking [Lighting]***

Parking areas shall have lighting capable of providing adequate illumination for security and safety. Lighting standards shall be energy-efficient and in scale with the height and use of the on-site structure(s). All illumination, including security lighting, shall be directed downward, away from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way in compliance with Section 16.18.100 (Lighting).

**HISTORIC MURRIETA SPECIFIC PLAN**

The Historic Murrieta Specific Plan, October 2000, provides a framework for the future enhancement and preservation of Historic Downtown Murrieta. The Specific Plan Area is bounded by Jefferson Avenue to the north; Ivy Street to the east; Hayes Avenue to the south; and, Kalmia Street to the west. The Specific Plan sets forth guidelines for design of appropriate development including architectural characteristics, site planning, parking, landscaping, and signage. The Specific Plan also identifies several gateways to Historic Murrieta of visual prominence, including Kalmia Street and Ivy Street, as well as Washington Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. A number of improvements are planned or have been made in recent years within Historic Downtown Murrieta. These improvements include design elements to enhance the overall historic theme and character, infrastructure and street improvements, recreational resources (i.e., parks), and improvements to various City facilities.

**5.3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

**VIEWSHEDS AND SCENIC VISTAS**

A viewshed is generally defined as an area that can be seen from a given vantage point and viewing direction. A viewshed is composed of foreground items (items closer to the viewer) that are seen in detail and background items (items at some distance from the viewer) that frame the view.

A scenic vista is generally defined as a view of undisturbed natural lands exhibiting a unique or unusual feature that comprises an important or dominant portion of the viewshed. Scenic vistas may also be represented by a particular distant view that provides visual relief from less attractive views of nearby features. Other designated Federal and State lands, as well as local open space or recreational areas, may also offer scenic vistas if they represent a valued aesthetic view within the surrounding landscape.

Natural visual resources, including mountain ranges, hillsides, low-lying valley, and streams, exist both within and surrounding the Planning Area. These features are frequently experienced from various locations within the City and by travelers along I-15, I-215, and area roadways.



## Distant Vistas

The City and the Sphere of Influence are located in the southern portion of the northwest trending Temecula/Murrieta Valley, which is formed by the Elsinore Fault Zone, a series of parallel faults. Mountain ranges and rolling hillsides surround the Planning Area. The Santa Ana Mountains (and Santa Rosa Plateau) located immediately to the west of the City are the most dominant and significant visual features contributing to the area's visual quality. Other mountain ranges offering distant vistas from within the City include the San Jacinto Mountains to the east, and the Santa Margarita and Agua Tibia ranges to the south.

## City Vistas

The City and the Sphere of Influence are surrounded by three foothill ranges: the Sedco Hills to the north; the Tocalota Hills (Bachelor Mountain) to the east; and the east wall of the Santa Ana Mountains' Santa Rosa Plateau to the west. Elevations within the City and the Sphere of Influence range from approximately 1,030 above mean sea level (amsl) feet in the Murrieta Valley to approximately 2,120 feet amsl in the rolling hillsides (Antelope Hills) north of the valley. The City is built on a series of plateaus, each raising the land elevation by approximately 100 feet beginning at Murrieta Creek, stepping up I-15, again at Murrieta Hot Springs Road, and finally at the Hogbacks. The Hogbacks are a prominent ridgeline that traverses the eastern portion of the City (generally east of I-215, south of Los Alamos Road, and north of Murrieta Hot Springs Road). The remaining native vegetation, which contributes to the City vistas, is concentrated in the foothills and canyons in the extreme western portion of the City, along the slopes and base of the Hogbacks, and along the northeastern hillsides. Overall, Murrieta's natural setting offers a variety of scenic views and vistas.

Extensive vistas of the Murrieta Valley to the southeast and north are afforded from the highlands in the northern portion of the City. The Hogbacks in the eastern portion of the City support areas of relatively undisturbed natural vegetation along the western slope. The Hogbacks represent a prominent visual feature within the Murrieta landscape and can be seen from many vantage points within the City and the Sphere of Influence.

Views to the Santa Rosa Plateau are afforded along Interstate I-15 and I-215, as well as from lands located to the west of the Hogbacks. Views from these locations also include the largely undisturbed ridgelines that extend to the north and south of the Plateau, combined with hillside areas supporting chaparral habitat. Oak woodland habitat and a variety of canyons are also present along the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains contributing to the distant views.

The area in the northern portion of the City (west of I-215) includes undeveloped hillsides, canyons, drainages, and oak woodlands. This area is highly visible from I-215 and the areas to the north and south, making it a valuable scenic resource.



The area to the west/southwest of Washington Avenue and Hayes Avenue is largely built out; however, views of rolling hillsides, undeveloped lands, and tree groves are visible, with mountains providing a backdrop. The western portion of the City also supports views of hillsides, canyons, and ridgelines, adding to the scenic quality.

## **VISUAL CHARACTER**

The City's present form (i.e., development patterns) has been influenced by its transportation infrastructure and system. Additionally, the natural and manmade elements contribute to its visual character and quality. These aesthetic elements include the native vegetation present throughout the scenic hillsides and along stream corridors, stands of large trees, historic areas, and rural residential neighborhoods.

## **DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS**

Two freeways, I-15 and I-215, bisect the City contributing to its formation and present day character. The City's most diverse area is located east of I-15. The roadway pattern located west of I-15 and including and south of Historic Downtown Murrieta, is reflective of a standard land plotting grid system of arterial streets. North of Historic Downtown Murrieta, the pattern of arterials, collectors, and local roadways is predominantly curvilinear, reflective of more contemporary developments. The area west of I-15 is characterized as having the City's oldest settlement patterns and most of the historic resources. In addition to the historic resources, a major watercourse (i.e., Murrieta Creek), rural and single-family residential tracts, small and large retail uses, multi-family housing and the majority of the City's industrial uses are located in this area.

The area between I-15 and I-215 represents the urban core of the City. In this area, the predominant pattern of roadways is also curvilinear, reflective of more contemporary developments. In addition to multiple rural and single-family residential tracts, this area contains the California Oaks Road commercial corridor and Specific Plan 276, which is approved for a major regional commercial center and entertainment facility. In the northern extent of this area, west of I-215, Greer Ranch encompasses approximately 555 acres and is characterized by two valleys created by three northeast-southwest trending ridgelines. Approximately 35 percent of this residential development involves open space, predominately comprised of natural areas. In the northeastern portion of this area, adjacent to I-215, Murrieta Oaks encompasses approximately 260 acres and includes significant natural features, such as the ridgeline, steep hillside areas, and drainage courses. Approximately 40 percent of this residential development involves open space.

East of I-215, the roadway pattern is predominantly rural, except for the southern portion that involves more contemporary developments. This area consists of single-family tract developments, large lot estates, and open lands including a major watercourse (i.e., Warm Springs Creek). This area also includes a major portion of the Los Alamos Road corridor, which



is characteristic of Murrieta’s historically rural lifestyle. The majority of residential tract housing in this area is located south of Los Alamos Road, west of Warm Springs Creek, and north of Murrieta Hot Springs Road. In the northern extent of this area, east of I-215, the Murrieta Highlands encompasses approximately 419 acres. Approximately six percent of this residential/commercial development involves open space. In the southern extent, east of I-215, Creekside Village encompasses approximately 145 acres. Approximately 13 percent of this residential development involves Warm Springs Creek and related vegetation open space.

## **NATURAL ELEMENTS**

The City of Murrieta lies within the southern portion of the Murrieta Valley. Rolling hillsides and steep mountain slopes form part of the setting and influence the area’s visual character. Approximately 32 percent (approximately 8,374 acres) of the approximately 26,852-acre City and Sphere of Influence area contains natural vegetation, including annual grassland, chaparral, coastal oak woodland, coastal scrub, riparian, and wetlands, among others. The more concentrated areas of native vegetation contributing to the area’s visual character occur in the foothills and canyons in the extreme western portion of the City, along the slopes and base of the Hogbacks, which includes the Los Alamos Hills area, and along the northeastern hillsides.

Murrieta and Warm Springs Creeks course the City further contributing to the area’s scenic value. Murrieta Creek forms the western boundary of the historic core of Downtown Murrieta and includes areas of established riparian vegetation. In addition, Warm Springs Creek flows through the eastern portion of the City and supports a natural environment of high scenic value. Other unique features include numerous freshwater springs and one active geothermal vent (Murrieta Hot Springs).

## **MANMADE ELEMENTS**

The following discussion provides a general overview of the City’s existing visual character, in the context of manmade elements.

### **Agriculture**

Agricultural activities have historically influenced the City’s visual character. Approximately 5,662 acres of agricultural land use (i.e., cropland, orchard, or vineyard) exists in the City and the Sphere of Influence. As the City continues to be developed, and lands are converted from agricultural uses to non-agricultural uses, areas that once supported extensive croplands have been significantly reduced and replaced by urban land uses and ornamental landscaping. Many lands that formerly supported agricultural activities presently lay fallow, and vegetative succession of pasture land and cropland back to some form of scrubland is evident in some areas.



## Buildings and Structures

Approximately 64 percent of the City is developed. Single-family residential uses represent approximately 30 percent of the City, while less than six percent is developed with commercial, commercial office, industrial, and public/institutional uses; refer to [Table 3-2, Existing Land Use Summary](#).

## Historic Resources and Landmarks

In the older portions of the City, a number of historic structures and landmarks are present, contributing to the City's visual character. The City's most historically significant areas generally occur along Washington Avenue, west of I-15, and Los Alamos Road, east of I-215. Refer to [Section 5.9, Cultural Resources](#), for a more detailed description of historic resources.

The Historic Murrieta Specific Plan Area is bounded by Jefferson Avenue to the north; Ivy Street to the east; Hayes Avenue to the south; and Kalmia Street to the west. The Specific Plan Area includes several gateways to Historic Murrieta of visual prominence, including Kalmia Street and Ivy Street, as well as Washington Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. Other elements contributing to the historic character of the area include a variety of large, mature trees, particularly along Washington Avenue.

## FOCUS AREAS

The General Plan 2035 identifies five areas targeted for land use change; which are shown on [Exhibit 3-3, General Plan 2035 Focus Areas](#), and two areas for policy change. The five areas targeted for land use change include key locations along freeway corridors that are suitable for major land development and redevelopment, and rural residential areas north of Clinton Keith Road. Accordingly, the following is a general overview of the Focus Areas' existing visual character, which is provided in order to establish the baseline conditions.

- **North Murrieta Business Corridor Focus Area:** This area is generally characterized as rural residential, including vacant, underutilized, or rural residential properties.
- **Clinton Keith/Mitchell Focus Area:** This area can be generally characterized as rural residential, given the presence of large-lot single-family homes. The presence of retail uses, including a regional commercial shopping center, also contributes to the area's character.
- **Golden Triangle North (Central Murrieta) Focus Area:** This area is characterized as mixed. Portions of this area have been developed with single-family homes or small businesses; however, the remainder is vacant. This area also includes the Crossroads Corporate Center and Rancho Springs Medical Center.



- ***South Murrieta Business Corridor Focus Area:*** The area's character is predominantly developed with business park and industrial uses; however, single-family homes are scattered throughout the area. Vacant or underutilized properties are present in this area.
- ***Multiple Use 3 (MU-3) Focus Area:*** This area is mostly developed and characterized as urban. Although, this area contains both commercial and multi-family uses, it is not characterized as a traditional mixed-use area. The individual parcels contain either 100 percent commercial or 100 percent multi-family uses. Additionally, this area contains vacant, single-family residential and underdeveloped properties.
- ***Historic Murrieta Specific Plan Focus Area:*** This area is characterized as the City's historic core, containing predominantly residential land uses. A mixture of historic commercial and residential buildings is present.
- ***Los Alamos Hills Focus Area:*** This area is characterized as rural residential, including various natural resources.

## Light/Glare

Lighting affects are associated with the use of artificial light during the evening and nighttime hours. There are two primary sources of light: light emanating from building interiors passing through windows and light from exterior sources (i.e. street lighting, building illumination, security lighting, parking lot lighting, and landscape lighting). Light introduction can be a nuisance to adjacent residential areas, diminish the view of the clear night sky, and if uncontrolled, can cause disturbances. Uses such as residences and hotels are considered light sensitive since occupants have expectations of privacy during evening hours and may be subject to disturbance by bright light sources. Light spill is typically defined as the presence of unwanted light on properties adjacent to the property being illuminated. With respect to lighting, the degree of illumination may vary widely depending on the amount of light generated, height of the light sources, presence of barriers or obstructions, type of light source, and weather conditions.

Glare is primarily a daytime occurrence caused by the reflection of sunlight or artificial light by highly polished surfaces such as window glass or reflective materials and, to a lesser degree, from broad expanses of light-colored surfaces. Perceived glare is the unwanted and potentially objectionable sensation as observed by a person as they look directly into the light sources of a luminaire. Daytime glare generation is common in urban areas and is typically associated with buildings with exterior facades largely or entirely comprised of highly reflective glass. Glare can also be produced during evening and nighttime hours by the reflection of artificial light sources such as automobile headlights. Glare-sensitive uses include residences, hotels, transportation corridors, and aircraft landing corridors.



Sensitive light and glare receptors in and around the City and the Sphere of Influence are generally represented by residential uses, natural wildlife habitat areas and wildlife corridors, and open space lands adjacent to existing or planned development. In addition, the Mount Palomar Observatory, located approximately 25 miles to the southeast of the City, represents a sensitive receptor, the operation and viewing capabilities of which are highly sensitive to light generated within the surrounding region.

Within the City of Murrieta, existing light sources generally include buildings, recreational facilities (i.e. sports fields), and lighting along roadways and parking lots. Interior light emanating from a structure; exterior light sources (i.e. security lighting); or, lighting to illuminate features for safety or decorative purposes may be visible within the existing landscape. Similar light sources are located within the Sphere of Influence, but to a lesser extent.

Sunlight reflecting off of a reflective surface can result in glare effects and unsafe visual conditions that may interfere with the vision of motorists operating vehicles in the proximity or that may otherwise generally degrade scenic views. Few structures within the City and the Sphere of Influence presently exhibit highly reflective materials (i.e. high rise buildings with extensive glazing), and therefore, potential glare effects are not considered to be of major concern.

### **5.3.3 SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD CRITERIA**

The issues presented in the Initial Study Environmental Checklist (Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*) have been utilized as thresholds of significance in this Section. Accordingly, aesthetics and light and glare impacts resulting from the implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 may be considered significant if they would result in the following:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- Create new sources of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Based on these significance thresholds and criteria, the proposed General Plan 2035's effects have been categorized as either "no impact," a "less than significant impact," or a "potentially significant impact." Mitigation measures are recommended for potentially significant impacts. If a potentially significant impact cannot be reduced to a less than significant level through the application of mitigation, it is categorized as a significant unavoidable impact.



## 5.3.4 PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### SCENIC VISTAS

#### ■ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA.

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** Murrieta's natural setting offers a number of vistas of scenic value, both within the City and toward distant locations. Mountain ranges and foothills are visible from many locations within the City, creating a varied visual background.

As discussed in detail in Section 3.0, Project Description, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 could potentially result in the development of approximately 10,734 additional dwelling units and approximately 36.2 million additional square feet of non-residential uses. This potential future development is anticipated to occur on both vacant and underutilized land throughout the City.

#### Distant Vistas

Given that Murrieta is surrounded by rolling hillsides and steep mountain slopes, distant vistas of surrounding significant visual features are afforded from within the City. Namely, the San Jacinto Mountains are visible to the east, the Santa Ana Mountains (and Santa Rosa Plateau) immediately to the west, and the Santa Margarita and Agua Tibia ranges to the south. It is not anticipated that implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would significantly impair distant views of these mountain ranges or hillsides given their distance from the City and the intervening topography and structures. Notwithstanding, due to the conceptual nature of the future development, proposals would require individual assessments of potential project-specific impacts. Therefore, future development according to the proposed General Plan 2035 is not anticipated to significantly impact distant scenic vistas.

#### City Vistas

Significant vistas are afforded toward three primary hillside areas within the City: in the foothills and canyons in the extreme western portion; in the eastern portion on and around the Hogbacks; and along the northeastern hillsides. As discussed in detail in Section 3.0, Project Description, the proposed General Plan 2035 has taken a focused development strategy that would be implemented through seven Focus Areas, with individualized approaches for each area. None of the Focus Areas would involve development within the City's three primary hillside areas. Therefore, future development within the proposed Focus Areas would not adversely impact the City vistas. Development is, however, anticipated elsewhere in the City consistent with the proposed General Plan 2035 Land Use Policy Map.



Approximately 36 percent of the City (approximately 7,750 acres) is currently vacant. Implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 could adversely impact the City vistas if future development within these vacant areas results in major alterations in topography or is not sufficiently integrated with the surrounding hillside environment. However, according to the proposed General Plan 2035 Land Use Element, it is the City’s goal (Goal LU-1) to provide a complementary balance of land uses throughout the community that meets the needs of existing residents and businesses as well as anticipated growth, and achieves the community’s vision. To this end, the City would provide for the development of complementary land uses, such as open space, for all future residential and non-residential development (Policy LU-1.4). Accordingly, the proposed General Plan 2035 includes the Parks and Open Space Land Use Designation, which is intended to provide for the preservation of natural open spaces and maintain natural and scenic resources, among other objectives. Approximately 3,221 acres are designated Parks and Open Space, representing approximately 18 percent of the City; refer to *Table 3-16, General Plan 2035 Land Use Distribution*, in the Land Use Element. The Parks and Open Space designation includes lands that would remain undeveloped within the City’s Planning Area. The Parks and Open Space designation is consistent with the MDC OS (Open Space) District, which is applied to appropriate areas, in order to ensure the conservation and protection of natural resources, including open space areas and steep slopes of 50 percent or more.

Additionally, pursuant to MDC Section 16.16.10.C.2, *MPO (Master Plan) Overlay District*, the MPO is applied to appropriate parcels with unique characteristics or circumstances that require additional development review. Certain projects in a MPO would require the preparation of a Specific Plan when the project site is of sufficient size to effectively utilize density transfers to protect and preserve significant open space areas. Finally, in response to its desire to preserve ridgelines and steep hillside areas for aesthetic reasons (among others), the City has also adopted MDC Chapter 16.24, *Hillside Development*. This Chapter regulates development in areas that because of their topography require special consideration to ensure that they are developed in a way that substantially maintains their natural character and aesthetic values. This Chapter also provides measures for the long-term protection of existing natural topography and scenic values whenever feasible through the regulation of grading activities, intensity/density of proposed development, structural massing, building height, and other characteristics, in order to minimize potential impacts on the existing viewshed. Hillside development standards and guidelines are established for development in the visually sensitive hillside areas, in order to minimize the adverse impacts of grading and promote the General Plan goals and policies.

Additionally, the proposed General Plan 2035 Conservation Element and Parks and Open Space Element have established goals to preserve open space. Namely, it is the City’s goal (Goal CSV-5) to protect hills and ridges for their environmental and aesthetic values. It is also the City’s goal (Goal ROS-7) to plan open space areas to protect, conserve, and utilize resources of unique character and value for the community. All future development would be subject to compliance with the policies outlined below, in furtherance of these City goals.



In general, future development under the proposed General Plan 2035 would be subject to compliance with the regulations, guidelines, and development review process set forth in the MDC, as well as the proposed General Plan 2035 goals and policies. These regulations and guidelines are intended to diminish conflicts between urban development and visual resources, and preserve hills and ridges. Where permitted, development on hillsides within the City would involve careful siting, grading, and design in order to minimize exposure and preserve the City's vistas. Additionally, due to the conceptual nature of the future development, proposals would require individual assessments of potential project-specific impacts to scenic vistas. If necessary, mitigation would be recommended to reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level. Therefore, future development according to the proposed General Plan 2035 is not anticipated to significantly impact the City's scenic vistas; thus impacts are considered less than significant in this regard.

## Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:

### LAND USE ELEMENT

**Goal LU-1** A complementary balance of land uses throughout the community that meets the needs of existing residents and businesses as well as anticipated growth, and achieves the community's vision.

#### Policies

LU-1.4 Provide for the development of complementary land uses, such as open space, recreation, civic, and service uses for all future residential and non-residential development.

### CONSERVATION ELEMENT

**Goal CSV-5** Hills and ridges are protected for their environmental and aesthetic values.

#### Policies

CSV-5.1 Promote compliance with hillside development standards and guidelines to maintain the natural character and the environmental and aesthetic values of sloped areas.

CSV-5.2 Incorporate significant landform features into City parks and open space, where appropriate.

### RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

**Goal ROS-7** Open space areas are planned to protect, conserve, and utilize resources of unique character and value for the community.



**Policies**

- ROS-7.1 Preserve and enhance open space resources in Murrieta.
- ROS-7.2 Designate open space to preserve habitat and scenic views of natural areas.
- ROS-7.3 Seek opportunities to designate open space along waterways, while also providing for the development of trails.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation measures beyond the goals and policies identified in the proposed General Plan 2035 are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Not Applicable.

**STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY**

■ **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD SUBSTANTIALLY DAMAGE SCENIC RESOURCES WITHIN A STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY.**

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** Segments of the State highway system are designated as being of particular scenic value or interest through Caltrans’ State Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program. As previously noted, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways that traverse Murrieta. Although, I-15 is an Eligible State Scenic Highway, in order for its status to change from eligible to officially designated, the City would be required to apply to Caltrans for scenic highway approval, adopt a Corridor Protection Program, and receive notification that the highway has been officially designated a Scenic Highway. Given no officially designated State Scenic Highway traverses Murrieta, project implementation would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway. No impact would occur in this regard.

As depicted in Riverside County Circulation Element Figure C-9 (Riverside County Scenic Highways), I-15 is recognized as an Eligible State Scenic Highway and I-215 is recognized as an Eligible County Scenic Highway. Additionally, the Riverside County Historical Commission has recommended that a four-mile segment of Los Alamos Road be designated as a County Historic Route. Finally, as discussed above, I-15 is an Eligible State Scenic Highway.

The proposed General Plan 2035 has taken a focused development strategy that would be implemented through seven Focus Areas, which are primarily located along the I-15 and I-215 corridors. Future development under the proposed General Plan 2035 would also occur on both



vacant and underutilized land throughout the City. Therefore, depending on the location of the future development, project implementation could damage scenic resources, including trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, within the I-15, I-215, and Los Alamos Road corridors. However, the MDC includes overlay districts that have been applied to the I-15, I-215, and Los Alamos Road corridors. Namely, MDC Section 16.16.10.C.1, *LAD (Los Alamos District) Overlay District*, and MDC Section 16.16.10.C.3, *SHO (Scenic Highway) Overlay District*, are intended to preserve the scenic resources along these corridors. The LAD Overlay (MDC Section 16.16.10.C.1) is applied to the historic district east of I-215 and south of Los Alamos Road, including the right-of-way, in order to preserve the historic resources. The SHO Overlay (MDC Section 16.16.10.C.3) is applied to the I-15 and I-215 corridors, in order to provide protection for scenic qualities of historic significance. All future development within these corridors would be subject to compliance with the general development standards and design standards established in MDC Sections 16.16.10.C.1 and 16.16.10.C.3, in addition to the standards and regulations of the primary zoning district. Therefore, following compliance with MDC Sections 16.16.10.C.1 and 16.16.10.C.3, project implementation would not substantially damage scenic resources within the I-15, I-215, and Los Alamos Road corridors. A less than significant impact would occur in this regard. Notwithstanding, due to the conceptual nature of the future development, proposals would require individual assessments of potential project-specific impacts to scenic resources along the corridors.

**Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:** No goals or policies in the proposed General Plan 2035 pertain specifically to State scenic highways.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation measures are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Not Applicable.

## VISUAL CHARACTER – SHORT-TERM

- **CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD TEMPORARILY DEGRADE THE VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE RESPECTIVE DEVELOPMENT SITE AND/OR ITS IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS.**

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Potentially Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** Visual impacts associated with construction activities would include exposed pads and staging areas for grading, excavation, and construction equipment. In addition, temporary structures could be located on the respective development site during various stages of construction, within materials storage areas, or associated with construction debris piles on site. Exposed trenches, roadway bedding, spoils/debris piles, and steel plates would be visible



during construction of street and utility infrastructure improvements. These could degrade the existing visual character and quality of the respective development sites and their surroundings during the construction phase.

Construction-related impacts would be short-term and temporary; construction activity would not be continuous and would proceed on a project-by-project basis. Temporary screening of a particular construction staging site would partially relieve the visual distractions typically associated with construction activities commonly encountered in developed areas. Moreover, areas of construction would vary within the City such that areas of temporary visual distraction would change throughout the implementation of the General Plan 2035. Mitigation Measures AES-1, AES-2, and AES-3, which would be incorporated into construction documents, would ensure that this impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

**Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:** No goals or policies in the proposed General Plan 2035 pertain specifically to visual character during construction.

**Mitigation Measures:**

- AES-1 For future development located in or immediately adjacent to residentially zoned properties, construction documents shall include language that requires all construction contractors to strictly control the staging of construction equipment and the cleanliness of construction equipment stored or driven beyond the limits of the construction work area. Construction equipment shall be parked and staged within the project site, as distant from the residential use, as reasonably possible. Staging areas shall be screened from view from residential properties.
- AES-2 Construction documents shall include language requiring that construction vehicles be kept clean and free of mud and dust prior to leaving the development site. Streets surrounding the development site shall be swept daily and maintained free of dirt and debris.
- AES-3 Construction worker parking may be located off-site with prior approval by the City. On-street parking of construction worker vehicles on residential streets shall be prohibited.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**VISUAL CHARACTER – LONG-TERM**

- **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD PERMANENTLY DEGRADE THE VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE RESPECTIVE DEVELOPMENT SITE AND ITS IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS.**



**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** As discussed in detail in Section 3.0, Project Description, buildout according to the proposed General Plan 2035 would result in approximately 44,484 dwelling units (DU), or approximately 10,734 DU over existing conditions. Additionally, the City's non-residential (i.e., Commercial, Professional/Office, Business Park, etc.) land use development potential at buildout is approximately 50.2 million square feet, or approximately 36.2 million square feet over existing conditions. This future development is anticipated to occur on both vacant and underutilized land throughout the City.

Approximately 36 percent of the City (approximately 7,750 acres) is currently vacant. Within these vacant areas, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would gradually, but permanently, alter the visual character of the respective development sites and their surroundings. Undeveloped lands would be replaced with urban improvements (i.e., structures, hardscaping, landscaping, and supporting infrastructure), in accordance with the proposed General Plan 2035 Land Use Policy Map and *MDC*. Additionally, within areas that are intended for redevelopment, the appearance of underutilized sites would be altered, as existing (and possibly aging) uses are gradually replaced with newer developments and/or different uses.

Potential change in visual character of Murrieta would primarily occur in key areas identified for development. The proposed General Plan 2035 has taken a focused development strategy that would be implemented through seven Focus Areas with individualized approaches for each area. The most significant changes in appearance associated with the residential development would occur in the Multiple Use 3 Focus Area with an estimated growth of 1,137 DU, and Clinton/Keith Mitchell Focus Area with an estimated growth of 869 DU. The most significant changes in appearance associated with non-residential development would occur in the North Murrieta Business Corridor Focus Area with an estimated growth of approximately 9.3 million square feet, or about 44 percent of the total estimated growth. Additionally, significant changes in appearance associated with non-residential development would occur in the South Murrieta Business Corridor Area with an estimated growth of approximately 5.6 million square feet, or about 27 percent of the total estimated growth.

Following is a general overview of the vision for each Focus Area and the anticipated changes in visual character.

***North Murrieta Business Corridor.*** The vacant, underutilized, and rural residential properties located in this area would be replaced with a mix of Office and Research Park and Commercial uses. As the major employment center in the northern portion of the City, the vision for this area includes creating a signature look as the northern gateway into the City. A key feature contributing to the character of this area is the proposed Loma Linda University Medical Center. A range of building heights would be permitted within this area, including with heights of two to three stories adjacent to residential areas increasing up to maximums between five and ten stories



in more centrally located areas near the five-story Loma Linda University Medical Center, along the I-215 freeway frontage, or adjacent to business park uses.

**Clinton Keith/Mitchell.** A mix of Rural, Single-Family, and Multiple-Family Residential, Commercial, and Office and Research Park uses would be provided. The rural residential character would be maintained generally west of Duster Road. Building heights would be a maximum of two to three stories.

**Golden Triangle North (Central Murrieta).** The single-family homes would be retained, and a mix of Multiple-Family Residential, Commercial, and Office and Research Park uses would be provided. The building heights for the Office and Research Park uses could range in height up to a maximum between five and ten stories.

**South Murrieta Business Corridor.** The vacant and underutilized properties located in this area would be replaced with a mix of Office and Research Park, Business Park, and Industrial Uses. As the major employment center in the southern portion of the City, the vision for this area includes creating a signature look as the southern gateway into the City. The Office and Research Park buildings heights could range in height up to a maximum of five to six stories. The Business Park and Industrial would be consistent with existing business park and industrial uses, ranging from two to three stories.

**Multiple Use 3 (MU-3).** This area would provide a mix of Multiple-Family Residential, Commercial, and Office and Research Park uses. Parcels that are vacant or underdeveloped would change to uses that are compatible with on-site and surrounding uses.

**Historic Murrieta Specific Plan.** This area is characterized as the City's historic core, containing predominantly residential land uses. The City seeks to continue the preservation and enhancement of the Historic Murrieta area through continued introduction of a complementary mix of residential, retail, civic, and job-creating uses.

**Los Alamos Hills.** Area property owners have expressed interest in developing a Specific Plan that would to maintain the rural core of the Los Alamos community west of Warm Springs Creek, while providing certain needed local services. With a Specific Plan, property owners intend to develop a land use plan that reflects the area's rural character, while providing for transitional land uses between the rural land uses and more intense development near Winchester Road. The open space, development pattern, and circulation system established for this area is intended to maintain and preserve the majority of area as a picturesque area, whose topography and setting contribute to the rural agricultural enclave.

Overall, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would lead to greater urbanization within the Focus Areas and throughout the City by localized intensification of land uses on underutilized sites and introduction of new land uses on vacant sites. However, the proposed General Plan 2035 Land Use Policy Map establishes consistent and compatible development intensities, maintaining and enhancing the overall visual character/quality of the City. As



discussed above, the proposed General Plan 2035 includes the Parks and Open Space Land Use Designation, which is intended to provide for the preservation of natural open spaces and maintain scenic resources, in order to preserve the City's visual character. The Parks and Open Space designation is consistent with the MDC OS (Open Space) District, which is applied to appropriate areas, in order to ensure the conservation and protection of natural resources.

All future development within the City would be evaluated on a project-by-project basis in order to verify compliance with the provisions of the *MDC*. Compliance with the *MDC* would ensure orderly growth and development that would maintain the community's rural/nonurban characteristics in appropriate locations. Additionally, compliance with the *MDC* would result in high quality planning and design for development, that enhances the City's visual character, avoids conflicts between land uses, and preserves the City's scenic qualities. More specifically, all future development and new land uses would be subject to the following:

- Development in the Residential, Commercial, Industrial, and Special Purpose Districts would be subject to compliance with the general development standards, and design standards and parameters outlined in MDC Chapter 16.08, *Residential Districts*, MDC Chapter 16.10, *Commercial Districts*, MDC Chapter 16.12, *Industrial Districts*, and MDC Chapter 16.14, *Special Purpose Districts*, respectively. The general development standards, and design standards and parameters address development factors that would influence the visual character/quality of a development site and its surroundings. Namely, the general development standards address parcel size and coverage, density and intensity, setbacks, and building height. For residential districts, the design standards and parameters address site planning (i.e., site character, variation of development patterns, streets, landscaping, and walls) and architectural standards (i.e., building design and materials). For non-residential districts, the design standards address site planning (i.e., site character, land use buffering, building placement, trash/loading/storage areas, and utility and mechanical equipment), and parking (i.e., project entry), and architectural design (i.e., architectural style, design consistency, form/mass, roofs, building materials, and colors).
- Development in the *MPO (Master Plan) Overlay District* (MDC Section 16.16.10.C.2) would require additional development review and potentially preparation of a Specific Plan, given the unique characteristics that exist at these locations.
- All development would be subject to compliance with general property development and use standards outlined in MDC Chapter 16.18, *General Property Development and Use Standards*, which are intended to ensure that all development produces an environment of desirable character; refer to the *MDC Chapter 16.18, General Property Development and Use Standards* section above for an outline of the issues addressed in MDC Chapter 16.18.



- All development involving resources of pre-historic and historic significance would be subject to compliance with the provisions of MDC Chapter 16.26, *Cultural Resource Preservation*, in order to protect and perpetuate the City’s historic character.

The proposed General Plan 2035 Land Use Element has established various goals (Goal LU-2, Goal LU-3, Goal LU-9, Goal LU-11, Goal LU-12, Goal LU-20, Goal LU-21, Goal LU-22, and Goal LU-27) that address preservation of the community’s rural heritage and character, preservation of neighborhoods, sustainable and healthy land use patterns and urban design, community design, redevelopment, land use transitions, natural resources, and Murrieta Municipal Code enforcement. The proposed General Plan 2035 Conservation Element has established goals in order to restore the aesthetic value of creeks and protect hills and ridges for their aesthetic values. Additionally, Goal ROS-7 has been established, in order to protect, conserve, and utilize resources of unique character and value for the community.

Overall, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would lead to greater urbanization within the Focus Areas and throughout the City by localized intensification of land uses on underutilized sites and introduction of new land uses on vacant sites. Despite these localized changes in visual character, they are not anticipated to degrade the existing visual character/quality of the respective development sites and their surroundings. All future development within the City would be evaluated on a project-by-project basis in order to verify compliance with the proposed General Plan 2035 goals and policies, as well as the provisions of the *MDC*, which address the visual character/quality of a development site and its surroundings. Moreover, future development projects would also undergo environmental review pursuant to CEQA on a project-by-project basis, in order to evaluate the development’s impact upon the visual character/quality of the site and its surroundings. Therefore, while implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would alter the visual character of the Focus Areas and development sites throughout the City, the changes would not be degrading and impacts would be less than significant.

## **Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:**

### **LAND USE ELEMENT**

**Goal LU-2** A community that preserves its rural characteristics in appropriate locations.

#### **Policies**

LU-2.1 Provide for the keeping of horses and other livestock, as well as farming or agricultural operations, on appropriate larger lot residential property to preserve the community’s heritage.

**Goal LU-3** Stable, well-maintained residential neighborhoods in Murrieta.



**Policies**

- LU-3.1 Maintain and enhance the character of single-family residential neighborhoods.
- LU-3.2 Protect residential areas from the effects of potentially incompatible uses. Where new commercial or industrial development is allowed adjacent to residentially zoned districts, establish and/or maintain standards for circulation, noise, setbacks, buffer areas, landscaping and architecture, which ensure compatibility between the uses.
- LU-3.3 Assure that the type and intensity of land use shall be consistent with that of the immediate neighborhood.
- LU-3.4 Strive to provide a diverse mix of housing types, along with uniformly high standards of residential property maintenance to preserve residents' real estate values and their high quality of life.
- LU-3.5 Prohibit uses that lead to deterioration of residential neighborhoods, or adversely impact the safety or the residential character of a residential neighborhood.
- Goal LU-9** Land use patterns and urban design that support healthy and sustainable lifestyles and businesses.

**Policies**

- LU-9.1 Encourage human-scale urban design on the neighborhood, block, and building scale.
- Goal LU-10** A community that provides pedestrian-friendly environments for residential, commercial, business, and recreation uses.

**Policies**

- LU-10.1 Prepare and use design guidelines to encourage high-quality, pedestrian-oriented design that enhances the public realm.
- LU-10.2 Consider preparation and adoption of a Street Master Plan that addresses walkability and streetscape.
- LU-10.5 Update the Development Code to create walkability, and interesting and varied pedestrian environments.
- LU-10.7 Encourage well-designed covered or structured parking instead of surface parking lots.



LU-10.8 Encourage new surface off-street parking to be located behind or to the side of buildings, as appropriate.

LU-10.9 Encourage ground-floor structured parking to be buffered from the pedestrian environment through strategies such as wrapping the structure with active retail uses, placing entrances off the street, and screening with landscaping or art.

**Goal LU-11** A community that is comprehensively designed to create a positive and distinctive City image by protecting historic resources, and by strengthening the positive qualities of the City’s overall image and neighborhood identity.

**Policies**

LU-11.1 Study and determine areas in the City where rural character can be created, enhanced, or preserved.

LU-11.2 Endeavor to establish distinctive themes and character for individual focus areas or other areas, as appropriate, within the community.

LU-11.3 Enhance the positive qualities that give residential, commercial, and industrial areas their unique identities, while also allowing flexibility for innovative design.

LU-11.4 Preserve the unique character and integrity of the City's traditional residential neighborhoods.

LU-11.5 Improve the appearance and function of regional commercial centers through improved site design, landscaping, and architectural integrity.

LU-11.6 Seek to create unique retail spaces that are architecturally rich, pedestrian friendly, culturally sensitive, and economically viable.

LU-11.7 Prepare and implement design guidelines for special districts or areas with unique character in the City of Murrieta, as appropriate.

LU-11.8 Develop a design palette for multiple-family and mixed use buildings.

**Goal LU-12** Effective use of redevelopment as a tool for economic development and community improvement.

**Policies**

LU-12.1 Continue to prioritize commercial, industrial, and residential revitalization within the redevelopment project area.



- LU-12.2 Revitalize private and public lands in need of redevelopment or those that are underdeveloped due to lack of public facilities and revitalization.
- LU-12.3 Provide yearly review of the City’s redevelopment program under the California Community Redevelopment Law to coordinate and pursue community improvement and revitalization activities.
- LU-12.4 Ensure conditions of blight are evaluated, as needed, to ensure the Redevelopment Plan is reflective of community needs.

**Goal LU-20** West of Warm Springs Creek, preserve the historic rural character of the Los Alamos Hills area by maintaining its unique environment rural style with low-density development and small rural roads while preserving natural features.

**Policies**

- LU-20.1 Maintain the existing 2.5-acre minimum residential parcel size west of Warm Springs Creek.
  - LU-20.2 Establish development standards for all new construction to ensure high quality rural development in the area west of Warm Springs Creek.
  - LU-20.3 Establish unifying visual elements, such as split rail fencing, mature native trees, and well-spaced homes, as a means of distinguishing the Los Alamos Hills area as a rural historic enclave within Murrieta for the area west of Warm Springs Road.
  - LU-20.4 Encourage the construction of homes and accessory structures, west of Warm Springs Creek that are compatible with surrounding residential uses and the rural character of the Los Alamos Hills area.
  - LU-20.7 Allow commercial farms, tree crops and other agricultural uses on lots of at least 2.5 acres in size consistent with Los Alamos’ long history as an agricultural community.
  - LU-20.8 Allow for the creation of entry monuments that are rural in character to announce the arrival into the Los Alamos Hills area.
  - LU-20.9 Discourage features such as small lots, conventional sidewalks, or conventional street lights, west of Warm Springs Creek.
- Goal LU-21** Appropriate land use transitions between rural land uses west of Warm Springs Creek and more intense land uses east of Warm Springs Creek.



**Policies**

LU-21.1 Consider the creation of a transitional density/intensity non-rural area to serve as a buffer area between the developments along Winchester Road and the rural residential land uses to the west of Warm Springs Creek.

**Goal LU-22** Natural and visual resources are valued resources to maintain the rural character of the Los Alamos Hills.

**Policies**

LU-22.1 Encourage the preservation of natural and visual resources within Los Alamos Hills, such as rock outcroppings and scenic views of the local hills and valleys, to the greatest degree practicable.

LU-22.2 Encourage new construction and landscape design that utilizes grading techniques to mimic the natural terrain.

LU-22.3 Encourage development that minimizes impacts to existing water courses, mature trees, and natural features as much as possible. In those cases that these areas/features are impacted, the final design should provide adequate mitigation on-site and/or in nearby areas.

LU-22.4 Encourage healthy and structurally sound, existing groves of eucalyptus and other mature non-native trees located west of Warm Springs Creek to be considered a visual asset to the area, and should be conserved and maintained to the maximum degree practicable.

LU-22.5 Encourage new development to replace or supplement with native tree species as opportunities arise.

**Goal LU-24** Historic Murrieta as the City’s cultural, civic and community center.

**Policies**

LU-24.1 Preserve and enhance the historic Murrieta area as the governmental and cultural focal point of the City.

**Goal LU-27** The quality and character of the City is preserved and enhanced by compliance with relevant codes and regulations.



## Policies

- LU-27.1 Review the Development Code and determine which sections are outdated to meet current trends, regulations, adopted community visions, and the General Plan 2035 land use designations, and revise as necessary.

## CONSERVATION ELEMENT

- Goal CSV-4** Restoration of the natural function and aesthetic value of creeks, while providing flood control measures and opportunities for recreation.

## Policies

- CSV-4.1 Prioritize creek preservation, restoration and/or mitigation banking along creeks as mitigation for environmental impacts.
- CSV-4.2 Consider alternatives to hardlined bottoms and side slopes within flood control facilities, where technically feasible.
- CSV-4.3 Preserve Warm Springs Creek and Cole Creek as a wildlife corridor, while accommodating flood control measures and passive recreation.
- CSV-4.4 Retain and restore natural drainage courses and their function where health and safety are not jeopardized.
- CSV-4.5 Support efforts for restoration, flood control, and recreation along Murrieta Creek, in coordination with regional and federal plans.
- CSV-4.6 Seek funds and provide support for creek restoration, maintenance and protection through grant and mitigation programs, development entitlements, and non-profit organizations.
- CSV-4.7 Continue to support the architectural enhancement of bridges over creeks as a scenic resource.

- Goal CSV-5** Hills and ridges are protected for their environmental and aesthetic values.

## Policies

- CSV-5.1 Promote compliance with hillside development standards and guidelines to maintain the natural character and the environmental and aesthetic values of sloped areas.



CSV-5.2 Incorporate significant landform features into City parks and open space, where appropriate.

CSV-5.3 Maintain a register of cultural resources that includes landforms with cultural significance.

**Goal CSV-9** A community that promotes the growth of an urban forest and water-efficient landscaping, recognizing that plants provide natural services such as habitat, storm water management, soil retention, air filtration, and cooling, and also have aesthetic and economic value.

**Policies**

CSV-9.1 Identify and protect native trees, trees of historic or cultural significance, and mature trees, consistent with the Tree Preservation Ordinance.

CSV-9.2 Consider the establishment of street tree standards and a program for street tree planting, maintenance, and replacement.

CSV-9.3 Promote the use of street trees as a buffer between pedestrians and motorized traffic.

CSV-9.4 Encourage the planting of street trees in linear planting beds rather than tree wells in order to support long-living healthy trees. (formerly hc9.3)

CSV-9.5 Encourage the planting of trees in private yards and properties.

CSV-9.6 Maintain a guide to preferred trees, shrubs, and ground cover plants of non-invasive species, or refer private parties to an existing guide that meets City needs to assist private landscaping efforts.

CSV-9.8 Encourage any new landscaped areas requiring permits to respect and incorporate the distinctive elements of the existing community landscape, including the retention of existing trees, to the maximum extent feasible.

CSV-9.9 Promote the use of native plant species in public landscaping of parks, schools, medians and planter strips, as well as in private development throughout the City.

**RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

**Goal ROS-7** Open space areas are planned to protect, conserve, and utilize resources of unique character and value for the community.



## Policies

- ROS-7.1 Preserve and enhance open space resources in Murrieta.
- ROS-7.2 Designate open space to preserve habitat and scenic views of natural areas.
- ROS-7.3 Seek opportunities to designate open space along waterways, while also providing for the development of trails.
- ROS-7.4 When possible, link open space and parks for the movement of wildlife and people.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation measures beyond the goals and policies identified in the proposed General Plan 2035 are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Not Applicable.

## LIGHT AND GLARE

- **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD CREATE NEW SOURCES OF LIGHT/GLARE THAT COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT VIEWS IN THE AREA.**

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** Glare is the sensation produced by luminance within the visual field that is significantly greater than the luminance to which the eyes are adapted. This can cause annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance and visibility. Light pollution is caused by stray light from unshielded light sources and light reflecting off surfaces that enters the atmosphere where it illuminates and reflects off dust, debris, and water vapor to cause an effect known as “sky glow.” Light pollution can substantially limit visual access to the night sky, compromise astronomical research, and adversely affect nocturnal environments.

Implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would allow for future development of residential and non-residential land uses within the Focus Areas and throughout the City. New development could cause light and glare impacts through new light sources such as street lighting, interior and exterior building lighting including for safety purposes, vehicle headlights, illuminated signage, traffic signals, sports field lighting, and new glare sources such as reflective building materials, roofing materials, and windows. These new sources of light and glare would be most visible from development along adjacent roadways, and to receptors such as residents and traveling motorists.



All lighting installed with future development within the City would be subject to compliance with the provisions of MDC Section 16.18.100, *Lighting*, which requires that exterior lighting be directed downward and shielded so that glare is confined within the boundaries of the subject parcel, among other requirements. Additionally, light sources would be shielded to direct light rays onto the subject parcel only, pursuant to MDC Section 16.18.100.C, *Shielded Lighting*. Additionally, all future development would be subject to compliance with MDC architectural design standards relative to building materials and colors, in order to reduce glare effects; refer to *MDC Chapters 16.10 and 16.12*.

The purpose of MDC Section 16.18.110, *Mount Palomar Lighting Standards*, is to restrict the use of certain light fixtures emitting into the night sky undesirable light rays that have a detrimental effect on astronomical observation and research. To this end, all future development within the Dark Sky Zone (the circular area 30 miles in radius centered on the Palomar Observatory) would be subject to compliance with the general, lamp source, and shielding requirements established by MDC Section 16.18.110.

Compliance with the *MDC* provisions in the lighting of future developments would ensure proper design, installation, and operation of all exterior lighting, thereby reducing the potential for glare effects, light spillover onto adjacent properties, or conflicts with the Palomar Observatory. As such, consistency with the MDC would ensure that potential impacts associated with light and glare would be less than significant. Additionally, compliance with proposed General Plan 2025 Policy LU-20.10, which addresses lighting in the Los Alamos Hills area, would further minimize potential impacts in this regard.

## Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:

### LAND USE ELEMENT

**Goal LU-20** West of Warm Springs Creek, preserve the historic rural character of the Los Alamos Hills area by maintaining its unique environment rural style with low-density development and small rural roads while preserving natural features.

#### Policies

LU-20.10 Encourage the minimal use of outdoor lighting to maintain the nighttime dark sky in the rural Los Alamos Hills area.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation measures beyond the goals and policies identified in the proposed General Plan 2035 are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Not Applicable.



## SHADE AND SHADOWS

- **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD CREATE SHADE AND SHADOWS THAT COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT ADJACENT LAND USES.**

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

**Impact Analysis:** New development within the City would occur on existing vacant land, through infill development on underutilized parcels, or through redevelopment of currently developed land. The proposed General Plan 2035 may allow new larger (i.e., mid-rise or high-rise) commercial, industrial, or residential structures in higher density land use designations that could create shade/shadow impacts on nearby buildings, public streets, and sidewalks, and that could effectively limit light into an adjacent yard or structure.

Future development within the City would be evaluated on a project-by-project basis in order to verify compliance with the provisions of the *MDC*. *MDC* Chapters 16.08, 16.10, 16.12, 16.14, and 16.18 include provisions that address potential shade and shadow affects on adjacent properties, including parcel coverage, density and intensity, setbacks, and building height and placement. Additionally, future development would undergo environmental review pursuant to CEQA on a project-by-project basis, which requires an analysis of shade and shadow impacts and incorporation of mitigation measures, as needed, to reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level. Following compliance with *MDC* requirements, project implementation would result in a less than significant impact involving shade and shadows.

**Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:** No goals or policies in the proposed General Plan 2035 pertain specifically to shade or shadows.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation measures are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Not Applicable.

## 5.3.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

- **DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 AND CUMULATIVE DEVELOPMENT COULD RESULT IN CUMULATIVELY CONSIDERABLE AESTHETICS, LIGHT, AND GLARE IMPACTS.**

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation:** Potentially Significant Impact.



**Impact Analysis:** Cumulative aesthetic impacts are primarily analyzed in terms of impacts within the City of Murrieta, as aesthetic impacts are primarily confined to local areas. The City is urbanized and approximately 64 percent built-out. The proposed General Plan 2035 anticipates growth within the Focus Areas and throughout the City, which would alter the City’s existing visual character. Cities surrounding Murrieta are developed and urbanized with similar density and character. New development within those cities would contribute to the urban character of the region. New development would be reviewed on a project-by-project basis, in order to ensure each City’s development standards are met and new development is compatible with the existing and desired regional and local urban and natural environment. Additionally, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 goals and policies would enhance the City’s physical setting and reduce the incremental aesthetic impact on the region to a level of insignificance. Moreover, the proposed General Plan 2035 would not result in any regional aesthetic impacts that extend beyond the City’s borders. The proposed Land Use, Conservation, and Recreation and Open Space Elements establish goals and policies that would preserve and improve the City’s character and aesthetic quality by focusing on the natural environment and historic resources. Therefore, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would not result in cumulatively considerable aesthetic impacts.

**Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:** Refer to the goals and policies referenced above in this Section 5.3.

**Mitigation Measures:** Refer to Mitigation Measures AES-1 to AES-3. No additional mitigation measures are required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation:** Less Than Significant Impact.

### 5.3.6 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Aesthetics impacts associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would be less than significant by adherence to and/or compliance with goals and policies in the proposed General Plan 2035, compliance with the Murrieta Development Code, and recommended mitigation measures. No significant unavoidable aesthetics impacts would occur as a result of buildout of the proposed General Plan 2035.

### 5.3.7 SOURCES CITED

*County of Riverside General Plan*

*Murrieta Development Code*

State of California Department of Transportation, *California Scenic Highway Mapping System Website*, [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic\\_highways/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm), December 20, 2010.