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## IV.S AESTHETIC RESOURCES/VIEW

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### INTRODUCTION

This section identifies and describes the visual characteristics of the proposed project site, and views of the site from surrounding areas as seen from off-site public vantage points. The purpose of this evaluation is to establish an objective frame of reference concerning the visual characteristics of the area as a basis for assessing the potential impact of the project on the visual character of the area. Sources utilized in the preparation of this section include: the Brentwood Pacific Palisades District Plan, the City-wide General Plan Framework Element, visual reconnaissance, and photographs of the project area.

### AESTHETIC RESOURCES

#### **Environmental Setting**

This section of the Draft EIR presents an examination of the proposed project's effect on aesthetic resources. Aesthetics refers to the general perception of the visual environment. Evaluation of aesthetics requires assessment of the visual effects of proposed development on the project site and surrounding locale. In the context of environmental assessment, aesthetics, as defined by the general perception of the visual environment, is both subjective and highly contextual. Aesthetic impact assessment generally deals with the issue of contrast, or the degree to which elements of the environment differ visually. Aesthetic features occur in a diverse array of environments, ranging in character from urban centers to rural regions and wildlands. Adverse visual effects can include the loss of natural features or areas, the removal of urban features with aesthetic value, or the introduction of contrasting urban features into natural areas or urban settings. Natural features may include, but are not limited to open space, native or ornamental vegetation/landscaping, topographic or geologic features, and natural aesthetic features. The introduction of contrasting urban features may have a local impact, or, if part of a larger landscape, may contribute to a cumulative decline in overall visual character.

#### ***City-Wide Visual Setting***

The City of Los Angeles has a wide variety of landscapes and seascapes, including natural and urban components. The landscapes and seascapes exhibit a wide range of aesthetic characteristics and contrasts, including suburban neighborhoods, dense urban areas, the Port of Los Angeles, airports, and

hillside residential areas. Physical development within the City has generally occurred within the Los Angeles Basin, leaving mostly as open space, large open vistas within the City's distinctive hillsides to the west, and Santa Monica Mountains. The City-wide General Plan Framework Element identifies two concepts that define City-wide visual characteristics: "urban form" and "neighborhood design". Urban form is defined as: (1) the general pattern of building height and development intensity, and (2) the structural elements that define the City physically, such as natural features, transportation corridors, open space, public facilities, as well as activity centers and focal elements. Neighborhood design is defined as the physical character of neighborhoods and communities within the City. According to the City-wide General Plan Framework Element, by recognizing that Los Angeles is comprised of neighborhoods, planning measures can reinforce those neighborhoods and connect them to one another and to larger districts, thereby defining a City-wide structure.

### ***On-Site and Surrounding Areas Visual Setting***

The project area is located within the Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District of Los Angeles. The project site is located in the Santa Monica Mountains on the Canyonback and Stoney Hill ridgelines within the Mountaingate Community. The Mountaingate Community is generally situated between Mandeville Canyon on the west and I-405 (San Diego Freeway)/Sepulveda Boulevard on the east. The project site is generally west of the Mountaingate Country Club Golf Course and west and south of the Crest, Crown and Promotory residential neighborhoods. The proposed project site is currently undeveloped land with a hiking trail and service dirt road for the DWP on-site water tank and electrical transmission lines. Apart from the existing Mountaingate Community and the golf course, the site is surrounded by open space.

### ***Plans and Policies***

The visual quality of the project area is addressed by the goals and policies contained in the Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District Plan (the Community Plan). The goals and policies establish the minimum level of design that shall be observed in multiple residential and commercial projects within the entire Plan Area. With regard to design, it is the Community Plan's goal to ensure that all buildings would "be of a quality and character that improves community appearance by avoiding

excessive variety and monotonous repetition”.<sup>1</sup> According to the Community Plan, this goal can be accomplished through:

- Requiring the use of articulations, recesses, surface perforations and porticoes to break up long flat building facades;
- Utilizing complementary building materials in building facades;
- Incorporating varying design elements to provide definitions for each floor;
- Integrating building fixtures, awnings, security gates, etc., into design of buildings;
- Screening all rooftop equipment and building appurtenances from adjacent properties;
- Requiring decorative masonry walls to enclose thrash.

## Environmental Impact Analysis

### *Threshold of Significance*

According to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, a determination of significance with respect to aesthetics impacts shall be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:<sup>2</sup>

- The amount or relative proportion of existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area, which would be removed, altered, or demolished;
- The amount of natural open space to be graded or developed;
- The degree to which proposed structures in natural open space areas would be effectively integrated into the aesthetics of the site, through appropriate design;
- The degree of contrast between proposed features and existing features that represent the area’s valued aesthetic image;
- The degree to which the project would contribute to the area’s aesthetic value; and
- Applicable guidelines and regulations.

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<sup>1</sup> Brentwood-Pacific Palisades Community Plan, Text, Exhibit “B”, page V-1, City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, March 12, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, City of Los Angeles, Environmental Affairs Department, May 14, 1998. p. 1. L.1-3.



## **Project Impacts**

### **Visual Character**

The most valued visual character of the area surrounding Mountaingate is natural open space. Implementation of the proposed project would result in grading approximately 56 total acres along the Canyonback and Stoney Hill Ridgelines to provide space for 29 homes, including 12.7 acres on the Mission Canyon 8 Landfill and 19.1 acres in the canyon immediately adjacent to Canyonback Ridge. The total building pad area would be approximately 24 acres. Aesthetically, the new Mountaingate neighborhood would be an extension of the residential neighborhoods that currently exist on the Canyonback and Stoney Hill Ridgelines. A total of 424± acres, or approximately 94 percent of the 449.5-acre project site would remain as permanent open space. Less than 10-percent of the project area would be altered from its current undeveloped condition to a new neighborhood immediately adjacent to existing residential uses, thus constituting an extension of the existing residential neighborhood. Consequently, the proposed development would not substantially alter the visual character of the project area. One of the major natural features of the site is the approximately 1,600-foot knoll located in the southern portion of the site near the existing DWP water tank. Implementation of the project would not remove this natural feature. Additionally, approximately 50,000 cubic yards of soil cut during grading activity would be deposited on the Mission Canyon 8 Landfill, while 1,050,000 cubic yards would be deposited in the canyon between the Canyonback and Stoney Hill Ridge lines. These two locations were selected for cut balancing due to the unobtrusive visual nature it would have on the existing residential uses. Therefore, no significant impacts are identified in relation to altering the visual character of the project site and area.

### **Plans and Policies**

The Community Plan contains design policies and standards to ensure that residential projects and public spaces and rights of way incorporate specific elements of good design, the intent of which is to promote a stable and pleasant environment. In residential areas, the emphasis is on the promotion of architectural design that enhances the quality of life, living conditions and neighborhood pride of the residents. The project applicant has a history of developing residential neighborhoods with high quality standards. It is the intent of the project applicant to adhere to their past development standards and build a new additional Mountaingate neighborhood that represents good design similar to existing development in Mountaingate. The applicant would abide by all applicable guidelines and regulations relating to residential design as contained in the Community Plan. Thus, no significant

impacts would occur to neighborhood visual character with respect to plans and policies on residential design.

### ***Cumulative Development***

As a requirement of the City of Los Angeles, the project design for each project would be reviewed by the Los Angeles Department of City Planning for consistency with applicable City codes and regulations prior to final plan approval. As such, alteration to the visual character of the area would not be cumulatively considerable, and so is not considered and not considered a significant impact.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Project impacts would be less than significant and no mitigation measures would be required.

### **Adverse Impacts**

No adverse impacts would occur with the implementation of the project.

## **VIEWS**

### **Environmental Setting**

The term “views” generally refers to visual access to, or the visibility of, a particular sight from a given vantage point or corridor. “Focal views” focus on a particular object, scene, setting or feature of visual interest; “panoramic views” or vistas provide visual access to a large geographic area, for which the field of view can be wide and extend into the distance. Examples of focal views include natural landforms, public art/signs, individual buildings, and specific, important trees. Panoramic views are usually associated with vantage points looking out over a section of urban or natural areas that provide a geographic orientation not commonly available. Examples of panoramic views might include an urban skyline, valley, mountain range, the ocean, or other water bodies.

### ***Project Site and Vicinity***

The project site is located within the Santa Monica Mountains. Natural ridges and hills form the area’s dominant visual features. Views of the site are characterized by a rolling topography including

ridges, steep slopes and knolls and dense vegetation. The most dominant public view of the site is the approximately 1,600-foot knoll located in the near the DWP water tank.

Based on site visits and visual reconnaissance, two types of public views were identified: (1) those from roadways in the project area, and (2) those from adjacent land uses. In order to document the existing visual character of the project site and its surroundings, photographs were taken from locations where the site may be visible to the greater public.

### **Roadways**

To visually characterize the public roadway views of the site and illustrate potential impacts, two viewing locations were selected for analysis. Viewing locations were selected by staff of the Department of City Planning and were determined in the field based on visibility from mobile viewing audiences located within the Sepulveda Pass and Mandeville Canyon Road.<sup>3</sup> Each viewing location is publicly accessible. **Figures IV.S-1** and **IV.S-2** illustrate these viewing locations.

#### **View 1: Sepulveda Pass Area**

**Figure IV.S-1** represents views to the project site from Skirball Center Drive at the I-405 (San Diego Freeway) Overpass, looking southwest within the Sepulveda Pass. From this point, intermittent glimpses of the site can be seen by motorists and pedestrians traveling south and west toward Mulholland Drive, south on Skirball, and south from the I-405 on-ramp. The project area cannot be seen in its entirety, because the topography and vegetation of surrounding areas block such views. However, the top portion of the approximately 1,600-foot knoll located near the DWP water tank can be seen from this location.

#### **View 2: Mandeville Canyon Area**

Along Mandeville Canyon Boulevard, only parts of the site can be seen from a few locations. **Figure IV.S-2** shows a representative panoramic view of the project site from the 3200 block of Mandeville Canyon Boulevard located to the direct west of the project site. The most visible part of the site from the area along Mandeville Canyon Boulevard is the dedicated open space area located west of the part of the site proposed for development. Due to the topography, and especially vegetation, not all the residents that live on Mandeville Canyon are able to see the site. From the roadway, the residences to the east and street trees block views of the site.

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<sup>3</sup> Hadar Pflakin, City Planner, City of Los Angeles, telephone communication, March 7, 2000.

**Figure IV.S-1**  
**Existing View 1: Sepulveda Pass Area**

**Figure IV.S-2**  
**Existing View 2: Mandeville Canyon Area**

### **Views from Adjacent Land Uses**

The proposed project would be built immediately adjacent to Mountaingate's Crest and Promotory neighborhoods. Stoney Hill Ridge would include 22 of the 29 units built along the ridgeline as an extension of Stoney Hill Road. Residents immediately adjacent to the proposed Stoney Hill Road continuation have views of the project site with the canyon and dense vegetation, as well as the partially graded Stoney Hill Ridge. Some other residents that live in the southern portion of the Crest and Promotory neighborhoods have views of the golf course and the Stoney Hill Ridge. Residents in other locations in these neighborhoods do not have views of Canyon Back Ridge, due to existing knoll south of the existing terminus of Canyonback Road, which obstructs their views. Residents on Mountain Crest Lane within the Crest and Promontory neighborhoods do not have direct views of the proposed development area on Canyonback Road due to the intervening topography. Residents of the Crown neighborhood have views of the northwestern portion of the project site with canyons and dense vegetation.

### **Scenic Roadways**

Roadways which provide scenic views within and around the City of Los Angeles are designated by the City of Los Angeles *General Plan* (Brentwood-Pacific Palisades District Plan) as Scenic Corridor, Scenic Major Road, Scenic Secondary Road, and Scenic Secondary Road and Scenic Park Road. In the immediate project area, Sepulveda Boulevard is designated as a Scenic Major Road, and both Mountaingate Drive and Stoney Hill Road are designated as Scenic Secondary Roads. Sepulveda Boulevard is located approximately one-half mile east of the project site. Due to distance and topography, the project site is not visible from Sepulveda Boulevard. Mountaingate Drive and Stoney Hill Road lead to the existing Mountaingate Community, and hence, the project site. The project site is therefore visible from the portions of Mountaingate Drive and Stoney Hill Road that are near the site.

## **Environmental Impact Analysis**

### ***Thresholds of Significance***

According to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, the determination of significance under aesthetics shall be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:<sup>4</sup>

- The nature and quality of recognized or valued views (such as natural topography, settings, man-made or natural features of visual interest, and resources such as mountains or the ocean);

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<sup>4</sup> L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, City of Los Angeles, Environmental Affairs Department, May 14, 1998, p. L.2-3.

- Whether the project affects views from a designated scenic highway, corridor, or parkway;
- The extent of obstruction (e.g., total blockage, partial interruption, or minor diminishment); and
- The extent to which the project affects recognized views available from a length of a public roadway, bike path, or trail, as opposed to a single, fixed vantage-point.

### **Project Impacts**

Upon completion of construction activities, 29 homes would be located on the project site, which is currently vacant. As previously mentioned, portions of the project site are publicly visible to motorists, pedestrians and/or residents from points along the I-405/Skirball Center Drive overpass, and portions of Mandeville Canyon Road. To assess the potential visual impacts of the 29 homes, a visual/photographic simulation of the homes was prepared by Impact Sciences based on field reconnaissance, project design features, preliminary engineering plans and photographs of the project area. Simulations were prepared for representative locations along the I-405/Skirball Center Drive Overpass, and Mandeville Canyon.

#### **View 1: Sepulveda Pass Area**

Based on the methodology as described above to assess post-project views of the project site from the I-405/Skirball Overpass, the project would not alter the views as seen under existing conditions. Although the project site is visible from this location, the topography of the area, including the knoll located near the DWP water tank, would obstruct views of the 29 homes from this location. As a result, the proposed project would neither obstruct public views to visual resources from the I-405/Skirball Center Drive area, nor affect the visual character of the project area. Thus, no significant impacts would occur in relation to view obstruction from this location.

#### **View 2: Mandeville Canyon Area**

Upon project completion the homes along Canyonback Road would be nearest to the Mandeville Canyon area. Utilizing the view impact methodology described above, none of these homes are visible from this viewing location. With project completion, pedestrians, motorists and residents would have eastward views to the hillsides, open space and natural vegetation of the project area without any obstruction from the proposed project. Further, as part of project implementation, and per Community Plan requirement as previously described under Plans and Policies above, all rooftop equipment and building appurtenances would be screened from adjacent properties. Project implementation is,

therefore not expected to negatively affect the visual character of the project area. Thus, the proposed project would not result in significant impacts to visual resources as seen from this location.

### **Views from Adjacent Land Uses**

Views from residences immediately adjacent to the project site in the Crest and Promotory neighborhoods would be altered from its current undeveloped condition with single-family homes. An existing knoll at the end of Canyonback Road will not be removed as a result of the project. As a result, views of the project site from adjacent homes on the Canyonback ridge would be blocked. Residents of the Crown neighborhood have views of the northwestern portion of the project site with canyons and dense vegetation. This view would not be altered as result of project implementation. Since very few people would be affected by the altered views of the site, the impact is not considered significant.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

The identified related project in **Section III, General Description of Environmental Setting**, of this EIR is not located immediately adjacent to the project site, and the project would result in the dedication of approximately 424 acres of open space surrounding the development site. Therefore, there would not be a cumulative obstruction of views to the visual resources of the immediate project area. As a result, project and related project impacts are not cumulatively considerable in relation to the views of the area and not significant.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Project impacts would be less than significant and no mitigation measures would be required. It should be noted that as part of project implementation, approximately 424 acres of land, including prominent visual features such as the knoll located near the DWP water tank and the natural vegetation would be dedicated as permanent open space. This would help maintain the existing visual and natural character of the project area.

### **Adverse Impacts**

No adverse impacts would occur with the implementation of the project.