3.6 Aesthetics

This section examines whether implementation of the 2004 Land Use Element, Zoning Code Revisions, and Central District Specific Plan will impact aesthetic and visual resources in the project area, degrade the existing visual character of Pasadena, or create new sources of light and glare.

This chapter does not address specific design components of the 2004 Mobility Element. Transportation improvements and components included in the 2004 Mobility Element promote the development of attractive and convenient transportation facilities that provide access to neighborhood districts, community activity centers, and regional centers while preserving Pasadena's unique character. The *Guidelines for Transportation Review of Projects* ensure aesthetic compatibility of transportation improvements relative to new development projects throughout the City.

Environmental Setting

Aesthetic Environment

The City of Pasadena is located in the western San Gabriel Valley. The northern portion of the City extends into the San Gabriel Mountains. The highest point in the City is approximately 1,600 feet above sea level. Pasadena's terrain slopes gently south from the San Gabriel Mountains, with the exception of the foothills distinguishing the western edge of the City. The San Gabriel Mountains are the most dominant visual resource in Pasadena.[1] The mountains are visible from most parts of the City; however, the most notable view corridors are along north-south roadway arterials such as Vista Avenue, Fair Oaks Avenue, Los Robles, Orange Grove Boulevard, Arroyo Boulevard, Lake Avenue, Hill Avenue, Allen Avenue, Altadena Drive, Sierra Madre Villa Avenue, and Michillinda Avenue.

The Arroyo Seco also provides views of the mountains and is one of the most scenic areas in the City. Although the watercourse was channelized long ago through Brookside Park and south of the Colorado Street (Arroyo Seco) bridge, the adjacent open space and dense vegetation along the banks of the Arroyo Seco give it a natural appearance. Views along the Arroyo Seco are enhanced by the Arroyo Seco Bridge (built in 1913 and partially reconstructed in 1991) and the La Loma Bridge (built in 1887 and later replaced).[2]

The abutting Angeles National Forest and San Rafael Hills, Arroyo Seco, and Eaton Canyon toward the eastern end of Pasadena provide extensive open space that creates scenic viewsheds within the urban environment. The hillsides largely support natural habitats consisting of chaparral, and sections of the Arroyo Seco and Eaton Canyon are interspersed with coast live oaks, cottonwoods, California sycamores, willows, and other riparian vegetation.

[1] City of Pasadena. *Central District Specific Plan*. May 2003.
[2] Ibid.

Pasadena City Hall

Beyond the natural landforms, Pasadena contains a rich architectural heritage that defines the scenic character within many neighborhoods. Pasadena is well known for its architecturally distinctive qualities which attract visitors and film and television production companies. Because much of Pasadena developed from the mid-1880s to the early 1900s, numerous examples of architectural styles remain, including Craftsman, Mediterranean, Monterey, Mission, Spanish Colonial, Tudor, and others. Old Pasadena, an 11-block area surrounding West Colorado Boulevard, contains the largest concentration of historic commercial buildings in the City. Pasadena City Hall, built in the Baroque style and completed in 1927, stands as a landmark to architecture. According to the City, there are nine residential historic districts in Pasadena, including eight neighborhood landmark districts and nine National Register historic districts. (See Figure 21 in Section 3.7 - Cultural Resources.) Examples of landmark districts include Bungalow Heaven, Banbury Oaks, and Garfield Heights.[3] Bungalow Heaven Landmark District is a rare and mostly intact collection of over 800 Craftsman style bungalow homes built from the turn-of-the-century through the 1930s.[4] Banbury Oaks is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Pasadena with an intact collection of houses built primarily from the late 19th century through the 1920s, also including a few significant houses built from 1930 to 1951. A defining feature to this neighborhood is the wood-framed houses with river rock retaining walls and the rare brick bungalows with porches. In addition to California bungalows, which are the predominant style, there are also excellent examples of Queen Anne, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional and International style houses.[5]

Central District Specific Plan Area

The Central District's streets and urban land use patterns began developing in the 1880s. Colorado Boulevard and Fair Oaks Avenue were designated as Pasadena's main commercial corridors, Arroyo Parkway accommodated industrial development, and the rest of the Central District was set aside for residential uses of decreasing density with distance from the commercial core. In 1925, Pasadena unveiled a bold vision for the creation of a Civic Center, the so-called Bennett Plan. City Hall, the Central Library, and the Civic Auditorium were subsequently commissioned and built. The Bennett Plan established a precedent for axial views of these three major public buildings and a fourth axial view that is now the Parsons development.[6]

Within the Central District, large-scale single-use projects often built on an auto-oriented suburban model were introduced with increasing frequency after World War II. However, numerous historically significant structures are still found within the Central District, including the largest concentration of historic public and commercial buildings in the City. Vistas of the San Gabriel Mountains contribute to the Central District experience.[7]

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[3] City of Pasadena Planning Division, Design and Historic Preservation Program. http://www.cityofpasadena.net/planning/deptorg/dhp/homedhp.asp.
[4] City of Pasadena. *Central District Specific Plan.* May 2003.
[5] City of Pasadena. *Banbury Oaks Conservation Plan.* 2001.
[6] City of Pasadena. *Central District Specific Plan.* May 2003.
[7] Ibid.

Today, land uses in the Central District form an identifiable pattern. Colorado Boulevard, Fair Oaks Avenue, and Lake Avenue are dominated by commercial retail and office uses. Arroyo Parkway and areas west include a mix of commercial and light industrial uses, medical office space, and housing. Properties north of Cordova Street support a mix of uses, including many public, educational, and service institutions. A long-established moderate-density residential neighborhood is located south of Cordova Street and east of Marengo Avenue, and is often described as "In-Town Housing." Within this mix of land uses, particular areas of the Central District have developed their own unique identities (see Figure 6 in Section 2.0 - Project Description):

- Old Pasadena is the historic core of the City that has developed into a vibrant regional retail and entertainment destination
- The Civic Center is the governmental center of Pasadena, distinguished by the landmark City Hall building and flanked by the historic YMCA and YWCA structures
- The Pasadena Playhouse District is developing as an arts-oriented area, anchored by the Pasadena Playhouse
- South Lake Avenue is a popular shopping and dining area

Los Robles Avenue north of Cordova Street has been developed to a relatively high intensity, including two major hotels. Properties in the southwest and northwest regions of the Central District are developed at much lower intensities. Central and Memorial Parks are the Central District's two major public parks.[8]

Thresholds Used to Determine Level of Impact

Adoption and implementation of the 2004 Land Use and Mobility Elements, Zoning Code Revisions, and the Central District Specific Plan will result in a significant impact if such implementation will:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage a scenic resource
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings
- Create a new source of light and glare which will adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

[8] Ibid.

Environmental Impact

Scenic Views and Resources

2004 Land Use Element and Zoning Code Revisions
The 2004 Land Use Element encourages infill development within existing urban areas to protect hillside and natural open space resources to the maximum extent possible. The 2004 Land Use Element includes the following objective and policies to protect scenic resources:

Objective 9 Open Space Preservation and Acquisition: Preserve and acquire open space in Pasadena in order to enhance the quality of Pasadena life.

Policy 9.1 Open Space Corridors: Development of open space corridors, easements and acquisition programs and trails shall be established where feasible.

Policy 9.2 Arroyo Seco: Continue and complete comprehensive planning for, and implementation of, plans for the Arroyo, including restoration of the natural area of the Lower Arroyo and the development of the Hahamongna Watershed Park Plan.

Policy 9.3 Eaton Canyon: Identify and continue protection of Eaton Canyon as an open space and recreation area, and as a nature center.

Policy 9.4 Adequate Open Space: Provide an adequate total quantity and equitable distribution of public or publicly accessible open spaces throughout the City.

The Zoning Code Revisions reflect the policies of the 2004 Land Use Element, including establishment of the Hillside Overlay Districts Ordinance.[9] The purpose of the Hillside Overlay Districts Ordinance is to preserve the City's environmental and scenic resources by encouraging the retention of natural topographic features and vegetation, as well as to encourage structures on hillside parcels to be designed with scale, massing, architectural design and detailing appropriate to maintain the visual character of the City's hillsides as natural open space. The Ordinance accomplishes these goals by limiting the height and density of the structure based on the slope of the proposed site. Furthermore, each structure is limited to locations in the most accessible, least visually prominent, most geologically stable portion or portions of the site, and at the lowest feasible elevation. Implementation of the above 2004 Land Use Element policies and the Zoning Code Revisions will work to protect open space areas that create scenic vistas. Impact will be less than significant.

Conclusion:

Implementation of the above 2004 Land Use Element policies and the Zoning Code Revisions will work to protect open space areas that create scenic vistas. Impact will be less than significant.

[9] Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.29 Hillside Overlay Districts.

Central District Specific Plan
With regard to properties governed by the Central District Specific Plan, the Specific Plan includes design guidelines that are applicable to all proposed development in the area to ensure that development will not obscure scenic views. For example, the Public Realm Design Guidelines include the protection of view corridors through the following goals and policies:

CC 4.1 Frame important views of natural and man-made landmarks, and look for opportunities to open new views of landmark buildings and features.

CC 4.2 Discourage developments that obscure existing views along the public right-of-way.

CC 4.3 Prohibit buildings from locating over or across a public street, including buildings constructed as part of a bridge or overpass that crosses a public street.

CC 4.4 Restrict the construction of pedestrian bridges across north-south streets, and discourage their construction along all other streets in the Central District.

CC 4.5 Limit pedestrian bridges to those that are least obtrusive; where provided, they should be of narrow width, open to the sky, and accessible to the public at all times.

Individual development proposals will be required to comply with the above goals and policies to protect scenic viewsheds. Impact will be less than significant with stringent enforcement of the Central District Specific Plan design guidelines.

Conclusion:

With stringent enforcement of the Central District Specific Plan objectives and programs regarding view corridors, significant impact on scenic resources within the Central District can be avoided. Impact will be less than significant.

Visual Character

2004 Land Use Element and Zoning Code Revisions
One of the guiding principles of the 2004 Land Use Element is that "change will be harmonized to preserve Pasadena's historic character and environment." Complementary change requires that new development and other physical alterations respect the existing character and scale of the City. Change and development must be accomplished in a manner that enhances and blends with Pasadena's existing qualities, both physical and social. Therefore, the 2004 Land Use Element contains the following objectives and policies to achieve this principle:

Objective 5 Character and Scale of Pasadena: Preservation of Pasadena's character and scale, including its traditional urban design form and historic character, shall be given highest priority in the consideration of future development.

Policy 5.1 Urban Design Principles: Apply citywide urban design principles to complement the scale and quality of the best of our architectural and urban design traditions.

Policy 5.2 Urban Design Guidelines: Adopt urban design guidelines for each targeted development area and/or each identified design district in Pasadena.

Policy 5.3 Character and Identity: Urban design programs, including principles and guidelines, shall reinforce the City's unique character, scale, and identity.

Policy 5.4 Neighborhood Character and Identity: Urban design programs, including principles and guidelines, shall recognize, maintain, and enhance the character and identity of existing residential and commercial neighborhoods.

Policy 5.5 Architectural and Design Excellence: The City shall actively promote architectural and design excellence in buildings, open space, and urban design and shall discourage poor quality development.

Policy 5.6 Human Values: Future development should reflect concern for the well-being of citizens – for workers, visitors, neighbors, and passersby – and should embody the cultural values of the community; it should be accommodating, inspiring, inviting, and enduring.

Policy 5.7 Enhanced Environment: Development should be shaped to improve the environment for the public; it should support the distinctiveness of the locality and region as well as the special characteristics of the existing fabric of the site's immediate surroundings.

Policy 5.8 Imagination and Creativity: Encourage creative responses and solutions at many scales and levels of development on the part of the various peoples and cultures involved in designing and creating places.

Policy 5.9 Contextual and Compatible Design: Urban design programs shall ensure that new development shall respect Pasadena's heritage by requiring that new development respond to its context and be compatible with the traditions and character of Pasadena, and shall promote orderly development which is compatible with its surrounding scale and which protects the privacy, and access to light and air of surrounding properties.

Policy 5.10 Spatial Attributes: Promote development that creates and enhances positive spatial attributes of major public streets, open spaces, cityscape and mountain sight lines and important "gateways" into the City.

Objective 7 Residential Neighborhoods: Preserve the character and scale of Pasadena's established residential neighborhoods.

Policy 7.1 Mansionization: Ensure that all new development in residential neighborhoods discourages mansionization.[10]

Policy 7.2 Subdivisions: Where subdivisions of existing lots is proposed, provide that the resultant lots in the proposed subdivision are consistent with the prevailing size and

[10] Mansionization is building a large stately house to the maximum area and height permitted on the lot. These houses typically take on the appearance of covering the entire lot.

character of the lots in the immediate vicinity, and that the subdivision would not have a substantial adverse impact on adjacent residences.

Policy 7.6 Hillsides: In recognition of the special character of the hillsides throughout the City, continue strict protections through city grading and hillside ordinances.

Implementation actions of the 2004 Land Use Element require that buildings and open space shall support the distinctiveness of localities and regions. Each new project must be designed to relate to and support the special characteristics of the existing fabric of the site's immediate surroundings, as well as the larger environment of which they are a part. The Design Commission will be responsible for ensuring that all new development subject to design review conforms to the existing character of the neighborhood in which the proposed site is located.

The Zoning Code Revisions, as the implementing tool of the 2004 Land Use Element, sets guidelines on the kinds of building materials that can be used, window styles, setbacks, lot size, height limits, and maximum density allowances permitted in some sections of Pasadena, such as Bungalow Heaven and Garfield Heights. These guidelines ensure that new development conforms to the existing character of the area. Implementation of the above goals and policies, primarily through application of the Zoning Code Revisions and the design review process, will work to preserve the visual character and quality of Pasadena's districts. Impact will be less than significant.

Conclusion:

Implementation of the above goals and policies, primarily through application of the Zoning Code Revisions and the design review process, will work to preserve the visual character and quality of Pasadena's districts. Impact will be less than significant.

Central District Specific Plan

Within the Central District Specific Plan, design guidelines require that all proposed development make a positive contribution and add significant value to the community.[11] This means that the proposed project will blend with the existing architectural pattern of the neighborhood in which the development will take place. In some cases, there is no defined visual context or setting of a neighborhood and new buildings can define the area's image. The intent of these design guidelines is to create continuity between existing and new uses in terms of outward appearance. Thus, the Public Realm Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan include the following:

CC 5.1 Encourage the recycling of Downtown buildings and landscapes; in particular, retain historically and architecturally significant buildings through adaptive use.

CC 5.2 Maintain the distinguishing qualities and features of a historic or architecturally significant building, structure, or site.

CC 5.3 Repair and retain, rather than replace, original building materials, as far as feasible.

CC 5.4 Allow contemporary alterations and additions to historic or architecturally significant buildings, structures, or sites, provided they do not substantially alter or harm the distinguishing qualities and features, and are compatible in terms of scale and character.

[11] City of Pasadena. Central District Specific Plan. May 2003. Page 137.

CC 5.5 Support rehabilitation and restoration of historically significant buildings according to the Secretary of Interior's Standards.

CC 5.6 Retain the following landscape elements unless removal or replacement supports long-term planning objectives: street trees; tree lawns; granite curbs; ornamental tree grates; historic street lights; and similar landscape elements.

Implementation strategies of the Central District Specific Plan call for the City to adopt revised Central District Zone Development Standards that meet the intent and are consistent with the Specific Plan's goals, policies, and recommendations for development. These development standards will include restrictions on building mass and placement to blend new development with the intended visual character of the area, if there is one. With stringent enforcement and implementation of the District-Wide Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan, impact on visual character will be less than significant.

Conclusion:

With stringent enforcement and implementation of the District-Wide Design Guidelines of the Central District Specific Plan, impact on visual character will be less than significant.

Light and Glare

2004 Land Use Element, Zoning Code Revisions, and Central District Specific Plan
Pasadena is already highly urbanized, and land use policies concentrate development into previously developed areas of the City. Thus, light levels within Pasadena will not substantially increase with implementation of the 2004 Land Use Element, the Zoning Code Revisions, and the Central District Specific Plan. However, new structures could create glare effects if they incorporate reflective building materials into project design. Therefore, depending on the location and scope of development, impact could be significant at a localized level. Mitigation measures will be required to reduce the impact to a less than significant level.

Conclusion:

Mitigation measures will be required to reduce the impact on light and glare of individual development projects to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures will be applied at the individual project level to avoid potential new light and glare effects:

1. For development proposals subject to environmental review and/or design review, the City will examine potential light and glare effects associated with structures and on-site activities, and will ensure that features are incorporated into projects to avoid any adverse light and glare impacts.

2. The Zoning Code Revisions will limit the use of reflective and glare-producing building materials.

3. The Zoning Code Revisions will require that all nighttime lighting be focused down onto the site and not onto adjacent properties.

4. The City will establish a program to encourage the use of low-wattage bulbs in nighttime lighting by offering an incentive that discounts the cost of energy-conserving nighttime lighting.

Level of Impact after Mitigation

Impacts relative to scenic views and resources and visual character are less than significant and require no mitigation.

With regard to light and glare, with mitigation, impact is less than significant.

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