

3.2 AESTHETICS

Comments received on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) were reviewed during preparation of this SEIR. However, no comments related to aesthetics were received.

3.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The visual character of the Project site and the surrounding area have not changed since the 2019 SOIA EIR was prepared. The Project site consists of farmland (i.e., row crops). Several rural residences and associated outbuildings are also present on the Project site, but only one building is visible from Grant Line Road. The off-site improvement areas also consist of farmland (cultivated with row crops), and an approximately 15-acre and 8-acre pond, respectively, surrounded by trees and shrubs. The surrounding area generally consists of buildings and parking areas associated with industrial development to the north and west, and row crops to the east and south.

As discussed in the 2019 SOIA EIR, a very low level of nighttime lighting associated with rural residences is present. Nighttime skyglow is present in the area from the existing developed properties to the north and west.

3.2.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

CITY OF ELK GROVE GENERAL PLAN

The City's General Plan (City of Elk Grove 2019) includes the following policies related to aesthetics that are applicable to the proposed Project.

Urban and Rural Development Element

"Urban design" generally refers to the design of public and private buildings and spaces. Good urban design is essential in creating attractive, appealing, and livable districts and neighborhoods. The City recognizes that the public's interest is served by ensuring that new development in Elk Grove is of a high level of design and quality.

- ▶ **Policy LU-5-1:** Ensure that new development reflects the City's desire to create a high-quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-2:** Provide and implement regulations that encourage high-quality signage, ensure that businesses and organizations can effectively communicate through sign displays, promote wayfinding, achieve visually vibrant streetscapes, and control excessive visual clutter.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-3:** Reduce the unsightly appearance of overhead and aboveground utilities by requiring the undergrounding of appropriate services within the urban areas of the City.
 - **Standard LU-5-3.a:** New utility facilities should be located underground to the extent possible. Facilities to be placed underground should include electrical transformers (where consistent with the guidelines of the electrical utility), water backflow preventers, and similar items.
 - **Standard LU-5-3.b:** Require that existing overhead utility facilities be undergrounded as a condition of project approval. This shall include electrical service lines under 69kV. Electrical service lines of 69kV and higher are encouraged to be undergrounded.

- ▶ **Policy LU-5-4:** Require high standards of architectural and site design, and apply strong design controls for all development projects, both public and private, for the enhancement and development of community character and for the proper transition between areas with different types of land uses. Design standards shall address new construction and the reuse and remodeling of existing buildings.
 - **Standard LU-5-4.a:** Nonglare glass shall be used in all nonresidential buildings to minimize and reduce impacts from glare. Buildings that are allowed to use semi-reflective glass must be oriented so that the reflection of sunlight is minimized. This requirement shall be included in subsequent development applications.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-5:** Improve the visual appearance of business areas and districts by applying high standards for architectural design, landscaping, and signs for new development and the reuse or remodeling of existing buildings.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-6:** When resources are available, seek to enliven the public right-of-way with attractive landscaping, public art, lighting, civic landmarks, sidewalk cafés, gateways, water features, interpretive/wayfinding signage, farmers markets, festivals, outdoor entertainment, pocket parks, street furniture, plazas, squares, or other amenities in spaces for public use.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-7:** Encourage incorporation of publicly accessible spaces, such as plazas or squares, into new commercial and mixed-use developments.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-8:** Require developers to provide pedestrian amenities, such as trees, lighting, recycling and refuse containers, seating, awnings, and/or art, in pedestrian areas along project frontages. Where appropriate, install pedestrian amenities in public rights-of-way.
- ▶ **Policy LU-5-9:** Emphasize placemaking design principles in new development projects.
 - **Standard LU-5-9.a:** Prioritize the pedestrian by implementing the following measures:
 - Minimize parking areas and curb cuts along commercial street frontages.
 - Encourage a vertical and horizontal mix of land uses.
 - Provide urban plazas and gathering spaces in commercial and multifamily development.
 - Provide pedestrian amenities such as lighting, landscaping, and benches.
 - **Standard LU-5-9.b:** Encourage public art in all new large-scale development projects equal to or greater than 100,000 square feet.

Mobility Element

- ▶ **Policy MOB-3-7:** Develop a complete and connected network of sidewalks, crossings, paths, and bike lanes that are convenient and attractive, with a variety of routes in pedestrian-oriented areas.
- ▶ **Policy MOB-3-8:** Provide a thorough and well-designed wayfinding signage system to help users of all modes of travel navigate the City in an efficient manner.

Community and Resource Protection Element

- ▶ **Policy NR-2-1:** Preserve large native oak and other native tree species as well as large nonnative tree species that are an important part of the City’s historic and aesthetic character. When reviewing native or non-native trees for preservation, consider the following criteria:
 - Health of the tree
 - Safety hazards posed by the tree
 - Suitability for preservation in place
 - Biological value
 - Aesthetic value
 - Shade benefits
 - Water quality benefits
 - Runoff reduction benefits
 - Air quality benefits (pollutant reduction)

- ▶ **Policy NR-2-4:** Preserve and plant trees in appropriate densities and locations to maximize energy conservation and air quality benefits.

- ▶ **Policy NR-2-6:** Promote the planting of drought-resistant shade trees with substantial canopies as part of private development projects and require, where feasible, site design that uses trees to shade rooftops, parking facilities, streets, and other facilities.

3.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the proposed Project would have a significant impact related to visual resources if it would:

- ▶ 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;

- ▶ except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; or

- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

The following issues were dismissed from further detailed analysis in the 2019 SOIA EIR because it was determined that no impact would occur; for the reasons explained below, these issues would also result in no impact for the proposed Project as evaluated in this SEIR.

Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista—A scenic vista is a public viewpoint that provides expansive views of highly valued scenery or landscapes. The City has not designated any scenic vistas in the Project area. Therefore, no impact would occur, and this issue is not evaluated further in this SEIR.

Damage Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway—The proposed Project would not affect features, including trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings, within a state scenic highway. The closest designated scenic highway segment is a portion of State Route (SR) 160, from Freeport south to the County line (California Department of Transportation 2017). SR 160 is approximately 9 miles to the west, and due to the flat topography and intervening vegetation, the Project area is not visible from SR 160. Therefore, no impact would occur, and this issue is not evaluated further in this SEIR.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

Impact 3.2-1: Substantial Degradation of Existing Visual Character.

The Project site and off-site improvement areas are more than two miles south/southwest from areas designated Rural Residential by the City, and the Elk Grove Triangle Policy Area is located between the Project site and most of the areas designated for Rural Residential development by the City.

The areas that would be rezoned for regional commercial and light and heavy industrial development currently support agricultural uses (i.e., row crops) that are consistent with the visual character of undeveloped areas on the south side of Grant Line Road. The Project site's rural character is visible to motorists on Grant Line Road, with views of agricultural areas and distant views of trees along the Cosumnes River floodplain. The Project site provides agricultural views that are typical of the region.

Buildings and related signage, landscaping, electrical substations, and other above ground supportive infrastructure associated with proposed development would alter the existing visual character of the Project site, as well as views of the Project site from public viewing locations. Public views from Grant Line Road and from the intersections of Grant Line Road and Mosher and Waterman Roads would change substantially compared to existing conditions. Views of development at the Project site would be prominent as motorists and nearby residents cross the UPRR tracks and approach the intersection of Grant Line Road with Waterman Road and drive northeast. Adding commercial uses, urban landscaping, and frontage improvements along Grant Line Road would change the site's visual character, consistent with relevant City policies, design guidelines, and code requirements.

The off-site drainage pipeline improvements to the existing 15-acre pond would be installed underground. Public views of improvements to the existing drainage channel on the east side of the UPRR tracks that discharges to the existing 8-acre pond, from the Emerald Lakes Golf Course, are blocked by tall trees and the elevated railroad track embankment. Views of this channel to the south for motorists traveling on Grant Line Road would be fleeting in nature for a few seconds from the UPRR overpass and would not change substantially from existing conditions. The presence of construction equipment would be temporary. The portion of the existing off-site drainage channel that would be improved near the northeastern Project site boundary (which discharges to Deer Creek) is not visible from any public location.

Temporary fencing would be used at the Project site and along pipeline alignments needed to extend utilities. Construction equipment and personnel, excavated soils, and parked vehicles and trailers would temporarily alter visual conditions; however, these conditions would be temporary and intermittent as construction progresses.

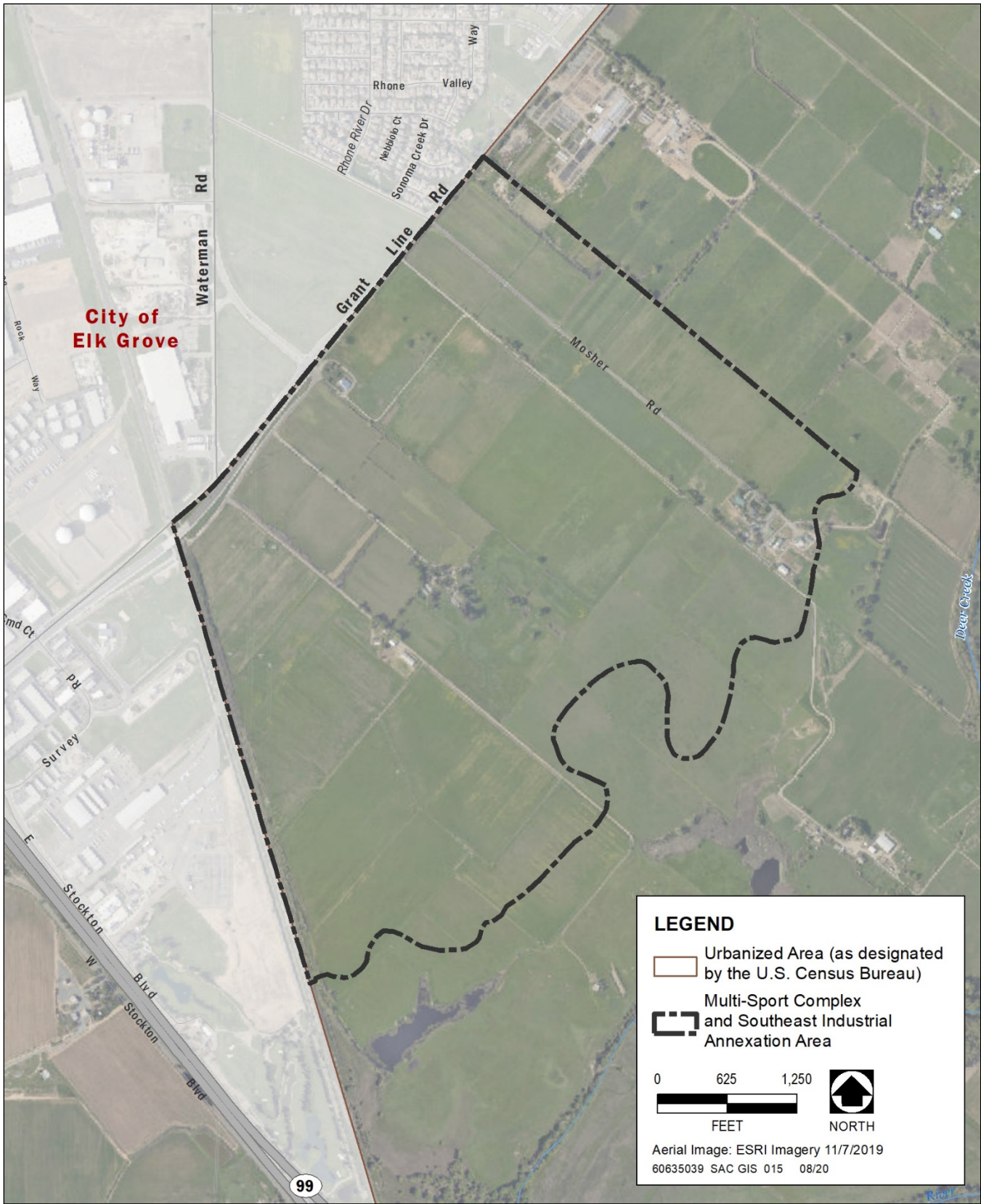
As applications for development within the Project site are processed by the City, they would be subject to applicable City General Plan policies, zoning regulations, and design guidelines, which are designed to reduce adverse visual impacts associated with new development. The City's Design Review regulations (Elk Grove Municipal Code Section 23.16.080) and the Elk Grove Design Guidelines (City of Elk Grove 2007) contain measures specifically for commercial and industrial development proposals, including building design and landscaping measures, which are intended to reduce visual effects. Specifically, for light industrial areas and business parks, the Design Guidelines have measures to protect adjoining uses from objectionable views. For example, service areas would likely be located at the rear of buildings and the City would emphasize review of the building entryways and landscaping. The General Plan policies and action items ensure the protection of certain trees, that the use of reflective materials would be reduced, and indicate that utilities should be located underground to the extent possible. The Elk Grove Municipal Code Title 23 also has additional restrictions related to landscaping, lighting, building siting and design, and other aesthetic characteristics. The Design Guidelines encourage incorporating natural features, setting back parking areas away from the front of the site to minimize visual impacts, planting landscaping to provide visual screening, and shielding lighting. Consistent with the Design Guidelines, City Design Guidelines require that parking is set back from Grant Line Road and would use street trees and on-site landscaping to shield views of future buildings.

Aesthetics impacts are inherently subjective. With adherence to City policies, Design Guidelines, and Code requirements, some viewers may consider changes to the visual character attributable to the proposed Project to be an improvement. However, the impact of proposed development within the Project site and the off-site improvements on the views of agricultural lands is conservatively determined to be **significant** because it would change the existing visual character of the Project site and as shown in Exhibit 3.2-1 the Project site is considered non-urbanized. Other than the implementation of City policies, design guidelines, and Code requirements that are designed to minimize visual impacts and promote high-quality design, there are no feasible mitigation measures to avoid or reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, as with the 2019 SOIA EIR, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 3.2-2: Potential Loss of Trees of Local Importance.

The Project site contains scattered native trees, including valley oaks, that would be considered trees of local importance under Section 19.12.040 of the City Municipal Code. The off-site drainage improvement area in the vicinity of the 15-acre pond also contains trees, which may qualify as trees of local importance. In addition, nonnative trees are also scattered throughout the Project site in the form of urban landscaping around existing rural residences. Through Elk Grove's design review and tree regulations, the City would evaluate site planning to determine whether existing trees can be preserved. If preservation is not feasible, individual development projects would be subject to compensation requirements for tree removal consistent with the City's tree regulations.

As with the 2019 SOIA EIR, removal of trees of local importance, including native oak trees, at the Project site and the off-site improvement areas is considered a **potentially significant** impact.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010

Exhibit 3.2-1. Urbanized Areas

Mitigation Measure 3.2-2: Prepare and Implement a Tree Mitigation Plan to Reduce Effects on Trees of Local Importance (2019 SOIA EIR Mitigation Measure 3.2-2).

Mitigation for the removal of trees of local importance shall be provided according to the Elk Grove Municipal Code, Title 19, "Trees," Chapter 19.12, "Tree Preservation and Protection." Mitigation will provide 1 new inch diameter at breast height (dbh) of tree for each inch dbh lost (1:1 ratio) through on-site or off-site replacement, payment of an in-lieu fee, or on-site or off-site relocation.

Significance after Mitigation

Development at the Project site and off-site improvements would be subject to the City's Municipal Code, which regulates preservation of, and compensation for, the loss of trees of local importance. As with the 2019 SOIA EIR, implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.2-2, which would require replacement of trees, would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.2-3: Light and Glare Effects from New Lighting Sources.

Skyglow is artificial lighting from urbanized uses that alters the rural landscape and, in sufficient quantity, lights up the nighttime sky, and thus reducing the darkness of the night sky and the visibility of the stars. The Project site currently supports agricultural uses and has few sources of ambient light other than the existing rural residences, lighting of Grant Line Road, and adjacent land uses in Elk Grove. Development would introduce street, parking lot, and building lighting, which would result in substantial new sources of light and glare.

To minimize lighting effects, the City would impose the requirements of Title 23 of the Elk Grove Municipal Code, which contains standards for lighting that address shielding of light fixtures, photometric calculations to determine the allowed level of illumination, and fixture height. Furthermore, the City's Design Guidelines encourage shielded and downward-pointing lighting. The Citywide Design Guidelines include provisions for outdoor light fixtures to be directed/shielded downward. Development would be required to limit outdoor lighting, which would be directed downward and shielded to minimize light spillover and skyglow. Further, the City would impose conditions of approval that minimize the use of reflective materials in building design. Compliance with City General Plan policies, zoning regulations, and Design Guidelines would minimize lighting and glare for development within the Project site. The off-site improvement areas would not require installation of lighting or structures that could create glare.

As with the 2019 SOIA EIR, compliance with the City's Municipal Code and Design Guidelines will ensure that this impact is **less than significant**.

It should be noted that, the prior 2019 EIR included the following Mitigation Measures 3.2-3a and 3.2-3b. These mitigation measures remain applicable to the Project.

Mitigation Measure 3.2-3a: Minimize Over-Lighting (2019 SOIA EIR Mitigation Measure 3.2-3a).

The City of Elk Grove will implement the following specific measures to minimize over-lighting in the SOIA Area, including the multi-sport park complex, consistent with Elk Grove Zoning Code:

- Exterior lighting shall be architecturally integrated with the building style, material and colors and be of a human scale.

- Design pole heights and light shielding to minimize spillover and skyglow.
- Schedule the use of outdoor lights and use an automated lighting control system to turn off unused lights.
- The hours of operation for the lighting system for any game or event shall not exceed one (1) hour after the end of the event.
- Schedule field use to emphasize using fields at the southern end of the site to increase the distance of night lighting from residential areas.
- Prepare and implement an operational plan to meet or exceed field lighting standards for field sports events established by oversight organizations (e.g., California Interscholastic Federation).
- Use methods to provide lower intensity light (“dimming”) for events that require less lighting and during post-event periods as teams leave the field and spectators move toward the parking lots.
- Implement a monitoring plan to ensure that light levels in adjacent residential areas do not exceed thresholds listed in the Elk Grove Design Guidelines.

Mitigation Measure 3.2-3b: Minimize Glare (2019 SOIA EIR Mitigation Measure 3.2-3b).

Consistent with Elk Grove Zoning Code, future development within the SOIA Area shall avoid the use of materials that could cause glare, such as reflective, mirrored, or black glass. Buildings that are allowed to use semi-reflective glass will be oriented to minimize the reflection of sunlight to sensitive receptors. Where the light source from an outdoor light fixture is visible beyond the property line, shielding shall be required to reduce glare so that the light source is not visible from within any residential dwelling unit.