

INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the existing visual characteristics of the project site and the surrounding area and evaluates the significance of the changes in visual character and quality of the project site that would result from development of the proposed project as viewed from the surrounding area. Information on existing visual resources was incorporated from the City of Pittsburg General Plan and field observations.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Existing Conditions

The main project site is located in a small Y-shaped valley open to the eastern frontage along Kirker Pass Road where the valley floor is at least 1,000 feet wide. A major ridgeline, as identified in Figure 4-2 of the Pittsburg General Plan, is located on the southern portion of the main project site (and is not proposed to be altered) while another ridgeline (not identified in General Plan Figure 4-2) is located on the northern portion of the main project site. These ranges have peaks ranging from approximately 655 feet above mean sea level (MSL) on the north side of the main project site, to 780 feet above MSL on the south and southwest side of the main project site. Between these two peaks sits a valley with an elevation low point of approximately 280 feet above MSL. The main project site is characterized by rolling grassland with scattered valley oak and buckeye trees. The only structures on the site are high-tension transmission lines and towers within several utility line easements. The off-site parcel is also characterized by rolling grassland.

Figures 5.1-1 and 5.1-2, Existing Views of the Project Site, provide photos of the main project site from different vantage points on the site.

Photo 1, Figure 5.1-1 provides a view northwest across the main project site from the property entrance off Kirker Pass Road. As shown, the small valley on the main project site is relatively flat and is covered with annual grasses. A small dirt road that runs the length of the valley is also visible from this vantage point. The hillsides surrounding the valley to the west and north are also visible with several rock outcroppings prominent on the south facing slope of the northern hills.

Photo 2, Figure 5.1-1 provides a view of the hills located on the northern portion of the main project site from the property entrance off Kirker Pass Road. As displayed, several small hills which display rock outcroppings are prominent in this view. Oak and buckeye trees and a utility line are also present. Kirker Pass Road and existing residential development are visible to the northeast.

Photo 1, Figure 5.1-2 provides a view of the hills located on the southern portion of the main project site from the property entrance off Kirker Pass Road. As shown, a large buckeye tree and a utility line are visible in the foreground. Fencing that was installed to control cattle is also visible; the site was used for cattle grazing in the past. There are views of oak and buckeye trees located below the major ridgeline on the southern portion of the main project site in the background and views of the electrical transmission line that borders the main project site to the west in the distance.

Photo 2, Figure 5.1-2 provides a view northeast across the main project site from the hills located on the western boundary of the property. As displayed, the small valley that comprises a large portion of the main project site is entirely visible along with the ridgeline along the northern boundary of the main project site. The access road that runs the entire length of the valley and the ephemeral stream that drains into Kirker Creek are also visible. The City of Pittsburg and Suisun Bay are visible in the distance.

Scenic Views

Views of the southern foothills to the south and the Suisun Bay to the north are considered important to the visual quality of the community. Views of the southern hills are prominent from the flatland areas of Pittsburg and are available from streets that have a north-south configuration as well as from larger opens spaces such as the Civic Center and Stoneman Park (Pittsburg 2004).

A viewshed analysis was conducted as part of the General Plan. Four “viewpoints” within the City were selected, and digital elevation modeling was used to determine what hills and ridges were visible from each viewpoint. Views of the northern ridgeline on the project site are available from Railroad Avenue/State Route 4 (General Plan, Figure 4-1). In addition, the ridgeline along the northern boundary of the main project site is visible from other areas within the City of Pittsburg to the north, but the proposed development area is located behind this ridgeline (not including the off-site detention basin) and would not be visible from public viewpoints in the City, as shown in General Plan Figure 4-1. The off-site detention basin would be visible from Woodland Hills Park, which is located at the corner of Crestview Drive and Sunnyhill Way. Because of intervening topography, the main project site is not generally visible from trails within the East Bay Regional Park District’s Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve to the east and recent District park acquisitions to the south. Views into the main project site from Kirker Pass Road are fairly brief at typical travel speeds along this stretch of roadway.



Photo 1: View Northwest Across the Project Site



Photo 2: View North of the Hills on the Northern Portion of the Project Site

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2006

FIGURE **5.1-1**

Existing Views of the Project Site





Photo 1: View South of the Hills on the Southern Portion of the Project Site



Photo 2: View Northeast Across the Project Site

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2011

FIGURE **5.1-2**

Existing Views of the Project Site



Scenic Routes

The project site is not located adjacent to or within the viewshed of a state scenic highway (CSHP 2011). The Contra Costa County General Plan identifies the segment of Kirker Pass Road adjacent to the project site as a Scenic Route. The County General Plan defines a Scenic Route as a roadway that traverses a scenic corridor of relatively high visual or cultural value (CCC 2005).

Light & Glare

There are currently no sources of light and glare on the project site. The nearest fixed lights are those associated with the homes in the Woodlands neighborhood, less than 0.25 mile north of the project site, and homes and ranches along Nortonville Road, approximately 0.5 mile southeast of the project site. Vehicle traffic on Kirker Pass Road adds intermittent moving sources of light from passing cars.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

City of Pittsburg General Plan

The Pittsburg General Plan Urban Design Element includes goals and policies relating to aesthetics and visual resources. The goals and policies applicable to the proposed project are listed below.

Views, Ridges, and Edges

Goal 4-G-1 Retain views of major and minor ridgelines within the southern hills, as designated in Figure 4-2.

Policy 4-P-2 As a part of the new development process, require design review of proposed hillside development. Ensure that:

- Hillside development is clustered in small valleys and behind minor ridgelines, to preserve more prominent views of the southern hills.
- Hillside streets are designed to allow open views by limiting the building of structures or planting of tall trees along the southern edge or terminus of streets.

Hillside Development

Goal 4-G-4	Encourage development that preserves unique natural features, such as topography, rock outcroppings, mature trees, creeks, and ridgelines, in the design of hillside neighborhoods.
Policy 4-P-9	Encourage new hillside development to preserve unique natural features by mapping all natural features as part of development applications, including landforms, mature tree stands, rock.
Policy 4-P-11	Limit grading of hillside areas over 30 percent slope (see Figure 10-1) to elevations less than 900 feet, foothills, knolls, and ridges not classified as major or minor ridgelines (see Figure 4-2). During review of development plans, ensure that necessary grading respects significant natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties.
Policy 4-P-14	Preserve natural creeks and drainage courses as close as possible to their natural location and appearance.

Lot Configuration

Policy 4-P-15	Minimize the visual prominence of hillside development by taking advantage of existing site features for screening, such as tree clusters, depressions in topography, setback hillside plateau areas, and other natural features.
Policy 4-P-19	Encourage lot configuration such that perimeter walls and fences along arterial corridors within the southern hills are not needed.
Policy 4-P-20	Discourage lot orientation that fronts onto the cross-slope of street segments on steep grades.
Policy 4-P-22	Discourage placement of lots that allow the rear of homes to be exposed to lower elevation views.

Street Layout

Policy 4-P-28	Encourage developers to align and construct streets along natural grades. Minimize visibility of streets from other areas within the City (see Figure 4-7).
Policy 4-P-30	Ensure that all residential developers provide multi-use trails or trailheads connecting to local schools and parks, commercial centers, and regional open spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with Appendix G of the 2013 *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*, the impact of the proposed project related to aesthetics would be considered significant 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.
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the study area and its surroundings.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

CEQA Checklist Items Adequately Addressed in the Initial Study

The analysis in the Initial Study prepared for the proposed project and circulated with the Notice of Preparation (NOP) concluded that further analysis of the following issues was not required in the EIR.

- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

The proposed project would involve the removal of mature oak and buckeye trees and rock outcroppings. The existing rock outcrops on the northern portion of the main project site would be removed and several scattered mature oak and buckeye trees in the lower portions of the site would be removed. However, the project site is not identified as being adjacent to a state scenic highway (CSHP 2011) and does not contain other scenic resources as identified in the Pittsburg General Plan; therefore, no scenic resources within view of a state scenic highway would be damaged. This impact is considered to be less than significant.

Impact Analysis

Impact AES-1 Implementation of the proposed project could have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (Potentially significant)

Implementation of the project would substantially alter existing views of the project site from surrounding areas. Views of the valley and grassy slopes below the northern ridgeline of the main project site would be replaced by urban development and graded slopes. Specifically, the northern ridgeline separating the main project site from existing development in the City of Pittsburg would be graded and re-contoured and 356 new residences, with associated roads, infrastructure, and detention basins, would be constructed in the valley. In addition, a partially buried water tank would also be added along the top of the northern ridgeline on the main project site and an off-site detention basin would be constructed on the off-site parcel. Both of these facilities would be visible from locations in the City to the north, particularly Woodland Hills Park at the corner of Crestview Drive and Sunnyhill Way. However, a large portion of the main project site to the south, which includes the southern ridgeline, would remain as undeveloped land.

The proposed project is designed to minimize impacts to views of ridgelines on the main project site. The General Plan considers views of major ridgelines important and General Plan Goal 4-G-1 requires the City to retain views of designated major and minor ridgelines within the southern hills. The southern ridgeline on the main project site is designated as a major ridgeline in the City of Pittsburg General Plan (2004) and would not be affected by development of the proposed project. While grading and development would occur on the south-facing slope of the northern ridgeline, this ridgeline is not designated as a major or minor ridgeline in the City's General Plan, nor would the ridge be entirely removed. No development would occur on the northern ridgeline except for the installation of the water tank. All new residential development would occur below the ridgeline under 475 feet in elevation.

The Pittsburg General Plan does not designate any scenic vistas within the City; however, it does identify views of the "rolling, grassy hills to the south," which characterize the site, as important visual resources for the City. In addition, the Contra Costa County General Plan identifies the segment of Kirker Pass Road adjacent to the main project site as a Scenic Route which is defined as a roadway that traverses a scenic corridor of relatively high visual or cultural value (CCC 2005). The main project site, including the area proposed for development, could be considered an element of broad scenic vistas of hills and open space visible from Kirker Pass Road; however, views into the main project site from Kirker Pass Road are fairly brief given typical travel speeds along this stretch of roadway. As stated above, the ridgeline along the northern boundary of the main project site is visible from the viewpoint of Railroad Avenue/State Route 4 and areas within the City of Pittsburg to the north (according to Pittsburg General Plan,

Figure 4-1), but the proposed development area behind the northern ridgeline is not visible from public viewpoints in the City, such as the marina to the north and nearby recreational areas including the East Bay Regional Park District's (EBRPD) Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve to the east and recent EBRPD park acquisitions to the south, due to intervening topography.

However, due to the proximity of the main project site to and visibility from Kirker Pass Road, future residential development could degrade the scenic views of adjacent hillsides, especially if the architectural design includes the use of high-contrast design elements such as light-colored stucco and brightly colored red toned roof tile. These architectural elements tend to contrast with the natural grassland setting (even though the surrounding hillsides are characterized by dry, yellow grasslands during much of the year) and have the potential to distract from the natural setting by drawing attention away from key focal elements of the existing scenic vistas (i.e., existing grassland and adjacent hillsides and ridgelines). Therefore, the proposed project could have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. However, with implementation of **Mitigation Measure MM AES-1**, which requires that architectural elevations and materials of the subdivision include natural, terrain-neutral colors and that the proposed project undergo design review, the impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures

MM AES-1 The architectural elevations and materials used on the exterior of the residences (including roofing materials, exterior finishing, and trim palette) shall include natural, terrain-neutral colors and prohibit the use of brightly colored terra cotta or red clay roof tiles in order to limit potential visual contrast between the proposed development and the adjacent hillsides, as determined acceptable by the Planning Commission through the design review process required by Pittsburg Municipal Code (PMC) section 13.50.100. The developer shall include Codes, Covenants, and Restrictions that prohibit or limit roofing color changes by future owners, in accordance with the Planning Commission design review approval.

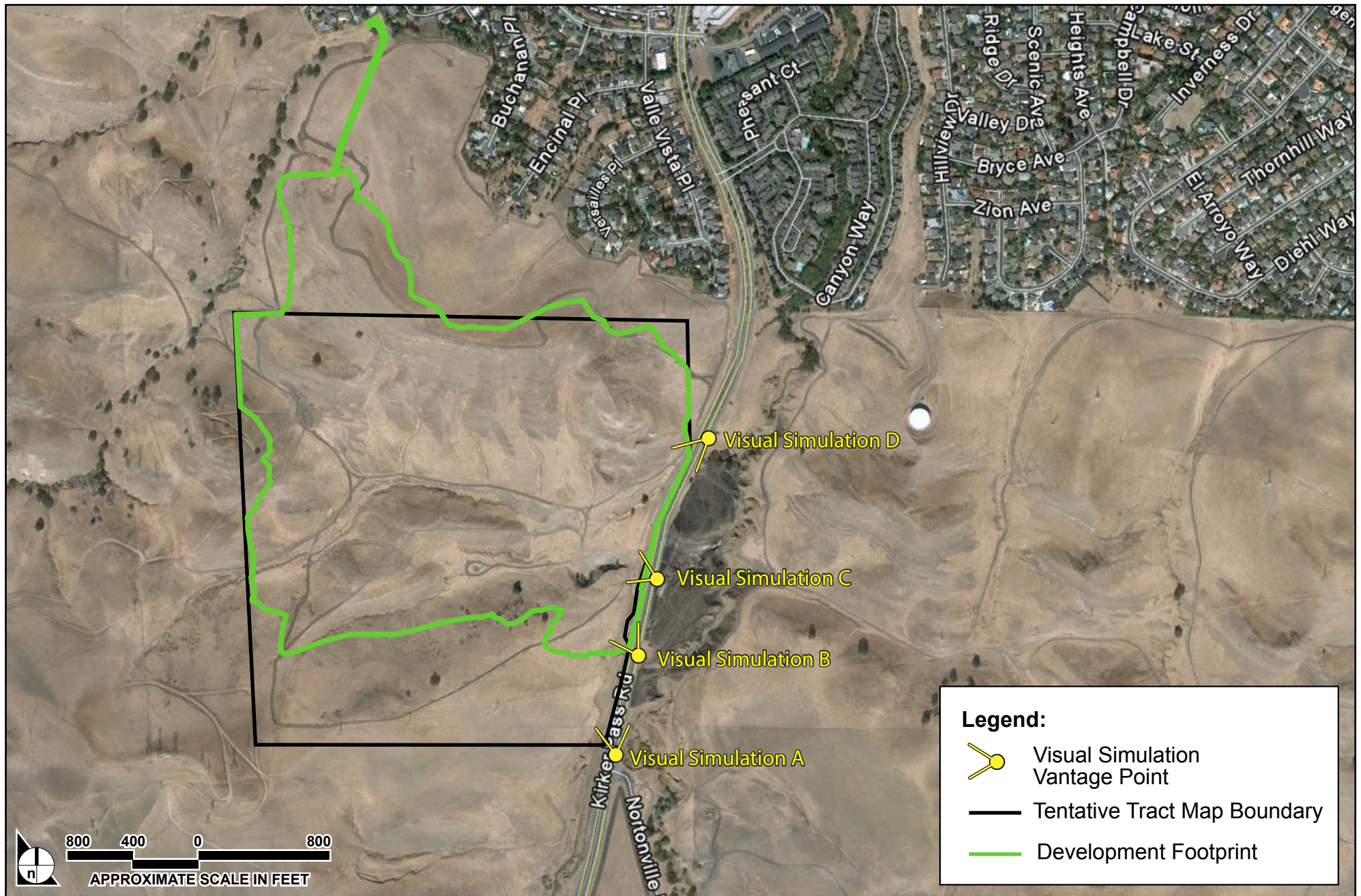
Residual Impacts after Mitigation

This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-2 Implementation of the proposed project could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings. (Potentially Significant)

Implementation of the project would substantially alter the visual character of the project site by altering the topography below the northern ridgeline, removing several rock outcroppings, removing trees, and transforming the undeveloped open land in the valley into a developed and urbanized area.

Visual simulations prepared for the proposed project illustrate the change to the visual character of the project site. **Figure 5.1-3, Visual Simulation Vantage Points**, provides the vantage points of the various visual simulations prepared for the proposed project. **Figure 5.1-4, Visual Simulation A**, provides a mid-range view of the main project site from northbound Kirker Pass Road. As illustrated in **Figure 5.1-4**, the proposed residences would be built on top of fill and would be nestled in the valley area between hilltops, in most cases at least 200 feet below the adjacent peaks. **Figure 5.1-5, Visual Simulation B**, provides a close up view of the proposed project from the secondary entrance to the main project site along Kirker Pass Road. As illustrated in **Figure 5.1-5**, the main project site would be extensively re-contoured when compared to existing conditions, with 10 to 85 feet of fill placed in the valley and a portion of the northern ridgeline reduced by 75 feet. The proposed single-family development on the main site would consist of one- to two-story houses that would be partially obscured by the re-contoured topography. **Figure 5.1-6, Visual Simulation C**, also provides a close up view of the proposed project near the main entrance to the main project site along Kirker Pass Road. As shown in **Figure 5.1-6**, the main project site would be extensively re-contoured when compared to existing conditions and the proposed residences would be located below the re-counter hillsides to the north. **Figure 5.1-7, Visual Simulation D**, provides a mid-range view of the project from southbound Kirker Pass Road. As shown in **Figure 5.1-7**, the northern ridgeline on the main project site which appears in the foreground of the photo and the small hill in the background along Kirker Pass Road would be altered and reduced in elevation compared to existing conditions. The topography of the main project site would block the view of some residences from this viewpoint although residences closer to the roadway would be visible.



SOURCE: Google Earth – October 2011

FIGURE 5.1-3

Visual Simulation Vantage Points



Existing Conditions
(as seen from northbound Kirker Pass Road)



Proposed Project Without Landscaping

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2011

FIGURE 5.1-4



Visual Simulation A



Existing Conditions
(as viewed from the secondary project entrance on Kirker Pass Road)



Proposed Project Without Landscaping

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2011

FIGURE **5.1-5**

Visual Simulation B





Existing Conditions
(as viewed from the main project entrance on Kirker Pass Road)



Proposed Project without Landscaping

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2011

FIGURE 5.1-6

Visual Simulation C





Existing Conditions
(as seen from southbound Kirker Pass Road)



Proposed Project without Landscaping

NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2011

FIGURE **5.1-7**



Visual Simulation D

The main project site is separated from existing urban development within the City of Pittsburg by a prominent ridge (elevation of up to 655 feet) and associated ridgelines on the northern boundary of the main project site. While the preliminary grading plan shows that the southern portion of this hillside would be graded down by approximately 75 feet, the prominent peak and sloping ridgelines would remain visually dominant and would screen the lower elevation residences from views from vantage points within the City and from the delta. While the slopes would be altered and a water tank would be added within the top of the northern ridge, the general key visual elements of the ridgelines and the viewshed from Railroad Avenue/State Route 4 would be maintained, with residential development limited to the lower elevations of the main site.

The water tank proposed to be placed on the top of the ridgeline on the northern boundary would be subject to design criteria of the City of Pittsburg Water Master Plan (2010). In accordance with the Water Master Plan, the tank would be constructed below ground, with only the upper 3 feet visible above ground. This aboveground portion of the tank would be painted to blend in with the surrounding grassy hills. The location of the residential subdivision clustered within the lower elevations of the main site and the placement of the water tank within the hilltop would ensure that the project has minimal visual impacts to the southern grassy hills from vantage points within the City and from the delta. However, construction of the off-site detention basin on the off-site parcel would result in the replacement of natural contours on the north-facing hillside of the northern ridge bordering the main project site with engineered slopes. An earthen berm would also be constructed around the detention basin. Given that the off-site detention basin would be visible from Woodland Hills Park, the impact associated with the visual change to the hillside is considered potentially significant. However, implementation of **Mitigation Measure MM AES-2**, which would require the developer to hydro-seed all disturbed, yet undeveloped, slopes (including those surrounding the proposed detention basin and the earthen berm) to encourage the growth of new vegetation on disturbed hillsides, would reduce the significance of this impact associated with the off-site detention basin.

While no architectural plans of the proposed dwelling units are available, it is expected that development in the main project site would be similar in character to nearby residential development to the north. The proposed project would also conform to City of Pittsburg General Plan policies governing development near ridges and in hillside areas, which would minimize visual impacts. For example, the proposed project includes landscaping along Kirker Pass Road which would maintain the sense of “rural” open space at the City’s southern boundary, as required by General Plan Policy 4-P-6. In addition, streets within the project area would only be visible from select points along Kirker Pass Road, near the project entrance, as recommended by General Plan Policy 4-P-28.

However, despite the isolation of the project site and adherence to policies and procedures to minimize visual impacts, implementation of the proposed project overall would still substantially alter the project site, thus substantially degrading the existing natural visual character of the site and its surroundings. As no feasible mitigation is available to reduce the severity of this effect, this impact is considered significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measures

MM AES-2 The developer shall hydro-seed all disturbed, yet undeveloped, slopes, including those surrounding the proposed off-site detention basin and the earthen berm, in order to encourage growth of new vegetation on disturbed hillsides.

Residual Impacts after Mitigation

Even with the implementation of mitigation, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AES-3 **Implementation of the proposed project would create a new source of substantial light or glare which could adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (Potentially significant)**

While the proposed project does not include any land use or feature that would be expected to generate a large, new source of nuisance light (e.g., a stadium or sports field), development on the main project site would contain lights typical for single-family residential development such as street luminaires, security lighting, landscape lighting, and interior lighting. This lighting has the potential to add multiple new visible light sources that could detract from the natural scenic vista of the southern hills. This represents a potentially significant impact. However, implementation of **Mitigation Measures MM AES-3a** through **MM AES-3d**, which regulate and place restrictions on lighting on the main project site, would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures

MM AES-3a The developer shall use full cutoff streetlights to direct light downward. A “full cutoff” luminaire is defined as a luminaire that allows no direct light emissions above a horizontal plane through the luminaire’s lowest light-emitting part.

MM AES-3b The developer shall prepare a photometric plan which shows the proposed height, location, and intensity of streetlights on-site. The plan shall comply with minimum standards for roadway lighting, and shall be reviewed and approved by the City Planning and Public Works Departments. The City will consider allowing minimum

street lighting illumination levels throughout the project site as the proposed subdivision is located on the urban edge in the foreground of the southern hills.

MM AES-3c The developer shall prepare Codes, Covenants & Restrictions (CC&Rs) that control flood lighting and landscape lighting on the slopes and yards of specific lots to avoid light “trespass” or “spill” and excessive illumination levels.

MM AES-3d The developer shall prepare CC&Rs that prohibit continuous all-night exterior lighting throughout the project.

In addition to the requirements of mitigation measures above, the location of the development within a valley and several hundred feet below the peaks of the surrounding ridgelines would further reduce potential impacts of light and glare, as the ridgelines would act as a physical barrier to help contain any potential light pollution.

Residual Impacts after Mitigation

This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Cumulative Impacts

Impact AES-4: **The proposed project could combine with other existing and future development in the cities of Pittsburg and Antioch to result in a significant cumulative impact with regard to visual character. (Potentially significant)**

Future development in the City of Pittsburg, including Sky Ranch II and the James Donlon Boulevard Extension Project, and in the City of Antioch, including the Black Diamond Ranch project, may alter the visual character of the southern hillsides on the east side of the City (the pending Tuscany Meadows project would not add to this impact, as it is considered an infill type of development located on flat land, north of the southern hills). However, none of the cumulative projects that are residential in nature are within the immediate vicinity of the proposed project and, as a result, none of these residential projects would be in the same viewshed as the proposed project, which is available from Kirker Pass Road. The only cumulative project in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project is the James Donlon Boulevard Extension Project. This project involves the construction of a roadway and no other improvements that would substantially alter lands to the east of the project. Therefore, views of the hillsides to the east would not be substantially modified by the extension project. In addition, the proposed project includes mitigation that would reduce the negative effects of the project to the existing natural visual character of the site and its surroundings. Therefore, the proposed project would not combine with other existing and

future development to result in a significant cumulative impact with regard to visual character, and the contribution of the proposed project to the cumulative visual character impact would not be cumulatively considerable.

Mitigation Measures

Implement **Mitigation Measures MM AES-1 and MM AES-2.**

Residual Impacts after Mitigation

This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-5: The proposed project could combine with other existing and future development in the cities of Pittsburg and Antioch to result in a significant cumulative impact with regard to light and glare (*Potentially significant*).

Future development in the City of Pittsburg, including Sky Ranch II and the James Donlon Boulevard Extension Project, and in the City of Antioch, including the Black Diamond Ranch, may result in significant cumulative impacts with regard to light and glare. The proposed project includes mitigation to reduce the negative effects of project lighting. In addition, with the exception of the off-site detention basin, a majority of the main project site is visually isolated from existing development to the north. However, the off-site detention basin would include no lighting. Therefore, the proposed project would not combine with other existing and future development to result in significant cumulative impacts with regards to light and glare, and the contribution of the proposed project to cumulative light and glare impacts would not be cumulatively considerable.

Mitigation Measures

Implement **Mitigation Measures MM AES-3a through MM AES-3d.**

Residual Impacts after Mitigation

This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level.

REFERENCES

California Department of Transportation, 2011 California Scenic Highway Program. Accessed August 26, 2011. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/scpr.htm>. (CSHP 2011)

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