
IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

A. AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the subject of aesthetics with respect to the proposed project and includes a description of existing visual conditions and an evaluation of potential aesthetic effects associated with implementing the proposed project. Computer-generated visual simulations illustrating "before" and conceptual "after" visual conditions at the project site as seen from four representative, public vantage points are presented as part of the analysis. Digitized photographs and computer modeling and rendering techniques were used to prepare the simulation images.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

As discussed in Section III (Project Description), the project site is located in the southwest portion of the City in the Rockaway neighborhood. The proposed project site is divided into two parcels that make up the 11.2-acre site. Development would occur on the westernmost two acres of the site. The site is bordered by Fassler Avenue to the west and south, vacant land to the north and a condominium development (the SeaCrest Condominiums) to the east.

The proposed project site consists of hilly terrain and generally slopes from a peak in the southeast portion (approximately 440 feet above mean sea level [msl]) of the site to a low point in the northwest region (240 feet above msl) of the project site. The average slope from the highest to lowest point on the project site is approximately 17.7 percent. An approximately 50-foot high ridge exists in the middle portion of the property, roughly parallel to Fassler Avenue. A former quarry is on the site as well as remnants of an old asphalt road. Illegally-dumped debris and garden waste is present throughout the project site.

The proposed project site is currently vacant and contains three different habitat types: coastal scrub, perennial grassland, and willow scrub.¹ In addition to the non-native species currently present on the project site there are two Monterey Cypress trees present on the project site, both having trunks with a circumference greater than 50 inches.

The region surrounding the proposed project site is characterized by rolling hills descending from the ridges of the Coastal Range to the east, and the cliffs and sandy beaches on the Pacific Ocean to the west. A combination of valleys and open hillsides running to the ocean dominate the area's geography. The immediate vicinity of the project site consists of undeveloped land and residential neighborhoods in

¹ Thomas Reed Associates, Revised Biotic Assessment Report for Fassler Avenue Property, Pacifica, CA. April 27, 2005.

outlying vicinity of the site. The proposed project site sits on a ridge that gradually lowers in elevation to Rockaway Beach. To the north of the project site the ridge drops off to a valley occupied by a residential neighborhood.

Views of the Project Site

In order to visually guide the reader through the narrative below that describes the appearance of the project site, photographs of the project site are presented in this discussion. These photographs include views from vantage points in areas surrounding the project site in which the site is visible. In no way is this grouping of photographs meant to be an exhaustive collection of all the views that include the project site from all vantage points. Rather, the photographs are meant to show representative views toward the site from the surrounding area.

Given the topography of the project site and the site's proximity to roadways, vacant and undeveloped land, residential uses and Highway 1, views of the project site include short-, medium- and long-range views from vantage points in the area of the project site. As such, representative short-, medium- and long-range views of the site were photographed. A photo location map is provided in Figure IV.A-1. The photographs are shown in Figures IV.A-2 through IV.A-5. Descriptions of the existing views seen in these photographs are provided below.

As discussed in Chapter IV (Environmental Setting), other public vantage points in the general project area include Highway 1, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area located approximately 0.75 miles east of the project site, Oddstad Park located approximately 0.60 miles south of the project site, and Frontierland Park located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the project site. The project site is not visible from any of the abovementioned public vantage points. The most prominent public vantage points from which the site is visible are analyzed below. There are no areas designated by the City's General Plan as Open Space in the general project vicinity.

Figure IV.A-2, View 1 is a medium-range view looking southeast from Fassler Avenue toward the project site. In the foreground Fassler Avenue is visible as is the vacant land located to the west of the project site. The vacant land is characterized by rolling hills covered by vegetation similar to that of the project site. On the left (west), a stand of trees is visible. In the middle-ground, two Cypress trees are present on the project site. Streetlamps are located along Fassler Avenue. On the right (south) vacant land is also visible to the south of the project site. The topography of the area to the south of the site is gently rolling with low-lying vegetation. Hills and undeveloped land occupy the background of the photograph, northeast of the project site. The residential development that exists to the east of the project site's boundary is not visible due to the topography of the project site. Views of the project site from this vantage are largely unobstructed with the exception of streetlamps and vehicles traveling on Fassler Avenue.

Figure IV.A-2, View 2 is a medium-range view looking northwest from Fassler Avenue toward the project site. The foreground of the photograph is occupied by Fassler Avenue which is intermittently lined with streetlamps. On the right (north) a small hill partially blocks the view of the project site.

Further west in the foreground is largely vacant land with low-lying vegetation and a single tree. The middle-ground features the north edge of Fassler Avenue and the adjacent undeveloped land located west of the project site. Unlike the topography of the project site which slopes upward, the area shown in the middle ground drops off dramatically into the valley to the north. The background features a dramatic view of the Pacific Ocean as well as a few stands of trees. Views of the project site from this vantage are largely unobstructed with the exception of streetlamps and vehicles traveling on Fassler Avenue.

Figure IV.A-3, View 3 is a short- to medium-range view looking south from the intersection of Buel Avenue and Ebken Street in the Rockaway Beach neighborhood. The foreground of this photograph is occupied by the residential street. The middle ground contains residential units and associated storage structures such as garages and tool sheds. Tall trees and dense vegetation are in the background of this view and reach heights that block the hills that lie beyond this immediate area. As such, views of the project site in pre-project conditions are not clearly visible from this view.

Figure IV.A-3, View 4 is a medium- to long-range view looking southeast toward the project site from the intersection of Roberts Road and Fassler Avenue. Roberts Road and Fassler Avenue dominate the foreground of this view as does the vacant land located west of Fassler Avenue and south of Roberts Road. The middle ground of this view features a small undeveloped hill with dense ground cover vegetation west of Fassler Avenue, and undeveloped land, small hills, and dense ground cover vegetation east of Fassler Avenue. The background of this view features the project site and large unbroken expanses of sky. The development located east of the project site along Fassler Avenue is not visible from this view.

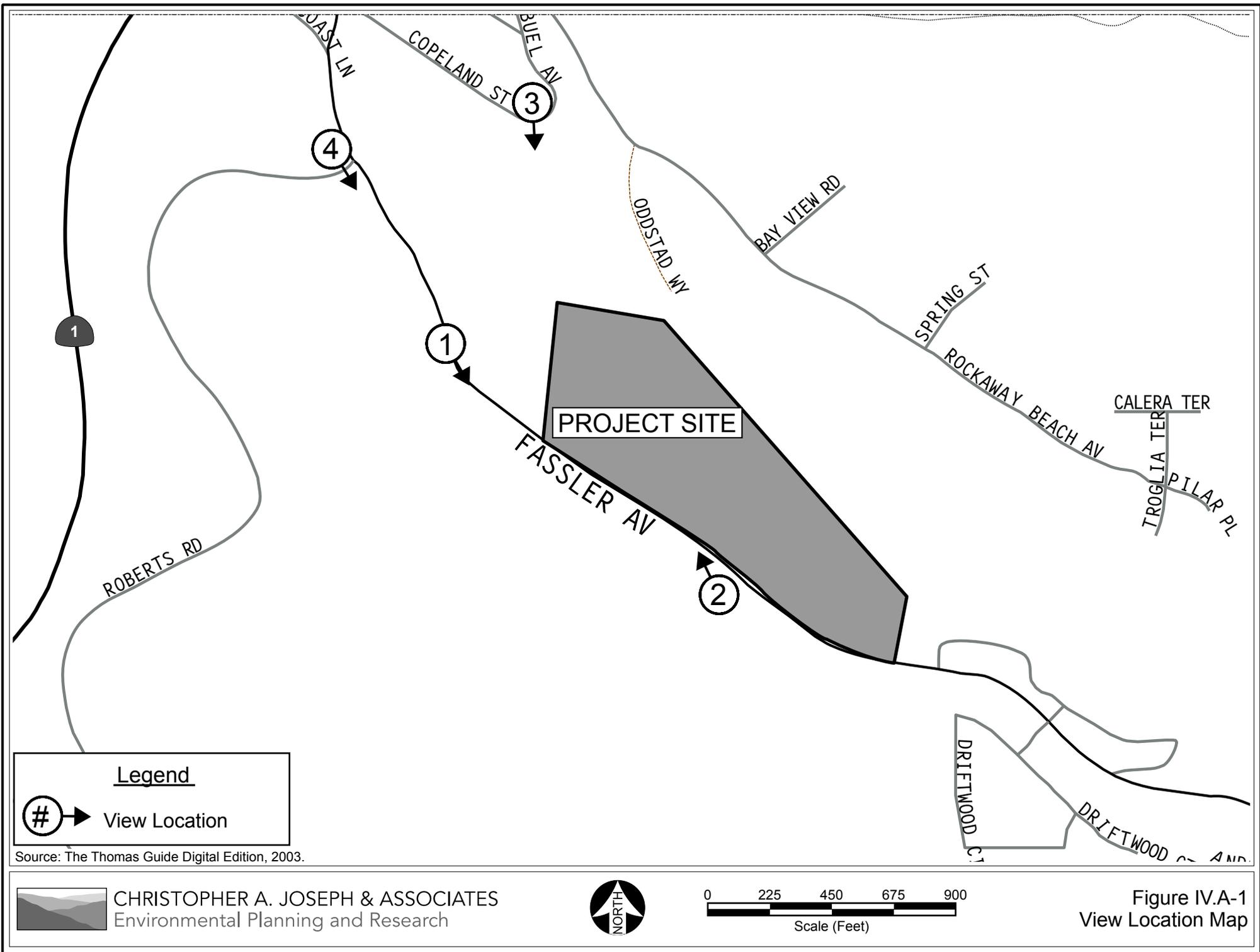
Scenic Vistas

The Open Space and Recreation and Community Design Elements of the General Plan contain policies aimed in part to preserve the visual character of the City. Although the General Plan does not define the term “scenic vista” the Open Space and Recreation Element draws a connection between open space and the City’s visual resources. The visual resources noted in this element are most importantly the City’s hillsides and ocean. The Community Design Element discusses the importance of protecting the City’s important viewsheds and sometimes “rather delicate terrain of hillside areas” and includes policies to balance these values with the interests of local property owners and residents. The Community Design Element designates Fassler Avenue adjacent to the project site as an important viewshed in the City.

Scenic Roadways

The Scenic Highway Element of the General Plan describes the Linda Mar Boulevard – Oddstad – Terra Nova Boulevard – Fassler Avenue loop as “providing spectacular views of the coastal ridge and ocean and connecting major recreation areas (San Pedro Valley County Park, Sanchez Adobe, and the Discovery Trail at the end of Fassler) and points of historic interest and scenic beauty. As such, the General Plan proposes these roadways for designation as a scenic roadway. The proposed project is within this proposed scenic roadway.

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Legend

→ View Location

Source: The Thomas Guide Digital Edition, 2003.

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Environmental Planning and Research



Figure IV.A-1
View Location Map

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View 1 - Looking southeast along Fassler Avenue. The project site is visible in the background (in the center of the photograph).



View 2 - Looking northwest along Fassler Avenue. The project site is visible in the middle ground (center of the photograph). The ocean is visible in the background.



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View 3 - Looking south from Buel Avenue and Ebken Street. The project site is located beyond the trees and is not visible from this view.



View 4 - Looking southeast from Roberts Road and Fassler Avenue. The project site is visible in the background (left of center in the photograph).



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Visual Character

The visual character of the site can generally be described as undeveloped. The primary character-defining features on the project site are its undeveloped nature, existing vegetation, remnants of the old asphalt road, and the illegally dumped debris and garden waste present on the project site. As previously discussed, vegetation on the site is mostly coastal scrub, perennial grasslands and willow scrub. Two mature Monterey Cypress trees are also located on the proposed project site.

The area surrounding the project site to the east is characterized by low-intensity development primarily consisting of suburban neighborhoods dispersed among undeveloped areas. The area surrounding the project site to the north is characterized by undeveloped hillsides and vacant land. Across Fassler Avenue to the west and south of the project site consists primarily of undeveloped areas.

The vacant areas that surround the project site contribute to the undeveloped character of the area. To the northeast of the project site, the ridgeline drops dramatically to a valley developed with residential uses accessed by Rockaway Beach Avenue. A multiple-family residential development is located almost immediately adjacent to the project site to the east (along the north side of Fassler Avenue). A larger, single-family residential development is located across Fassler Avenue further southeast of the project site.

Light and Glare

There are currently no sources of light and glare on the project site as it is undeveloped. There are no areas of high-intensity development in the vicinity of the project site. However, the residential neighborhoods located in the immediate proposed project vicinity contribute light and glare to the project site but the contribution is not substantial. There are no substantial existing sources of light and glare affecting the project site. The eastern portion of the project site is more affected by light and glare from the adjacent residential neighborhood. The northern and western portions of the site experience very little light spill-over from adjacent developed areas. Headlights or windshields of vehicles along Fassler Avenue are the only substantial source of light and glare at the proposed project site. Compared to light and glare conditions on a more developed area, the sources are minimal at the proposed project site and during the nighttime hours, the site is characterized by a dark sky.

REGULATORY SETTING

Federal and State

Currently no Federal and State policies and/or mandates related to Aesthetics exist.

Local

As previously mentioned, the Open Space and Recreation and Community Design Elements of the City of Pacifica General Plan include several policies considered to be applicable for aesthetics:

Open Space Element

Policy 1: Retain open space which preserves natural resources, protects visual amenities, prevents inappropriate development, provides for the managed use of resources, and protects the public health and safety.

Policy 3: Encourage development plans which protect or provide generous open space appropriately landscaped. Balance open space, development and public safety, particularly in hillside areas.

Action Programs

Short Term 3: Views of open space are as important as access to open space. Viewsheds should be identified and protected.

Community Design Element

Policy 3: Protect the City's irreplaceable scenic and visual amenities.

Scenic Highways Element

As discussed above, Fassler Avenue is part of a loop of streets that the General Plan has identified as proposed scenic roadways. The General Plan recommends that a corridor study be conducted, and a program to protect and enhance the scenic qualities from the proposed roadway, and adoption of the roadway with its protection program. The study, program preparation, and adoption of local scenic roadways is exclusively a local responsibility. State and county roadway designations are made by the State and county, but the study and program mentioned above are prepared locally with local initiative.

Design Review

The City of Pacifica has adopted Design Guidelines as one step in a continuing effort to maintain the quality of the City's physical development where desirable attributes exist, and to improve the quality of development where such attributes are lacking. The Guidelines are intended to:

- Ensure at least a minimum standard of design through the application of consistent policies.
- Encourage new construction which exceeds minimum standards and discourage construction which falls short of those standards.
- Provide a framework for review and evaluation of design proposals.
- Implement applicable General Plan and Local Coastal Plan goals and policies.
- Expedite and facilitate the planning permit process.
- Provide direction for design and redesign of projects.

The Design Guidelines include general guidelines that address site planning, building design, landscaping, and water conservation. They also include guidelines that address specific types of development and special problems including hillside development, substandard lots, infill development and multi-unit development guidelines which are most applicable to the project site. City staff will provide an assessment of the proposed project's consistency with these guidelines as part of the City's standard design review process.

Hillside Preservation District Ordinance

The proposed project is within the City's Hillside Preservation District (HPD). The HPD regulated lot coverage is based on the average slope of a property. As the slope increases, the amount of lot coverage allowed decreases. The ordinance expands the definition of coverage to include all disturbed land, such as paving, grading, landscaping, and buildings. Properties proposed for development within the Hillside Preservation District must be rezoned to "Planned Development", which requires a Development Plan and Specific Plan approval. The purpose of the HPD is as follows:

- To maximize choice in types of environment available in the City and particularly to encourage variety in the development pattern of the hillsides;
- The concentration of dwellings and other structures by clustering and/or high rise should be encouraged to help save larger areas of open space and preserve the natural terrain;
- To use to the fullest current understanding of good civic design, landscape architecture, architecture, and civil engineering to preserve, enhance, and promote the existing and future appearance and resources of hillside areas;
- To provide density and land use incentives to aid in ensuring the best possible development of the City's natural features, open space, and other landmarks;
- To encourage the planning, design, and development of building sites in such a fashion as to provide the maximum in safety and human enjoyment while adapting development to, and taking advantage of, the best use of the natural terrain;
- To preserve and enhance the beauty of the landscape by encouraging the maximum retention of natural topographic features, such as drainage swales, streams, slopes, ridge lines, rock-outcroppings, vistas, natural plant formations, and trees;
- To prohibit, insofar as is feasible and reasonable, the padding or terracing of building sites in the hillside areas;
- To provide safe means of ingress and egress for vehicular and pedestrian traffic to and within hillside areas while at the same time minimizing the scarring effects of hillside street construction;
- Utility wires and television lines shall be installed underground;

- Outstanding natural physical features, such as the highest crest of a hill, natural rock outcroppings, major tree belts, and the like, should be preserved;
- Roads should follow natural topography wherever possible to minimize cutting and grading;
- Imaginative and innovative building techniques should be encouraged to create buildings suited to natural hillside surroundings; and
- Detailed and effective arrangements shall be formulated for the preservation, maintenance, and control of open space and recreational lands resulting from planned unit development.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Thresholds of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*, a project would have a significant impact related to aesthetics if the project 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 site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Aesthetics Impacts Not Further Analyzed

All of the four thresholds of significance identified in Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines* have been evaluated below.

Project Impacts

Impact IV.A-1 Implementation of the proposed project would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

As previously discussed, the Community Design Element of the City's General Plan identifies portion of Fassler Avenue adjacent to the project site as an important viewshed in the City. Views of and from the project site offer panoramic ocean views as well as views of nearby hillsides and offer a general representation of the overall visual resources in the City.

Given the location of the project site and topography of the surrounding area, views of and through the project site encompass low-, medium-, and long-range views from the roadways and nearby adjacent

uses. Simulated views of the project as it would appear upon implementation are included in Figures IV.A-4 through IV.A-5

As described above, Figure IV.A-4 (Views 1 and 2) of post-project conditions show the project site from Fassler Avenue. Generally, the proposed project would be visible to motorists traveling along Fassler Avenue, portions of Highway 1, and in the western portion of the Rockaway Beach neighborhood. Figure IV.A-5 includes post-project conditions from View 3 from the Rockaway Beach neighborhood located to the east of the project site. Figure IV.A-5, View 4 shows post-project conditions from the intersection of Roberts Road and Fassler Avenue. The views from each of these locations are discussed in further detail below.

As seen in View 1 of post-project conditions (Figure IV.A-4), the proposed project would change the character of this view from one dominated by undeveloped and vacant lands to include a relatively large development on the hillside. As discussed above, although residential developments are located across Fassler Avenue to the southeast and immediately adjacent to the proposed project site to the east, neither of these developments are visible due to the topography of the project area. As such, the general character of this view is completely undeveloped. By introducing the project into this view, the scenic quality is diminished.

View 2 encompasses what the City's General Plan articulates as two of its most important visual resources: hillsides and the Pacific Ocean. In the existing view of the project site from this location, the view of the ocean is an unobstructed expanse, broken up only by streetlamps. Very few structures are visible from this vantage point under existing conditions. The introduction of the proposed project changes this view substantially by blocking more than two-thirds of the ocean view that would exist from this vantage point without the project. Because the project would dominate the foreground, the character of the area is changed drastically because the project blocks not only the ocean view but the view of the undeveloped area that lies beyond the project to the west. The character of the area in View 2 becomes more built up and developed.

As seen in View 3 of post-project conditions (Figure IV.A-5), the proposed project would be only slightly visible above the tree line that separates the residential units in this view from the vacant areas located south of this immediate area. Very few of the proposed residential structures would be visible in post-project conditions and would include those units that would be sited on the westernmost edge of the project site. Generally, the character of this area is not changed substantially through introduction of the proposed project and the proposed project could eventually be screened out by the trees shown in this view as they continue to grow taller. In addition, this view does not constitute a scenic vista.

As seen in View 4 of post-project conditions (Figure IV.A-5), the proposed project would be visible in the background of this view upon project implementation. Implementation of the proposed project would diminish the scenic quality of this view by introducing a residential development into an area previously characterized by vacant land and undeveloped areas. Because no other nearby residential developments are visible, the proposed project becomes the only visible development in the area.

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View 1 - Post-project view looking southeast along Fassler Avenue.



View 2 - Post-project view looking northwest along Fassler Avenue.



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View 3 - Post-project view looking south from Buel Avenue and Ebken Street.



View 4 - Post-project view looking southeast from Roberts Road and Fassler Avenue.



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In general, implementation of the proposed project would affect scenic vistas from and through the project site. Specifically, as discussed above, impacts would be significant from the various points along Fassler Avenue. Landscaping could reduce impacts in some cases, but overall, the landscaping would further alter views of scenic vistas although in some cases it would effectively camouflage the project site. As shown in the aforementioned post-project views of the project site, implementation of the project would substantially alter scenic vistas by partially blocking currently unobstructed views of the ocean and nearby undeveloped areas. As such, the proposed project would result in a significant and unavoidable impact to scenic vistas. Mitigation Measures MM IV.A-1 described below would reduce impacts related to scenic vistas. However, these impacts would not be eliminated to a level of insignificance. Impacts would remain *significant and unavoidable*.

Impact IV.A-2 The proposed project would substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

The proposed project is not within the viewing corridor of a state scenic highway. However, according to the City's General Plan, the City proposes to designate the Linda Mar Boulevard – Oddstad – Terra Nova Boulevard – Fassler Avenue loop as a scenic roadway. According to the City's General Plan, views along Fassler Avenue are considered a scenic resource and, as discussed under Impact IV.A-1, implementation of the proposed project would substantially alter the views available from Fassler Avenue. As such, the proposed project would substantially damage scenic resources within a scenic highway and would result in a significant and unavoidable impact. Mitigation Measure MM IV.A-1 described below would reduce impacts related to scenic resources in a scenic highway, but not to a less-than-significant level. Impacts would, therefore, remain *significant and unavoidable*.

Impact IV.A-3 The proposed project could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

The visual character of the project site can generally be defined as undeveloped with nearby low-intensity development. The primary defining features are the hillsides covered with light brush and shrub vegetation present throughout the project area and the views of the Pacific Ocean to the west. Currently, there is residential development in the project area. Additionally, the portion of Fassler Avenue where the project would be located is adjacent to other residential developments, including SeaCrest development to the east and another large single-family development across Fassler Avenue. As such, the project would add residential development to a vacant site, but considering the existing surrounding uses, it would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the surroundings. With regard to the project site itself, as discussed in Chapter III (Project Description) and Chapter IV.B (Biological Resources), the western 4.8 acres of the site would be developed and the majority of the eastern portion would remain undeveloped and its habitat would be restored. Because much of the site's existing characteristics would not be eliminated, the visual character of the site would not be substantially degraded. This impact is considered *less than significant*. Implementation of Mitigation Measure MM IV.A-1 is recommended and would further ensure that impacts to visual character remain less than significant.

Impact IV.A-4 Implementation of the proposed project could create a new source of substantial light and glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Implementation of the proposed project would introduce new sources of light and glare into the project area. The introduction of light and glare from the proposed project would be noticeable to viewers in the surrounding area, particularly to drivers traveling along Fassler Avenue and residents located east of the project site. Impacts are, therefore, considered significant.

Currently, a lighting plan is not available. However, Mitigation Measure MM IV.A-2 requires that the applicant prepare and submit a lighting plan for submittal to the City. The lighting plan would also be reviewed and approved by the City staff prior to issuance of a building permit and will be installed in accordance with the approved lighting plan. Nonetheless, even with lighting features designed in accordance with MM IV.A-2 to minimize impacts from light and glare sources, the proposed project would introduce sources into a site that is currently vacant and in an area characterized by low-intensity development.

However, most homes emit some light and glare during evening hours as is typical in residential areas. The proposed project would include indoor lighting, and outdoor lighting for safety purposes, that would be visible from a distance. Adherence to Mitigation Measure IV.A-2 would ensure that outdoor lighting would be designated to minimize glare and spillover to surrounding properties. The proposed project's exterior lighting would be similar to what exists at nearby residential areas. Regarding daytime glare, the project would use non-mirrored glass. Implementation of Mitigation Measure MM IV.A-2 would ensure that all applicable guidelines are integrated into the proposed project. As such, impacts are considered *less than significant*.

MITIGATION MEASURES

MM IV.A-1: Landscaping Plan and Design Review

- The proposed landscape plan shall include landscape screening throughout the project site to further screen the proposed project from off-site views. The plan shall include additional landscaping along the northern and western boundaries of the project site to ensure as much screening as possible.
- The use of screen plantings shall borrow from naturally established form, line, color and texture so that the visual characteristics are compatible with their surroundings.
- The landscape plan shall be subject to review and approval by City staff prior to issuance of grading or building permits.
- Colors used for exterior building surfaces shall match the hue, lightness, and saturation of colors of the immediately surrounding trees and vegetation. Several colors matching those of the surrounding trees and vegetation shall be used in order to minimize uniformity.

- Prior to building permit issuance, the grading plan, development plan, landscaping plan, sign plan, elevations, and colors and materials shall receive review and approval of the City of Pacifica staff through the design review procedures with the Planning Commission during approval of the Specific Plan.

MM IV.A-2: Lighting Plan

Prior to issuance of the building permit, an exterior lighting plan shall be submitted for review and approval by City staff. The lighting plan shall include but not necessarily be limited to the following:

- The exterior lighting plan shall show all potential light sources with the types of lighting and their locations.
- Exterior lighting shall include low mounted, downward casting and shielded lights that do not cause spillover onto adjacent properties and the utilization of motion detection systems where applicable.
- No flood lights shall be utilized.
- Lighting shall not "wash out" structures or any portions of the site.
- Low intensity, indirect light sources shall be required.
- On-demand lighting systems shall be required.
- Mercury, sodium vapor, and similar intense and bright lights shall not be permitted except where their need is specifically approved and their source of light is restricted.
- All light sources shall be fully shielded from off-site view.
- All buildings and structures shall consist of non-reflecting material or be painted with non-reflective paint.
- Generally, light fixtures shall not be located at the periphery of the property and should shut off automatically when the use is not operating. Security lighting visible from Fassler Avenue shall be motion-sensor activated.
- All lighting shall be installed in accordance with building codes and the approved lighting plan during construction.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

A few of the other projects listed in Section III.B are located within the project vicinity, including the Harmony @ 1 project at 4700 Fassler Avenue and the Mixed Use Project 1 located on Old County Road. The remaining other projects are further than 0.35 miles away from the proposed project and are not within the same viewshed as the proposed project. The Harmony @ 1 project is anticipated to change the character of its project site but these impacts are expected to be site-specific so that project-specific mitigation will reduce impacts to less-than-significant levels. The Mixed Use Project 1 would be

implemented on an already developed site and would not constitute a substantial change to the area. Because the proposed project site is largely undeveloped, the project would change the character of the site and contribute an incremental increase in light and glare into the general project area. These impacts are site-specific, do not comprise a significant cumulative contribution, and will be mitigated to the extent possible. The project site is situated in between a developed commercial area along Highway 1 to the west and residential development to the east. While, the proposed project will adversely affect specific views along Fassler Road, other projects planned for the area do not impact views of the ocean from Fassler Road as does the proposed project. Therefore, the impacts to scenic resources are project specific and not cumulative. Thus, cumulative impacts related to visual resources are considered *less than significant*.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Project-specific related to scenic vistas and scenic resources in a scenic highway would be *significant and unavoidable*. Project-specific and cumulative impacts related to visual character would be *less than significant*. Project-specific and cumulative impacts related to light and glare would be *less than significant*.