

J. VISUAL RESOURCES

This section evaluates the effects of the proposed project on visual resources, including views in the vicinity of the project site. This analysis also considers the proposed project's consistency with applicable City of Benicia visual resources-related policies. Photos are included to illustrate the site's visual qualities. View simulations that show "before" and "after" representations of the proposed project were prepared by Loving and Campos Architects. These simulations were prepared for eight representative vantage points in the vicinity of the site. The view simulations are intended to convey an impression of the location, scale and massing of the buildings that could be constructed at the project site, and to demonstrate potential effects of the proposed project on visual resources.

1. Setting

The following section describes the visual quality of the project site and views of the project site from surrounding areas.

a. Visual Quality of the Project Site. Please refer to Section IV.A, Land Use and Planning Policy, for a description of the physical characteristics of the project site.

The project site is a 527.8-acre site with rolling hills and six prominent knolls with intervening drainage swales and associated riparian vegetation. The majority of the site is grassland with scattered trees. The hills within the site, which rise up to elevations of almost 300 feet above mean sea level (msl), slope downwards toward Suisun Bay. Some of the steeper hillsides have grades of approximately 25 percent. The southeastern and southwestern portions of the site are relatively flat compared to the rest of the site. The western portion of the site is traversed by Reservoir Road, a 20-foot wide paved two-lane road that extends from East 2nd Street to Lake Herman Road. Although informal trails and unpaved double track pathways exist in several locations throughout the site, there are no additional formal or paved roadways on the site. The project site contains hilly topography, with expansive views of the Carquinez Strait and Mount Diablo.

A cluster of abandoned buildings and associated eucalyptus trees are present in the portion of the project site west of Reservoir Road. The eucalyptus trees are prominently visible from Lake Herman west of the intersection with Reservoir Road and partially screen the existing agricultural buildings.

Surrounding land uses vary widely and include light industrial and commercial buildings, new residential neighborhoods, a church campus currently under construction and undeveloped open property containing grass-covered hillsides.

b. Visual Quality of the Project Site Surroundings. Following is a brief discussion of the visual character of the areas surrounding the project site.

- *North.* Areas to the north of the project site, across Lake Herman Road, appear as undeveloped grass-covered hillsides. The City of Benicia Water Treatment Plant property is located south of Lake Herman Road and is surrounded on three sides by the project site. The Water Treatment Plant contains above-ground water storage tanks and associated water treatment facilities.
- *East.* Northeast of the project site, a new church campus is currently under construction. A commercial center (including a combined gas station, convenience market and fast food restaurant) is located immediately east of the project site at the intersection of East 2nd Street and

Lake Herman Road. Further east of the commercial buildings is I-680, which runs in a roughly north-south direction west of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and Suisun Bay. Additional commercial and light industrial buildings are located between the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and I-680. Views of the “Mothball Fleet” and Suisun Bay can be seen from the eastern portion of the site, as shown in Figure IV.J-1.

- *South.* Light industrial buildings are located immediately south of the project site along Industrial Way and East 2nd Street, south and southwest of the project site. The Valero refinery is located further southwest of the project site, and is visible when looking south from higher elevations in the northern portions of the project site, as shown in Figure IV.J-1.
- *West.* The area west of the project site consists of relatively undeveloped open space and recreational areas, with some new residential neighborhoods and the police shooting range. Lake Herman Regional Park is located west of the project site on Lake Herman Road. Some industrial buildings are located along Industrial Way, West Channel Road and California Court west of the site and north of East 2nd Street.

c. Views from the Project Site. Views from the project site include industrial areas on East 2nd Street and the commercial development at the intersection of Lake Herman Road and East 2nd Street. From the highest points on the northern edge of the project site, mixed industrial uses are visible south of the site, the Benicia Valero Refinery is visible southwest of the project site, and Suisun Bay and the “Mothball Fleet” are visible east of the project site. Distant views of Mt. Diablo to the southeast are available from portions of the project site.

d. Views of the Project Site. There are views of the project site from the streets that border the project site: Lake Herman Road, Industrial Way and East 2nd Street and there are distant views of the project site from portions of I-680, located east of the project site, and the residential neighborhoods to the southeast of the site (including Benicia Community Park). Key views of the project site are discussed below.

- *Views From Lake Herman Road.* The project site is visible from numerous locations along Lake Herman Road. Views of the site from Lake Herman Road vary as the road changes in elevation, and are predominately of the grass-covered hillsides at the project site. From portions of Lake Herman Road, views towards the south across the project site include foreground views of the open rolling hillsides and vegetated drainages within the project site and the Benicia Valero Refinery and coastal mountain ranges in the distance. From the eastern portions of Lake Herman Road, views of the project site towards the southeast include down slope views of open grass-covered hillsides and drainages with distant views of the Suisun Bay, the “Mothball Fleet” and Mt. Diablo further in the distance beyond the open undeveloped project site.
- *Views From I-680.* The project site is visible from two areas along and near I-680, including a scenic overlook looking west towards the project site, and from I-680 itself looking north towards the project site. Existing industrial uses south of the project site in the foreground and the grass-covered hillsides north of the project site are visible from I-680 looking north towards the project site. Views from the I-680 looking towards the northwest include the existing industrial uses south of the project site in the foreground and distant views of the grass-covered hillsides and ridgelines north of the project site.



View of Suisun Bay and the "Mothball Fleet" from the project site, looking towards the east



View of the Valero refinery from the project site, looking towards the south

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-1

Benicia Business Park EIR
Views from the Project Site

- *Views From East 2nd Street.* ~~The project site is visible from several locations along East 2nd Street, which follows the southern and eastern boundary of the project site, offers continuous views of the site.~~ These views are dominated by the rolling grass-covered hills, with occasional views into the open drainage swales and some riparian vegetation visible from various vantage points, as shown in Figure IV.J-2.
- *Views From Residential Neighborhoods.* Distant views of the site are also available from select streets in the residential subdivisions to the southwest of the project site, and from the hill on the northern edge of Benicia Community Park. These views include open, grassy hills, with industrial uses outside the project site in the foreground.

2. City of Benicia General Plan

The policy documents that are applicable to visual quality within and around the project site are the Circulation, Visual Character and Open Space and Conservation of Resources Elements of the City of Benicia General Plan. Applicable policies from the General Plan are presented below.

Land Use and Growth Management

- *Growth Management Goal 2.2:* Maintain lands near Lake Herman and north of Lake Herman Road in permanent agriculture/open space use.
 - *Growth Management Policy 2.2.1:* Protect and maintain agricultural and rural land uses, hillsides, two-lane curving roads, watersheds, riparian corridors and upland grasslands.

Circulation

- *Circulation Policy 2.20.3.* Maintain Lake Herman Road as rural, two-lane, curving scenic route.
- *Circulation Goal 2.23:* Ensure adequate parking while maintaining aesthetic features.
 - *Circulation Program 2.23.2.* Reduce the visibility of parking lots.
- *Goal 2.26.* Ensure that scenic and environmental amenities of I-680 and I-780 are not compromised.

Visual Character

- *Visual Character Goal 3.9.* Protect and enhance scenic roadways and highways.
 - *Visual Character Policy 3.9.1.* Preserve vistas along I-780 and I-680.
 - *Visual Character Policy 3.12.1.* Encourage additional attractive, quality development in industrial areas.

Open Space and Conservation

- *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Goal 3.15.* Provide buffers throughout the community.
 - *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Policy 3.15.1.* Preserve and protect, through a variety of methods, a pattern of open space buffers and greenbelts throughout the Planning Area.
 - *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Policy 3.15.2.* Preserve public views of public open space and maintain existing vistas (including the Northern Area Vistas) wherever possible.
 - *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Program 3.15.D.* Where applicable, require that new developments include view corridors that allow viewing open space from public roadways and public use areas.
 - *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Policy 3.15.5.* Encourage the landscaping of existing open spaces, and landscape new open spaces with native plants.
 - *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Policy 3.15.6.* Restore and maintain natural landscapes in a natural manner.



View of the project site from East Second Street,
looking towards the north



View of the project site from East Second Street, looking towards the north

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-2

Benicia Business Park EIR
Views of the Project Site

- *Regional and Subregional Open Space and Trails Goal 3.16.* Preserve key land forms which separate Benicia physically and visually from adjacent communities.

3. Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section analyzes impacts related to visual resources that could result from implementation of the proposed project. The subsection begins with the criteria of significance, which establish the thresholds for determining whether an impact is significant. The latter part of this section presents the impacts associated with the proposed project. Mitigation measures are recommended, as appropriate. Refer to Section IV.A., Land Use and Planning Policy, for a discussion of the project's consistency with visual resources-related policies.

a. Criteria of Significance. Implementation of the proposed project would have a significant effect on visual resources if it would:

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

b. Significant Visual Resources Impacts. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the significant impacts described below. The project would result in no less-than-significant impacts.

(1) Scenic Vistas. The project site contains rolling grass-covered hills and intermittent vegetated drainage swales. The project site is visible from Lake Herman Road and East 2nd Street and is visible from portions of I-680. There are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within view of the project site and the project site is not visible from any officially designated State Scenic Highways.¹

Lake Herman Road is identified in the City of Benicia General Plan Visual Character Element as a scenic street and gateway. Lake Herman Road functions as a northwestern gateway to Benicia where it passes through the Boundary Hills area west of the project site west of Lake Herman. From this vantage point, there are prominent views of the Carquinez Strait. As Lake Herman Road continues east past Lake Herman and along the northern boundary of the project site, the grass-covered hillsides north of Lake Herman Road and at the project site contribute to the rural character of the roadway.

I-680 (between Morrow Lane and the Benicia-Martinez Bridge) is also identified in the City of Benicia General Plan as a northern gateway where the visual experience is enhanced by the open hillsides to the west which, as the gateway is passed, recede to reveal Benicia's major industrial area. Views from I-680 include Suisun Bay to the east, where the "Mothball Fleet" can be seen. When traveling north to south along portions of I-680, the rolling hills above and below Lake Herman Road are a prominent visual attribute of the I-680 corridor identified in the General Plan. The proposed project would result in the grading of approximately 9 million cubic yards of soil, and would substantially change the natural terrain and topography of the site. The project would remove most of the

¹ California State Scenic Highway Mapping System, 1999. Solano County. Website: www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/cahisys.htm

wetlands and drainages on the site. However, the proposed project would maintain the existing topography in the upland portions of the site (Lot A) that contain characteristic grass-covered rolling hills. These preserved upland areas, which would be seen from Lake Herman Road and I-680, would ensure that some of the site's hilly, undeveloped character is maintained in existing views.

The project includes a landscape buffer and berm along the south side of Lake Herman Road to screen views of the industrial and commercial uses within the site from portions of Lake Herman Road. Preserved open space on the site would allow for continued views of Suisun Bay and Mount Diablo from Lake Herman Road. However, land use changes at the project site would substantially alter views from Lake Herman Road and I-680.

Impact VIS-1: The proposed project would adversely affect scenic vistas from several public roadways. (S)

The project would replace rural grasslands and riparian/wetland vegetation with commercial and industrial uses and would involve 9 million cubic yards of grading, resulting in the leveling of many of the hillsides within the site. The substantial hillside grading would significantly change the appearance of the hillsides within the project site. The proposed project would affect the visual quality of areas within the I-680 and Lake Herman Road viewsheds, and would also affect views from the residential areas to the southwest of the project site (including viewpoints in Benicia Community Park). Implementation of the following mitigation measure would ensure that the changes to existing views would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure VIS-1: The sponsor shall develop a detailed landscape plan that includes landscape screening designed to protect views from public roadways, including Lake Herman Road and I-680. The landscape plan shall also address the project's effect on views from the residential neighborhood to the southwest of the project site. Final landscaping plans shall include provisions for street and site tree plantings that would be designed to at least partially screen views of the buildings from off-site viewpoints within 5 years of planting. The final landscaping plan shall be reviewed and approved by City staff. (LTS)

(2) **Visual Character.** The proposed project would result in substantial grading and terrain modification of the project site. The terrain modifications would stem from the cutting and leveling of existing hillsides and the filling of existing drainage swales. The graded pads would be located on top of fill with embankments 16 to 40 feet high along East 2nd Street and along some of the internal access roads. The embankments of the filled pads would dominate the views from East 2nd Street looking towards the north into the project site. In addition, the project would result in the development of many of the wetlands, drainages, and trees on the site. These features are important components of the visual character of the site. The proposed project would extend light industrial development and urbanized visual character from the existing industrial areas of Benicia up into the lower hillside areas south of Lake Herman Road.

The maintenance of existing hillside in the northern portion of the project site and a major drainage in the central portion of the site would retain some of the site's visual character, especially as seen from Lake Herman Road. Open space and large water tanks on the Water Treatment Plant property would continue to be visible above the majority of the low rise development at the project site.

The evaluation of potential impacts of the proposed project on the visual character of the site are partially based on the visual simulations prepared by Loving and Campos. A map of the viewpoint locations is provided in Figure IV.J-3 and the visual simulations are included as Figures IV.J-4 through Figures IV.J-11. No specific building details have been included as part of the project. Therefore, the visual simulations are based on prototypical light industrial buildings and show the complete build-out of the proposed project. Landscaping in the visual simulations is shown as it would appear approximately 10 years after project construction. As no plans were available for the water storage tanks at the time of publication of this EIR, the visual simulations do not include the two 1 million gallon water reservoir tanks that would be constructed as a part of the proposed project. Buildings would undergo individual approval on a lot by lot basis when specific plans are provided to the City. The following paragraphs describe changes to the visual character of the project site as depicted in each of the visual simulations.

Views From the Intersection of (Proposed) Industrial Way and Lake Herman Road Looking East (Visual Simulations A). As shown in Figure IV.J-4, existing views of the project site include foreground views of existing trees and portions of the uppermost grass-covered rolling hills. The proposed project would result in the creation of a berm along Lake Herman Road to partially buffer views of the new buildings within the project site. The existing mature trees along Lake Herman Road would remain, and the existing hills visible from this vantage point would remain unchanged. Therefore, the visual character of the site from this vantage point would not be substantially changed by the proposed project.

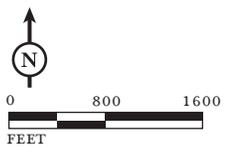
Views From the Intersection of Industrial Way and East 2nd Street Looking Northeast (Visual Simulations B). As shown in Figure IV.J-5, the visual character from this vantage point is characterized by grass-covered hillsides and intermittent drainage swales within the project site. The proposed project would result in substantial alterations of the topography and the complete removal of select existing hillsides and the filling of the drainage swales. The finished graded pads would result in up slopes along the northern shoulder of East 2nd Street. These embankments would dominate views from East 2nd Street and would block distant views into the project site from adjacent vantage points along East 2nd Street. Buildings on top of the pads would be partially visible, but the new topography would result in reduced visibility into the project site and would limit views of the new buildings from this vantage point. The visual character of the site would be altered from natural, rolling hillsides to artificially uniform embankments with straight ridgelines.

Views From Hillsides West of the Project Site Looking Towards the Project Site in the East (Visual Simulations C and D). As shown in Figures IV.J-6 and IV.J-7, the existing visual character of the project site from these vantage points is of grass-covered hillsides, light industrial urban land uses at lower elevations, and distant views of the rolling hillsides and drainages further to the north. The existing water tanks and Water Treatment Plant are partially visible from these vantage points. The proposed project would result in development of industrial uses on what are currently grassy hillsides. However, the new buildings would not be located higher on the hillsides than the existing water tanks. From these distant vantage points, the open rolling hillsides north of the project site would remain unchanged and the new buildings on top of the elevated pads would appear higher on the hillsides than the existing light industrial development. Project-related development would encroach



FIGURE IV.J-3

LSA



-  VIEWPOINT LOCATIONS
-  PROJECT BOUNDARY

Benicia Business Park EIR
 Map of Visual Simulations
 Viewpoint Locations



Existing view of the project site from the intersection of Lake Herman Road and (proposed) Industrial Way, looking towards the east



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-4

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - A



Existing view of the project site from the intersection of East Second Street and Industrial Way, looking towards the east



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-5

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - B



Existing view of the project site from hillsides west of the project site, looking towards the east



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-6

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - C



Existing view of the project site from hillsides west of the project site, looking towards the east



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-7

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - D

into the lower elevations of open hillsides, but distant views of the grass-covered hillsides further north would remain.

Views From the I-680 Overlook Looking Towards the Project Site in the West (Visual Simulations E). As shown in Figure IV.J-8, existing views of the project site from the scenic overlook near I-680 consist of foreground views of Lake Herman Road with more distant views of the rolling grass-covered hillsides within the project site. The proposed project would alter the existing topography and add new light industrial and commercial buildings to the view. While the proposed project would alter the visual character of the site from open, undeveloped hillsides to views of graded pads and new buildings, the visual changes to the project site would be consistent with the existing commercial and light industrial land uses in the area of the Lake Herman Road/I-680 interchange.

Views from Lake Herman Road Looking South and Southeast Towards the Project Site (Visual Simulations F and G). As shown in Figures IV.J-9 and IV.J-10, views south and southeast from Lake Herman Road are characterized by foreground views of grass-covered hillsides and drainage swales, with distant views of the Benicia Valero Refinery, Suisun Bay, the "Mothball Fleet" and Mount Diablo. The proposed project would result in the obstruction of views of Suisun Bay from this vantage point due to the development of a berm along Lake Herman Road and the construction of new buildings. The buildings would be located at least 500 feet away from Lake Herman Road, and the undeveloped open space areas within Lot A would reduce impacts to the visual character of the site by maintaining a buffer of undeveloped grass-covered hillsides within the visual corridor along Lake Herman Road. Mount Diablo would still be seen from this vantage point after development of the project. However, new buildings and graded pads would be visible over 500 feet from the road and would adversely affect the visual character of the site from this vantage point.

Views From I-680 Looking North Towards the Project Site (Visual Simulations H). As shown in Figure IV.J-11, the visual character of the site as seen from I-680 is influenced by foreground views of existing light industrial buildings along the freeway with distant views of grass-covered hillsides within the project site and north of Lake Herman Road. The proposed project would result in an incremental increase in the amount of development visible against the northern hills; however, an increase in the intensity of development as seen from this vantage point would not significantly alter the visual character of the landscape, which is already affected by light industrial uses in low lying areas.

The visual changes to the project site that would result from the proposed project would occur in association with a change in land use (from rural to industrial/commercial) and substantial grading of the existing topography. In addition, the proposed project would include the construction of two 1 million gallon water tanks in the northern portion of the site within Lot A.

Impact VIS-2: The proposed project could adversely affect the visual character of the project site, as observed from public vantage points surrounding the site. (S)

The proposed project would substantially change the visual character of the project site. While the open space buffer and berms along Lake Herman Road would reduce impacts to view corridors, the proposed project would result in significant changes to the visual character of the project site resulting from the conversion of rural landscapes, the grading of hillsides, and the removal of drainages and wetlands for development. The architectural design of proposed building materials, color choices,

landscaping design and the construction of two large water tanks could also have adverse effects on the visual character of the area. Implementation of the following two-part mitigation measure would reduce this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. Reducing this impact to a less-than-significant level would require a substantial reconfiguration of land uses on the project site, reduced grading, and other modifications to the project, and would be impractical in the context of the current project design, objectives, and development assumptions. Therefore, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Mitigation Measure VIS-2a: Implement Mitigation Measure VIS-1.

Mitigation Measure VIS-2b: The final building designs shall include wall articulation and varied rooflines. Prior to the approval of a building permit for an individual building at the project site, the City of Benicia Planning Department shall ensure that building plans include variations in exterior wall depth, varied rooflines, appropriate buildings materials and colors and the use of landscaping to break up continuous walls through the City's Design Review process. (SU)

Impact VIS-3: The water tanks would be visible from several public viewpoints and would be out of scale and character with the adjacent open space. (S)

Two 1 million gallon water storage tanks are proposed to be installed in the northern portion of the project site. Under existing conditions, similarly sized water tanks are located adjacent to the project site within the Water Treatment Plant site. While the new water tanks would appear similar to the existing water tanks adjacent to the site, they would be out of character with the existing open space. Implementation of the following mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level:

Mitigation Measure VIS-3a: Both water tanks shall be set on graded pads set 30 feet into the hillsides so that the tops of the water tanks are not visible from Lake Herman Road.

Mitigation Measure VIS-3b: The proposed water tanks shall be painted an earth tone color, such as clay or sienna, that blends into the adjacent landscape. The color shall be subject to approval by City staff prior to the issuance of building permits for the tanks.

Mitigation Measure VIS-3c: The water storage tanks shall be screened by native vegetation. Trees shall be planted to obscure at least 50 percent of the water tanks within 10 years of final project build out. A 20-foot buffer between the vegetation and tanks would be required to maintain access to the tanks. The trees shall be properly planted and maintained by the project sponsor or its successor-in-interest. (LTS)

(3) **Light and Glare**. The proposed project would include new lighting for internal streets, parking areas, and buildings.

Impact VIS-4: The proposed project could increase the amount of light and glare in Benicia adversely affecting day or nighttime views of the area. (S)

Exterior lighting would be installed throughout the project site, including along interior access roads and parking areas. In addition, the proposed project would introduce nighttime lighting associated with the new light industrial and commercial buildings. Although proposed lighting is expected to be



Existing view of the project site from I-680 scenic overlook looking towards the west



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-8

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - E



Existing view of the project site from Lake Herman Road, looking towards the south



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-9

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - F



Existing view of the project site from Lake Herman Road looking towards the south



Visual simulation of the proposed project



Visual simulation of the proposed project with mature landscaping

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-10

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - G



Existing view of the project site from I-680, looking towards the north



Visual simulation of the proposed project

LSA

FIGURE IV.J-11

Benicia Business Park EIR
Visual Simulations - H

generally consistent with and similar to existing lighting in commercial and light industrial areas, this lighting could increase levels of nighttime light and glare in the area, particularly for the residential areas to the south and west of the project site. Implementation of the following three-part mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level:

Mitigation Measure VIS-4a: Prior to the approval of the first Development Plan for the site subsequent to the approval of the Master Plan, the project sponsor shall submit for City staff review the proposed lighting fixtures that will be used for security lighting, street lighting, lighting in parking lots and along sidewalks or paths throughout the project site. The fixtures shall be selected to minimize light and glare spillover into areas outside of the project site and shall be to the satisfaction of City staff. The detailed manufacturer's specifications shall be provided for the proposed fixtures. A variety of fixture types may be used, provided that each is approved by City staff. Additionally, the project sponsor shall submit the proposed maximum height of any poles to be used for security, street or parking lot lighting. City staff may require photometric analysis if necessary to properly evaluate the proposed lighting.

Mitigation Measure VIS-4b: All exterior lighting fixtures mounted on buildings shall be hooded and downward-directed to minimize spillover light and glare onto adjacent properties.

Mitigation Measure VIS-4c: No flood lighting of buildings, landscaping or signs shall be permitted unless expressly approved as part of a Development Plan or Design Review approval in which City staff has made a determination that such lighting can occur without adverse light and glare impacts. (LTS)

