
IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

N. AESTHETICS

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Introduction

This examination of aesthetics is based upon an evaluation of two categories of values: visual character and the attributes of the related views and/or viewsheds. Visual character is comprised of a combination of elements making up the aesthetic qualities of both existing conditions on the project site and the proposed project itself, such as land use, building scale and mass, proportion and balance, and ambience. The visual character of a project and site is typically evaluated with respect to its physical components and within the context of its neighborhood through an analysis of its compatibility with the land uses of the immediately surrounding areas. The values and issues generally associated with visual character and the degree of associated environmental impact tend to be subjective - more so with respect to the aesthetic qualities of the project, in and of themselves; less so with respect to the compatibility of the aesthetic qualities with the surrounding environment. The inherent subjectivity of issues and values relative to visual character often makes a conclusive determination of what constitutes a "significant impact" under CEQA.

Visual impacts are also analyzed through an examination of views and/or viewsheds. Viewsheds refer to the visual qualities of a geographical area. The geographical area is defined by the horizon, topography, and other natural features that give an area its visual boundary and context. Viewshed impacts are typically characterized by the loss and/or obstruction of existing scenic vistas or other major views in the area of the site which are available to the general public. For the purposes of this analysis, views are categorized by distance from the observer into three classifications: foreground (the view within approximately 500 feet of the observer), middleground (the view generally beyond 500 feet of the observer to approximately 2,700 feet) and background (the view beyond 2,700 feet of the observer). View analysis is also based upon relative visibility with regard to viewing location and future development onsite. Views treated within this analysis assume fair-weather daytime conditions.

Surrounding Area

The setting for the project site is the Verdugo Mountains, an area recognized for its high scenic values. The mountains are steep and laced with deep ravines that support ephemeral watercourses frequently canopied by riparian woodlands. Rock outcroppings abound in the higher elevations. Following the winter rains, the mountains turn green with new vegetation growth; by spring the mountains can be covered with a profusion of wild flowers. Generally, by summer the mountain slopes have turned to brown and remain that way until the next rains start the cycle over again.

The most dramatic visual element of the Verdugo Mountains is the open space, which provides highly prized visual relief from the surrounding urban development. As described elsewhere in this Draft EIR, the Verdugo Mountains are an island of open space surrounded by urbanization. To the north are the communities of Sunland and Tujunga, Shadow Hills, and Lake View Terrace; to the east are the Cities of Glendale, La Crescenta, and La Canada/Flintridge; to the south are the cities of Burbank and Glendale; and to the west is the San Fernando Valley, which is part of the City of Los Angeles. While urban development encroaches upon the foothills and lower slopes of the Verdugo Mountains, the higher elevations and most of the interior of the range remain in an undisturbed natural condition.

The scenic values of the Verdugo Mountains are recognized by the designation of two scenic highways that traverse the area. The Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan designates Interstate 210 as a scenic freeway and La Tuna Canyon Road as a scenic secondary highway. The Draft Specific Plan provides guidelines for the protection of the scenic values of these two highways, and others (see Section IV.G (Land Use), for detailed discussion of the Draft Specific Plan).

Project Site

The 887-acre irregularly-shaped project site contains many of the scenic elements characteristic of the Verdugo Mountains, such as prominent ridges, steep slopes, rock outcroppings, dense vegetation, and large expanses of open space. Further, as previously indicated, the project site is bisected into northern and southern portions by Interstate 210, a designated scenic highway. La Tuna Canyon Road, a designated secondary highway, forms the project site's southern boundary. Figure IV.N-1 graphically presents the topographic complexity of this large property.

Northern Portion

The northern portion of the project site consists of an irregularly-shaped property roughly bordered on the north by a prominent east-west ridgeline and on the south by Interstate 210. A series of secondary, north-south trending topographic ridges descend from the prominent ridgeline to the freeway. During freeway construction, the toes of several of these secondary ridges were shaved back to accommodate the freeway alignment. Now, a series of manufactured cut-slopes face directly onto the freeway where naturally contoured hillsides once existed. Steep and narrow south-draining ravines alternate with the secondary ridges to form an undulating topography. The ravines produce north-south view corridors that lead the viewer's attention toward the prominent ridgeline, while the secondary ridges form barriers to east-west views across the length of the project site (see Figure IV.N-1).

Development Area A is located in the eastern half of the northern portion of the project site. The central portion of Development Area A is visually defined by two generally south-trending ridges, one on the east side and one on the west side of the development area. The onsite portion of neither of

these two ridges is designated as a Prominent Ridgeline in the draft San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan (“Draft Specific Plan”). Scattered homes along Verdugo Crestline Drive to the north, and along Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, and Glen O Peace to the east and northeast, also border Development Area A. Some homes along these roadways are visible from the freeway, behind Development Area A (see Photograph A).

Southern Portion

Prior to the construction of Interstate 210, the south-facing interior slope of the Verdugo Mountains descended continuously from the aforementioned prominent east-west trending ridgeline to the bottom of La Tuna Canyon. However, the construction of the freeway has separated that mountainside into higher elevations to the north and lower elevations to the south. Hence, the southern portion of the project site is a natural continuation of the northern portion, artificially separated by the freeway. While the southern portion exhibits the same topographic pattern of steep hillsides cut by deep ravines as seen on the northern portion of the project site, there are also visual differences between the two properties. For example, the southern portion is bordered by the La Tuna Canyon Wash, a deeply incised watercourse that supports a dense growth of riparian habitat (see Photograph B). Also, large manufactured fill slopes, constructed to support the freeway, are visually prominent man-made features along the higher elevations of the southern portion (see Photograph C).

Development Area B is located primarily on the south and east sides of a Prominent Ridgeline (designated in the Draft Specific Plan) that rises above the freeway grade in the south-central portion of the project site. Currently, the only portion of Development Area B that can be seen from the freeway is the top of this ridgeline. However, Development Area B is prominently visible from La Tuna Canyon Road (see Photographs B and D).

Existing Views of the Project Site

Interstate 210 and La Tuna Canyon Road are the major corridors from which the public may view the project site. Other locations from which smaller numbers of the public are likely to view the project site include the public parkland to the south of La Tuna Canyon Road, which is owned and maintained by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the existing residential community that is adjacent to the north and northeast of the project site. The following discussion provides a description of the views of the project site, as seen from these four perspectives: Interstate 210, La Tuna Canyon Road, public parkland, and existing adjacent residential communities.

Figure IV.N-1

Elevation Analysis with Observer Points

Figure IV.N-2, Views of the Project Site

Photograph A (FORMA-3) View from 210 Freeway looking northeast into Development Area A, with existing adjacent homes in the middle ground.

Photograph B (FORMA- 2) View from La Tuna Canyon Road looking northwest toward Development Area B in the middle ground, with the La Tuna Canyon Channel in the foreground.

Figure IV.N-3, Views of the Project Site

Photograph C (DSCN8514.JPG) View from La Tuna Canyon Road looking northeast across the southern portion of the project site toward Interstate 210 and a massive manufactured fill slope.

Photograph D (DSCN8511.JPG) View looking northeast along La Tuna Canyon Road toward Development Area B from offsite.

Views of the Project Site from Eastbound Interstate 210

Northern Portion

Most of the northern portion of the project site is located above the grade of the freeway and is visible from the freeway (see Figure IV.N-1). As the eastbound traveler enters the segment of the freeway adjacent to the project site, the vistas to the north are constrained by tall cut slopes created during the construction of the freeway. These foreground views of manufactured slopes quickly transition to views with more depth of undisturbed south-trending secondary ridges alternating with deep ravines. Most of these hillsides retain their natural undulating surfaces and undisturbed native vegetation. However, there are occasional cut slopes along the north side of the freeway. These manufactured slopes have flat regular surfaces with exposed soils and sparse vegetation.

Middleground views of the northern portion of the project site consist of the east- and west-facing slopes of secondary ridges that extend southerly from the prominent east-west trending ridge that approximates the northern boundary of the project site. Steep and narrow south-draining ravines alternate with the secondary ridges to form an undulating topography. The ravines form north-south view corridors toward the prominent ridgeline, while the secondary ridges form barriers to east-west views across the length of the project site.

There are no background views of the communities of Sunland and Tujunga, which lie to the north of the project site. The aforementioned prominent east-west ridgeline defines the extent of views toward the north. However, in the eastern portion of the project site there are background views of the San Gabriel Mountains that frame Development Area A (see Photograph A).

Because some portions of Development Area A are situated below the freeway grade, there are unrestricted views into portions of the development area. However, due to the complexity of the topography, not all of Development Area A can be seen from any one location. Rather, passengers in vehicles on Interstate 210 have progressively changing views of the project site as they move eastward. For example, where hills within the development area are close to the freeway, they block middleground views of the higher ridgeline that lies behind them. Such constrained views quickly open into broader vistas as drainages provide view corridors deeper into the property. Upon passing such corridors, views again become constrained by intervening topography. Where not blocked by intervening hillsides, some homes along the edge of the adjacent residential community to the north and east are visible from the freeway, behind Development Area A (see Photograph A).

The project site has approximately 2.7 miles of frontage on the north side of Interstate 210. At 65 mph, it takes a vehicle approximately two minutes thirty seconds to traverse the length of the property. Development Area A (including the entrance and access road) would only occupy the eastern portion of

the project site (approximately 1.4 miles of freeway frontage). Traveling at 65 mph, it takes approximately 77 seconds to traverse this distance of the Development Area A's freeway frontage. Sections B and C on Figure IV.N-4 indicate the portion of the freeway from which Development Area A can be viewed from eastbound traffic.

Southern Portion

Most of the southern portion of the project site is below the freeway grade and is not visible from eastbound vehicles on Interstate 210. However, the highest elevations of Development Area B rise above the freeway grade and are visible from eastbound vehicles. Eastbound vehicles travel approximately 0.8 miles of project site freeway frontage before the "Prominent Ridgeline" (as designated in the Draft Specific Plan) in Development Area B comes into view (see Figure IV.N-4, Section D). The Prominent Ridgeline then remains in view for a distance of approximately 0.9 mile (see Figure IV.N-4, Section E). At a speed of 65 mph, the Prominent Ridgeline remains in view for a period of approximately 50 seconds.

Views of the Project Site from Westbound 210 Freeway

Northern Portion

The northern portion of the project site is visible from westbound vehicles on Interstate 210 for approximately the same length of time as it is from eastbound vehicles. During the time the northern portion is visible, passengers in westbound vehicles also experience constantly changing views of largely undisturbed hillsides and ravines. Sections B and C on Figure IV.N-4 indicate the portion of the freeway from which Development Area A can be viewed from westbound traffic.

Southern Portion

As previously discussed, most of the southern portion of the project site is at an elevation below the adjacent freeway grade, and is not visible to travelers on Interstate 210. However, the highest elevations of Development Area B rise above the freeway grade and the eastern portion of the Development Area B Prominent Ridgeline is visible for a distance of approximately 2,400 feet to westbound travelers (Figure IV.N-4, Section F). At 65 mph, Development Area B is visible for approximately 25 seconds from westbound vehicles.

Figure IV.N-4

View Section Analysis

Views of the Project Site from La Tuna Canyon Road

As it passes Development Area B, La Tuna Canyon Road sits below Interstate 210. In the vicinity of Section G, Interstate 210 is not visible from La Tuna Canyon Road. However, the fill slopes that support the freeway (on either side of the Development Area B prominent ridgeline) are prominently visible from La Tuna Canyon Road, as are the tops of tall trucks driving in the freeway's outside eastbound lane. Due to topographic restrictions in the lines-of-sight towards the north, the only very highest elevations of the northern portion of the project site are visible from La Tuna Canyon Road (see Figure IV.N-3, Photograph C).

For westbound vehicles on La Tuna Canyon Road, views of Development Area B first occur approximately 2,000 feet westerly of the Interstate 210 underpass. Intermittent views of the Development Area B – partially blocked by stands of dense vegetation – occur for the next 0.8 miles (see Figure IV.N-4, Section G). For westbound traffic traveling at 50 mph on La Tuna Canyon Road, Development Area B is visible for a period of approximately 58 seconds. For eastbound traffic on La Tuna Canyon Road, the higher elevations of Development Area B first become perceptible in the vicinity on the project's proposed equestrian center. Portions of Development Area B remain visible for a distance of approximately 1.0 mile, or 80 seconds at 50 mph, the current speed limit (see Figure IV.N-4, Section G).

Views of the Project Site from Existing Residential Community on La Tuna Canyon Road

There are a handful of homes located along La Tuna Canyon Road to the west of the project site. Due to line-of-sight constraints, none of these homes have views of Development Area A. Furthermore, due to intervening topography and dense vegetation, it is unlikely that any of these homes have substantial views of the Development Area B.

Views Existing Residential Community to the North and Northeast of Development Area A

The existing residential area located north and northeast of Development Area A includes numerous residential streets, although views of the project site are largely restricted to Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, Glen O Peace Parkway, and Verdugo Crestline Drive. Residents who live on Tranquil and Reverie Drives have an unrestricted field of vision into Development Area A that extends in an arc from northwest to southeast. Residents along Inspiration Way and Glen O Peace Parkway generally have views of Development Area A that extend from the northwest to the south, while residents along Verdugo Crestline Drive look down into Development Area A in a field of vision that extends from the west to the south. It is estimated that there are roughly 50± homes along these

roadways that have views of Development Area A.¹ Figures IV.N-18 and IV.N-19, below, provide typical views of Development Area A from these existing residential areas. As can be seen from these sample views, the terrain is complex and not all portions of Development Area A can be seen from any one vantage point. Development Area B is not visible from this existing residential area due to intervening terrain and line-of-sight constraints. In addition to the hillsides of the project site, some existing homes to the north and northeast also have limited views of Interstate 210. The extent to which the freeway is visible from the existing adjacent residential area is indicated in Photograph E, which provides a view of the freeway from the vicinity of Tranquil/Reverie Drives, and Photograph F provides a view of the freeway from Inspiration Way.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with Appendix G to the CEQA Guidelines, the project would have a significant impact on aesthetics if it would cause any of the following conditions to occur:

- A substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- Substantially damages scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway,
- Substantially degrades the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Project Characteristics

Development Areas A and B have been designed to create a low-density, clustered residential community that avoids the appearance of a “tract” development. The proposed homes would be located on large lots with ample side-yard spacing, and would appear dispersed and informally organized within the landscape. In addition, a curvilinear street plan would be used to avoid straight rows of houses. Hence, the site design avoids the look of large houses squeezed onto small lots. Also, natural hillsides and re-vegetated manufactured slopes would be integrated into the development areas, creating a sense of preserved open space. Overall, the effect is that of a community perched on the land, rather than forced onto it.

¹ Residents who live north of Verdugo Crestline Drive and easterly of Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Glen O Peace Parkway, and Inspiration Way do not have nighttime views of the project site due to a combination of intervening terrain, structures and vegetation.

Figure IV.N-5, Photographs E and F

Photograph E. (Photo 5 from Light & Glare study)

Photograph F. (Photo 6 from Light & Glare study)

To avoid the appearance of “mass grading”, the project has been designed to avoid the project site’s steeper slopes, and development has been clustered in order to maximize open space. Where the terrain is favorable, existing knolls would be back-cut (essentially creating berm-like conditions) to reduce the visibility of some homes as seen from Interstate 210. Also, substantial setbacks would be provided along La Tuna Canyon Road in order to preserve the rural ambiance of the scenic highway. In both Development Areas A and B, the proposed private roads have been designed to wind their way up to the proposed homes, following the new lay-of-the-land. The proposed project would also include the permanent preservation of approximately 693 acres of open space (78 percent of the project site). The design effect would be the predominance of the remaining open space.

As indicated above, clustering provides the opportunity to maximize open space on the project site. Clustering also permits the project design to minimize impacts to the most sensitive resources. For example, of the 1,309 coast live oak trees on the project site, the site design preserves 1,077 trees, or 82 percent. Similarly, of the 148 western sycamore trees on the project site, the site design preserves 121 trees, or 82 percent.

Due to the size of the project site, the complexity of its topography, and the extremes of elevation change, only a portion of Development Area A or B would be visible from any location. This is particularly true for views of the Development Areas from Interstate 210, the vantage point for most of the public who would view the proposed development.

For the most part, Development Area A would be clustered between two secondary ridges. These ridges would partially block views of Development Area A from approaching vehicles on Interstate 210. At a speed of 65 mph, Development Area A would be visible to both eastbound and westbound vehicles on Interstate 210 for approximately 77 seconds.

The majority of Development Area B is located below the grade of Interstate 210 and would not be visible from either eastbound or westbound vehicles on the freeway. The Prominent Ridgeline would block most views of Development Area B from eastbound vehicles; however, those portions of Development Area B that rise above the grade of Interstate 210 would be visible from westbound vehicles for approximately 25 seconds.

For the most part, Development Area A would not be visible from vehicles on La Tuna Canyon Road. However, Development Area B would be visible from eastbound vehicles on La Tuna Canyon Road for approximately 58 seconds, while it would be visible from westbound vehicles for approximately 50 seconds.

The existing residential area located north and northeast of Development Area A includes numerous residential streets, although views of the project site are largely restricted to homes along Tranquil

Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, Glen O Peace Parkway, and Verdugo Crestline Drive. There are approximately 50 homes along these bordering streets that have unrestricted views of Development Area A. Nevertheless, the terrain is complex and not all portions of Development Area A can be seen from any one existing home. Development Area B is not visible from this existing residential area due to intervening terrain and line-of-sight constraints.

Project Impacts

Project development would require cut and fill grading operations to prepare the project site for the proposed residential construction. Within Development Area A, site preparation would require the landform alteration of approximately 156.7 acres. This grading would include the lowering of a secondary ridgeline, in some places by as much as 80 feet. In addition to the project area directly affected by grading, an additional area of 71.6 acres of native vegetation would be affected by brush clearance and fuel modification for fire protection purposes. Combined, grading and brush clearance/fuel modification would alter the appearance of 228.3 acres within Development Area A.

Within Development Area B, site preparation would require the landform alteration of approximately 60.2 acres. In addition to the project area directly affected by grading, an additional area of 22.2 acres of native vegetation would be affected by brush clearance and fuel modification for fire protection purposes. Combined, grading and brush clearance/fuel modification would alter the appearance of 82.4 acres within Development Area B.

When Development Areas A and B are combined, grading and brush clearance/fuel modification would permanently alter the appearance of 310.7 acres within the project site. Project construction would also require the removal of up to 232 oak trees, of which 154 (potentially including two trees on the Duke Property) would be removed from Development Area A and 78 would be removed from Development Area B.

Elevation Analysis

Due to the size of the project site, the complexity of its topography, and the extremes of elevation change, the entirety of the Development Areas A and B cannot be viewed from any one location. This is particularly true for views of the Development Areas from Interstate 210, the vantage point for most of the public who would view the proposed development. For travelers on Interstate 210 views of the proposed Development Areas are constantly changing, with new views opening up while older views move out of sight. To help visualize the extent to which Development Areas A and B would be visible from Interstate 210, a computerized view analysis was prepared by FORMA Systems.

The first step in the analysis was the preparation of the elevation analysis (Figure IV.N-1). This computer generated topography map uses color to indicate 100-foot elevation contours for the

developed project site (i.e., after grading). Because the elevation of Interstate 210 is also presented in the figure, it is relatively easy to determine which portions of the project site lay above and below the adjacent freeway grade.

The second step in the analysis was the generation of a series of “observations” or views that show how much of the project site and the development areas can be seen from a series of points along the freeway. Six such observations were prepared. The locations of these computer-generated observations along Interstate 210 are shown on Figure IV.N-1. The results of the analysis are presented in Figures IV.N-6 through IV.N-11. In each of these figures, the observation point along the freeway is indicated, and the extent to which the project site is visible from that location is highlighted in yellow. Essentially, each graphic presentation is a “plan view” of the 360-degree line of site available from that location. The views clearly demonstrate the blocking effect that nearby intervening topography has upon the viewer’s ability to see “what lies beyond”. It should be noted that the computer program analyzes and highlights changes in elevation. Consequently, level terrain (such as building pads) that lies above the freeway grade and is not therefore visible in the line-of-sight, is depicted as not visible in the computer-generated graphics. However, structures (such as houses) that rise above the flat plain of the building pad, could be visible from that location.

The following paragraphs present brief discussions of each observation point and the view available from that location:

Observation Point #1 – Figure IV.N-6

Observation Point #1 is representative of the first views of the project site and Development Area A from approaching westbound vehicles on Interstate 210. It is also representative of the last views of the same area for passengers within eastbound vehicles. From this location, there are views of the proposed access road area into Development Area A and the adjacent hillsides. There are no views of the central portion of Development Area A or of any portion of Development Area B from this location.

Observation Point #2 – Figure IV.N-7

Observation Point #2 is located approximately 2,900 feet farther west than Observation Point #1. From this location (outside lane for westbound vehicles), there are views into the closer central portion of Development Area A, the higher elevations of Development Area B, and background views of the tops of some of the higher ridges within the project’s proposed open space. The analysis shows that while the homes of Development Area A in closest proximity to Interstate 210 would be visible from this location, most of Development Area A would be obscured from view by intervening topography. The analysis also shows that existing homes located along such roads as Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, and Glen O Peace will continue to be visible from Interstate 210 after completion of

the proposed project. With respect to Development Area B, the analysis shows that the proposed homes situated at the highest elevations and closest to Interstate 210 would be visible from Observation Point #2; however, the majority of Development Area B would be below freeway grade and would not be visible.

Observation Point #3 – Figure IV.N-8

Observation Point #3 is located only approximately 600 feet farther west than Observation Point #2, but the views have changed dramatically. From this location approximately 50 percent of Development Area B would be visible from eastbound vehicles in the outside lane, but only as rear views after the vehicle has already passed the development area. For westbound vehicles, approximately 30 percent of Development Area B would be visible. From this same location, views into Development Area A are somewhat hampered by the intervening freeway and its center divider. Smaller, more scattered, areas of Development Area A are visible (compared to Observation Point #2). However, the majority of Development Area A, including all of the homes at higher elevations, is not visible. Also, some existing homes in the vicinity of Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, and Glen O Peace Parkway would be visible from this location.

Observation Point #4 – Figure IV.N-9

Observation Point #4 approximates the point along Interstate 210 where proposed homes in Development Areas A and B are situated closest to the freeway. Observation Point #4 is located at approximately the center of the freeway and, as such, it approximates the view of both eastbound and westbound vehicles. Observation Point #4 is located only approximately 800 feet farther west than Observation Point #3. To the south, Development Area B homes above the grade of Interstate 210 would be directly visible, but actually fewer would be visible from this location than from Observation Point #3. To the north, more homes along the ascending western ridge would become visible, while the same ridge would start to block views toward the northeast. As with the previous views, the majority of Development Area A would not be visible from this location.

Observation Point #5 – Figure IV.N-10

Observation Point #5 (eastbound outside lane) is located approximately 3,000 feet farther west than Observation Point #4, and is adjacent to the proposed open space. To the south, the intervening northwest-facing “Prominent Ridgeline” (as designated in the Draft Specific Plan) would effectively block all views of Development Area B. No homes in Development Area B would be visible from this location. To the north, most of Development Area A would be blocked by intervening terrain. However, homes along the western edge of Development Area A would be visible from this location (see also Figure IV.N-16, below).

Observation Point #6 – Figure IV.N-11

Observation Point #6 (center of 210 Freeway) is located approximately 2,400 feet farther west than Observation Point #5, and is also adjacent to the proposed open space. From this location, there are no views of either Development Area A or B.

Photo Simulations

The preceding discussion assessed the degree to which Development Areas A and B would be visible from various locations along Interstate 210. The following analysis provides computer simulations of what the project is expected to look like after construction is completed. For each photo simulation, “before” and “after” views are presented. The “before” views are photographs taken in the year 2002. The first step in producing the photo simulations was the 3-dimensional computer modeling of the project’s proposed grading plan. This was accomplished by overlaying the grading plan on the computer modeling of the existing site topography. Next, using global positioning satellite technology to ensure exactness of fit, the computer generated 3-dimensional grading plan was overlaid onto the “before” photographic views. This produced an accurate image of the finished graded landforms. The last steps involved adding the “skin” of native vegetation back onto the revised image, the depiction of the proposed roadways, the positioning of generic housing types on their building pads, and the addition of generic landscaping.

Since no specific architectural plans for the future homes have been prepared yet, the final images presented herein include a variety of generic house forms chosen from the computer’s image library. No attempt has been made to depict what the actual architectural style of the homes would ultimately look like. However, the homes would have an average size of 4,000 square feet and a maximum height of approximately 30 feet, as depicted in the photo simulations. However, brush clearance and fuel modification are depicted in accordance with standard City of Los Angeles guidelines: approximately 100 feet of brush clearance and an additional 100 feet of fuel modification (200 foot total depth from structures). The simulations also demonstrate the project’s design intent to “feather” the transitions from one zone to the next to avoid a visually harsh appearance. The photo simulations include generic streetscape and residential landscaping, aged to show what the growth could look like after approximately 10 years of growth. Some coast live oak and western sycamore trees would be planted within the total 200-foot fuel modification zone as part of the recommended by oak/sycamore tree mitigation plan.

Figure IV.N-6

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #1

Figure IV.N-7

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #2

Figure IV.N-8

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #3

Figure IV.N-9

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #4

Figure IV.N-10

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #5

Figure IV.N-11

Visibility Analysis At Observation Point #6

A total of eight photo simulations are presented in the following section. The locations from which the existing view photographs were taken and the direction of each view are indicated on Figure IV.N-12. The views are presented in Figures IV.N-13 through IV.N-20. The following paragraphs present brief discussions of each photo simulation:

Photo Simulation 1 – Figure IV.N-13

Existing View: This is an existing view looking west toward Development Area B, taken from La Tuna Canyon Road approximately 600 feet westerly of the proposed eastern entrance. The La Tuna Canyon Wash is located in the lower central portion of the photograph, although only the tops of the tree canopy are visible to mark its location. From this vantage point there is no intervening terrain or vegetation to obscure the view of the development area from the roadway.

Proposed View: This view depicts the lower portion of the eastern access road and the first grouping of housing accessed from this entrance. As can be seen in this view, the site plan has been designed to create flat building pads, while retaining as much of the existing terrain as possible. The private roads are designed to wind their way up to the proposed homes, following the new lay-of-the-land. There are no rectilinear road alignments that have been forced onto Development Area B. The homes are spread out along the roadway, with ample side-yard spacing that avoids the look of large houses squeezed onto small lots.² While most of the homes in this view appear to be tucked onto their building sites, a few break the silhouette of the modified skyline as seen from La Tuna Canyon Road. To establish scale, the closest depicted home is approximately 1,200 feet from the observer's location. Natural hillsides and re-vegetated manufactured slopes are integrated into the development area and create a sense of preserved open space. Overall, the effect is that of a low-density community perched on the land.

Photo Simulation 2 – Figure IV.N-14

Existing View: This is an existing view looking north and up from La Tuna Canyon Road into the western portion of proposed Development Area B. This view location is approximately 3,000 feet westerly of the view location for Photo Simulation 1 (see Figure IV.N-12). The higher elevations of this steep area are clearly visible from La Tuna Canyon Road and are not blocked by any existing roadside vegetation or intervening terrain.

Proposed View: This view depicts the western portion of Development Area B. To establish scale, the closest depicted house (center) is approximately 700 feet from the observer's location. As can be seen in this view, the proposed grading in this area would lower the existing skyline in order to create building sites. While easily visible from La Tuna Canyon Road, the homes in this area are well set

² *Proposed building pads in this area have a minimum size of 10,350 square feet.*

back from the highway, and several appear to be tucked into their building sites, although others would clearly break the silhouette of the graded ridgeline. Due to large building pads and side-yards, the houses appear well spread out along the roadway. The simulation also shows that the open space would continue to be a dominant visual feature of this vista. It should also be noted that, due to line-of-sight limitations, the houses at the highest elevations within Development Area B are not visible from this viewing location.

Photo Simulation 3 – Figure IV.N-15

Existing View: This existing view looks northeast from Interstate 210 toward the secondary ridgeline that forms the eastern edge of Development Area A (left-hand side of photograph). This view location coincides with Observation Point #3 (Figure IV.N-8). The higher elevation, offsite portion of this ridgeline is designated as “Prominent Ridgeline” in the Draft Specific Plan. However, the Prominent Ridgeline designation and the “Prominent Ridgeline Protection Area” associated with it do not extend onto the project site (see Section IV.G (Land Use) for detailed discussion of the Draft Specific Plan). As can be seen in the photograph, this ridge is an effective barrier to long-distance views along the freeway for both eastbound and westbound vehicles.

Proposed View: This view of the eastern portion of Development Area A illustrates how the secondary ridgeline would be lowered and contoured to create building sites. New homes located along the west face of the ridgeline would not be visible from approaching westbound vehicles. However, new homes along the ridgeline would break the silhouette of the ridgeline as seen from eastbound vehicles. Also, the slope facing Interstate 210 has been back-cut, essentially creating a berm-like effect that would help to reduce the visibility of the closest homes. Again, the overall effect is the predominance of the remaining open space.

Photo Simulation 4 – Figure IV.N-16

Existing View: This existing view looks east along Interstate 210 and represents one of the first views of proposed Development Area A. This view location approximates Observation Point #5 (Figure IV.N-6). From this location the undulating ridge and ravine topography of the northern portion of the project site is clearly visible. The Verdugo Crestline, designated as a “Prominent Ridgeline” in the Draft Specific Plan (although only the land on the north side of the easterly portion of that Prominent Ridgeline has been designated as a “Prominent Ridgeline Protection Area”), appears to be indicated by the SCE transmission line tower in the left-hand portion of the photograph. However, the Prominent Ridgeline actually lies beyond the SCE transmission line and is not visible in Figure IV.N-16.

Proposed View: This simulation of the western edge of Development Area A suggests the first view of Development Area A from eastbound vehicles on Interstate 210. From this perspective, substantial

alteration of the skyline would be apparent. The natural irregularities of the skyline would be removed, and replaced by a manufactured “plateau” effect. While, the main portion of Development Area A would not be seen from this location, the edge of the development would appear as a line of homes arranged along the skyline and descending along a minor ridge (which is not a designated Prominent Ridgeline in the Draft Specific Plan). Development Area B is to the right and cannot be seen in this view.

Photo Simulation 5 – Figure IV.N-17

Existing View: This existing view looks west along Interstate 210 toward the Prominent Ridgeline in Development Area B. This view location approximates Observation Point #2 (Figure IV.N-10). The photograph clearly indicates that only the top of the Prominent Ridgeline is visible from this location. The remaining portions of the southern half of the project site and Development Area B are below the freeway grade and cannot be seen from this location. Development Area A is to the right of the photograph.

Proposed View: The photo simulation clearly demonstrates that only those proposed homes in Development Area B that are at elevations equal to or higher than the freeway grade would be visible from this location. In this view simulation, approximately 20 homes are visible. In the northern portion of Development Area B, the new homes would be tucked into the east-facing side of the Prominent Ridgeline. While clearly visible from westbound vehicles, the Prominent Ridgeline prevents views of Development Area B from eastbound vehicles. As the Prominent Ridgeline descends toward the south, the new homes can be seen to break the silhouette of the ridgeline. A sound wall (ranging in height from 8 to 16 feet) has been recommended in the noise study for the proposed project (see Section IV.E) to protect the closest proposed homes from freeway noise. A conceptual landscaped sound wall is shown in the view simulation. Development Area A is to the right and has not been modeled in this view.

Photo Simulation 6 – Figure IV.N-18

Existing View: This existing view looks west into proposed Development Area A from the adjacent residential area in the vicinity of Inspiration Way. The view looks along the SCE Transmission Line ROW and shows two existing homes in the foreground and the high point of the offsite Prominent Ridgeline in the right-hand portion of the photograph.

Proposed View: The photo simulation illustrates the extent of proposed development in the northern portion of Development Area A. Substantial landform alterations would be visible from this perspective. Irregularities in the existing skyline would be straightened out and replaced with horizontal lines. While the SCE Transmission Line ROW would remain a swath of undeveloped open

space (with the exception of private internal circulation roads that must cross the Transmission Line ROW), new housing would be developed both to the north and south of the Transmission Line ROW. For existing residents who border Development Area A, their current views of the complex topography of the adjacent natural open space would be converted into views of a residential community.

Photo Simulation 7 – Figure IV.N-19

Existing View: This existing view looks south from Verdugo Crestline Drive into the proposed Development Area A. The view shows the complexity of the topography within Development Area A. In the center right of the photograph, one can see in the background the ridgeline on the south side of La Tuna Canyon. Neither Interstate 210 nor Development Area B is visible from this location.

Proposed View: The photo simulation illustrates the extent of proposed development in the northern portion of Development Area A. There are only a few existing homes along Verdugo Crestline Drive that would be exposed to the view presented in this photo simulation. However, for those existing residents, their current views of the surrounding open space would be converted into views of a residential community. The photo simulation also shows how foreground landscaping would be used to soften the appearance of the new development. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the public who may view Development Area A would do so from Interstate 210. For those individuals, this area is almost invisible (see Photo Simulations 3, 4 and 5).

Photo Simulation 8 – Figure IV.N-20

Existing View: This existing view looks north toward the central portion of Development Area B from a fire road/hiking trail in the public parkland on the south side of La Tuna Canyon Road. The parkland is owned and maintained by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Currently, the view from the hiking trail is of rugged, undisturbed open space. From this vantage point, neither Interstate 210 nor the proposed Development Area A can be seen. However, almost all of Development Area B is visible from various locations along hiking trails within the parkland.

Proposed View: Proposed construction within Development Area B would be exposed to view from various locations along hiking trails in the public parklands to the south of La Tuna Canyon Road, as demonstrated in Photo Simulation 8. The proposed project would alter the outdoor experience of trail users by modifying the existing view of rural countryside to include clustered low-density development.

Figure IV.N- 12

Visual Simulations Locations

Figure IV.N-13

Photo Simulation 1

Figure IV.N-14

Photo Simulation 2

Figure IV.N-15

Photo Simulation 3

Figure IV.N-16

Photo Simulation 4

Figure IV.N-17

Photo Simulation 5

Figure IV.N-18

Photo Simulation 6

Figure IV.N-19

Photo Simulation 7

Figure IV.N-20

Photo Simulation 8

Scenic Vistas

As discussed above, the Development Areas have been designed to maximize open space and take advantage of the existing terrain to minimize the visibility of the proposed homes. Only a portion of Development Area A or B would be visible from any location. However, portions of the Development Areas are adjacent to and visible from Interstate 210, a designated scenic highway. In addition, portions of Development Area B are adjacent to and visible from La Tuna Canyon Road. Both of these highways were designated as scenic highways because of the high quality of the scenic resources visible within their viewsheds. Within the vicinity of the project site, those resources include (but are not limited to) expanses of undeveloped hillsides, steep and complex topography, rugged rock outcroppings, deep ravines, and undisturbed native vegetation.

The proposed project would introduce a residential development into the scenic vistas afforded by these scenic highways, resulting in a substantial alteration of existing views. In some places, the existing skylines would be lowered and their natural forms reshaped into horizontal planes to support the proposed development. Portions of the new residential development within Development Areas A and B would be visible from both eastbound and westbound traffic on Interstate 210. Development Area B would be clearly visible from eastbound and westbound traffic on La Tuna Canyon Road.

However, as discussed above, portions of Development Area A and B would only be visible to occupants of moving vehicles on Interstate 210 and La Tuna Canyon Road for short periods. At a speed of 65 mph, different portions of Development Area B would only be visible to westbound vehicles on Interstate 210 for approximately 25 seconds. Under similar conditions, different portions of Development Area A would be visible to eastbound and westbound vehicles on Interstate 210 for approximately 77 seconds. At a speed of 50 mph, different portions of Development Area B would be visible from eastbound vehicles on La Tuna Canyon Road for approximately 58 seconds, and from westbound vehicles for approximately 50 seconds.

Because the assessment of aesthetic impacts involves subjective judgments, there will always be an element of controversy regarding the determination whether a proposed change in the visual environment constitutes an adverse physical effect. While some may consider the introduction of a residential development into undisturbed hillsides as a significant intrusion under any circumstances, others may consider a sensitively-designed project as an asset to the community and desire to purchase homes there. However, while the project has been designed to minimize the visibility of the proposed homes, based on the close proximity of the Development Areas to two designated scenic highways, the proposed development should be considered to have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, and the proposed project's impacts on scenic vistas would therefore be considered significant.

Damage to Scenic Resources

Clustering of the proposed homes provides the opportunity to maximize open space on the project site. As designed, approximately 693 acres (or approximately 78 percent of the project site) would remain open space following project development. The proposed clustering would also minimize the impacts to the most sensitive resources on the project site. For example, the proposed project would preserve 1,077 (or more than 82 percent) of the estimated 1,309 coast live oak trees on the project site. Similarly, 121 (almost 82 percent) of the estimated 148 sycamore trees on the project site would be preserved.

However, the proposed project would cause landform alterations to approximately 240.2 acres of land, due to grading. Fuel modification for fire prevention purposes would result in alterations to an additional 93.8 acres of currently undisturbed native habitat. The native vegetation of the project site and the surrounding Verdugo Mountains constitutes a major scenic resource. Within the proposed Development Areas, grading would transform the rugged skyline and complex terrain of the hillsides into more regular ordered patterns of horizontal planes. In some locations, such as the central portion of Development Area A, grading would reduce the height of an existing secondary ridgeline by as much as 80 feet. The rugged natural forms of the project site and the surrounding Verdugo Mountains constitute major scenic resources.

Notwithstanding that the proposed project would preserve approximately 693 acres of the project site as open space, substantial portions of the 194-acre Development Area would involve the removal or alteration of existing scenic resources such as major landforms and undisturbed native vegetation, which would substantially impact scenic resources. Therefore, the proposed project's impacts on scenic resources would be considered significant.

Existing Visual Character or Quality of the Project Site and Its Surroundings

As previously discussed, Development Areas A and B have been designed to create a low-density, clustered residential community that avoids the appearance of a "tract" development. A curvilinear street plan would be used to avoid straight rows of houses. Instead, the private roads would wind their way up to the proposed homes. The proposed homes would be located on large lots with ample side-yard spacing, and would appear dispersed and informally organized within the landscape. Hence, the site design avoids the look of large houses squeezed onto small lots. Also, natural hillsides and re-vegetated manufactured slopes would be integrated into the development areas, creating a sense of preserved open space.

To avoid the appearance of "mass grading" the project site has been designed to avoid the project site's steeper slopes, and development has been clustered in order to maximize open space. Where the terrain is favorable, existing knolls would be back-cut (essentially creating berm-like conditions) to reduce the

visibility of some homes as seen from Interstate 210. Also, substantial setbacks would be provided along La Tuna Canyon Road in order to preserve the rural ambiance of the scenic highway. The proposed project would also include the permanent preservation of 693 acres of open space (approximately 78 percent of the project site). The design effect would be the predominance of the remaining open space.

The existing residential area located north and northeast of Development Area A includes numerous residential streets, although views of the project site are largely restricted to homes along Tranquil Drive, Reverie Drive, Inspiration Way, Glen O Peace Parkway, and Verdugo Crestline Drive. There are approximately 50 homes along these bordering streets that have unrestricted views of Development Area A. Nevertheless, the terrain is complex and not all portions of Development Area A can be seen from any one existing home. Development Area B is not visible from this existing residential area due to intervening terrain and line-of-sight constraints.

However, while the proposed project has been designed to preserve the existing visual character and quality of the project site, the development of the proposed project would transform undisturbed hillsides in the 194-acre Development Areas into a residential community, a change that would substantially affect the existing visual character and/or quality of approximately 28 percent of the project site. Particularly with respect to the existing residential community to the north and northeast, which has an informal ambiance, the proposed homes in Development Area A would substantially affect the visual character or quality of the open space to which the existing community has become accustomed. On the south side of Interstate 210, the introduction of 69 new homes within Development Area B would substantially change the visual character of La Tuna Canyon, most of which is currently rural open space. While there is existing residential development along La Tuna Canyon Road west of the project site, it is tucked in along the sides of the road and does not dominate the landscape. However, some of the proposed homes in Development Area B would be elevated above La Tuna Canyon Road and visible to passersby. Consequently, the substantial increase in the number of homes in the canyon and their high visibility from La Tuna Canyon Road would substantially impact the rural ambiance of that portion of La Tuna Canyon. For these reasons, the project could be considered to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Development Areas and the proposed project's impacts on the visual character and quality of the project site would therefore be considered significant.

MITIGATION MEASURES

- N-1** All structures on the project site shall comply with the applicable requirements of the Draft San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan.

- N-2** All fences, gates and walls visible from Interstate 210 or La Tuna Canyon Road shall be constructed of one or more of the following materials: rough-cut, unfinished wood; native-type stone; split-face concrete bloc; textured plaster surface walls; black or dark green chain link; wrought-iron in combination with small-gauge tubular steel posts (tubing posts not to exceed 1½” square in dimension).
- N-3** The project developer shall prepare and implement a landscape plan that provides planting and maintenance guidance for common landscaped areas, slopes, and undeveloped building pads. A separate landscape plan may be prepared for each Development Area. The project developer shall be responsible for the plan's implementation until such time as a homeowners' association assumes responsibility for landscape maintenance. The landscape plan shall be subject to the review and approval by the Department of City Planning prior to issuance of any grading permit. To ensure its implementation, the landscape plan shall be incorporated into the project's CC&Rs. Major features of the landscape plan shall include:
- A listing of plant species appropriate for use for both temporary slope stabilization purposes and long-term landscaping designs for common areas. The plan shall emphasize the use of drought-tolerant, fire retardant, native plant species. Only non-invasive non-native plant species shall be included in the listing of acceptable planting materials. In addition, wherever practical, plants which are relatively pest resistant and which require a minimum of added nutrients shall be utilized in landscaping.
 - Retention of a landscape contractor thoroughly familiar with the provisions of the landscape plan, by the project's homeowners' association, for ongoing implementation of the Landscape Plan.
- N-4** All utilities installed in connection with the development of the new subdivision shall be placed underground.
- N-5** All roofs visible from Interstate 210 and La Tuna Canyon Road shall be surfaced with non-glare materials and no equipment shall be placed thereon. This provision shall not apply to solar energy devices and satellite dishes.
- N-6** Where feasible, drainage devices (terrace drains, benches and intervening terraces) visible from surrounding areas shall be bermed and placed in swales.
- N-7** Concrete drains and all other drainage devices shall be tinted with an appropriate earth tone to effectively conceal them from surrounding views.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

There is only one related project close enough to the project site to have a direct cumulative visual quality impact at the project site. That is the proposed Duke Project, which has been approved for 10 additional homes on the north side of Interstate 210 adjacent to Development Area A. The effect of the proposed project combined with the Duke Project would be further landform alteration, loss of scenic resources, and further sub-urbanization of Interstate 210 scenic corridor. Although only two projects are involved, the cumulative impacts would be considered significant. Because the proposed project would account for approximately 95 percent of the new residential construction on the north side of Interstate 210, the proposed project's incremental contribution to the significant cumulative impact would be considerable.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Project impacts with respect to scenic vistas, scenic resources, and existing visual character would remain significant following implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.