

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

A. AESTHETICS/VIEWS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

REGIONAL SETTING

The project area (between Devonshire Street and the SR-118 freeway) is generally characterized by single-family suburban developments with a background of distant and nearby low-lying (maximum 3,500 foot elevation) mountain ranges. The area is also somewhat hilly, rising from south to north. The “near-view” visual aspect of the region is dominated by the north-south De Soto Avenue corridor. Within this corridor, the area east of De Soto Avenue is primarily developed with single-family tract homes and the area west of De Soto Avenue is developed with a mix of tract homes, equestrian homes and other uses permitted within agricultural zoning.

The northward-rising terrain characterizing the area also allows for distant view opportunities to the north. Although no significant views to the east are available from the De Soto Avenue corridor, the Santa Susana and Santa Monica Mountains, to the west, north and south, can be seen from public streets in the area. The Santa Susana Mountains and hillside residential development within Porter Ranch, just north of the SR-118 freeway, form the backdrop for northerly views. Recent fill slopes and residences within Porter Ranch are visible from De Soto Avenue and Lurline Avenue, several blocks south of the freeway. The Santa Susana Mountains are north of the Porter Ranch development and the SR-118 freeway and are more visible farther south of the freeway.

Southerly views are toward the older urbanized Chatsworth community. Although views to the south are generally obstructed by the flattening of the terrain south of the freeway, the Santa Monica Mountains at the south end of the San Fernando Valley are visible in the distance, approximately eight miles south of Chatsworth. The Santa Susana Mountains also form a backdrop on the west from approximately two miles west of De Soto Avenue and are visible from most streets and open areas within the region.

West of De Soto Avenue, the westbound SR-118 freeway begins to climb over the Santa Susana Mountains. Various rock formations and outcroppings, typified by Stony Point Park east of Topanga Canyon Boulevard, characterize the scenic vistas along this freeway corridor.

LOCAL SETTING AND CHARACTER

Project Site

Overview

The project site is adjacent to an established single-family residential area on the south and east and to publicly-owned land (DWP) on the northwest and north. Currently, the property has two distinct areas that contribute to its visual character: a large estate size residence with associated improvements, including numerous mature ornamental trees, that occupies the northern, upper parts of the site; and vacant undeveloped property that occupies the southern,

lower, parts of the site. The site's topography is relatively flat towards the south, and slopes gradually upward to the north where the existing estate is located. The maximum elevation difference on the property is approximately 65 feet including a 15-foot high sloping embankment that runs east-west through the center of the site and separates the upper and lower terraces. The existing single-family property on the northeast portion of the property includes many associated improvements and landscaping. Until recently, the vacant balance of the site lent an undeveloped open space character to much of the property and a semi-rural feel to the area. Hundreds of tall mature ornamental trees (see Section V.C., Biological Resources of this Draft EIR) are located on the portion of the site on which the existing estate is located, which largely block views into that area from the south, and also partially obstruct views of the Santa Susana Mountains. Specifically, some of the trees reach heights of close to 100 feet and are densely located on the northern half of the site along the site's upper terrace and along the top of the slope that crosses through the middle of the site (see **Figure IV-1, Aerial Photograph**). However, grading for the extension of Rinaldi Street that travels along the site's southern boundary in a northeasterly direction is underway, which has transformed the immediate area to a more developed character with active grading, construction equipment and infrastructure plainly visible. This is a contrast to the condition of the area before construction began when the Rinaldi Street right-of-way occupied vacant land that contributed to the site's semi-rural character.

The following discussions describe the site from several different viewpoints within the property. A key for all photograph locations is provided in **Figure IV.A-1, Photograph Locations**.

Existing Residential Property

The upper part of the project site includes the fenced, landscaped, and gated single-family residential property. The residence and swimming pool area are shown in **Figure IV.A-2 Existing Views of Upper School Site**, Photos 1 and 2. The dense landscape that characterizes the residential lot is shown in the background of Photo 2. The lawn area in the northeast portion of the property is shown in **Figure IV.A-2**, Photo 3. This view is toward the Rinaldi Street right-of-way at the east side of the property and visible in the background.

As previously described, views of the residence from other vacant on- and off-site areas are obscured by the cultured trees and dense shrubbery along the fence line and within, the residential lot. Existing landscape features around the residential site are shown in **Figure IV.A-3, Existing Views of Upper School Site**. Photo 4 shows the landscape border along the northerly property boundary and Photo 5 shows the dense growth of cultured trees and shrubs along the southern portion of the existing residential lot.

Vacant Site Areas

The lower portion of the site is vacant and undeveloped. The property generally rises to the north and east, although the terrain rises more sharply toward the north, just below the southerly fence line of the estate and associated landscaping. Northeasterly views across the property from the former Rinaldi Street terminus (grading for the extension has begun and the improved terminus has been removed) are shown in **Figure IV.A-4, Previous and Existing Views of Vacant Site Areas From Rinaldi Terminus**. These photos also show the disturbed character of the adjacent Rinaldi Street extension right-of-way, where construction is underway, and how this has changed the previous vacant and semi-rural character of the lower project site and

Figure IV.A-1 Photograph Locations Key

**Figure IV.A-2
Existing Views of Upper School Site**

FIGURE IV.A-3
Existing Views Of Upper School Site

FIGURE IV.A-4
Previous and Existing Views of Vacant Site Areas
From Rinaldi Terminus

neighboring property. At this time, views of the lower part of the project site are slightly distinguished by the sloping lower terrace beyond the immediate area of grading.

Surrounding Properties

Areas to the south, east and west of the project site consist primarily of single-family residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are typified by one- and two-story homes constructed in the past 50 years that generally do not possess a distinguishing single architectural character. Most lots are closely spaced and reflect the RE9 and RE-11 zoning of the area. The terrain of the area rises gradually toward the north with added grade variation and aesthetic interest in neighborhoods adjacent to the project site. Two two-story single-family residences are located to the west, on the north side of the current Rinaldi Street terminus, between the project site and De Soto Avenue, the closest of which is approximately 260 feet from the site. As typical of the area, these lots are narrow and deep with limited side-yard setbacks from each other and from the western boundary of the project site. A Department of Water and Power (DWP) easement containing above-grade pumps is located between the closest residence on the west and the project site (see **Figure IV.A-4**, Photos 7a and 7b).

A sunken concrete reinforced DWP water storage facility is also located adjacent to the site on the west. This DWP property extends westerly to De Soto Avenue and also contains a paved service road accessing De Soto Avenue. Undeveloped DWP property is also located along the northerly site boundary, between the property and the SR-118 freeway and also contains the Backbone Equestrian Trail as shown in **Figure IV.A-5, Existing Northerly Off-Site Views Showing Adjacent Uses**, Photo 8.

A freeway overcrossing bridge for the Rinaldi Street extension is located northeast of the site. The freeway roadbed, which is below grade in this area, is not visible from the project site, nor is much of Porter Ranch north of the freeway.

Lurline Avenue, which is located immediately east of the site (on the south side of the Rinaldi Street extension), is partially improved to the entrance of the existing residential property. Views of abutting uses on Lurline Avenue east of the site are limited to the rear yards and second stories of residences fronting Celtic Street, as shown in **Figure IV.A-5**, Photo 9, and an unimproved equestrian trail along the west side of the street where it terminates near the current driveway for the estate.

AVAILABLE VIEWS OF THE SITE

Views of the school site are available from several single-family residences located to the south and east. These include a few residences fronting Nashville Street, east of Lurline Avenue, and residences fronting Nashville Street, west of Lurline Avenue. Pedestrian views of the site are also available from Lurline Avenue and from Nashville Street, near and adjacent to the site. Westward and northwestward views towards the site from the intersection of Nashville Street and Lurline Avenue, and from Nashville Street west of Lurline Avenue are depicted in **Figure IV.A-6 Available Off-Site Views and View From Site Interior**. These views include an adjacent vacant parcel proposed for single-family residential development (Related Project No. 3, see associated cumulative impacts discussion later in this section) that occupies the foreground of Photos 10a and b, and grading and site preparation underway for the extension of Rinaldi Street. In Photos 10a and b, the school property is located beyond the Rinaldi Street right-of-way and to the right in proximity to the trees and shrubbery. A vista of the Santa

**Figure IV.A-5
Existing Northerly Off-Site Views Showing Adjacent Uses**

Figure IV.A-6
Available Off-Site Views and View From Site Interior

Susana Mountains is in the far background of the photo. Similarly, Photos 11a and b show the vacant parcel and Rinaldi Street extension right-of-way in the foreground, the school site in the middleground (in the upper and left portions of the photo), and the sharp rise in elevation along the fence line seen along the base of the line of trees. Limited views of the Santa Susanna Mountains are available from this location as shown in the background of the photo.

Photos 12a and b in **Figure IV.A-6** show residences facing toward the site along the south side of Nashville Street. These residences are separated from the site by the extension of Rinaldi Street and an adjacent vacant parcel between Nashville Street and the right-of-way. The property is also visible from Oklahoma and Gazette Avenues and the short north/south section of Nashville Avenue, all south of the Rinaldi Street right-of-way. Views from these streets, however, are partially obscured by existing landscaping between the end of these streets and the former terminus of Rinaldi Street. Views of the site are also available from the side yards and windows of residences facing Oklahoma and Gazette Avenues and the north/south section of Nashville Street. These residences, however, are oriented toward the east and west and do not directly face the school property.

All of these photos depict conditions before February 2002 (when the adjacent property was undisturbed) and after September 2004 (when the initial grading of Rinaldi was underway) and show how the immediate area has changed the vacant and semi-rural character of the lower portion of the project site and neighboring properties.

The school site is also visible from the rear of a few single-family residences that back-up to Lurline Avenue from Celtic Street, directly east of the site (see **Figure IV.A-4**, Photo 9). Direct second story views into the site from the north side of these homes are currently blocked by a row of eucalyptus trees along the west side of unimproved Lurline Avenue, but the southerly lots closer to Nashville Street have more unobstructed views into the property. Lower level views from these residences are also blocked by an existing 6-foot-high privacy wall at the back of the lots.

A direct view into the project site is available from the side yard and windows of a two-story residence on the north side of the existing Rinaldi Street, directly west of the school property.

No direct views of the site are available from northbound or southbound De Soto Avenue, or from the SR-118 freeway.

ALLOWABLE BUILDING HEIGHTS

The project site is currently zoned A2-1 (Height District 1) and (T)RE11-1 (Height District 1). The Height District 1 designation in the A and RE zones limits new structures to a maximum allowable height of 45 feet. Any structures in excess of this height in the A and RE zones are only allowed by issuance of a Zone Variance or a Conditional Use Permit.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

THRESHOLD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The CEQA Guidelines (as amended through January 1, 2004) provide direction for evaluating whether the aesthetic impact of a project could be considered significant. Specifically, the Initial Study Checklist found in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines call out four criteria for

determining whether the impact of a project has potential significance and should be further evaluated in an Environmental Impact Report. These criteria include whether the project would:

- have a substantial impact on a scenic vista;
- substantially degrade 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.¹

The Draft City of Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds Guide provides more specific guidance to determine not just the potential for significance, but to establish thresholds by which a potential aesthetic impact can be measured. By way of background, the CEQA Thresholds Guide observes that aesthetic impact assessment generally deals with the issue of visual contrast occurring among the components of form, line, color and texture; or the degree to which elements of the environment differ visually. The Guide further notes that adverse visual effects can include the loss of natural features or areas, the removal of urban features with aesthetic value, or the introduction of contrasting urban features into natural areas or urban settings.

As noted by the CEQA Thresholds Guide:

“There is an extraordinary range of aesthetic characteristics and contrasts with the City of Los Angeles, including suburban neighborhoods, dense urban areas, and hillside residential areas. Given the size and diversity of the city, there are no aesthetic standards that apply to all areas...General aesthetic requirements that apply to individual zoning districts or types of land uses are provided in the Municipal Code [and in applicable community and specific plans]...While certain screening and significance thresholds can be identified for this issue, a degree of discretionary judgment may be required to determine the ‘value’ of the aesthetic resource or potential project impacts”²

The CEQA Thresholds Guide recognizes the subjectivity brought to such an analysis and states that a determination of significance is to be made on a case-by-case basis based on the following considerations:³

¹ The Initial Study for the project determined that the project would have less than significant light and glare impacts. Specifically, all security and landscape lighting would meet Planning Department requirements for low illumination levels and uplit fixtures as part of the Conditional Use process. Furthermore, the City’s extension of Rinaldi Street through the property will introduce more intense lighting levels to the area that will further obscure night lighting of the school. The project would also utilize many non-reflective materials in its construction and would not be a source of substantial glare. Further analysis is not required.

² Los Angeles Thresholds Guide, City of Los Angeles Environmental Affairs Department, May 14, 1998, (page L.1-2.

³ Op. Cit., page L.1-3.

- The amount of relative proportion of existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area, which would be removed, altered, or demolished;
- The amount of natural open space to be graded or developed;
- The degree to which proposed structures in natural open space areas would be effectively integrated into the aesthetics of the site, through appropriate design, etc.;
- The degree of contrast between proposed features and existing features that represent the area's valued aesthetic image;
- The degree to which a proposed zone change would result in buildings that would detract from the existing style or image of the area due to density, height, bulk, setbacks, signage, or other physical elements;
- The degree to which the project would contribute to the area's aesthetic value;
- Applicable guidelines and regulations (whether the project affects views from a designated scenic highway, corridor or parkway);
- The nature and quality of recognized or valued views (such as natural topography, settings, man-made or natural features of visual interest and resources);
- The extent of obstruction (e.g. total blockage, partial interruption, or minor diminishment); and,
- The extent to which the project affects recognized views available from a length of a public roadway, bike path, or trail, as opposed to a single, fixed vantage point.

These considerations are incorporated into this Draft EIR to establish the level of significance of aesthetic impacts created by the proposed secondary school project.

AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT

As described in detail in Section III, Project Description, a 550-student private secondary school would be developed at the north side of the future extension of Rinaldi Street. The school would remove the existing residence and associated improvements and develop the site with a secondary school campus of four one- to three-story structures, an at-grade parking level and a project footprint that utilizes the sloping character of the site. The southerly of the four structures is a classroom building located above the at-grade parking level and along the inside curve of the future Rinaldi Street extension, and a performing arts center also is located above the parking level between the rear of the classroom building and the western property boundary. The classroom building and performing arts center would have a maximum height of 69 feet above grade (as measured from the lowest point of adjacent grade within five feet of the structure to the highest point of the roof, structure or the parapet wall, whichever is highest, per Municipal Code Section 12.03). However, when measured relative to adjacent grades, most of the classroom building would range from between 45 and 60 feet in height and most of the performing arts center would range from between 43 and 50 feet in height. The classroom building would be set back approximately 25 feet from the Rinaldi Street extension (except for

the right-turn pocket at the westerly project entrance). The parking level would be “nested” into the existing slope adjacent to the classroom building and performing arts center in order to maintain a consistent height deeper into the property (i.e., lower height at grade as measured from the rear, rather than from the front). The top of the parking level would form a pedestrian plaza for students and faculty between school buildings. The parking level would not be enclosed at the front, but would become more enclosed towards the rear as a result of the slope. The northerly of the school structures would be located on the site of the existing residence and associated improvements and landscaped grounds. The larger of the two structures is the athletics building, which would be located in the northeastern corner of the property parallel to the top of the future Rinaldi Street extension as it passes by the site. This building would sit on grade as it is at the higher site elevation of the existing residential lot and would have a maximum height of 54 feet. The athletics building, like the classroom building, would be set back approximately 25 feet from the extension of Rinaldi Street (except for the right-turn pocket at the easterly project entrance). The one- and two-story administration building would overlap the existing footprint of the single-family residential structure that would be removed as part of the project. The administration building would have a maximum height of 69 feet above grade and would be set back the farthest from the extension of Rinaldi Street.

As seen in **Figures IV.A-2** through **6**, construction of the Rinaldi Street extension is transforming the previous vacant and semi-rural character of the project site and immediately adjacent properties to the south to more of a developed character.

The most prominent changes to existing terrain would result from cut and fill slopes, new pads and retaining walls necessary to accommodate the secondary school design and program. This would alter the current relatively undeveloped/residential lot character of the existing site and change the sloping undeveloped terrain to a fully developed integrated secondary school campus. The project design would utilize the sloping character of the site by providing a parking level on the lower part of the property and building at-grade school buildings on the higher, rear part of the property. This would allow for a more uniform height of the project when viewed from off-site as well as a development of a campus plaza that connects each of the school buildings at different at-grade base elevations. Retaining walls would be required along the rear of the site and along the Rinaldi Street frontage.

The project would provide well defined entrances on the north side of Rinaldi Street, which would further convey the school’s presence and identity to pedestrians and the street. The project would also provide a 12-foot wide equestrian trail along the western edge of the property, curving northwesterly, where it would connect to an easement on DWP property below the existing backbone trail.

A final landscape plan has not been prepared at this stage of environmental review. However, development and approval of a landscape plan to the satisfaction of the Planning Department will be required. Furthermore, the school will be required to comply with the City’s Landscape Ordinance as described in Section V.C, Biological Resources, of this Draft EIR. The project design and buffering from adjacent uses affords the opportunity for a consistent landscape theme, treatment and use of plant materials. It is also the school’s intention to provide an attractive and functional landscape scheme that is in keeping with the historic semi-rural setting of the site. However, as described in Section V.C, most, if not all, of the 297 existing trees would be removed to accommodate the project. Some of these trees approach 100 feet tall, creating privacy for the existing residence and adding to the site’s semi-rural character.

The project would be fully landscaped along the Rinaldi Street frontage (although landscaping along Rinaldi Street between the main entrance and the visitor entrance to the south would be kept to a low height to ensure visibility and safety for vehicles and pedestrians) While removed trees are not proposed to be relocated within the project site, the project would utilize mature non-native ornamental species, native species where possible, and other plantings along the school perimeters to create a softened project edge and convey identity with the site's surroundings. In addition to the Rinaldi Street frontage, this landscaping would be provided along the equestrian trail and western boundary where the site is adjacent to DWP uses, along the rear of the property and around the aquatics center, and on the school plaza.

The proposed secondary school would be designed to use simple building masses to complement the site's landform and sloping topography. The project would emphasize the use of natural materials and textures to provide a unified aesthetic campus environment. Landscaped areas would provide contrast and relief, and recessed windows and door openings would provide additional articulation of the building exteriors. Overall, the design of the school would create an academic village setting comprised of several buildings that provide a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces. Renderings of the project depicting architectural style, treatment and landscaping are provided in **Figures III-7** through **III-9** in Section III. Project Description.

POST-PROJECT VIEWS OF THE PROJECT SITE

Post-project views of the site would be greatly affected by the future extension of Rinaldi Street, which is currently under construction adjacent to the project site is expected to be completed by summer 2005. Construction of the roadway has substantially transformed the semi-rural character of adjacent undeveloped property. Rinaldi Street will be built to a 100-foot right-of-way and will abut the entire project frontage along the south. Construction of Rinaldi Street will also greatly change the character of available views from the south by introducing additional elevation changes, a 100-foot roadway, new sources of lighting and generally altering the currently undeveloped foreground to the project. As such, upon its completion, Rinaldi Street will become a dominant feature from southerly views looking towards the project site. Although the school campus would be visible from locations east and south of the site, Rinaldi Street also would be an intervening feature between the nearest locations on Gazette and Oklahoma Avenues, the north-south section of Nashville Street and homes backing up to Lurline Avenue. The new street, in and of itself, will introduce a more developed character to the project site and the school would further contribute to the change in character.

The classroom building and parking level would be closest to residences south of the site while the athletics building would be the closest structure to residences whose lots back to Lurline Avenue. The campus complex would be visible from different perspectives and the project design, which would utilize the site's sloping topography to create a uniform character and general height across the site's frontage, means that the increasing grade of the Rinaldi Street extension (as it passes by the site from south to north), would become more of an intervening feature to the upper parts of the site and the project when viewed from the south. The project would be visible to homes on both sides of Rinaldi Street (between the west entrance of the project and De Soto Avenue), at the east side of Gazette Avenue, from Oklahoma Avenue and on the north-south section of Nashville Street. In this area, the nearest residence would be approximately 160 feet from the south end of the classroom building with the extension of Rinaldi Street located in between. Since homes on these streets are east- and west-facing, the campus would be visible across Rinaldi Street from side yards and side windows and although

partially obscured by landscaping/walls at the termini of these short streets, the campus would be visible to northbound vehicles on these residential streets.

The campus, and predominantly the performing arts center, plaza, classroom building and equestrian trail, would be visible from upper story windows of the closest residence on the north side of Rinaldi Street to the west (a privacy wall obstructs ground level views), from the front yard of this residence and from the back yard of both homes on Rinaldi Street, between the site property and De Soto Avenue.

The equestrian trail would vary in elevation, sloping from south to north along the western property line. The trail would start at street level and increase in elevation as it follows the western boundary of the site and would be well landscaped with as an edge treatment to also create privacy, most likely with native and non-native trees and shrubs.

On the east side of the new campus, homes backing up to Lurline Avenue would be approximately 250 feet from the athletics building. As shown in Photo 9, **Figure IV.A-5**, a masonry wall along the back yards of these properties would block views of the campus area from ground level locations. However, views of campus structures would be available from the rear second-story windows of these homes. Upon the completion of Rinaldi Street, the new street will occupy the foreground views in front of the athletics building from the residences' second stories. Additionally, some of these views are partially obstructed by mature trees along the west side of Lurline Avenue off the project site. The school currently owns a remnant parcel at this location that is created by the Rinaldi Street extension. No development is proposed on this parcel, and it is assumed that these ornamental trees would remain until such a time the parcel is sold as a developable residential lot.

Direct views of the campus from residences near the intersection of Nashville Street and Lurline Avenue would be available with greater visibility of the south (and lower) end of the site. Unlike current views where the upper part of the site and Santa Susana Mountains are partially obstructed by mature trees that provide privacy for the existing residential lot, views of the project site would be more open and the campus would be plainly visible. However, development of the adjacent parcel with a residential subdivision will alter these conditions and interrupt some views of the campus from this location (see subsequent discussion of Cumulative Impacts) as will the extension of Rinaldi Street, which will pass in front of the entire length of the site.

No direct views of the project would be available from northbound or southbound De Soto Avenue, or from the SR-118 freeway.

IMPACTS TO EXISTING FEATURES AND ELEMENTS

The proposed school would substantially change the existing character of the project site. In particular, the project would develop vacant land fronting the north side of the Rinaldi Street right-of-way, and would involve a more intensified use of a previously developed residential estate property. The vacant portion of the project site, in combination with the undeveloped Rinaldi Street right-of-way and adjacent property, comprises several acres of contiguous undeveloped land, which currently provides available views to several adjacent lots. As described in this Draft EIR section, however, none of the adjacent properties directly face, or would have unobstructed views of the project site. Although the site is visible from the northerly portions of Lurline Avenue, a non-through residential street, it is not visible from any through

streets or highways, nor does it form the backdrop or ridgeline view from any public street or highway, including Lurline Avenue.

The vacant properties adjacent to the site, including the Rinaldi Street extension (earmarked as a major highway) before construction began, have historically contributed to the open space character of the property and include an adjacent vacant parcel (Related Project No. 3) designated by the Community Plan for development consistent with the surrounding residential community. However, construction of the Rinaldi Street roadway extension has already changed the open space character of property adjacent to the lower portion of the site and will be permanently altered once the extension is completed.

Because of the location and condition of the school site (between the extension of Rinaldi Street and the Ronald Reagan freeway), it would not be considered as contributing to the valued visual character of the neighborhood, community, or localized area. As such, the project would not remove, alter or demolish existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area. In fact, the surrounding area is already being transformed with a more developed character with construction of the Rinaldi Street extension. Therefore the project is considered to have a less than significant impact associated with existing visual features or elements.

OPEN SPACE IMPACTS

Some degree of grading is required to accommodate the campus on the sloping site including the parking level, foundations, pads and other engineering requirements. Grading would occur throughout the property, but predominantly on the lower part of the site where the slope is greater. The project site, however, has been previously disturbed and would not be considered natural open space. Prior grading and development included construction of DWP pipelines and facilities, development of pads for the existing residence, pool, horse stables, lawns, and other built features, and prior tilling and disturbance of the current vacant portions of the property. Currently, adjacent property is a construction zone for the Rinaldi Street extension and much of the previous open space character of the site and adjoining properties has been irrevocably altered. No natural habitat or significant tree species are located in this area. The visual impact relative to the grading or alteration of natural open space would be less than significant.

IMPACTS TO AESTHETIC CHARACTER

Contrast Between Proposed Features and Existing Features That Represent the Area's Valued Aesthetic Image

The proposed project would contrast with the existing aesthetic image of the site, particularly in the lower portions of the property by transforming vacant portions of the site to an active academic village style campus. However, within the context of the extension of adjacent Rinaldi Street, the degree of contrast between the existing site and the proposed project would be lessened. Slope easements, grading, and the removal of vegetation along the Rinaldi Street frontage associated with the street extension, have begun to diminish the aesthetic image of the site, with or without the proposed campus. While the project would contrast with existing aesthetic features, the impact would be lessened with the completion of the Rinaldi Street extension and associated elevation increases with the roadway. Nonetheless, although the project would incorporate the site's natural sloping landform, use simple building massing, be

extensively landscaped, provide a large open plaza and create a unified aesthetic environment, the project would still introduce a prominent and significant change to conditions in the immediate area. Therefore, the degree of contrast between project features and existing features that represent the area's valued aesthetic image is considered to result in a significant visual impact.

Degree to Which a Zone Change Would Result in Buildings That Detract From the Existing Style or Image of the Area

The proposed project does not require a zone change, and the degree to which a zone change would allow buildings that detract from the existing style or image of the area due to density, height, bulk, setbacks, signage, or other physical elements is not relevant to the project. The project consists of a secondary school campus that, with the exception of the adjacent DWP reservoir, could be inconsistent with bulk, height, and other physical elements of the surrounding residential neighborhood. Several factors, however, reduce these effects, including the extension of Rinaldi Street. With development of Rinaldi Street, the project site would be "sandwiched" between Rinaldi Street, a 100-foot-wide secondary highway, and the SR-118 freeway. The proximity of these two roadways visually separates the project from adjacent existing residential development and there is not a unique architectural or aesthetic context to the immediate project area (i.e., extensive adjacent open space, an aesthetically attractive and well-defined use of the property, a unique or established architectural style of an adjacent community or structures, etc.). Nevertheless, the 69-foot maximum building height (administration building) would exceed residential height limits in the A2 zone and adjacent residential zones and land uses and requires approval of a vesting Conditional Use Permit. Although the school use is permitted by existing zoning through the Conditional Use Permit process and a Zone Change is neither required nor requested, the project as designed could not be built without relief from the existing 45-foot height limit being granted as part of the Conditional Use Permit process. Nevertheless, extensive landscaping, the creation of an interior campus plaza, the use of simple building massing, and the use of natural colors, materials, and textures would all enhance the consistency of the project with the style and image of the surrounding residential area. In addition, while the scale of the campus would be greater than any individual single-family residence, the school as a whole is not a use that would detract from the existing style or character of the area. This is largely due to the proposed design of the project, the site's relationship with the existing neighborhoods to the south and north (which face away from the project site and thus, are buffered from the school) and that the site is adjacent to public uses on the northwest and north, as well as the physical barrier to be established by the extension of Rinaldi Street. However, the project would still introduce a new use to the area, and mitigation is identified to ensure maximum compatibility of the project with the surrounding area.

Degree to Which the Project Would Contribute to the Area's Aesthetic Value

The campus would provide, through an articulate and uniform design, a landmark feature (e.g., the school as a whole would convey a sense of a distinct identity and visual character) that would enhance the visual quality of the property and surrounding area. The project would also be in keeping with a changing local character initiated by the construction of the Rinaldi Street extension, which is already underway. The project would be designed to create an academic village setting with a consistent aesthetic treatment. The existing site is not anchored by a unique aesthetic or architectural identity as it is located between a freeway and a soon to be completed major highway. The project would also be buffered from the adjacent neighborhoods

to the south and east by the extension of Rinaldi Street. Additionally, the Conditional Use Permit process will include consideration of the project's contribution to the area's aesthetic value by implementing City policies relative to landscaping and other aesthetic considerations. Consequently, the impact of the project on the aesthetic value of the area would be less than significant.

Impacts to Applicable Guidelines and Regulations

Rinaldi Street is designated as a City of Los Angeles scenic highway in the vicinity of the proposed project and specific design criteria will apply to the project site and to the public roadway. Criteria pertinent to the development of a Scenic highway are described in detail in Section V.G, Land Use, of this Draft EIR. Although most Scenic Highway criteria pertain to the design of the scenic roadway, the ordinance also prohibits most types of advertising signage within 500 feet of the centerline of the roadway. Signs are generally limited to place identification. Also, under Scenic Highway criteria, electric, communication and other public utility distribution facilities within 500 feet of the Scenic Highway would be placed underground. According to the criteria, if undergrounding of such facilities is not feasible, all new or relocated utilities must be screened from view. The proposed project would be consistent with the intent of the City's scenic highway criteria in that all utilities serving the project would be screened. In addition, signs for the school would be for identification of the campus and entrances only.

The Scenic Highway designation would not be in place until the roadway is constructed, and no significant vistas or views from the future Rinaldi Street have been identified to date. Viewed from the south (the future scenic highway area), views west of the campus are surmounted by a concrete enclosed water reservoir (DWP) and ancillary structures on the ridgeline. Current views beyond the central portion of the future campus are also partially blocked by a dense growth of shrubbery and trees. The Rinaldi Street roadway requires several cuts where it climbs northeasterly along the edge of the site. Along this portion of the site, views within and beyond the campus would not be blocked by the grade difference effected by the cuts and by street landscape, but some northwesterly views from the project site may be obstructed by the proposed development. However, there are currently no views from the Rinaldi Street extension right-of-way, as potential views are obstructed by existing trees, topography and improvements. More significant north vistas would be available from Rinaldi Street at the top of the hill near the freeway overpass. At this point the campus would be to the west and thus, would not block available vistas.

Long-range views toward the south would also be available from Rinaldi Street, particularly from the top of the hill, south of the freeway. Again, the campus would be west of the highway and would not block previously available long-range views from this location. As the project will comply with the provisions of the Scenic Highways Plan with respect to utilities and signage, the impact on guidelines and regulations (scenic highway criteria) would be less than significant.

Impacts to the Nature and Quality of Available Public Views

The project would not break or interfere with existing significant ridgeline views or vistas available to the public from adjacent right-of-ways, streets or other public vantage points. As described above, the terrace of the moderate slope that runs through the central and easterly portion of the site and is partially blocked by a dense growth of shrubs and trees and is developed with an existing residential structure. This area contains no visually distinctive outcroppings or other valued views or man-made features of visual interest and resource. As

addressed by the previous Impacts to Applicable Guidelines and Regulations discussion, there are currently no scenic views from the Rinaldi Street extension right-of-way adjacent to the site, as potential views are obstructed by existing trees, topography and improvements. More significant north vistas would be available from Rinaldi Street at the top of the hill near the freeway overpass, but at this point, the campus would be to the west and thus, would not block available vistas. Therefore, development of the project would not block any significant public views or visual resources and the impact of the project in relation to this threshold would be less than significant.

Extent of View Obstruction

The open aspect of the westerly portion of the site, when combined with the Rinaldi Street right-of-way and adjacent undeveloped property south of the Rinaldi Street right-of-way, currently affords some view of the Santa Susana Mountains toward the west, from approximately three residences backing up to Lurline Avenue. Since the back property line of these homes are bounded by a 6-foot masonry wall, westerly views are primarily available only from the second-floor back windows of these structures. Limited obstructed views are available across the northerly portion of the project site with tall mature trees along the existing estate entrance. The proposed classroom building in the central portion of the site would be 54 feet in height and would be located approximately 330 feet away from the residences to the east. The ground elevation in the vicinity of the classroom building would also be lower (approximately 1,087 feet) than the ground elevation in the vicinity of the residences backing up to Lurline Avenue (approximately 1,100 to 1,115 feet). Development of the athletics building with a maximum height of 53 feet would be located closer to the northernmost residences, which back on to Lurline Avenue (approximately 250 feet at the closest point) and would be at a comparable or slightly higher elevation (approximately 1,113 feet). Distant views from these residences would be partially blocked by these structures. However, since the residences do not face the direction of the school campus and are already partially blocked by their own walls and structures from westerly views, as well as from mature trees that currently exist along Lurline Avenue, the view blockage created by the project would be considered less than significant.

Limited views are also available from Lurline Avenue, north from Nashville Street, but this segment is a cul-de-sac with no through public access and has been partially improved to service the existing estate residence on the site. Additionally, views are now dominated by newly constructed homes in Porter Ranch (Related Project No. 2), but offer some limited mountain views. Since no development along Lurline Avenue is involved with the proposed school, and these views are not afforded to the general public, no significant impact would occur.

Impacts to a Length of Public Roadway, Bikepath or Trail

Sections of the Backbone Equestrian Trail are located east (north and east of the Lurline Avenue terminus) and north of the project site (in the DWP open space). Views to the west, across the property, from the equestrian trail north and east of Lurline Avenue are currently blocked by landscape trees and the masonry wall along the existing estate (visible in **Figure IV.A-5**). Views toward the north and south from this trail section would not be blocked by the future project since the campus would be located to the west of this part of the trail.

No views toward the south are available from the section of the trail in the DWP open space property north of the site. Views across the property are presently blocked by existing

landscaping along the northern estate boundary and by the slight rise in elevation between the trail and the site. Views of mountain areas toward the north and west would not be blocked by the future project since the school campus would be located to the south of the trail. Consequently, the impact of the school on a length of public roadway or trail would be less than significant.

MITIGATION MEASURES

- V.A-1 If so determined by the Planning Department, the design of individual buildings along the Rinaldi Street frontage shall provide for additional landscape relief and/or other architectural treatment along south facing walls if needed to create further articulation and to avoid the creation of an unarticulated, “blank” surface. Exterior walls may be covered with clinging vines or screened by similar vegetation capable of covering or screening entire walls up to heights of at least 9-feet, excluding windows and signs. Specific treatments shall be provided to the satisfaction of the Planning Department, for their review and approval, prior to issuance of a building permit.
- V.A-2 Prior to issuance of a building permit, design and landscape plans shall be submitted for review and approval by the Planning Department for purposes of ensuring compliance with the Scenic Highways Plan. Compliance shall include, at a minimum, undergrounding or screening of project utilities and meeting signage requirements within 500 feet of the centerline of the future extension of Rinaldi Street.
- V.A-3 A master landscape plan shall be developed for the project by a licensed landscape architect and submitted for review and approval by the Planning Department prior to issuance of any building permits. All open areas not used for buildings, driveways, parking areas, recreational facilities or walks shall be attractively landscaped and maintained in accordance with the landscape plan, including an automatic irrigation plan.
- V.A-4 The owner shall maintain the subject property clean and free of debris and rubbish and to promptly remove any graffiti from the walls, pursuant to Municipal Code Sections 91.8104 and 91.8104.15.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Of the 30 identified related projects, one project is located proximate to the site and within the future viewshed of the project. That project, Related Project No. 3 would develop the property south of the Rinaldi Street extension, north of Nashville Street and west of Lurline Avenue, with 7 single-family lots. Currently, this property forms an area of open space from the current terminus of Rinaldi Street east towards Lurline Avenue and up to the boundary of the existing residential estate on the project site. With the extension of Rinaldi Street and the new adjacent subdivision, the open space aspect of these combined properties would be significantly reduced. The cumulative development of the proposed school campus, the extension of Rinaldi Street and Related Project No. 3 would transform the open character of the area to a developed character, bisected by a secondary highway. As previously described, views of this area are limited to local residences abutting the property or adjoining non-through, residential street segments, and the aesthetic character has been transformed due to ongoing construction activity for Rinaldi Street.

The extension of Rinaldi Street would occupy the largest portion of this vacant area and effect the greatest aesthetic change in the vicinity. Conversely, the long-range planning of Rinaldi Street through this location is the reason that the project site has remained undeveloped. In a strict sense, the Rinaldi Street extension is not a related project, but a reserved land area and a long-standing transportation element serving regional growth in the Chatsworth-Porter Ranch area. Although it contributes to the ensuing adjoining development and the future built aspect of the area, it would not be considered a contributing related project since it already exists as a reserved and future land use.

The Rinaldi Street extension will isolate two sections of the larger area (the project site to the north of the right-of-way, and the proposed residential site to the south) and will create two distinct land use environments. The adjacent residential site is functionally and visually more compatible with surrounding single-family development and will be cut off from public open space uses to the north, while the project site is “sandwiched” between a secondary highway (Rinaldi Street), DWP facilities, and the DWP open space/ SR-118 freeway corridor.

Related Project No. 3 would have a different character than the proposed secondary school north of Rinaldi Street and would be aesthetically compatible with surrounding single-family residential uses. The visual qualities of this related project would be generally neutral in the context of the surrounding community, while the proposed project would be aesthetically different from land uses south of the Rinaldi Street extension. Consequently, the related project, which is not contiguous or similar to the proposed project, would not further compound the aesthetic impacts of the project and create an additional significant cumulative impact.

With respect to other proposed projects, the next closest project is a 40-unit subdivision directly northeast of the site (Related Project No. 11). This project site does not share substantial viewshed with the secondary school site and is not visible to most viewpoints to the south of the site that would have views of the proposed project. This related project would likely be visible along the northern segment of the Rinaldi Street extension, but as with the neighboring related project, would be a compatible extension of the existing single-family uses in the area. Similarly, no significant cumulative impacts would occur with this project. A number of other developments are proposed in the greater area, including the Porter Ranch Specific Plan, north of the SR-118. This project will continue to significantly alter the character of the surrounding undeveloped foothills where it is situated. As addressed earlier, limited viewpoints towards the project site also have available views of the Porter Ranch area due to distance and elevation changes below the SR-118 Freeway. The effects of the Specific Plan, while significant to altering the undeveloped area north of the SR-118, do not appreciably contribute to the aesthetic effects of the proposed secondary school project, which is largely an isolated site. Consequently, no significant cumulative impacts would occur as a result of the proposed project and the Porter Ranch Specific Plan.

No other related projects are either 1) located in potentially common viewshed areas that could contribute to a significant cumulative impact, and/or 2) introduce incompatible or intrusive visual changes or land uses within a common viewshed area. Related projects closest to the site are residential in nature and consistent with long-term planning and/or the existing residential character of the surrounding areas. Consequently, no significant cumulative impacts would occur.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

The proposed secondary school would introduce new visual elements to the project area and alter the site's existing character. The school use is permitted by existing zoning and would not introduce an inherently intrusive land use to the predominately residential area, as school uses are conditionally permitted in residentially zoned areas. Development would not exceed three stories, would achieve a uniform design, and would be well landscaped. Furthermore, the future extension of Rinaldi Street will become a dominant visual element to the area that will further buffer the project from neighborhoods to the south and east. However, the introduction of the campus is still considered a prominent and significant change to conditions and therefore is considered a significant visual impact. While site specific mitigation measures, would reduce this impact to the fullest extent possible, the project as currently designed would still have a significant visual impact.