

## 3.1 AESTHETICS

This section describes the environmental and regulatory setting for aesthetics. It also describes existing conditions and potential impacts related to aesthetics that would result from implementation of the proposed project, and mitigation measures for potentially significant impacts, where feasible.

### 3.1.1 Environmental Setting

#### Regional Visual Character

The proposed project is located in Cutten, California, an unincorporated community in Humboldt County, located south of the City of Eureka. This portion of the County is visually characterized by the mix of urban and rural development along the northern California coastline that is surrounded by natural features, including Arcata Bay to the north, undeveloped timber forests and agricultural lands to the east and south, and Humboldt Bay and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Urban development is primarily concentrated in the City of Eureka, and consists of single-family residential, commercial, visitor serving, industrial, and public uses. In addition to the community of Cutten, there are several other unincorporated communities in this portion of the County, including Myrtle town, Ridgewood, Bayview, Pine Hill, and Humboldt Hill. These unincorporated communities mostly consist of suburban and urban residential uses and supporting commercial uses that are surrounded by timber forest and agricultural lands.

U.S. Highway 101 is the major transportation corridor in the County, which extends north to south and east to west in this portion of the County. U.S. Highway 101 is located about 2.5 miles west of the project site. Important scenic vistas and resources in the County include those that are visible from major public roadways and public areas that contain views of the coast, forests, open space, or agricultural lands, as well as views of historic districts, landmarks, and cultural sites (Humboldt County 2017a).

#### Project Site Visual Character

The 81-acre project site consists of undeveloped forest land in the eastern portion of Cutten, at the end of Manzanita Avenue, Redwood Street, and Fern Street. The project site is characterized visually by dense third-growth redwood and mixed conifer forest that have historically been used for commercial timber harvesting. The topography is relatively flat in the west portion of the project site, but increasingly slopes down to the east portion of the project site that is traversed by various natural gulches and bordered by Ryan Slough. The overall site elevation ranges from about 150 to 200 feet amsl. The proposed project also includes a 0.3-acre area about 2.5 miles south of the proposed development, near the unincorporated community of Ridgewood. The 0.3-acre site consists of undeveloped forest lands that are next to an existing water tank owned by HCSD. The elevation of the 0.3-acre site is about 475 feet amsl.

The 81-acre project site is immediately adjacent to the developed portion of Cutten. Land uses adjacent to the west boundary of the project site primarily consist of single-family residences that are one to two stories tall. The west boundary of the project site surrounds Redwood Fields Park, an outdoor recreation center that includes two baseball fields, basketball courts, a playground, and surface parking. The south boundary of the project site is adjacent to Glen Paul School and Winship Middle School. Other uses in the vicinity include the PG&E transmission right-of-way near the eastern boundary of the project site. Undeveloped forest land includes part of the McKay Community Forest and additional timber forest land surrounds the north, east, and south boundaries of the project site. The dense forest land largely obstructs public views of the project site from surrounding land uses.



The project site does not contain existing sources of nighttime light and glare. Nighttime lighting immediately surrounding the project site is limited to outdoor lighting around Redwood Fields Park and from the adjacent residential neighborhoods, including street lighting, exterior and interior lighting from the houses, and headlights from vehicles.

### 3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

#### State

##### *California Scenic Highway*

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the State Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the Landscape Architecture Division of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California's highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2020).

According to the Caltrans list of eligible and officially designated State Scenic Highways, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways in the County (Caltrans 2020). U.S. Highway 101, about 2.5 miles west of the project site, is an eligible State Scenic Highway and has not been officially designated (Caltrans 2020).

#### Local

##### *Humboldt County General Plan*

The following lists goals and policies from the Humboldt County General Plan pertaining to aesthetics that are applicable to the proposed project.

**Goal SR-G1: Conservation of Scenic Resources.** Protect high-value scenic forest, agriculture, river, and coastal areas that contribute to the enjoyment of Humboldt County's beauty and abundant natural resources.

- **Policy SR-P1: Working Landscapes.** Recognize the scenic value of resource production lands.

**Goal IS-P20: Street Lighting.** Street lighting shall be required when necessary to improve public safety in urban and suburban areas and Village Centers.

- **Policy IS-S9: Street Lighting.** Where development is required to install streetlights, they shall be designed to block upward transmission of light, avoid light trespass, and achieve design illumination in prescribed areas with limited scatter.

Additionally, the following standards from the Humboldt County General Plan would apply to the proposed project:

- **Standard SR-S4: Light and Glare.** New outdoor lighting shall be compatible with the existing setting. Exterior lighting fixtures and street standards (both for residential and commercial areas) shall be fully shielded and designed and installed to minimize off-site lighting and direct light within the property boundaries.



## **Humboldt County Code**

### *Section 314-31.1.6, Planned Unit Development Design Guidelines*

Section 314-31.1.6 of the Humboldt County Code establishes the design guidelines that should be considered by architects, engineers, and other persons involved in designing Planned Unit Developments, and by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in reviewing them. These guidelines recognize that while few people are in complete accord on what makes a well-designed project, there is general agreement on a number of basic design principles, such as the maintenance of the natural features of the site, circulation and parking considerations, architectural considerations, landscaping, placement of utilities, and site access (Humboldt County 2017b).

### **3.1.3 Methodology for Analysis**

Analysis of the proposed project's visual impacts is based on an evaluation of the changes to the existing visual resources that would result from implementation of the proposed project. In determining the extent and implications of the visual changes, consideration was given to: the existing visual quality of the affected environment; specific changes in the visual character and quality of the affected environment; the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that provide unique visual experiences or that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and the sensitivity of viewers and their activities and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the proposed project. In addition, the analysis assumes that approximately 59.27 acres of forest land would be lost, as a worst-case scenario. However, it is reasonable to expect that some trees within the 59.27 acres could be retained, particularly on the eastern periphery where large, single-family lots are proposed.

### **3.1.4 Thresholds of Significance**

The CEQA Guidelines' Appendix G Environmental Checklist was assessed during the NOP scoping process to identify the proposed project components that have the potential to cause a significant impact. The following thresholds of significance were used to determine if further evaluation in an EIR was warranted to ascertain whether the proposed project may:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day- or nighttime views in the area



### 3.1.5 Project Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

This section analyzes the proposed project's potential to result in significant impacts related to aesthetics. When a potential impact is determined to be potentially significant, mitigation measures were identified that would reduce or avoid that impact.

#### Scenic Vista

---

**Impact AES-1      The proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.**

---

#### Impact Analysis

Important scenic vistas and resources in Humboldt County include those that are visible from major public roadways and public areas that contain views of the coast, forests, open space, or agricultural lands, as well as views of historic districts, landmarks, and cultural sites (Humboldt County 2017a). The project site consists of undeveloped timber forest lands that are adjacent to the developed portion of Cutten and is approximately 2.5 miles from U.S. Highway 101 and Humboldt Bay. The proposed project also includes a 0.30-acre site located about 2.5 miles to the south, near the unincorporated community of Ridgewood, that consists of undeveloped forest lands next to an existing water tank. The project site is also directly adjacent to Redwood Fields Park, which includes public park facilities. The project site is not designated a scenic vista by the Humboldt County General Plan, and due to the site's generally flat topography, the surrounding dense forest land, and urban development, it is not visible from Humboldt Bay or major public roadways, including U.S. Highway 101.

Although the current land uses provide views of a dense forest that is representative of the region, views of the project site are not unique in the region. The County General Plan sets forth policies concerning the protection and preservation of natural resources. Goal SR-G1 calls for protection of high-value scenic forest, agriculture, river, and coastal areas that contribute to the enjoyment of the County's beauty and abundant natural resources. The proposed project would preserve approximately 21.73 acres of timber forestland in the northern and eastern portion of the project site as permanent open space. In addition, a majority of the trees immediately west of Redwood Fields Park would be retained. The proposed project could require removal of approximately 59.27 acres of timber forest lands to develop the new residential subdivision, commercial uses, roadways, and associated utility infrastructure. While removal of the existing undeveloped timber forest lands would change the views of the project site, the proposed project would comply with the design guidelines established in Section 314-31.1.6 of the County Code for Planned Unit Developments. The design guidelines require new developments to consider maintenance of the prominent natural features of the site, retain existing vegetation to the maximum extent possible, and concentrate development in level areas so that disturbance of steeper slopes is minimized. The proposed project would comply with these design requirements and would be developed on all flat portions of the project site. To further ensure compliance with the County's design guidelines, the proposed project would also implement Mitigation Measure (MM) AES-1 and incorporate the design guidelines into the final development plan and development standards for each phase. Implementation of the design guidelines would ensure the project design is compatible with adjacent residential uses and that existing vegetation is retained to the maximum extent possible to obscure views of the proposed project from surrounding land uses. The proposed water storage tank site is obscured from surrounding land uses and would not impact any scenic vistas. As such, the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista and the impact would be less than significant with implementation of MM AES-1.



### Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially Significant Impact.

### Mitigation Measures

**MM AES- 1: Prepare and Submit Design Guidelines.** Prior to filing a map for each phase, the Applicant shall submit the final development plan and development standards to the County for review and approval. The County shall review the final development plan and development standards to ensure that the Applicant has incorporated the design guidelines established in Section 314-31.1.6 of the Humboldt County Code for Planned Unit Developments. At a minimum, the final development plan and development standards shall consider the County's design guidelines related to the maintenance of the natural features of the site, circulation and parking considerations, architectural considerations, landscaping, placement of utilities, site access, and setbacks from adjacent land uses.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.

### Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway

---

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

---

### Impact Analysis

According to the Caltrans list of eligible and officially designated State Scenic Highways, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways in the County. U.S. Highway 101, located about 2.5 miles west of the project site, is listed as an eligible State Scenic Highway and has not been officially designated (Caltrans 2020). The proposed project would require removal of approximately 59.27 acres of forest lands to develop the new residential subdivision, supporting commercial uses, roadways, and associated utility infrastructure. However, the project site is about 2.5 miles east of U.S. Highway 101. Due to intervening urban development and vegetation, removal of timber forest lands on the project site would not be visible. As such, the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway and impacts would be less than significant.

### Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

### Mitigation Measures

None required.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.



**Visual Character**


---

**Impact AES-3      The proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point).**

---

**Impact Analysis**

The project site consists of undeveloped timber forest lands that are adjacent to existing residential development in Cutten. The proposed project also includes a 0.3-acre site located about 2.5 miles to the south, near the unincorporated community of Ridgewood, that consists of undeveloped forest lands next to an existing water tank. The project site is mostly surrounded by undeveloped timber forest lands; however, there are existing residential, recreation, and public facility uses to the west of the proposed development site. The dense forest land largely obstructs existing public views of the project site from these surrounding land uses.

The proposed project would require removal of approximately 59.27 acres of timber forest lands to develop 146 single-family residences, 174 multi-family units, and 22,000 square feet of neighborhood commercial.

Construction

Construction activities are typically considered short-term as they are temporary and last few years. However, the proposed project would be built over 10 to 20 years resulting in a relatively longer but intermittent construction duration. During construction, equipment and materials would be stored on-site, and temporary facilities (such as construction trailers, staging sites, and portable toilets) would be stored on-site but screened by temporary construction fencing. Existing trees on the west side of Redwood Fields Park largely obstruct any views of the ongoing construction activities. The most visible view of project construction activities would be from Redwood Fields Park. It is anticipated that efforts will be made to continue to present an attractive community presence throughout the duration of construction activities; and in order to enhance safety concerns, construction areas will be clearly partitioned and visually segregated from public areas.

Although construction-related structures and activities would create a notable change to the visual character, these changes would extend only for the duration of the construction activities, which are relatively shorter over the life of the project. Therefore, impacts during construction would be less than significant with regard to visual character.

Operation

Development of the proposed residential subdivision and commercial uses would substantially alter the existing visual character of the project site by removing the existing timber forests. As shown on Figure 2-4, the proposed single-family residences would be located in the eastern portion of the project site at least 300 feet from Ryan Creek. The maximum height of single-family residences would be 35 feet. The proposed multi-family units would be located in the western portion of the project site near the Redwood Fields recreation center, would range from two to three stories tall, and are not expected to be more than 35 feet tall. The proposed commercial buildings would be located in the central portion of the project site at the intersection of proposed new internal roadways, Redwood Street and Arbutus Street. The proposed commercial buildings would be up to 45 feet in height. The County proposes to rezone the project site for



the development of residential and commercial uses; therefore, the proposed project would appear as an extension to the existing residential development in Cutten. The Planned Unit Development (P) overlay is intended to facilitate a cohesive project design among the various base zoning districts. The new water storage tank would be consistent with surrounding uses in terms of shape, size, and color, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character, as it would be in proximity to another nearby water tank.

As discussed in Impact AES-1, the proposed project would comply with the County's design guidelines established for Planned Unit Development and develop on flat portions of the project site. The proposed project would preserve approximately 21.73 acres of the project site as permanent open space to the north and east, and also would include trail connections to the McKay Community Forest. In addition, a majority of the trees immediately east of Redwood Fields Park would be retained. The County's design guidelines also require a Planned Unit Development to complement nearby development by incorporating similar roof types, siding materials, color schemes, architectural details, and landscaping design. Landscaping should also be used to enhance privacy and to give visual order to new developments. At this time, project-specific Design Guidelines are not available. As such, MM AES-1 is proposed requiring the Applicant to prepare Design Guidelines prior to filing a map for each phase. Implementation of MM AES-1 would ensure the project design is compatible with the adjacent residential uses and that existing vegetation is retained to the maximum extent possible to obscure views of the proposed project from surrounding land uses.

In addition to approval of Design Guidelines, the proposed project would be subject to Landscape Plan review and Site Plan and Design review to ensure that new and modified uses and development will be compatible with the existing and potential development of the surrounding area. The site plan would include information on construction materials; architectural styles; the harmony and proportion of the overall design; siting of the structure on the property; color scheme of the proposed structure, parking, and circulation; signs; and landscaping and screening.

As such, the proposed project would alter the visual character but not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the project site; therefore, the impact would be less than significant with the implementation of MM AES-1.

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation**

Potentially Significant Impact.

**Mitigation Measures**

MM AES-1 would be required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.



**Light and Glare**


---

**Impact AES-4      The proposed project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.**

---

**Impact Analysis**

The project site consists of undeveloped forest lands and does not contain any sources of light and glare. Existing sources of nighttime lighting in the project vicinity consist of outdoor lighting around Redwood Fields Park, and from within the residential neighborhoods, including street lighting, exterior and interior lighting from houses, and headlights from vehicles.

The proposed project would develop new residential subdivision and commercial uses on an undeveloped site that would introduce new sources of light and glare that could affect day and nighttime views in the project vicinity. The project would require lighting of roadways, parking lots, commercial uses, and homes for security. If the proposed project was not designed in such a way as to reduce upward directed light, nighttime lighting associated with the proposed project could obscure views of the night sky that are currently visible.

Building windows do not typically produce substantial amounts of glare, and in most cases, glare would be tempered by surrounding trees. Residential uses in general are not anticipated to create significant light and glare. Moreover, as discussed in Section 2.0, Project Description, all new outdoor lighting installed for the proposed project would be the minimum lumens required for security purposes, directed downward, and shielded to prevent lighting spillover onto adjacent properties. However, given the proximity of the proposed project to adjacent forests to the east, the proposed project would add new sources of light and glare.

As such, implementation of MM AES-2 would require the Applicant to submit a lighting plan to the County for review and approval. The lighting plan would identify the location of all proposed outdoor light fixtures and ensure that all outdoor lighting is compatible with the surrounding setting, directed downward, and shielded to reduce light and glare on the adjacent residential areas in accordance with County Code. Therefore, the proposed project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare, and the impact would be less than significant with implementation of MM AES-2. The proposed water storage tank would be adjacent to an existing water tank that is surrounded by dense trees. As such, it would not create any significant new sources of light and glare and would result in a less than significant impact.

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation**

Potentially Significant Impact.

**Mitigation Measures**

**MM AES-2:      Submit Lighting Plan.** Prior to filing a map for each phase, the Applicant shall prepare and submit an outdoor lighting plan (which includes a photometric analysis) to Humboldt County for review and approval that includes a footcandle map illustrating the amount of light from the project site at adjacent light sensitive receptors. The lighting map shall comply with the General Plan policies and shall include minimal levels of street; parking, building, site, and public area lighting to meet safety standards and provide direction; directional shielding for all exterior lighting; and automatic shutoff or motion sensors and/or additional standards as determined by the Director of Planning and Building.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.

