

4.1 AESTHETIC RESOURCES

This section of the EIR identifies and evaluates potential visual resource (aesthetic) impacts resulting from implementation of the project. The analysis focuses on the potential for the project to result in impacts to visual resources as seen from public vantage points in the area, and from the project site.

4.1.1 Existing Conditions

The project area is situated at the base of the Irish Hills of the southern Coastal Range region of California. The Irish Hills provide a backdrop for the beach community of Avila Beach as well as panoramic views of San Luis Obispo Bay, Port San Luis, and the Pacific Ocean. The open hillsides of the Irish Hills give way to a coastal terrace which averages in elevation of about 100 feet and includes nearly vertical sea cliffs and narrow beaches. San Luis Obispo Bay is bordered on the west by the southward jutting Point San Luis while Avila Beach lies on the eastern edge of the bay. Port San Luis sits at the western end of San Luis Obispo Bay along Avila Beach Drive. The major public vantage points are Avila Beach Drive, distant views from U.S. Highway 101 (US 101), the beaches, the piers, and San Luis Bay.

The project area is characterized by a variety of highly scenic features and includes well-known landmarks such as Avila Beach, the Avila Beach Pier, Port San Luis, the Harford Pier, and the Port San Luis Lighthouse. Scenic elements include the small-scale development of Avila Beach as well as commercial fishing and recreational boats moored in the bay. The San Luis Bay Inn, a multi-storied structure is visible on a hill immediately west of San Luis Obispo Creek. Views to Avila Beach are partially screened by the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) Marine Sciences Facility pier.

Port San Luis provides a small-scale harbor for the local commercial fishing community as well as recreational boaters. Services available in the Pier area include boat repair and maintenance and supply facilities, other marine-related businesses and restaurants. Scenic views of the bay, moored boats and the community of Avila Beach and backdrop of hills can be viewed from Harford Pier.

Areas surrounding Port San Luis are characterized visually by highly scenic natural features combined with a variety of man-made elements. Visually significant elements in the area include: the developed portions of the Avila Beach community; the former Unocal tank farm located above the Avila Beach community; three piers which extend into San Luis Obispo Bay, and the San Luis Bay Inn. These features are set amongst a visual backdrop of sloping hillsides surrounding an open bay. Views of the bay often include commercial fishing and recreational boats moored in proximity to the coastline. Views from Port San Luis, particularly from its higher elevations, include many of these visual elements.

Harford Pier and ancillary facilities are the identifiable features of Harford Landing and the Pier area. The pier, in particular can be seen from a number of points within the area. Generally, Port San Luis facilities are located on coastal hillsides facing San Luis Obispo Bay and the Pacific Ocean. These hillsides are part of a continuous set of ridgelines which trend westward from Avila Beach to Montaña de Oro State Park. Most of the hillsides near Port San Luis are undeveloped with the exception of the San Luis Bay Inn, approximately 0.75 mile east of the Port. Port facilities, and therefore occupy a visually prominent portion of the viewshed of the San Luis Obispo County and the San Luis Bay coastline, particularly from vantage points to the southeast, south, and southwest of the site.

Views of Port San Luis from other directions and from portions of Avila Beach Drive are mainly shielded by surrounding hillsides, higher elevations or other topographic barriers. Motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians utilizing Avila Beach Drive are provided views of the landing as they approach the site from the east (Avila Beach). Views of the Port begin as travelers pass by the Cal Poly Marine Sciences Facility pier approaching the site from the east.

The project site is clearly visible from Avila Beach Drive, and is located within a highly scenic area. Given the nature and extent of previous site alteration and existing uses onsite, however, most of the unique or significantly attractive natural features of the project site visible within the existing viewscape of the Port San Luis area have been eliminated. Development is incongruous and competes for attention with the natural landscape, but does not obscure the features inherent to the area. The facilities therefore exhibit a moderate visual condition (refer to Section 4.1.4 Impact Assessment and Methodology below for further description of categories).

4.1.1.1 Project Site

The project site is located north and east of the intersection of Avila Beach Drive and Diablo Canyon Road with views immediately facing San Luis Obispo Bay and the Pacific Ocean. The site provides a visual backdrop for views from San Luis Obispo Bay and Harford Pier as well as vantage points from Avila Beach, San Luis Bay, and the Pacific Ocean further out to sea. The project site area has been altered forming a series of graded, level terraces that ascend the steep hillside to an elevation of approximately 200 feet above mean sea level (msl). Due to these graded terraces much of the native vegetation as well as the natural topography of the site has been significantly degraded especially when compared to the natural conditions of the surrounding hillsides. Consequently, the graded slopes are largely bare and highly visible from surrounding viewsheds.

The project site is located in a prominent location in view of coastal roadways, beaches, and areas of significant public recreational use. The project site is visible from several key areas including Avila Beach Drive, Fisherman's Beach, Olde Port Beach, and Harford Pier. The site is also visible from within the harbor waters.

The existing visual character of the site is defined by large benched terraces, gravel roadways, storage areas and equipment, boats and marine equipment, RVs and vehicles, a 90,000-gallon water storage tank in the upper northern portion of the project site, and variable coverage with vegetation within the site. These manmade elements are prominent features when viewed from vantage points to the southeast, south and southwest. South of Avila Beach Drive and facing San Luis Obispo Bay the ocean bluff is protected by rock revetments. The project site is also visible at a greater distance from vantage points in Avila Beach as well as from US 101 (near Spyglass Drive, approximately 3.5 miles to the southeast, across the bay) and from San Luis Obispo Bay. The areas surrounding the site (including areas above the site at higher elevations) contain oak woodland, grassland, and coastal scrub habitats. Within the boundaries of the project site, the land and vegetation have been highly disturbed and present little value in terms of scenic variety. Bordering the project site, however, are steeper slopes, defined canyons, and varied vegetation, which, although common in the project area, provide higher value in terms of variety. Surrounding uses include open space, road infrastructure, access control structures at Diablo Canyon, roadside RV camping, and other facilities associated with the Port.

RVs are currently allowed to park and camp on the ocean-side of Avila Beach Drive across from the parking area, which blocks views of the ocean as seen from Avila Beach Drive.

4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

4.1.2.1 Federal and State Regulations

The California Coastal Act of 1976 was adopted after state voters approved the Coastal Conservation Act (Proposition 20) in 1972. The Act was intended to protect a range of coastal resources.

Section 30251 states:

"The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting."

The Coastal Act places priority on the protection of ocean and coastal views from public areas including highways, roads, beaches, parks, coastal trails and accessways, vista points, and other public vistas. Policy clarification regarding consideration of public views versus private views is provided by the CCC concerning §30251 of the Coastal Act:

The primary concern under this section of the Act is the protection of ocean and coastal views from public areas such as highways, roads, beaches, parks, coastal trails and accessways, vista points, coastal streams and waters used for recreational purposes, and other public preserves rather than coastal views from private residences where no public vistas are involved.

4.1.2.2 Local Regulations and Policies

County of San Luis Obispo Local Coastal Program

As required by the California Coastal Act, San Luis Obispo County developed the San Luis Obispo LUE – LCP/Coastal Plan Policies. The LCP contains policies and implementation programs aimed at protecting visual resources, including the following:

- **Protection of Visual and Scenic Resources.** Unique and attractive features of the landscape, including but not limited to unusual landforms, scenic vistas, and sensitive habitats are to be preserved, protected, and in visually degraded areas, restored where feasible.
- **Site Selection for New Development.** Permitted development should be sited so as to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas. Wherever possible, site selection for new development is to emphasize locations not visible from major public view corridors.
- **Development on Coastal Bluffs.** New development on bluff faces shall be limited to public access stairways and shoreline protection structures. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to be compatible with the natural features of the landform as much as feasible. New development on bluff tops shall be designed and sited to minimize visual intrusion on adjacent sandy beaches.

The Local Coastal Program, Coastal Plan Policies, Chapter 10, Visual and Scenic Resources cites the CCA as follows:

30251 – Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of the surrounding areas, and where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas.

30253 (5) – Where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods which, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

The San Luis Bay Coastal Area Plan (County of San Luis Obispo 2009) describes county land use policies for the Coastal Zone portion of the San Luis Bay Planning Area. As part of the Plan's Planning Area Standards is a section setting goals for visual and scenic resources. Additional policies are specifically identified for the project site.

Visual and Scenic Resources

Goal: A Landscape that reflects the context of its use and the natural setting with minimal impacts to scenic viewsheds.

1. **Waterfront Character.** Protect scenic qualities including the time-honored character of Port San Luis and compatibility with surrounding uses and views.
2. **Bluffs and Hillside.** New development on bluffs and scenic hillsides shall be sited and designed to protect scenic resources and enhance the visual quality of the bluffs and hillsides. Visually degraded areas shall be restored where feasible.
3. **Historic Areas.** Adhere to adopted guidelines and legal provisions for renovation of Port properties with historic significance.
4. **Long-term Design.** Incorporate visually pleasing design solutions that limit long-term maintenance requirements.

Harbor Terrace

- b. New development shall be sited and designed to minimize the visual impacts of the development, including those related to light and glare, in order to preserve the scenic quality of the area as viewed from public viewing areas, adjacent roads, piers, beaches, and the ocean. Special attention shall be given to maintaining character of the Harbor area. This shall be accomplished by:
 1. Restricting the development of commercial retail facilities and structures (eating and drinking establishments, food and beverage retail sales, commissary, market, meeting rooms, parking, etc.) to the lower previously graded portions of the site, as depicted in Conceptual Harbor Terrace Plan Figure 8.7 (refer to the Area Plan).

2. *Limiting commercial retail facilities/structures and the harbor office/shop to two-stories with a maximum height of 25 feet.*
3. *Limiting hotel motel units (yurts, cabins, inns, casitas, bungalows) to single-story with a maximum height of 15 feet.*
4. *Limiting the use of APN 076-171-021 to walk-in/bike-in camping. The small, previously disturbed area on the northwest portion of the parcel adjacent to the existing access road may be used for structures necessary to serve the walk-in/bike-in campsites. No new road development or road improvements shall occur on APN 076-171-021 and vegetation removal shall be minimized. Each walk-in/bike-in site shall be limited to a level area or platform for a tent, a picnic table, a fire ring, and a water spigot.*
5. *Requiring that all development to be designed, colored, and sited to minimize visibility within the public viewshed. New development shall avoid large, boxy structures by providing variations in height, articulated roof forms and pitch, and open space view corridors. Structures shall blend in with the natural surroundings by using earth toned colors and materials. Reflective materials and finishes are prohibited. Lighting (particularly overhead street lights should they be necessary) shall be minimized in number and shall be shielded to orient lighting downward. All development shall be landscaped with native vegetation appropriate to the site in order to soften the visual prominence of the new development and to restore the visual qualities of the site. Invasive plant species are prohibited.*
6. *Requiring that landscape plans and appropriate irrigation plans be submitted with new developments. Plans shall identify revegetation areas necessary to stabilize slopes and planting areas necessary to minimize visual impacts of grading/terracing and the proposed use of the site. Landscape plans shall utilize native plant species appropriate to the site, and shall be designed to minimize the visual impact of all development on the site as viewed from public viewing areas, piers, beaches, and the ocean. Alteration of natural landforms is to be minimized and any areas of cut/grading shall immediately be re-seeded using a native seed mix.*
7. *Requiring a restroom building or other structures necessary to serve the campsites to be sited in the least visible portions of previously disturbed areas, and designed and landscaped to prevent its visibility from public view.*
8. *Requiring that any improvements or additions to the existing water tank to be limited to the minimum necessary to provide approved site development with water storage for domestic supply and fire protection purposes; shall be placed underground to the greatest degree feasible; and shall be sited, colored, and landscaped to minimize visibility from public viewing areas (including roads, piers, beaches, and offshore areas).*

9. *Requiring at the time of coastal development permit application, or as part of an environmental review document, a detailed visual analysis which demonstrates that the visual and scenic character of the site will be preserved and improved where possible.*

Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance

The CZLUO (County of San Luis Obispo 2011b) contains a number of standards designed to protect visual resources in the Coastal Zone. Relevant regulations include the following:

Section 23.05.034 Grading Standards:

- d. **Landform alterations within public view corridors.** *Grading, vegetation removal and other landform alterations shall be minimized on sites located within areas determined by the Planning Director to be public view corridors from collector or arterial roads. Where feasible, contours of finished grading are to blend with adjacent natural terrain to achieve a consistent grade and appearance.*
- e. **Final contours.** *Contours, elevations and shapes of finished surfaces are to be blended with adjacent natural terrain to achieve a consistent grade and natural appearance. Border of cut slopes and fills are to be rounded off to a minimum radius of five feet to blend with the natural terrain.*
- g. **Revegetation.** *Where natural vegetation has been removed through grading in areas not affected by the landscape requirements, and that are not to be occupied by structures, such areas are to be replanted.*

Section 23.05.064 Tree Removal Standards:

- d. **Tree removal within public view corridors.** *Tree removal within public view corridors (areas visible from collector or arterial roads) shall be minimized in accordance with Visual and Scenic Resources Policy 5.*

23.05.120 Underground Utilities:

Utilities serving new development shall be installed underground rather than by the use of poles and overhead lines, and where applicable shall be installed in accordance with California Public Utilities Commission rules and regulation. This requirement applies to electrical service and telecommunications (including cable TV, telephone and data transmission) connections between utility company distribution lines and all proposed structures on a site, and all new installations that distribute utilities within a site.

23.08.266 Recreational Vehicle (RV) Parks:

- b. **Location criteria.** *Approval of a Development Plan application by the Planning Commission is to include a finding that the recreational vehicle park will not be excessively visible from a public road or Residential use, or that such visibility will be acceptably mitigated.*
- e. **Site design standards.**
 - (6) **Fencing and screening.** *A solid wood or masonry six foot high solid fence, screen or hedge will be required along all property lines and*

front yard setbacks. In addition, recreational vehicle spaces should be generally screened from adjacent properties and public roads by means of natural landscaping, terrain variations and distance. Where a proposed park will be visible from a major highway or freeway, additional screening landscaping will be required, which is to utilize plant materials with the capability of achieving 80% opacity within two years when viewed from the roadway. The Planning Commission may waive or adjust fencing and screening standards where terrain, natural vegetation or area character would make screening unnecessary or ineffective.

- (i) **Street trees.** Street trees are to be planted where the park abuts a public road right-of-way. Trees are to be planted at 20 foot intervals, or at more frequent intervals if appropriate for the species selected. Varied groupings are encouraged with linear plantings to be varied in setback.*
- (ii) **Interior trees.** Trees are to be planted in the park interior in all common and recreation areas.*

Port Master Plan and Port Master Plan Final Program EIR

The Port Master Plan (RRM Design Group 2004) included the following measures, which are applicable to the proposed project:

- Construct buildings and other structures with quality design and materials that are compatible with the waterfront character of Port San Luis.
- Use primarily native and other appropriate coastal vegetation for landscaping.
- Screen as recommended in the Harford Pier sub-area section above.
- Site structures, uses utilities, and roads to reduce visual impacts.
- Minimize visual impacts of new buildings by allowing uses to be divided into smaller components on the site and by incorporating variation in wall plane, wall height, and roof forms.
- Consider views to the site from public roads and offshore areas.
- Site harbor uses with sensitivity to visitor views from upper terraces to lower areas.
- Use latest lighting technology to decrease brightness.
- Discourage the use of chain link fencing. If chain link fencing is necessary, incorporate design elements such as landscaping and wooden posts to make it more attractive.

The Port Master Plan Final Program EIR (CMCA 2004) included the following mitigation measures, which are applicable to the proposed project:

- V-1** *Grading shall be designed to conserve natural topographic features and appearances by means of land sculpturing to blend graded slopes and benches with natural topography.*

V-2 *Construction equipment and staging areas for the development of the Harbor Terrace and Avila parking lot sites shall be stored and located in the least visually prominent location on site, and/or screened from public view.*

V-3 *Lighting shall be hooded and designed to shine downward. To the extent practical, parking lot lighting shall be confined to the project site and shall be designed and oriented to ensure safety within the parking lots, access, and pedestrian walks. Lighting will be installed with the minimum foot-candles necessary to ensure safety.*

4.1.3 Thresholds of Significance

The determinations of significance of project impacts are based on applicable policies, regulations, goals, and guidelines defined by CEQA and the County. In addition to comparing the project to relevant policies and standards, the aesthetic resources assessment identified which specific criteria contribute most to the existing quality of each view and if change would occur to that criteria as a result of the project. If a change in visual criteria was identified, this change was analyzed for its potential effect on the existing scenic character. This analysis was combined with the potential number of viewers, their sensitivities, and viewing duration in order to determine the overall level of impacts. Specifically, the project would be considered to have a significant effect on the environment if the effects exceed the significance criteria described below.

- a. Create an aesthetically incompatible site open to public view.
- b. Introduce a use within a scenic view open to public view.
- c. Change the visual character of the area.
- d. Create glare or night lighting, which may affect surrounding areas.
- e. Impact unique geological or physical features.

4.1.4 Impact Assessment and Methodology

A visual resource is the aggregate of characteristic features imparting visually aesthetic qualities to the environment. The setting for the visual resource may be natural (i.e., formed by nature with no apparent human intervention), rural, or urban. In describing the visual quality of an area or region, three attributes are relevant: visual condition, visual sensitivity, and scenic variety. The scenic variety of an area is a descriptive inventory of the distinguishing features of the landscape. Visual sensitivity indicates where adverse visual effects would be expected to generate the greatest controversy. Relevant factors include public concern, and the frequency with which the resource is viewed. Visual condition is the overall attractiveness of the resource and is a function not only of the appeal of inherent characteristics, but also of the effects of features that have been introduced and which appear incongruous.

Scenic variety is evaluated based on relative variations in natural characteristics such as landscape character, landforms, vegetation, drainage, and urban components, if applicable. In general, areas of steeper topography, with a wide variety of vegetation types, are considered "distinctive" and therefore more valuable aesthetically, while areas of relatively low relief and more homogenous vegetation are considered "common" or of "minimal" value. In general, landforms in the project area would be considered common to distinctive under the criteria presented. Outside of developed portions of the Avila Beach community, vegetation and

shorelines are likewise considered common to distinctive, as well as the general landscape character. As viewed from the beaches and local roadways, the community now presents a common to distinctive urban character, with areas of strong unity and proportion.

Visual Sensitivity. Visual sensitivity is the relative degree of public interest in the visual resource and concern over changes in the quality of that resource. The degree of interest and concern has not only to do with public attitudes, but also the frequency of viewing. Factors that affect visual sensitivity reflect the viewer's awareness of the scenic resources of the site, including the level of public concern, and frequency and level of detail at which the resource is viewed. Greater concern over visual quality is assumed to be felt by those driving for pleasure or those engaged in recreational activities. The community of Avila Beach is a major tourist destination within San Luis Obispo County. Inherent to its recreational value is the scenic quality of the area. Sensitivity to change is therefore considered high.

Visual Condition. The overall visual attractiveness of a region is defined as the visual condition. The determination is based on the inherent characteristic variety of the resources and the degree to which introduced features appear uncharacteristic or incongruous with their surroundings, thereby disrupting the continuity of the scene. Visual condition is termed high, moderate or low. Areas with high visual condition may have some incongruities, but they would be overlooked by the casual observer. Areas with moderate visual condition have incongruities that would compete with the inherent features of the site and may obscure such features to some degree. Areas with low visual condition have substantial incongruities that obscure natural features such that the inherent qualities of the area cannot be determined.

4.1.4.1 Key Viewpoints and Photo-simulations

Field reconnaissance was conducted in December 2013 by Robert Carr, Landscape Architect, to assess the existing visual setting and determine project visibility from public areas. Resulting from this initial review, representative viewpoints were determined for further analysis, based on dominance of the site within the view, duration of views, and expected sensitivity of the viewer group. Of those representative viewpoints, Key Viewpoints were selected that best illustrate the visual changes proposed by the project (refer to Figure 4.1-1). Photographs were taken from the following Key Viewpoints, which were selected to provide a reasonable analysis and representation of the project setting and public view areas:

Key Viewpoint 1: Harford Pier and San Luis Bay (Figures 4.1-2 and 4.1-3)

This viewpoint was selected due to the popularity of the Harford Pier and San Luis Bay. The photograph was taken near the existing boat launch and kayak rental facility. This viewpoint provides an expansive view of the project site, due to distance and perspective from the bay. The project site is visible for an extended period of time to persons walking northwest from the end of the Harford Pier to the shore and from boaters, kayakers, and paddlers within the bay. Visibility of the project site from is obscured in some locations by existing fishing and marine-related facilities on the pier. The waters of the bay are present in the foreground, Avila Beach Drive and parked RVs and vehicles are seen below a visible road cut, and the existing access roads, terraces, water tank, RVs, boats, and other storage materials are visible. The existing ridgeline is vegetated with a mix of grasses, coastal scrub, and oak woodland. Existing utility poles are also visible near Avila Beach Drive (refer to Figure 4.1-2)

Key Viewpoint 2: Olde Port Beach (Figures 4.1-4 and 4.1-5)

This viewpoint was selected due to the popularity of the beach area south of the project site. This viewing point is located on Olde Port Beach, southeast of the project site and below Avila

Beach Drive. The beach area is located in the foreground, and the existing steep road cut and ridgeline cut by Lighthouse Road dominate the view. The Babe Lane approach to Avila Beach Drive can be seen, in addition to existing RVs and vehicles parked on Avila Beach Drive. The boat dock at the entrance to the Port parking lot can be seen to the left of the photo (refer to Figure 4.1-4).

Key Viewpoint 3: Avila Beach Drive (Figures 4.1-6 and 4.1-7)

This viewing point represents a closer view of the project site, at the Diablo Canyon approach to Avila Beach Drive. This viewpoint was selected to represent public views of visitors exiting Port San Luis and heading towards the community of Avila, as seen from Avila Beach Drive. The emergency siren, utility poles, and chain link fencing can be seen, in addition to existing RVs parked on Avila Beach Drive. The existing road cut, the lower and upper terraces, and existing boat and RV storage can be seen (refer to Figure 4.1-6).

In order to understand the type and extent of physical change expected by project implementation, the physical size and form of buildings, structures, parking areas, RVs, and other site features, a three-dimensional (3D) model of generalized building massing and roof shape was developed using Sketch Up 3D software and placed in the perspective photo images that represent the Key Viewpoints noted above (refer to Figures 4.1-3, 4.1-5, and 4.1-7). All actual architectural detail, building and roof shape, massing, and site vegetation will be determined by a future developer, but would be generally consistent with the model. Buildings are presented to communicate a basic and preliminary visual character to be consistent with the San Luis Bay Area Plan requirements, including height (15 feet for cabins and 25 feet for commercial buildings). The visual simulations represent the most reasonable worst-case scenario as the buildings' massing, wall and roof articulation, openings, and general character communicate a basic consistency with the visual character as required per the San Luis Bay Area Plan. Future architectural design by the developer will refine the materials and articulation so that the visible portions of the building are appropriate to the setting, consistent with identified mitigation measures. Landscaping shown on the photo-simulations is intended to present conceptual vegetative treatments such as ground level plants and trees. The trees shown in the simulations are not intended to depict an exact species; however, they approximate the scale of a 10 to 15-year old native coast live oak or a 7 to 10-year-old ornamental tree. The simulations present trees (approximately 15 to 20 feet in height) and ground level vegetation in a general manner to not overly obscure the proposed buildings, and to present a conservative representation of vegetative screening after establishment and growth.

Figure 4.1-1. Key Viewpoints



Figure 4.1-2. Existing Visual Conditions Key Viewpoint 1



Figure 4.1-3. Photo-simulation of Proposed Project Key Viewpoint 1



Figure 4.1-4. Existing Visual Conditions Key Viewpoint 2



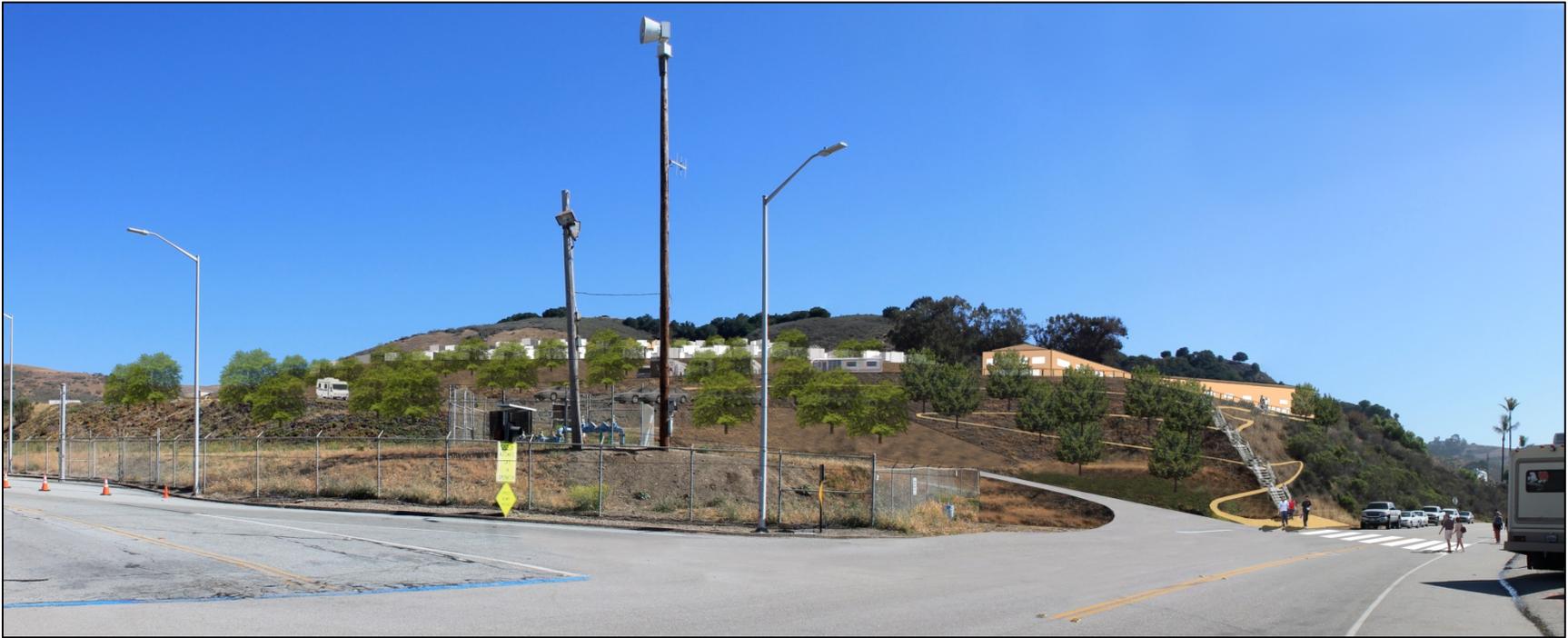
Figure 4.1-5. Photo-simulation of Proposed Project Key Viewpoint 2



Figure 4.1-6. Existing Visual Conditions Key Viewpoint 3



Figure 4.1-7. Photo-simulation of Proposed Project Key Viewpoint 3



4.1.5 Project Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Create an Aesthetically Incompatible Site Open to Public View

The project site occupies a highly visible location as part of the Port San Luis viewshed as seen from a wide range of public viewpoints including roadways, beaches, the pier, and other recreational areas. Although the project site itself is degraded by previous actions and development, the greater visual context is considered a generally high-quality scenic vista due mostly to the varied and dramatic topography, patterns of native vegetation on the adjacent hillsides, the Pacific Ocean, sand beaches and cliffs, and the working and historic maritime structures and activities. The project would require re-grading of the site in designated areas, would construct new commercial and other buildings, and would increase parking and recreational vehicle activity on the site. Based on the location of the future Harbor Use building and analysis of visual simulations, the Harbor Use building would not be visible as seen from off-site locations due to intervening topography. Due to the steep viewing angle, and proximity of the roadway to the project site, the proposed commercial building may silhouette above the ridgeline as seen from Avila Beach Drive. This visual change would have the potential to adversely affect the Port San Luis scenic vista. Measures identified in the Port Master Plan and Final Program EIR would substantially reduce these potential adverse effects. However, review of the plans and photo-simulations indicate that visual impacts would remain even with implementation of the identified measures. As a result, additional measures are recommended to reduce visual impacts to a less than significant level, including standards to be incorporated into final site, grading, construction, and landscape plans.

AES Impact 1	
Implementation of the proposed project may result in the following potentially incompatible features: the proposed commercial building would potentially silhouette above the ridgeline as seen from locations along Avila Beach Drive; topographic constraints and proposed development area limits the creation of natural-appearing landform grading, which would result in constant planes with highly engineered appearance, which may be inconsistent with LCP visual policy; and, the parked recreational vehicles (RVs) on the hillside would be highly visible as seen from the majority of public viewpoints in and around the harbor, and the generally light-colors of the motor homes and trailers would increase their visibility, and add to a noticeable visual clutter on the hillside.	
Mitigation Measures	
<i>AES/mm-1</i>	<i>Upon application for construction permits from the County of San Luis Obispo, the Harbor District or designee shall design and site the commercial buildings(s) and new water tank (if required) so that no part is above the natural ridgeline in the background. This may be accomplished by measures including but not limited to setting the structure further back from the leading edge of the graded top-of-slope, reducing building height, and/or stepping the upper portions of the building back from the lower façade. Prior to Harbor District approval of construction and architectural plans for proposed structures, a sight-line study shall be prepared showing the buildings will not silhouette above the primary natural ridgeline as seen from Avila Beach Drive. The sight-line study shall be submitted to the County with the construction permit application.</i>
<i>AES/mm-2</i>	<i>Upon application for construction permits from the County of San Luis Obispo, the Harbor District or designee shall submit final landscape plans incorporating substantial screening of all engineered graded surfaces. The plant palette shall incorporate plants of varied-size that will produce a natural pattern of vegetative growth.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a. Plants shall be arranged in natural appearing patterns using a combination of ground covers, different sized shrubs, and different sized trees. Plant types shall be native or native appearing.</i> <i>b. Trees and large shrubs shall be planted such that within 10 years after project construction, no more than 20% of the parked RVs and other vehicles (at full-use capacity) are visible from viewpoints on Avila Beach Drive, beaches, the pier and pier</i>

AES Impact 1	
	<p><i>parking lot , and other public vantage points. Screening vegetation shall be strategically planted on the slopes in front of the parking areas, as well as on the flatter areas among the spaces. Plantings shall be allowed to provide for adequate visual sight lines and views of the coast for visitors to the project site.</i></p> <p>c. <i>Plant trees and large shrubs such that within 10 years after project construction, no more than 30% of the commercial and other buildings and structures including the water tank (if required) are visible from viewpoints on Avila Beach Drive, beaches, the pier and pier parking lot , and other public vantage points. Plantings shall be allowed to provide for adequate visual sight lines and views of the coast for visitors to the project site.</i></p>
AES/mm-3	<p><i>Upon application for construction permits from the County of San Luis Obispo, the Harbor District or designee shall submit plans showing proposed recreational vehicle (RV) parking spaces set back as far back from the edge of the graded terrace as feasible, while avoiding the creation of additional cut slopes and retaining walls.</i></p>
	<p><i>Implement Port Master Plan Final Program EIR mitigation measures V-1, V-2, and V-3.</i></p> <p><u><i>V-1 Grading shall be designed to conserve natural topographic features and appearances by means of land sculpturing to blend graded slopes and benches with natural topography.</i></u></p> <p><u><i>V-2 Construction equipment and staging areas for the development of the Harbor Terrace and Avila parking lot sites shall be stored and located in the least visually prominent location on site, and/or screened from public view.</i></u></p> <p><u><i>V-3 Lighting shall be hooded and designed to shine downward. To the extent practical, parking lot lighting shall be confined to the project site and shall be designed and oriented to ensure safety within the parking lots, access, and pedestrian walks. Lighting will be installed with the minimum foot-candles necessary to ensure safety.</i></u></p>
Residual Impacts	
<p>Based on the location of the project site, any development would be visible from public view areas including Harford Pier, San Luis Bay, Olde Port Beach, and Avila Beach Drive. In addition to several required standards, mitigation is identified for inclusion in final site and construction plans to facilitate visual compatibility to the maximum extent feasible, consistent with Coastal Policies related to visual and scenic resources, and the Port Master Plan. Based on compliance with existing regulations, mitigation measures identified in the Port Master Plan Final Program EIR, and additional mitigation measures identified above, residual impacts would be less than significant.</p>	

Introduce a Use within a Scenic View Open to Public View

As noted above, historical uses of the project site included a trailer park, RV and campsites, and storage areas. The proposed project would introduce uses similar to existing and historical uses, and would not consist of an entirely new use; however, the intensity of development, including commercial uses, swimming pool, comfort stations, cabins and yurts, and campsites would be greater than that of past uses and would be a noticeable change compared to the current setting. Please refer to impact discussion above, and below under “visual character.” No additional impact would occur under this significance threshold.

As noted above, RV camping is currently allowed on the ocean-side of Avila Beach Drive across from the parking area, which blocks views of the ocean and southern shoreline as seen from Avila Beach Drive. The proposed project would result in the relocation of these RV campsites onto the project site, which would open up highly scenic coastal views as seen from the roadway, resulting in a beneficial effect for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

Change the Visual Character of the Area

The existing visual character of the project site and its surroundings represents a variety of styles and eras of development. Historic structures such as the pier and associated buildings combine with more recent structures. The overall visual character is defined by the working and recreational maritime-related activities. The breakwater and rock-fortified beachfront slopes provide visual reminders of the powerful natural forces at work in the area. The character of the setting is equally defined by the natural setting including the surrounding hillsides and cliffs, the Pacific Ocean and sandy beaches, and the natural vegetative patterns. Currently the project site detracts from the visual character of the natural landscape because of its graded terraces and disturbed areas. Certain aspects of the project site however are not completely inconsistent with the visual character of the surrounding uses. The harbor is recognized in part as a working maritime zone, with boats, trailers, various equipment, and activities as part of the view. To some degree the project site contributes to the functional, working character of the area.

The project proposes a denser, more formal-appearing use for the site. The engineered slopes, commercial buildings, paved roadways, stairs, light poles, signage, and other elements would result in a substantially more organized, constructed-looking environment. In general, the proposed use of the site may not be unexpected given the sometimes intense level of existing activity that occurs in the area. Although the proposed use may be consistent with viewers' expectations, the potentially engineered-appearance of the graded terraces and formal and commercial appearance of structural development would substantially alter the character of the coastal setting. This adverse change in character could potentially be caused by such things as visible graded slopes, linear and commercial style landscaping, generic architectural styles (i.e., blocky, lack of articulation, monotonous rooflines, prefabricated plastic signage), buildings that are not subordinate to the setting, signage and lighting schemes that are obtrusive, and other elements.

Measures identified in the Port Master Plan and Port Master Plan Final Program EIR would substantially reduce these potential adverse effects. However, review of the plans and photo-simulations indicate that visual impacts would remain even with implementation of the identified measures. As a result the following additional measures are recommended to reduce visual impacts to a less than significant level.

AES Impact 2	
Implementation of the proposed project may result in changes to the visual character of the area, including the creation of visible graded slopes, monotonous landscaping, blocky and generic commercial architecture, and other features that are not subordinate to the visual setting.	
Mitigation Measures	
AES/mm-4	<p><i>Upon application for construction permits from the County of San Luis Obispo, the Harbor District or designee shall prepare and submit plans incorporating the following:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a. All buildings and structures shall appear visually subordinate to the setting, blend with the hillside, and designed to reduce noticeability from off-site locations.</i> <i>b. Buildings shall reflect the historic character of the working harbor and shall be an architectural style distinct from the redeveloped buildings seen along Front Street in Avila Beach. Blocky, monotonous, and pre-fabricated architectural style and design shall not be applied.</i> <i>c. Buildings shall be pedestrian in scale, mass, layout, and appearance, (i.e., designed for visibility and use by pedestrians proximate to the building rather than visibility from Avila Beach Drive, such as finer distinctive architectural features, integration of art, massing and layout designed for function rather than to promote visibility, and smaller, lower</i>

AES Impact 2	
	<p><i>positioned signage and lighting). Exterior colors, materials, and finishes shall visually blend with or complement the natural surroundings.</i></p> <p><i>d. All site amenities including signage, light poles, street furniture, and other features shall be unobtrusive, blend with the setting, and support an architectural theme.</i></p> <p><i>e. All commercial buildings shall not exceed 25 feet in height, and shall be located on the lower, previously graded portions of the project site, consistent with San Luis Bay Coastal Area Plan Standards.</i></p> <p><i>e-f. The design of above-ground retaining walls shall incorporate features of the natural setting, including colors and articulation (i.e., simulated stone) to blend the appearance of the visible portion of the retaining wall into the surrounding landscape.</i></p>
	<p><i>Implement Port Master Plan Final Program EIR mitigation measures V-1, V-2, and V-3.</i></p> <p><i>V-1 Grading shall be designed to conserve natural topographic features and appearances by means of land sculpturing to blend graded slopes and benches with natural topography.</i></p> <p><i>V-2 Construction equipment and staging areas for the development of the Harbor Terrace and Avila parking lot sites shall be stored and located in the least visually prominent location on site, and/or screened from public view.</i></p> <p><i>V-3 Lighting shall be hooded and designed to shine downward. To the extent practical, parking lot lighting shall be confined to the project site and shall be designed and oriented to ensure safety within the parking lots, access, and pedestrian walks. Lighting will be installed with the minimum foot-candles necessary to ensure safety.</i></p>
	<p><i>Implement mitigation measures AES/mm-1, AES/mm-2, and AES/mm-3.</i></p>
Residual Impacts	
	<p>Based on the location of the project site, any development would be visible from public view areas including Harford Pier, San Luis Bay, Fisherman’s Beach, Olde Port Beach, and Avila Beach Drive. In addition to several required standards, mitigation is identified for inclusion in final site and construction plans to ensure the final design of the project is consistent with the visual character of the area, consistent with Coastal Policies related to visual and scenic resources, and the Port Master Plan. Based on compliance with existing regulations, mitigation measures identified in the Port Master Plan Final Program EIR, and additional mitigation measures identified above, residual impacts would be less than significant.</p>

Create Glare or Night Lighting

Because of the site’s generally steep topography, variety of uses and activities, and 24-hour function, it is expected that extensive night lighting may be visible, including permanent lighting for public safety and portable lighting associated with RVs and campsites. This lighting would be visible from throughout the area and potentially from great distances down the coast. Glare from RV and vehicle windshields may also occur; however, the duration of the glare would be short-term during the day, and implementation of the proposed landscape plan would provide screening. Therefore, the effect would be less than significant. Measures identified in the Port Master Plan and Port Master Plan Final Program EIR would reduce these potential adverse effects to some degree. However, visual impacts would remain even with implementation of the identified measures. As a result, additional measures are recommended to reduce visual impacts caused by light and glare to a less than significant level.

AES Impact 3	
Implementation of the proposed project would result in additional sources of light and glare, potentially affecting dark-sky views in the area.	
Mitigation Measures	
AES/mm-5	<p><i>Upon application for a construction permit from the County of San Luis Obispo, the Harbor District (or their designee) shall submit a comprehensive lighting plan to the Department of Planning and Building for review and approval showing the following:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a. The Lighting Plan shall be based on a photometric study prepared by a qualified engineer who is an active member of the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA), using guidance and best practices endorsed by the International Dark Sky Association.</i> <i>b. The Harbor District (or their designee) shall provide the specific technical data and performance criteria required by the applicable safety policy used as the basis for the lighting plan.</i> <i>c. As part of the Lighting Plan, illumination levels shall be the minimum required by the specifically defined public safety policy and ordinances.</i> <i>d. As part of the Lighting Plan, all lighting sources shall be directed downward and shielded from view from public roads, beaches, the pier, parking lots, and other off-site public areas.</i> <i>e. As part of the Lighting Plan, lights shall be designed and constructed to reduce illumination of the adjacent slopes and hillsides where applicable.</i> <i>f. As part of the Lighting Plan, lighting shall include low-height bollard-type fixtures and be equipped with motion sensors to the greatest extent allowed by safety and security codes.</i>
<p><i>Implement Port Master Plan Final Program EIR mitigation measure V-3.</i></p> <p><u><i>V-3 Lighting shall be hooded and designed to shine downward. To the extent practical, parking lot lighting shall be confined to the project site and shall be designed and oriented to ensure safety within the parking lots, access, and pedestrian walks. Lighting will be installed with the minimum foot-candles necessary to ensure safety.</i></u></p>	
Residual Impacts	
<p>Based on the location of the project site, anticipated lighting requirements for security and public safety, and other sources of light (i.e., lanterns, recreational vehicle lighting), the project would result in light and glare that would affect dark-sky views in the immediate area. Although light and glare would be seen, and cannot be avoided, compliance with standard regulations for outdoor lighting and mitigation identified in the Port Master Plan Final Program EIR, and additional proposed mitigation measures would reduce the effects of light and glare to the maximum extent feasible. Therefore, potential impacts would be mitigated to less than significant.</p>	

Impact Unique Geological or Physical Features

Implementation of the proposed project would require re-grading and re-contouring of the existing landscape. The upper slopes of the ridgeline and surrounding coastal scrub, oak woodland, and drainage features on the site would remain intact. These features in the upper slopes are common to the area, and contribute to the high scenic quality. Based on the areas proposed for site alteration and development, the proposed project would not impact unique geological or physical features. Mitigation is identified above (AES/mm-1) in addition to mitigation required under the Port Master Plan Final Program EIR (V-1), which would address site alteration, and no additional impact would occur under this significance threshold.

4.1.6 Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative impact scenario includes build-out under the Port Master Plan. The Port Master Plan Final Program EIR, which included an assessment of the development of Harbor Terrace, identified potentially significant but mitigable and less than significant impacts that would occur as a result of build-out of the Port Master Plan. Potential impacts include an alteration of visual character and quality (less than significant upon implementation of mitigation measures), visibility of construction equipment (less than significant), and the creation of light and glare (less than significant upon implementation of mitigation measures). Implementation of the proposed project would contribute to these identified impacts, but would not result in a cumulatively considerable effect resulting in a significant, adverse, unavoidable effect. Mitigation is identified, including compliance with previously adopted mitigation for the Port Master Plan and additional mitigation measures specific to the currently proposed project at Harbor Terrace. No other major projects are proposed within the Harbor District.

Projects located outside of the Harbor District that may affect visual resources in the region include the Avila Point (Avila Tank Farm) remediation, general plan amendment, and development project. The Avila Tank Farm project site is located in a prominent location above the community of Avila Beach, approximately 1 mile east of Harbor Terrace. The visual analysis for the Avila Tank Farm project will be conducted as part of an EIR that will be prepared by the County and their consultants, and the impact analysis is not currently available. However, it can be anticipated that the project would have an effect on visual resources, including changes to visual character, introduction of new development features within the landscape, and creation of light and glare. Other smaller projects are anticipated within the Avila urban area, and would be subject to design standards identified in the Avila Specific Plan. All discretionary projects in the Avila and Port San Luis area would cumulatively shape the visual character of the region. Based on the existing visual setting onsite, the design of the project, and incorporation of identified mitigation measures, the proposed project would not have a significant, adverse, cumulative effect on visual resources.

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