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## 5. AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

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This chapter describes existing visual and scenic resources in the planning area. The chapter includes the regulatory framework necessary to evaluate potential environmental impacts resulting from the 2040 General Plan, describes potential impacts that could result from the General Plan, and discusses General Plan goals, policies, and implementation programs that would avoid or reduce those potential impacts.

### 5.1 SETTING

The environmental and regulatory setting of the Burlingame planning area, with respect to aesthetics and visual resources, is described in detail in Section 6.4 (Infrastructure: Aesthetics) and Sections 2.6 and 2.7 (Land Use and Urban Form: Urban Structure and Form and Community Character) of the General Plan Existing Conditions Report (City of Burlingame, 2015). Pursuant to section 15150 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the Existing Conditions Report is incorporated into the Draft Program EIR by reference. The Existing Conditions Report is available at the City of Burlingame 2040 General Plan website at:

<http://www.Burlingame.org/GENERALPLAN/>

Copies of the Existing Conditions Report may be viewed during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), Monday through Friday, at the City of Burlingame Planning Division, 501 Primrose Road, Burlingame, CA 94010.

#### 5.1.1 Environmental Setting

Section 6.4 (Infrastructure: Aesthetics) and Sections 2.6 and 2.7 (Land Use and Urban Form: Urban Structure and Form and Community Character) of the Existing Conditions Report describe aesthetics and visual resources within the planning area. This information is based on the existing visual character and resources in the county, which are linked to the region's natural hilly topography and San Francisco Bay. Interstate 280, located just west of Burlingame, is officially designated as a State Scenic Highway (also known as the Junipero Serra Freeway). Major findings from the Existing Conditions Report relevant to aesthetics and visual resources are described below.

- Due to Burlingame's topography, properties in its hillside areas have scenic views of both the City and San Francisco Bay, with the skylines of East Bay cities visible on clear days.
- Natural features most associated with Burlingame are its trees, and Burlingame has been designated a "Tree City USA" for over 35 years. California Drive and El Camino Real have groves of large, mature trees.
- Important scenic resources include views of marshlands and San Francisco Bay, visible from the hills as well as from Old Bayshore Highway, and views of the extensive tree canopy that can be seen from such streets as Carmelita Drive, Hillside Drive, and Broadway.

- The City has gateways that mark major city entrances; the most notable is the historic Broadway Burlingame sign at Broadway and California Drive that can be seen by travelers entering Broadway from Highway 101.
- Downtown, which grew up around the Burlingame railroad station in the early days of the City, consists of buildings from a wide range of ages and architectural styles, some of which may have historic value. These buildings contribute to the variety and character of the streets.
- The majority of Burlingame's neighborhood housing stock was developed between the 1890s and 1960s. Residential growth occurred as a result of new subdivisions, with large estates divided into smaller lots that were developed over time. The older neighborhoods have homes built by individual developers, while later subdivisions along Trousdale Drive have homes built by merchant builders. As a result, the city has a unique character created by the diversity of architectural styles within its neighborhoods.
- Locally designated scenic roadways include Bayshore Freeway, Canyon Road, Easton Drive, El Camino Real, Skyline Boulevard, Ralston Avenue, Hillside Drive, Trousdale Drive, Airport Boulevard, Occidental Avenue, Ray Drive, Bellevue Avenue, Burlingame Avenue, and California Drive. These scenic roadways were designated in the San Mateo County or the City of Burlingame General Plans.
- The existing visual character of Burlingame combines commercial, residential, and industrial development to the northwest and residential development nestled in the western hills, with little undeveloped open space in the city.
- Burlingame is a source of substantial nighttime light since the City is urbanized.

### 5.1.2 Regulatory Setting

The Existing Conditions Report Natural Resources Section 6.4 (Infrastructure: Aesthetics) discusses the following regulatory setting relevant to aesthetics and visual resources.

#### Federal

Federal regulations do not apply to aesthetic resources in Burlingame.

#### State

**California Streets and Highways Code (Section 260).** This code preserves and protects scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A California highway may be designated as scenic depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on the traveler's enjoyment of the view. When a city (or county) nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must identify and define the scenic corridor of the highway, as defined by the motorist's line of vision (a reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to a distant horizon). The city (or county) must also adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor, including: 1) regulation of land use and density of development; 2) detailed land and site planning; 3) control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards); 4) careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and 5) careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment.

## Local

**City of Burlingame Design Guidelines.** In addition to the standard design review process for development projects, three specific plans include guidelines for the appearance of the City's buildings, structures, and open spaces.

**Residential Design Review.** All new houses built in Burlingame, most second-story additions, and some single-story additions, require an application to the Planning Commission for Residential Design Review. Projects will be reviewed for compliance with the Residential Design Guidebook, which offers guidance on appropriate design based on the style of the existing home and the character of the surrounding neighborhood. A landscape plan is also required, and the project may be required to plant new landscape trees, based on the City's tree List.

**Downtown Specific Plan – Streetscapes and Open Space, Design and Character Guidelines.** The Downtown Specific Plan area is framed by Oak Grove Avenue on the north, the Caltrain tracks south to Burlingame Avenue and Anita Road on the east, Peninsula Avenue and the City limits on the south, and El Camino Real on the west. This specific plan includes design guidelines for architectural compatibility/consistency/diversity, pedestrian use and character, commercial and residential streetscapes, signage, gateways, building scale, parking, façade design, roof treatment, public open spaces, lighting, site amenities, land use transitions, shadow impacts, landscaping (street trees), and historic building preservation.

Within the specific plan area, any actions proposing substantial physical changes to any parcel of land or existing structure, or the proposed construction of new structures, shall be subject to Design Review as outlined in Section 25.57 of the Burlingame Municipal Code.

**Bayfront Specific Plan – Design Guidelines.** The Bayfront planning area includes all of the area in Burlingame that is located east of Highway 101 to San Francisco Bay, from the northern border shared with the City of Millbrae at El Portal Creek, south to the Coyote Point County Park, a San Mateo County recreational area. This specific plan includes design guidelines for building/street relationships, Bayshore Highway interface, parking, landscaping, view corridors, signage, gateways, Highway 101 frontage, street design, and building design.

**North Burlingame/Rollins Road Specific Plan – Design Guidelines.** The North Burlingame/Rollins Road planning area includes the Rollins Road industrial corridor, which is bordered by Highway 101 to the east and the Caltrain tracks to the west, and extends south from the City of Millbrae to Broadway. On the west side of the Caltrain tracks, the planning area also includes the El Camino Real commercial corridor, which is bordered by Millbrae to the north, Ogden Drive and Marco Polo Way to Clarice Lane to the west, and to the rear property lines of the residential neighborhoods to the south of the Mills Peninsula Hospital (Davis Drive and Dufferin Avenue).

This specific plan includes design guidelines for setback distance, minimum and maximum buildings heights, minimum building frontage, signs, awnings, lighting, parking and parking structures, landscaping, and gateway features.

**Hillside Area Construction Permit Requirements.** The City of Burlingame has designated that development in most areas in the hillsides will require a Hillside Area Construction Permit, which would allow neighbors, the Planning Commission, and City Council an opportunity to review all construction in the hillside area that could affect existing distant views from inside structures on nearby properties.

## 5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

This section describes potential impacts on aesthetics or visual resources that could result from the General Plan, and discusses General Plan goals, policies, and implementation programs that would avoid or reduce those potential impacts. The section also recommends mitigation measures as needed to reduce significant impacts.

### 5.2.1 Significance Criteria

Based on the CEQA Guidelines, implementation of the City of Burlingame 2040 General Plan would have a significant impact related to aesthetics and visual resources if it would:

- a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- b. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- c. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Burlingame Planning area or its surroundings; or
- d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the Planning area or its surroundings.

### 5.2.2 Analysis Methodology

The methodology for evaluating potential environmental impacts on aesthetics and visual resources followed this basic sequence:

- a. The General Plan Existing Conditions Report was evaluated to identify existing environmental conditions and problems related to aesthetics and visual resources, including the regulatory framework that applies to these issues.
- b. The CEQA Statute and Guidelines (2017), including Appendix G (Environmental Checklist Form), were consulted to identify environmental impact topics and issues that should be addressed in the program EIR. In part, this process resulted in the significance criteria listed in subsection 5.2.1 above.
- c. The General Plan, including the associated development capacity assumptions (see EIR Section 3.6), was analyzed to identify goals, policies, implementation programs ("policies" for short), and potential outcomes that address the significance criteria. This analysis resulted in two basic conclusions regarding policies and outcomes: a) many policies would avoid or reduce potential environmental impacts, and (b) some policies or outcomes could result in new environmental impacts or increase the severity of existing environmental problems.

- d. For potential environmental impacts that would result from the 2040 General Plan, mitigation measures were designed to avoid or reduce each impact to a less-than-significant level. If implementation of all identified feasible mitigations cannot reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level, then the impact is considered significant and unavoidable.

### **5.2.3 Environmental Impacts**

#### **Potential Impacts of Future Development Pursuant to the 2040 General Plan**

Impacts on visual resources within the planning area could occur if existing regulations and/or proposed policies are not sufficient to preserve and enhance scenic vistas, scenic resources, and overall visual character and quality of the community. The planning area is fully developed, and future development pursuant to the General Plan policies would generally be constructed within the context of an urbanized environment. (Significance Criteria 5.2.1 [a], [b], and [c])

Development directed by the policies of the General Plan could produce new sources of light and/or glare that may potentially cause significant impacts on daytime and/or nighttime views. Excessive or inappropriately directed lighting can adversely impact nighttime views by reducing the ability to see the night sky and stars. Glare can be caused from unshielded or misdirected lighting sources. For example, a floodlight attached to the side of a single-family residence could be oriented inadvertently to shine into a neighbor's house. Reflective surfaces (e.g., polished metal) can also cause glare. Impacts associated with glare range from simple nuisance to potentially dangerous situations (e.g., if glare is directed into the eyes of motorists). New commercial development in the planning area could introduce inappropriate lighting or use building materials that could cause inappropriate glare. (Significance Criterion 5.2.1 [d])

#### **How Existing Regulations and General Plan Policies Reduce Impacts**

Table 5-1 is aligned with relevant Existing Regulations and General Plan policies that relate to aesthetics and visual resources. Column 1 (Objective) lists each Regulation and General Plan goal, policy, and implementation program ("policy" for short), organized by General Plan element, that addresses the potential impact identified in Table 5-1. Column 2 is a summary of the regulation and the text of the policy. Column 3 answers the question, "How does the regulation/policy avoid or reduce the potential impact?" Column 4 identifies the applicable significance criteria that is addressed by the regulation/policy.

The verbs in Column 3 are intended to be applied consistently. The verb "ensures" means that the policy is sufficient to guarantee the result identified in the policy. The verb "helps" means that the policy contributes to avoiding or reducing the identified potential impact; in many cases, "helps" is used for a policy that can be applied to avoid or reduce a wide range of potential impacts. The verb "implements" is used for General Plan implementation programs to indicate that the program provides the details to put the associated policy into action.

**Table 5-1: Proposed Burlingame Existing Regulations and General Plan Policies to Avoid or Reduce Impacts on Aesthetics and Visual Resources**

Regulation/Policy	Description of Regulation/Policy	How Does It Avoid or Reduce Impact?	Applicable Significance Criteria
<b>Existing Regulations</b>			
California Streets and Highways Code (Section 260)	Preserves and protects scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways.	Maintains and protects Interstate 280, a designated State Scenic Highway, as an important scenic resource.	(b) Scenic highways
City of Burlingame Design Guidelines – Residential Design Review	All new houses built in Burlingame, most second-story additions, and some single-story additions require an application to the Planning Commission for Residential Design Review. Projects will be reviewed for compliance with the Residential Design Guidebook, which offers guidance on appropriate design based on the style of the existing home and the character of the surrounding neighborhood.	Ensures that new development will not degrade the existing visual character of the area. Ensures that potential light and glare impacts will be addressed during design review.	(c) Visual character (d) Light and glare
City of Burlingame Design Guidelines – Downtown Specific Plan, Bayfront Specific Plan, and North Burlingame/Rollins Road Specific Plan Design Guidelines	All specific plans require individual project consistency with the applicable design guidelines. The guidelines address topics such as: architectural compatibility/consistency/diversity, pedestrian use and character, commercial and residential streetscapes, signage, gateways, building scale, parking, façade design, roof treatment, public open spaces, lighting, site amenities, land use transitions, shadow impacts, landscaping (street trees), and historic building preservation.	Ensures that new development will not degrade the existing visual character of the area. Ensures that potential light and glare impacts will be addressed during design review.	(c) Visual character (d) Light and glare
Hillside Area Construction Permit Requirements	Development in most areas in the hillsides require a Hillside Area Construction Permit, which allows neighbors, the Planning Commission, and City Council an opportunity to review all construction in the hillside area that could affect existing distant views from inside structures on nearby properties.	Helps ensure that scenic vistas from within the Planning area are protected and that scenic views of hillsides are protected.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic resources

**2040 General Plan Healthy People Healthy Places Element – Scenic Resources**

**Table 5-1: Proposed Burlingame Existing Regulations and General Plan Policies to Avoid or Reduce Impacts on Aesthetics and Visual Resources**

Regulation/Policy	Description of Regulation/Policy	How Does It Avoid or Reduce Impact?	Applicable Significance Criteria
Goal HP-7	Protect local scenic resources and preserve views of the natural amenities in the city.	Ensures that local scenic vistas and scenic resources are protected throughout the city.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic highways (c) Visual character (d) Light and glare
Policy HP-7.1: Hillside Development	Continue to require a Hillside Area Construction Permit for all new residences or accessory structures, as well as additions to existing residences or accessory structures, to protect residential viewsheds. Consider establishing specific development standards for hillside residential projects to ensure view preservation in the area.	Helps ensure that scenic vistas from within the planning area are protected and that scenic views of hillsides are protected.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic highways
Policy HP-7.2: State Scenic Highways	Protect officially designated California State Scenic Interstate 280 by maintaining open space and low-density residential land uses along the highway corridor, ensuring roadway signage does not detract from scenic views, and screening unattractive structures with appropriate landscaping.	Maintains and protects Interstate 280, a designated State Scenic Highway, as an important scenic resource.	(b) Scenic highways
Policy HP-7.3: City and County Scenic Roadways	Protect local scenic roadways by preserving mature trees wherever possible, maintaining landscaping along roadways, and ensuring that development and land uses do not detract from the aesthetics of the corridor. Consider establishing specific design guidelines for residential development, commercial development, and roadway signage along scenic corridors.	Protects the visual character and/or quality of the Burlingame planning area and/or its surroundings.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic highways (c) Visual character
Policy HP-7.4: Scenic Gateways	Identify locations for gateway treatments along scenic roadways at key intersections, and establish a cohesive signage aesthetic that enhances scenic views.	Will protect scenic resources within gateway corridors and ensure new signage or gateway features are aesthetically pleasing.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic highways (c) Visual character
Policy HP-7.6: Connectivity to	Coordinate and identify connectivity opportunities between	Enhances the quality of scenic resources and	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic

**Table 5-1: Proposed Burlingame Existing Regulations and General Plan Policies to Avoid or Reduce Impacts on Aesthetics and Visual Resources**

Regulation/Policy	Description of Regulation/Policy	How Does It Avoid or Reduce Impact?	Applicable Significance Criteria
Recreation Amenities	scenic routes and adjacent public recreation areas such as parks, scenic outlooks, and biking and hiking trails. Prioritize the development of separated bicycle lanes along scenic routes to connect with recreational trails.	provides more opportunities for citizens to enjoy the resources.	highways (c) Visual character
Policy HP-7.7: Shoreline Views	Protect views to the Bay shoreline by identifying viewsheds to the Bay from key locations and restricting the height of buildings within these viewsheds. Ensure that new Bayfront development does not detract from the scenic qualities of the area, and consider adopting commercial and hotel design guidelines specific to the Bayfront.	Helps ensure that the views of the bay shoreline are maintained for their scenic qualities and that potential visual impacts of new bay shoreline development are minimized.	(a) Scenic vistas (b) Scenic highways
<b>2040 General Plan Community Character Element – Neighborhoods</b>			
Policy CC-4.2 Attractive Design	Emphasize attractive building and site design by paying careful attention to building scale, mass, placement, architecture, materials, landscaping, screening of equipment, loading areas, signage and other design considerations.	Helps ensure that potential light and glare impacts will be addressed during design review.	(c) Visual character (d) Light and glare
Policy CC-4.7 Hillside Residential Design Standards	Regulate the design of streets, sidewalks, cluster home development, architecture, site design, grading, landscaping, and utilities in hillside areas to protect aesthetics, natural topography, and views of surrounding open space and distant landscapes.	Helps ensure that potential light and glare impacts will be addressed during design review.	(c) Visual character (d) Light and glare

## Conclusions

In most cases, no one regulation, goal, policy, or implementation measure is expected to completely avoid or reduce an identified potential environmental impact. However, the collective, cumulative mitigating benefits of the regulations and policies listed in Table 5-1 will result in a less-than-significant impact related to the identified significance criteria and the corresponding environmental topic listed in Table 5-1. This conclusion is consistent with the purpose and use of a program EIR for a general plan (see EIR Introduction, Chapter 1).

Based on the methodology described above, 2040 General Plan impacts on aesthetics and visual resources would be **less than significant** (see criteria [a] through [d] in subsection 5.2.1, “Significance Criteria,” above). No mitigation is required.