



## 5.1 Aesthetics

---





## 5.1 AESTHETICS

This section assesses the potential for aesthetic impacts using accepted methods of evaluating visual quality, as well as identifying the type and degree of change the proposed project would likely have on the character of a landscape. The analysis in this section is primarily based on information provided by the project Applicant and verified through a site visit conducted by RBF Consulting (RBF) on March 7, 2013. Photographic documentation and visual renderings of the proposed project are utilized to supplement the visual analysis and to fulfill the requirements of CEQA. The visual renderings were provided by the project Applicant and are intended to provide general information on the proposed massing and scale of the project.

### 5.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

The City is located in southern Orange County, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego, on the east side of Interstate 5 (I-5). Adjacent cities include Mission Viejo on the east, Irvine on the west, and Laguna Woods and Laguna Hills on the south. The City is an area of 16.6 square miles located in the heart of South Orange County and Saddleback Valley, between the coastal floodplain and the Santa Ana Mountains. The northeastern portion of the City (the project vicinity) reaches elevations of up to 1,500 feet. The Santa Ana Mountains and foothills can be seen from various points within the City, including major roadways in the project area (such as El Toro Road), while views of the Saddleback Valley floor and the Pacific Ocean can be seen from higher elevations (such as the project site and surrounding Portola Hills community). The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is a prominent visual feature in the project area. Aliso Creek (to the east of the project site) and Serrano Creek (to the west of the project site) flow south, in the project vicinity, and include trails and open space, resulting in a natural/undeveloped character.

The project site (approximately 195 acres of vacant land) is specifically located to the north of State Route 241 (SR-241) and bisected by Glenn Ranch Road; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-1, \*Existing Condition Photographs\*](#). A substantial portion of the site has been extensively graded in the past. The first phase of grading associated with the subject site involved the rough grading from Saddleback Ranch Road from its intersection with Fawn Ridge Road southerly to its intersection with Glenn Ranch Road. The second phase of grading involved the construction of Glenn Ranch Road. The remaining grading phases were essentially accomplished concurrently. These included rough grading of the superjacent Tracts 13981 and 13334; the rough grading of Phase I of Former Tentative Tract 13491; the mass grading of former Tentative Tract 13491 (west of Glenn Ranch Road); and the mass grading for former Tentative Tract 13490 (east of Glenn Ranch Road). Several manmade features exist on the subject property, including a detention basin located south of Glenn Ranch Road as well as several bench drains along the manufactured slopes adjacent to the existing residential development to the east and along the roadways.

Surrounding land uses include the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park to the north and west, residential development to the north and east, and open space to the east (along Aliso Creek) and to the south. The area immediately south of the site is a Southern California Edison utility corridor. The westernmost portion of the site, almost completely surrounded by the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, is not proposed for development and would be retained as permanent open space.



View of surrounding residential uses to the north of the project site.



Typical view of on-site sloping terrain.



View of the northern portion of the project site, bisected by Saddleback Ranch Road.



View looking east towards the intersection of Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road.



## SCENIC VIEWS AND VISTAS

According to the General Plan, Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park and the Saddleback Valley floor are designated as prominent features and El Toro Road (between Santa Margarita Parkway and Live Oak Canyon Road) is designated as a County scenic route.

### Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park

Within the project's viewshed,<sup>1</sup> Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is visible from multiple publicly accessible areas, including motorists traveling along Glenn Ranch Road, as well as recreational bicyclists and pedestrians/hikers using Glenn Ranch Road and nearby trails. Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park encompasses approximately 3,000 acres of riparian and oak woodland canyons, rolling grassland hills, and steep slopes of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. The park includes scenic rock formations, including the Red Rock Canyon, as well as intermittent streams (including Serrano Creek and Aliso Creek) that traverse the park. This County park supports hundreds of recreational users (including bicyclists and hikers) and, due to the visual assets discussed above, this park is considered a prominent feature within the City.

### Designated Scenic Route

The City's General Plan also considers the County General Plan's Scenic Highway Master Plan, which designates El Toro Road (between Santa Margarita Parkway and Live Oak Canyon Road) as a scenic route. With this designation, specific guidelines are given for enhancing the scenic amenities of this facility. Currently within the project's viewshed, views along El Toro Road include sloping topography and hillsides, background views toward the Santa Ana Mountains, and views to native vegetation, including riparian vegetation along Aliso Creek.

### Saddleback Valley Floor

The only public views in the project viewshed that include background views toward the Saddleback Valley floor are those seen from motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians traveling westbound on Glenn Ranch Road, within the western portion of the project site. These background views provide visual change in an urban environment that create interest, and offer important landmarks that communicate a sense of place and location within the community.

## KEY VIEWS

A Key View is an area (in this case, the project site) that can be seen from a particular public location. Selected Key Views, which were determined in consultation with City staff, represent views from certain publicly accessible locations. Key Views represent public views from both the public right-of-way and publicly accessible areas located within the vicinity of the proposed project. Characteristics for each Key View are defined within foreground, middleground, and/or background views. Characteristics located within foreground views are located at close range and tend to

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, a "viewshed" is defined as all of the surface areas visible from the project site. Typical obstructions that limit the project's viewshed include topography, structures, and vegetation (particularly trees).



dominate the view. Characteristics located within middleground views are distinguishable, yet not as sharp as those characteristics located in the foreground views. Features located within the background views have few details and distinctions in landform and surface features. Objects in the background eventually fade to obscurity with increasing distance.

For the purposes of this analysis, RBF used photographic renderings of the project provided by the project Applicant in March 2013. Five Key Views representing views from motorists (traveling along El Toro Road, SR-241, Glenn Ranch Road, and Saddleback Ranch Road), recreational viewers (at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park and Aliso Creek Trail), and public views from residents to the southeast were selected for this analysis; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-2, Key View Locations Map](#). Key Views 1 through 3 were selected to depict potential impacts to scenic views and vistas, while Key Views 4 and 5 were chosen to depict potential impacts to the character/quality of the project area. It is noted that Key Views 1 through 3 depict both scenic views/vistas as well as character/quality. The following describes the viewshed from Key Views 1 through 3; refer to the *Visual Character/Quality* section below for a discussion of Key Views 4 and 5.

Key View 1. Views from Key View 1 are afforded from motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians traveling along El Toro Road and Glenn Ranch Road; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-3, Key View 1 - Existing Condition](#). These westward views encompass the project site and surrounding vacant land. Glenn Ranch Road, and the associated Aliso Creek bridge structure and riparian vegetation are visible in foreground views. Middleground views toward sloping hills and vacant land (associated with the project site) as well as surrounding vacant land are noted. Background views are not afforded as a result of existing topographic conditions.

Key View 2. Views from Key View 2 are generally afforded by residents to the east of the project site as well as motorists traveling along El Toro Road; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-4, Key View 2 - Existing Condition](#). Foreground views toward El Toro Road, Aliso Creek, and associated riparian vegetation are visible. Middleground views encompass vacant lands both on-site and in the surrounding area, as well as surrounding residential development to the north. Sloping hillsides are visible in middleground views. The Santa Ana Mountains are noted in background views.

Key View 3. Views from Key View 3 are afforded from recreational users at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-5, Key View 3 - Existing Condition](#). Foreground views include the unpaved parking lot at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park. Middleground views encompass sloping vacant lands on-site as well as surrounding residential development to the north. Background views are not afforded as a result of existing topographic conditions.

## VISUAL CHARACTER/QUALITY


RBF conducted a photographic inventory of the project area to document the existing visual character and quality of the project site and its surroundings; refer to [Exhibit 5.1-1](#). The most prominent factors influencing the character of the project site and its surroundings include the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, Santa Ana Mountains, the Saddleback Valley floor, as well as trees, creeks, canyons, hillsides, and other open lands.



Source: Google Earth, February 2013.

 - Project Boundary

 - Orientation

 - Photograph Number

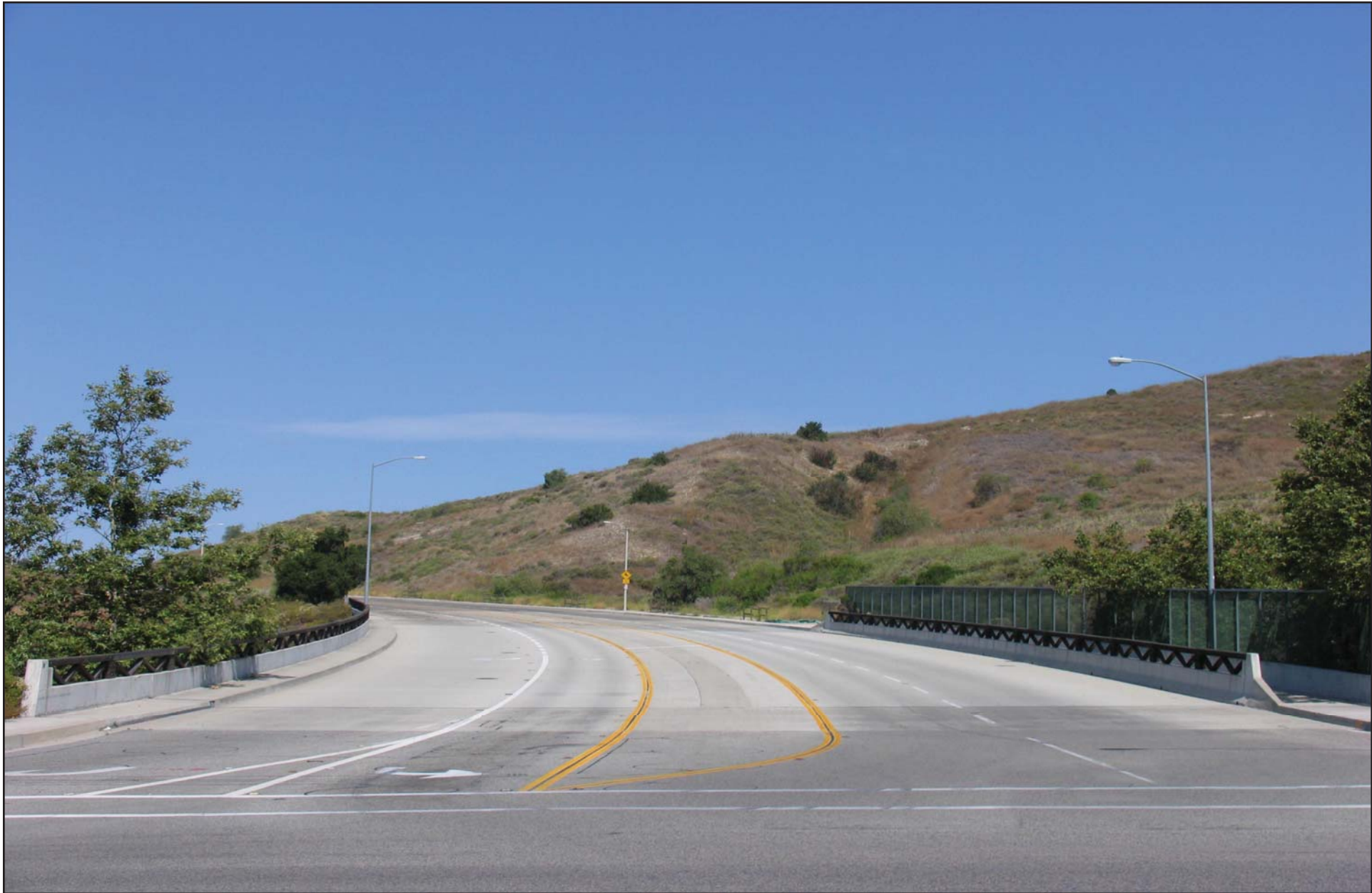
NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Key View Location Map**

**Exhibit 5.1-2**











As discussed in the *City of Lake Forest General Plan (General Plan)*, dated June 21, 1994 and Amended on July 20, 2010<sup>2</sup>, these resources provide visual changes in an urban environment that create interest, and offer important landmarks that communicate a sense of place and location within the community.

The project site is specifically characterized by vacant lands that include grassland, coastal sage scrub, and wetland/riparian vegetation on-site. Surrounding uses include residential uses to the north and east of the project site and recreational uses to the west (Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park) of the project site as well as throughout the general area via recreational trails (including Aliso Creek Trail). As previously noted, the selected Key Views represent views from certain publicly accessible locations. In addition to that described above for Key Views 1 through 3, the following describes the existing character of the site and its surroundings from Key Views 4 and 5.

Key View 4. Views from this Key View are generally afforded to motorists traveling along SR-241 and recreational viewers using Aliso Creek Trail; refer to Exhibit 5.1-6, Key View 4 – Existing Condition. This Key View encompasses foreground views to vacant lands to the south of the project site. Middleground views include the vacant project site as well as the paved Class I bike trail along Aliso Creek, to the east of the project site. Residential development to the north of the project site is also visible. Riparian vegetation along Aliso Creek is noted. Background views include the Santa Ana Mountains.

Key View 5. Views from this Key View are afforded to motorists traveling along Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road; refer to Exhibit 5.1-7, Key View 5 – Existing Condition. This Key View encompasses the intersection of Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road, vacant lands (at the project site), and the paved Saddleback Ranch Road in foreground views. Middleground views include residential development to the north of the project site and associated ornamental landscaping. No background views are afforded as a result of existing topographic conditions.

## 5.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

### LOCAL LEVEL

#### Orange County Master Plan of Scenic Highways

The *Orange County Master Plan of Scenic Highways* designates El Toro Road between Santa Margarita Parkway and Live Oak Canyon Road as a County scenic highway (a Viewscape Corridor). The County identified these designations based on several factors, including the level of development, aesthetic character of the area through which the roadway extends, etc. The treatment intended for the Viewscape Corridor is described below.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Housing Element was amended on September 21, 2010. While the General Plan and its supporting documents may be incorporated by reference and relied upon, pursuant to the Development Agreement only the version of the General Plan in place as of June 1, 2008 applies to the project.







Viewscapes Corridor (Type 1). A viewscapes corridor is a route which traverses a corridor within which unique or unusual scenic resources and aesthetic values are found. This designation is intended to minimize the impact of the highway and land development upon the significant scenic resources along the route. Safety roadside rests and vista points should be developed, when feasible and where appropriate, to enhance any exceptional scenic values. Development of the right-of-way should, to the extent possible, follow the adopted Viewscapes Typical Section prescribed in the Scenic Highway Plan. If utilization of the typical section would destroy the scenic amenities of the corridor, a modification of the standard can be considered. The appropriate width and development of the right-of-way shall be discussed/considered in the scenic corridor implementation plans. With this designation, specific guidelines are given for enhancing the scenic amenities of these facilities.

## City of Lake Forest General Plan

### Land Use Element

The Land Use Element is a guide to land use planning in the City and provides a framework for the environmental and infrastructure issues examined in the other General Plan elements. The Land Use Element identifies how land would be used in the future (for housing, commercial, and business centers, public facilities, parks, open space, and transportation). The planned future land use in the General Plan reflects community goals to maintain a quality suburban environment for families, strengthen the community's distinctive image, diversify and expand the local economy, and preserve natural areas that make the City unique.

Goal 2.0 A distinct image and identity for Lake Forest

- Policy 2.1 Enhance the physical attributes of Lake Forest to create an identifiable and distinct community within Orange County.
- Policy 2.2 Promote high quality in the design of all public and private development projects.

Goal 3.0 New development that is compatible with the community.

- Policy 3.1 Ensure that new development fits within the existing setting and is compatible with the physical characteristics of available land, surrounding land uses, and public infrastructure availability.
- Policy 3.2 Preserve and enhance the quality of Lake Forest residential neighborhoods by avoiding or abating the intrusion of disruptive, nonconforming buildings and uses.
- Policy 3.4 Blend residential and non-residential development with landscaping and architectural design techniques to achieve visual compatibility.



## City of Lake Forest Municipal Code

Design guidelines and provisions related to visual quality of development are included in Title 8 (*Buildings and Construction*, specifically Chapter 8.30, *Lake Forest Grading and Excavation Code*) and Title 9 (*Planning and Zoning*, Chapters 9.02 through 9.224) of the City's Municipal Code, as well as the *Retaining Wall Design Guidelines*, approved by the Lake Forest City Council on June 15, 2010.

Chapter 8.30, *Lake Forest Grading and Excavation Code*. It is the intent of the Lake Forest Grading and Excavation Code is to safeguard life, limb, property, and the public welfare by regulating grading and controlling the quality of water runoff on private and public property within the City. This Code sets forth rules and regulations to control excavation, grading, and earthwork construction, including fills and embankments. Per Sections 8.30.100, *Cuts*, and 8.30.110, *Fills*, cut and fill slopes shall be no steeper than two horizontal to one vertical (2:1) unless otherwise recommended in the soil engineering or engineering geology report and approved by the City Engineer. Further, per Section 8.30.046, *Time of Grading Operations*, grading and equipment operations within one-half mile of a structure for human occupancy shall not be conducted between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. nor on Sunday and Federal holidays. The City Engineer may, however, permit grading or equipment operations during specific hours after 8:00 p.m. or before 7:00 a.m. or on Sunday and Federal holidays if he/she determines that such operations are not detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the inhabitants of such a structure. Permitted hours of operation may be shortened by the City Engineer's finding of a previously unforeseen effect on the health, safety, or welfare of the surrounding community.

Title 9, *Planning and Zoning*. The purpose of the Zoning Code is to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the public, including establishing conditions which would allow all of the land uses to exist in harmony within the community and to promote the stability of existing land uses and to protect them from incompatible and harmful intrusion.

Applicable regulations include Sections 9.44.080 and 9.56.080 of Title 9, which restrict building heights within the single-family residential and multi-family residential districts to 35 feet. Section 9.144.030, *Setback Regulations for Buildings and structures*, also includes setback regulations for single-family residential and multi-family residential districts (including 20-foot front setback requirements). Section 9.144, *General Regulations*, also includes standards and regulations for landscaping, including discretionary approval of a landscape plan; and planting, irrigation, and landscape-related improvements include water efficient landscape.

*Retaining Wall Design Guidelines*. The *Retaining Wall Design Guidelines*, approved by the Lake Forest City Council on June 15, 2010, are an outgrowth of the goals and policies of the Land Use Element of the General Plan pertaining to ensuring that new development is compatible with the community and that a distinctive image and identity is created. The objective of the Guidelines is to ensure that proposed retaining walls are constructed in an aesthetically pleasing and high quality manner that fits within the character of the community. These Guidelines include recommended wall heights and setbacks (the higher the wall the larger the recommended setback), compatibility in context of the surrounding area, design features, visual interest, landscape considerations, as well as safety and maintenance considerations.



Although the *Retaining Wall Design Guidelines* were adopted after the approval of the Development Agreement, the Applicant and the City agreed in the June 2010 Implementing Agreement to “work cooperatively with Portola to review proposed retaining wall designs consistent with these Guidelines that allow for the unique conditions of the site, subject to Section 8.1 (Owner’s Vested Right) and Section 8.3 (Governing Land Use Regulations) of the Development Agreement.” Consistent with the June 2010 Implementing Agreement, the City’s staff reviewed the proposed retaining wall designs, and the Applicant presented the proposed retaining wall designs to the Planning Commission in two workshops on September 27, 2012 and January 10, 2013. The proposed project and retaining walls were revised to incorporate input from staff, the public, and the Planning Commission; and these revised retaining walls are the retaining walls discussed and evaluated in this SEIR.

### 5.1.3 IMPACT THRESHOLDS AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines contains the Initial Study Environmental Checklist form used during preparation of the project Initial Study, which is contained in [Appendix 11.1](#) of this SEIR. The Initial Study includes questions relating to aesthetics and visual resources. The issues presented in the Initial Study Checklist have been utilized as thresholds of significance in this section. Accordingly, a project may create a significant adverse environmental impact if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista (refer to Impact Statement AES-1);
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway (refer to [Section 8.0, \*Effects Found Not to be Significant\*](#));
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings (refer to Impact Statements AES-2 and AES-3); and/or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area (refer to [Section 8.0, \*Effects Found Not to be Significant\*](#)).

Based on the City’s *CEQA Significance Thresholds Guide*, a project would normally have a significant visual impact if one of the following occur:

- A project will substantially damage scenic resources, including scenic vistas from public parks and views from designated scenic highways or arterial roadways.
- A project will create a new source of substantial night lighting that would result in “sky glow” (i.e., illumination of the night sky in urban areas) or “spill light” (i.e., light that falls outside of the area intended to be lighted) onto adjacent sensitive land uses (refer to [Section 8.0, \*Effects Found Not to be Significant\*](#)).
- A project will create a new source of substantial glare which would adversely affect daytime visibility and/or views in the area (refer to [Section 8.0, \*Effects Found Not to be Significant\*](#)).





- A project will substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings where:
  - The project exceeds the allowed height or bulk regulations, or exceeds the prevailing height and bulk of existing structures.
  - The project is proposed to have an architectural style or to use building materials that will be in vivid contrast to an adjacent development where that development had been constructed adhering to a common architectural style or theme.
  - The project is located on a visually prominent site and, due to its height, bulk, architecture or signage, will be in vivid contrast to the surrounding development or environment degrading the visual unity of the area.
  - A project would include unscreened outdoor uses or materials.
  - A project would result in the introduction of an architectural feature or building mass that conflicts with the character of the surrounding development.

Based on these standards, the effects of the proposed project have been categorized as either a “less than significant impact” or a “potentially significant impact.” Mitigation measures are recommended for potentially significant impacts. If a potentially significant impact cannot be reduced to a less than significant level through the application of mitigation, it is categorized as a significant and unavoidable impact.

#### **5.1.4 OVERVIEW OF OSA PEIR AESTHETICS ANALYSIS**

The OSA PEIR analyzed potential aesthetic impacts (i.e., impacts to scenic views/vistas and the degradation of character/quality) associated with the proposed Lake Forest Opportunities Study. The OSA PEIR concluded that potential aesthetic impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level with compliance with statutory requirements, as described below.

The OSA PEIR found that development proposed within the project site would be similar in style and design to other uses in the vicinity. While some parcels on the OSA are more visually prominent than others due to topography or location (including Site 2 [the project site]), adherence to development guidelines in the City’s Municipal Code, applicable Planned Community Text documents, height, bulk, architecture, and/or signage would ensure that development in the OSA would not contrast with or degrade the visual unity of the surrounding areas. Specific development proposals would be subject to the City’s design review process, with approval by the Planning Commission, which would further ensure compatibility with surrounding architectural styles. Municipal Code regulations for screening outdoor uses and materials would be required to be followed. The impact on visual quality relative to development on Site 2 (the project site) was determined to be less than significant.

Views from the site consist primarily of the existing Portola Hills and Foothill Ranch communities, the Santa Ana Mountains, and Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park to the north and west. Due to its



elevation, views to the south and east include panoramic views of the Saddleback Valley, including portions of Mission Viejo and Lake Forest. Development on Site 2 (the project site), depending on siting and building height, could partially or completely obstruct views from a given vantage point. As the proposed Lake Forest Opportunities Study would convert a primarily undeveloped area to development, if it creates view barriers from El Toro Road, which is on the County's Master Plan of Scenic Highways or arterial roadways, this impact could be significant. There are no natural features that have been identified by the City or any applicable plans that would be affected by the proposed Lake Forest Opportunities Study.

Development on Site 2 (the project site) would alter the view of this area by adding development to existing undeveloped lands adjacent to open space areas. While development may alter views from arterial roadways and SR-241, no views of scenic resources such as the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, Santa Ana Mountains, or panoramic views of the Saddleback Valley would be blocked. Because there would be no further obstruction of viewsheds by development on Site 2 (the project site) than what existed at the time of the OSA PEIR, this impact was determined to be less than significant.

Site 2 (the project site) is located near the portion of El Toro Road that is designated on the *Orange County Master Plan of Scenic Highways*. Portions of the site are visible from El Toro Road. The conceptual plan for the site shows a significant buffer between El Toro Road and the nearest development. It is anticipated that the nearest structure within Portola Center is approximately 930 feet from El Toro Road. The developed pad is approximately 80 feet higher than El Toro Road. The development pad closest to El Toro Road is approximately 700 feet from El Toro Road. The conceptual land plan places a neighborhood park at this location. Specific developments within Site 2 (the project site), which are visible from El Toro Road, would be reviewed by the City for consistency with the applicable *Orange County Master Plan of Scenic Highways* guidelines at the Area Plan or Site Plan level. Therefore, impacts related to the designated scenic highway were determined to be less than significant.

## 5.1.5 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### SCENIC VIEWS AND VISTAS

#### AES-1 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WOULD NOT HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL ADVERSE AFFECT ON A SCENIC VIEW OR VISTA.

**Impact Analysis:** As previously noted, Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park and the Saddleback Valley floor are designated as prominent features and El Toro Road (between Santa Margarita Parkway and Live Oak Canyon Road) is designated as a County scenic route. The OSA PEIR concluded that development on the project site, depending on siting and building height, could partially or completely obstruct views from a given vantage point. As the proposed Lake Forest Opportunities Study would convert primarily undeveloped area to development, if it creates view barriers from El Toro Road, this impact could be significant. In order to verify resultant view obstruction, the Applicant provided photo renderings for each Key View location in order to demonstrate the degree of change resulting from project implementation. These renderings have been utilized to depict, at a conceptual level of detail, the "proposed" project conditions. It should be noted that these renderings are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the



form, size, and scale of the proposed structures within the project area. The following analyzes the project's effects on scenic views associated with Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park and the designated County scenic route along El Toro Road, as experienced from motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians (Key Views 1 and 2) and recreational users (Key View 3).

Key View 1. Views from Key View 1 are afforded from motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians traveling along El Toro Road and Glenn Ranch Road. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the alteration of topography, the replacement of grassland and coastal sage scrub with native, drought-tolerant species (for designated native open space areas and fuel modification zones), and new residential structures; refer to Exhibit 5.1-8, Key View 1 - Proposed Condition. Foreground views to Glenn Ranch Road, the associated Aliso Creek bridge structure, and riparian vegetation associated with Aliso Creek would remain visible. The sloping hills in middleground views have been altered and vacant land has been replaced with new landscaping, fencing improvements along the Aliso Serrano Equestrian Trail (located to the north and along Glenn Ranch Road), and new residential structures have been introduced. Views to the surrounding vacant land uses would remain.

Key View 2. Views from Key View 2 are generally afforded by residents to the east of the project site as well as motorists traveling along El Toro Road; refer to Exhibit 5.1-9, Key View 2 - Proposed Condition. Foreground views toward El Toro Road, Aliso Creek, and associated riparian vegetation remain visible. The sloping hills have been altered and vacant land in middleground views have been replaced with residential uses and native, drought-tolerant landscaping (for designated fuel modification zones). Views to surrounding residential uses and background views to the Santa Ana Mountains remain.

Key View 3. Views from Key View 3 are afforded from recreational users at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park; refer to Exhibit 5.1-10, Key View 3 - Proposed Condition. Foreground views toward the unpaved parking lot would remain visible. Middleground views of sloping vacant lands have been altered and new residential uses have been constructed. Associated retaining walls and ornamental landscaping have also been installed. The surrounding residential development to the north remains visible.

As previously discussed, the OSA PEIR concluded that development on the project site, depending on siting and building height, could partially or completely obstruct views from a given vantage point. As discussed in Key View 3 above, the project site would impact views as seen from recreational users at Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park. Other recreational viewers that would have view impacts would include bicyclists, hikers, and pedestrians using the Aliso Serrano Riding and Hiking Trail and Aliso Creek Trail. Although the project would alter these views, as concluded in the OSA PEIR, no views of scenic resources such as the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park or the Santa Ana Mountains would be blocked. Refer to Impact Statement AES-3 for an analysis of the change in character/quality during project operations from these viewers. Because designated visual resources would not be obstructed by the proposed project, a less than significant impact would result.



Source: Hunsaker & Associates Irvine, Inc.

Note: For comparative purposes, site photographs are utilized to demonstrate the general character at different points of the project area. These simulations are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the form, size, and scale of the proposed improvements within the project area.



Source: Hunsaker & Associates Irvine, Inc.

Note: For comparative purposes, site photographs are utilized to demonstrate the general character at different points of the project area. These simulations are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the form, size, and scale of the proposed improvements within the project area.



Source: Hunsaker & Associates Irvine, Inc.

Note: For comparative purposes, site photographs are utilized to demonstrate the general character at different points of the project area. These simulations are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the form, size, and scale of the proposed improvements within the project area.



The OSA PEIR also concluded that potential view blockage from El Toro Road could result from proposed development and that this impact could be significant. As discussed in Key Views 1 and 2 above, implementation of the proposed project would alter the visible topography and increase the appearance of hardscape in the area. However, the project would not result in view obstructions to the Santa Ana Mountains, riparian vegetation associated with Aliso Creek, or vacant lands surrounding the project site to the west and south. Thus, implementation of the proposed project would not result in view blockage as seen from motorists traveling along El Toro Road. Refer to Impact Statement AES-3 for an analysis of the change in character/quality during project operations as seen from motorists traveling along El Toro Road. Project implementation would result in a less than significant impact in this regard.

It should be noted that the OSA PEIR also identified potential impacts from views looking south, toward Saddleback Valley due to its elevation. The only public views in the project viewshed that include background views toward the Saddleback Valley floor are those seen from motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians traveling westbound on Glenn Ranch Road, within the western portion of the project site. These westward background views from viewers in the western portion of the project site provide visual change in a developed area that creates interest, and offers important landmarks that communicate a sense of place and location within the community. Implementation of the proposed project may alter the foreground views as seen from these viewers in the western portion of the project site, as the new Neighborhood Park to the south and new residential uses to the north would be visible. However, the distant views toward the Saddleback Valley floor would not be obstructed. Further, upon implementation of the proposed grading activities at the project site, these views may result in more distant views toward the Saddleback Valley floor as a result in the alteration of topography at the project site, particularly from the proposed Neighborhood Park at the southeastern corner of the intersection of Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road. This new public view would allow increased views toward the Saddleback Valley floor to the south. Thus, project impacts in this regard would be less than significant.

**Standard Conditions of Approval:** No Standard Conditions of Approval are applicable to this topical area.

**Applicable OSA Mitigation Measures:** No OSA PEIR Mitigation Measures are applicable to this topical area.

**Additional Mitigation Measures:** No additional mitigation measures are required.

**Level of Significance:** Less Than Significant Impact.

## SHORT-TERM VISUAL CHARACTER/QUALITY

### **AES-2 PROJECT CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES WOULD NOT TEMPORARILY DEGRADE THE VISUAL CHARACTER/QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.**

**Impact Analysis:** The OSA PEIR did not consider potential impacts to the degradation of character/quality as a result of short-term construction impacts. As described in [Section 3.5, Phasing/Construction](#), the Area Plan contains a Public Facilities Financing and Phasing (PFFP) Plan



identifying backbone infrastructure and a phasing plan for development of the three Planning Areas (the Northwest, Northeast, and South Planning Areas). The PFFP Plan specifies timing for the development of public facilities and infrastructure in accordance with construction of homes, parks, and commercial space.

Construction-related activities would temporarily influence the character of the project site, as viewed from surrounding sensitive viewers. Surrounding sensitive receptors that would have long duration views of the project site during construction include single-family residential uses (Portola Hills community) to the north and residential uses to the east. Sensitive receptors that would have moderate and short duration views would include recreational users at the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park; hikers, bicyclists, and pedestrians using recreational trails throughout the project area; and motorists traveling along El Toro Road, Glenn Ranch Road, and Saddleback Ranch Road.

During construction of the proposed Tentative Tract Map Nos. 15353 and 17300, construction activities would intermittently alter the character of the project site and its surroundings. Graded surfaces, construction debris, construction equipment, and truck traffic would be visible. Additionally, during the grading stage soil would be stockpiled and equipment would be staged at various locations throughout the project site. The duration and intensity of project construction would vary with each stage. Most of the heavy equipment would be on-site for the period needed to complete the grading. Additional Mitigation Measure TRA-1 would require the preparation of a Construction Management Plan, which specifies requirements for equipment and vehicle staging areas, stockpiling of materials, fencing (i.e., temporary fencing with opaque material), and haul route(s). All staging areas would be required to be sited and screened in a manner that would minimize public views and views from surrounding residents to the staging areas. Implementation of the Additional Mitigation Measure TRA-1 would minimize the visual impacts, as viewed by the surrounding residents, recreational users, and motorists. As these impacts are temporary in nature and would cease upon project completion, the project's construction-related impacts to the visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings would be reduced to less than significant levels.

**Standard Conditions of Approval:** No Standard Conditions of Approval are applicable to this topical area.

**Applicable OSA Mitigation Measures:** No OSA PEIR Mitigation Measures are applicable to this topical area.

**Additional Mitigation Measures:** Refer to Additional Mitigation Measure TRA-1.

**Level of Significance:** Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated.

## LONG-TERM VISUAL CHARACTER/QUALITY

### AES-3 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WOULD NOT DEGRADE THE VISUAL CHARACTER/QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

**Impact Analysis:** According to the OSA PEIR (page 7-40 of the OSA Final PEIR), the project site would include development of 930 dwelling units, 40,000 square feet of commercial development, and 8 acres of neighborhood park uses (Alternative 7 or Hybrid Alternative). Development





associated with the OSA would be at densities similar to those within existing developed areas within Lake Forest and would comply with City's Zoning Code requirements. The commercial uses proposed at the project site were anticipated to be neighborhood serving commercial uses consistent with the proposed neighborhoods. Therefore, the provision of housing and commercial uses on the project site was not anticipated to exceed allowed height or bulk regulations, and was not anticipated to substantially degrade the visual quality of the OSA. The OSA PEIR analysis anticipated that development associated with the Opportunities Study would change the character of the site from vacant land to a developed area; however, it was not anticipated to substantially degrade the visual quality of the OSA by detracting from the overall image of the City, or result in buildings that exceed or would be in vivid contrast to adjacent development. Further, as the proposed development was anticipated to be similar in style and design to other similar uses in the City, it would not degrade views from adjacent roadways or uses. The OSA PEIR concluded that although the project site is visually prominent due to topography and location, adherence to development guidelines in the City's Municipal Code, applicable Area Plan, and height, bulk, architecture, and/or signage regulations, development would not conflict with the surrounding development or environment, or degrade the visual unity of the area. Per the OSA PEIR, impacts on visual quality were concluded to be less than significant.

Implementation of the proposed project would alter the visual character of the site and its surroundings, as the existing vacant land would be replaced with residential, mixed use, park, and open space uses. Photo renderings were prepared to demonstrate the degree of change resulting from project implementation (Key Views 1 through 5). Key Views 1 through 3 are discussed in Impact Statement AES-1. The following analyzes the project's effects on the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, as depicted from SR-241 and Aliso Creek Trail (Key View 4), and motorists traveling along Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road (Key View 5).

Key View 4. Views from this Key View are afforded to motorists traveling along SR-241 as well as recreational viewers along Aliso Creek Trail. Project implementation would result in the alteration of visible topography, vegetation removal, and the development of residential uses; refer to Exhibit 5.1-11, Key View 4 – Proposed Condition. Foreground views to vacant lands to the south of the project site would remain similar to existing conditions. Middleground views toward vacant lands would be replaced with residential uses and associated ornamental landscaping. The paved Class I bike trail along Aliso Creek and riparian vegetation (associated with Aliso Creek) to the east of the project site and background views toward the Santa Ana Mountains would remain, similar to existing conditions. Residential development to the north of the project site would also remain visible.

Key View 5. Views from this Key View are afforded to motorists traveling along Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road. As depicted on Exhibit 5.1-12, Key View 5 – Proposed Condition, vacant lands have been replaced with residential development. Altered topography and increased hardscape as a result of retaining walls, soundwalls, and buildings are visible in foreground views. Views to the paved Saddleback Ranch Road in the foreground and ornamental landscaping in the middleground remain. The majority of middleground views toward residential development to the north are obstructed by new intervening structures similar to the existing structures to the north. Introduced ornamental landscaping is also visible in foreground views.



Source: Hunsaker & Associates Irvine, Inc.

Note: For comparative purposes, site photographs are utilized to demonstrate the general character at different points of the project area. These simulations are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the form, size, and scale of the proposed improvements within the project area.



Source: Hunsaker & Associates Irvine, Inc.

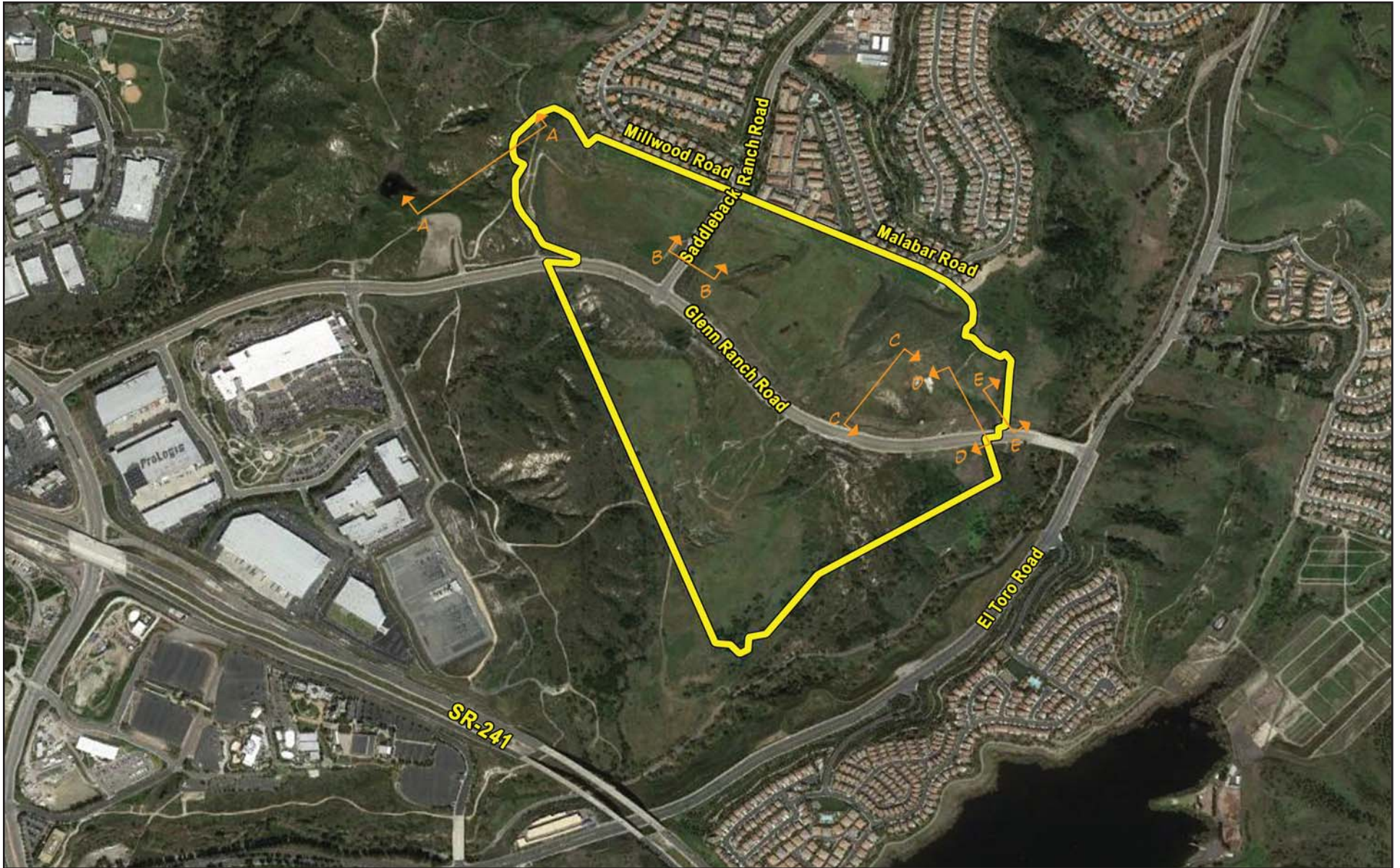
Note: For comparative purposes, site photographs are utilized to demonstrate the general character at different points of the project area. These simulations are subject to change and are intended to provide the reader with information on the form, size, and scale of the proposed improvements within the project area.



Overall, the project proposes the development of residential, mixed use, park, and open space uses. The proposed development would change the character of the project site, replacing vacant lands with new development. The residential development would be at densities similar to those existing in Lake Forest and would be subject to the Municipal Code and Area Plan requirements. The commercial uses would be neighborhood-serving and compatible with the proposed neighborhoods. The proposed residential and commercial uses would be subject to compliance with the City's Zoning Code, as well as the Area Plan Community Design Guidelines and Development Standards (Area Plan Chapter 6) with respect to site planning (building height and setbacks, screening, and landscaping), walls and fences, and architectural design (styles and components). Among other features, the project also proposes conventional concrete block retaining walls and Mechanically Stabilized Earth (MSE) Walls along the site's southern and eastern edges, as well as along Glenn Ranch Road, and intermittently throughout the interior portions of the project.

Although previously anticipated in the OSA PEIR, the height, length, location, and other characteristics of the walls were unknown until the site-specific design progressed to the Tentative Tract Map stage. In addition, since the certification of the OSA PEIR and approval of the Development Agreement, the City has adopted new Retaining Wall Design Guidelines. The Development Agreement provides that the project is not subject to any subsequently adopted land use regulations unless the Applicant agrees in writing. In the Implementing Agreement, the City agreed to "work cooperatively with Portola to review proposed retaining wall designs consistent with these Guidelines that allow for the unique conditions of the site, subject to Section 8.1 (Owner's Vested Right) and Section 8.3 (Governing Land Use Regulations) of the Development Agreement." As noted above, the City's staff reviewed the proposed retaining wall designs, and the Applicant presented the proposed retaining wall designs to the Planning Commission at two workshops. The proposed retaining walls were revised to incorporate input from staff, the public, and the Planning Commission, and these revised retaining walls have been designed to be compatible with the City's Retaining Wall Design Guidelines to ensure that the walls are constructed in an aesthetically pleasing and high quality manner that fits within the character of the community.

More specifically, the walls for TTM No. 15353 would generally range in height from 1 to 7 feet (retaining walls and 10 to 30 feet [MSE walls]). The walls for TTM No. 17300 would generally range in height from 1 to 6 feet (retaining walls), 5.5 to 20 feet (MSE walls), and 8 to 16 feet (soil nail wall). Further, the project would be required to install two 6-foot soundwalls in the northwestern area, three 6-foot soundwalls in the northeastern area, and two 6-foot soundwalls in the southern area, along Glenn Ranch Road and Saddleback Ranch Road. Exhibit 5.1-13, *Wall Cross-Sections Key Map*, and Exhibit 5.1-14 through Exhibit 5.1-18, generally illustrate the proposed wall features that would be constructed as part of the proposed project. Although the proposed MSE walls are intended to be aesthetically pleasing due to the incorporation of landscaping, this increase in hardscape as a result of new wall features would alter the character of the area. In addition to Retaining Wall Design Guidelines, the proposed project would be required to install appropriate landscaping and/or architectural treatments, similar in character to the surrounding community, in order to minimize the appearance of hardscape and/or to break up the visual monotony imposed by large wall features (Additional Mitigation Measure AES-1). With implementation of the Retaining Wall Design Guidelines and Additional Mitigation Measure AES-1, the increased appearance of new wall features would be reduced to less than significant levels.



Source: Google Earth, February 2013.

— Project Boundary

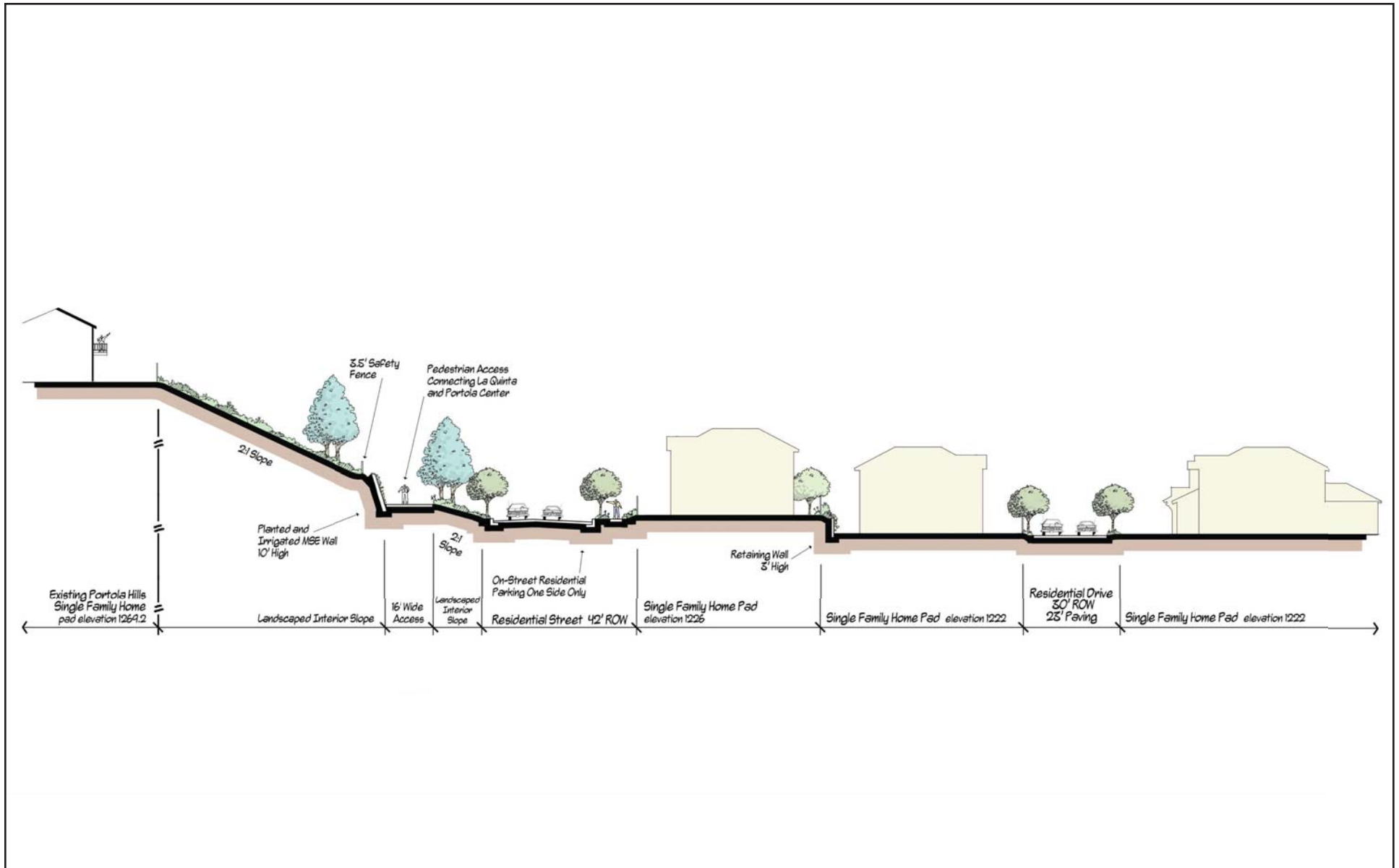
NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Wall Cross-Sections Key Map**

**Exhibit 5.1-13**



Source: Design-Fusion International, Inc., December 21, 2012.

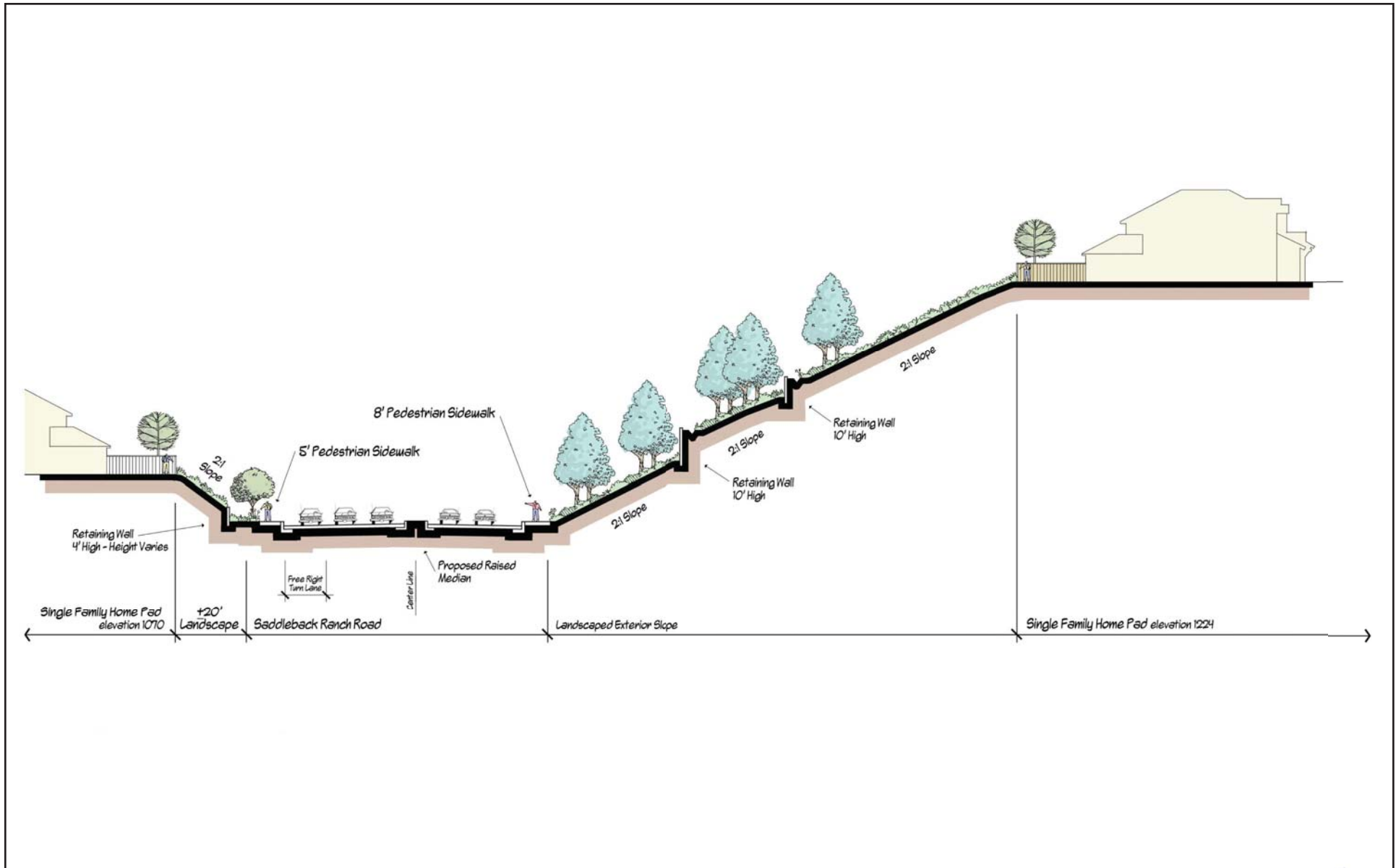
NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Section A-A – Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park**

**Exhibit 5.1-14**



Source: Design-Fusion International, Inc., December 21, 2012.

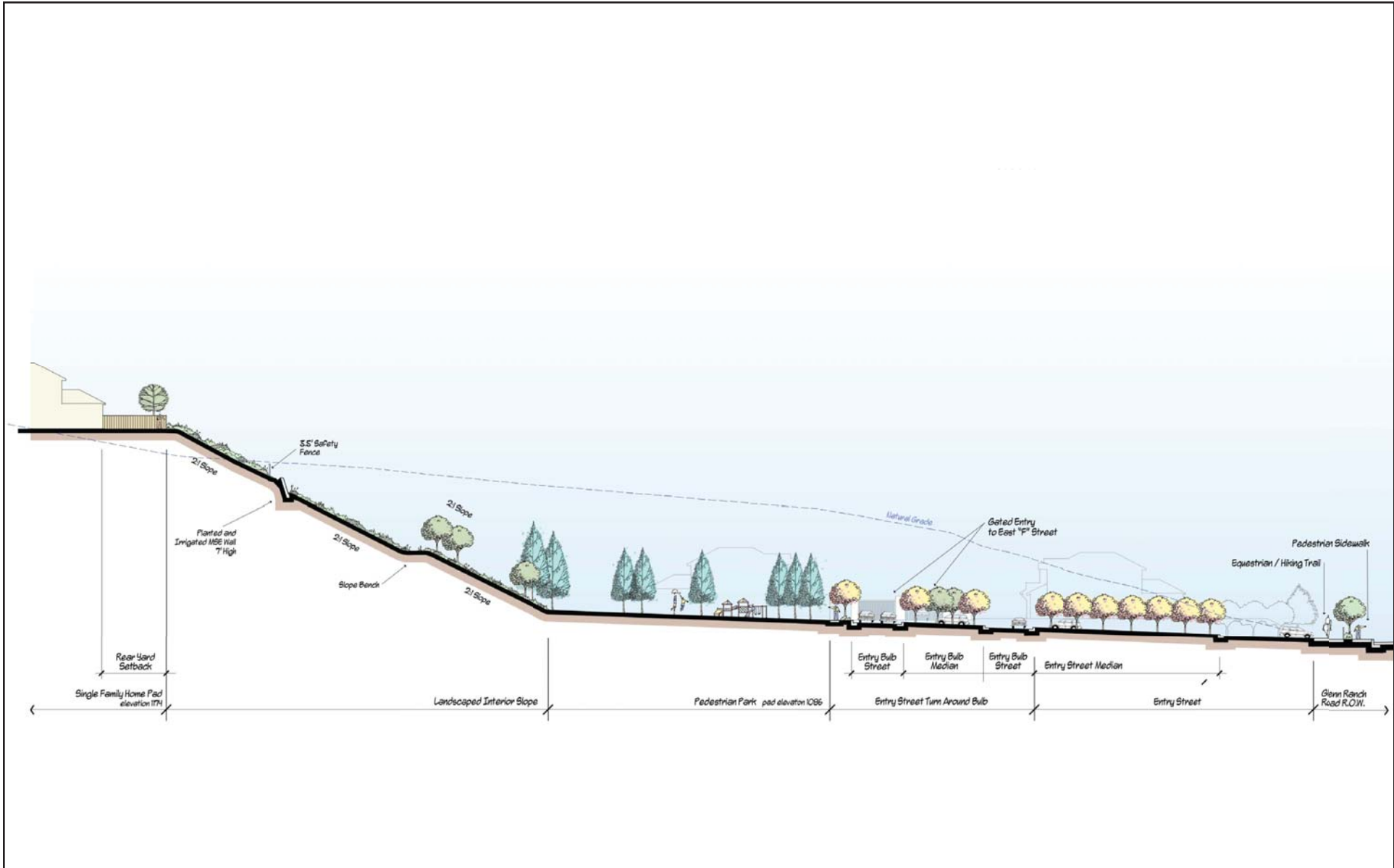
NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Section B-B – Saddleback Ranch Road**

**Exhibit 5.1-15**



Source: Design-Fusion International, Inc., December 21, 2012.

NOT TO SCALE

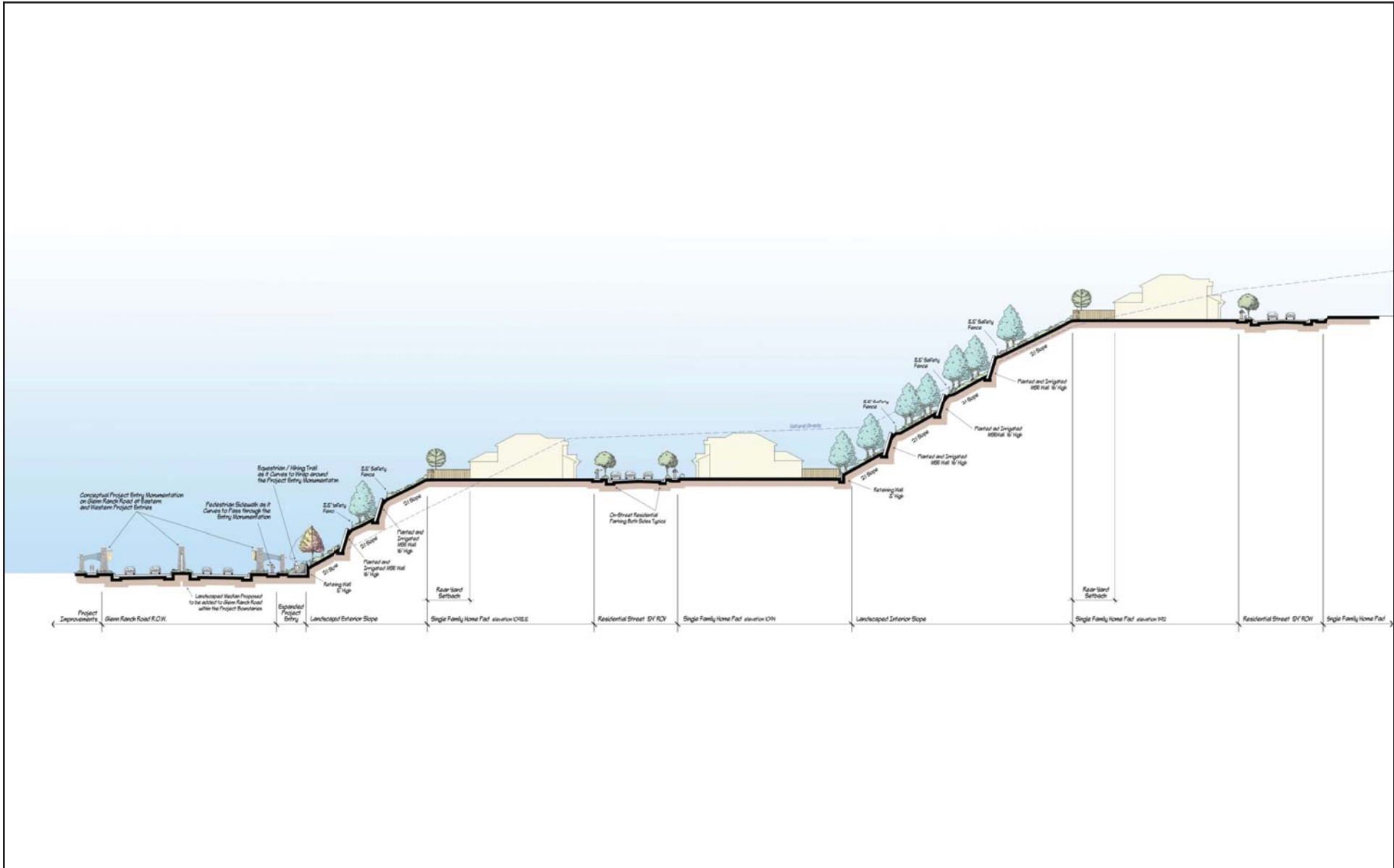


06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Section C-C – New Entry at Glenn Ranch Road**

**Exhibit 5.1-16**





Source: Design-Fusion International, Inc., December 21, 2012.

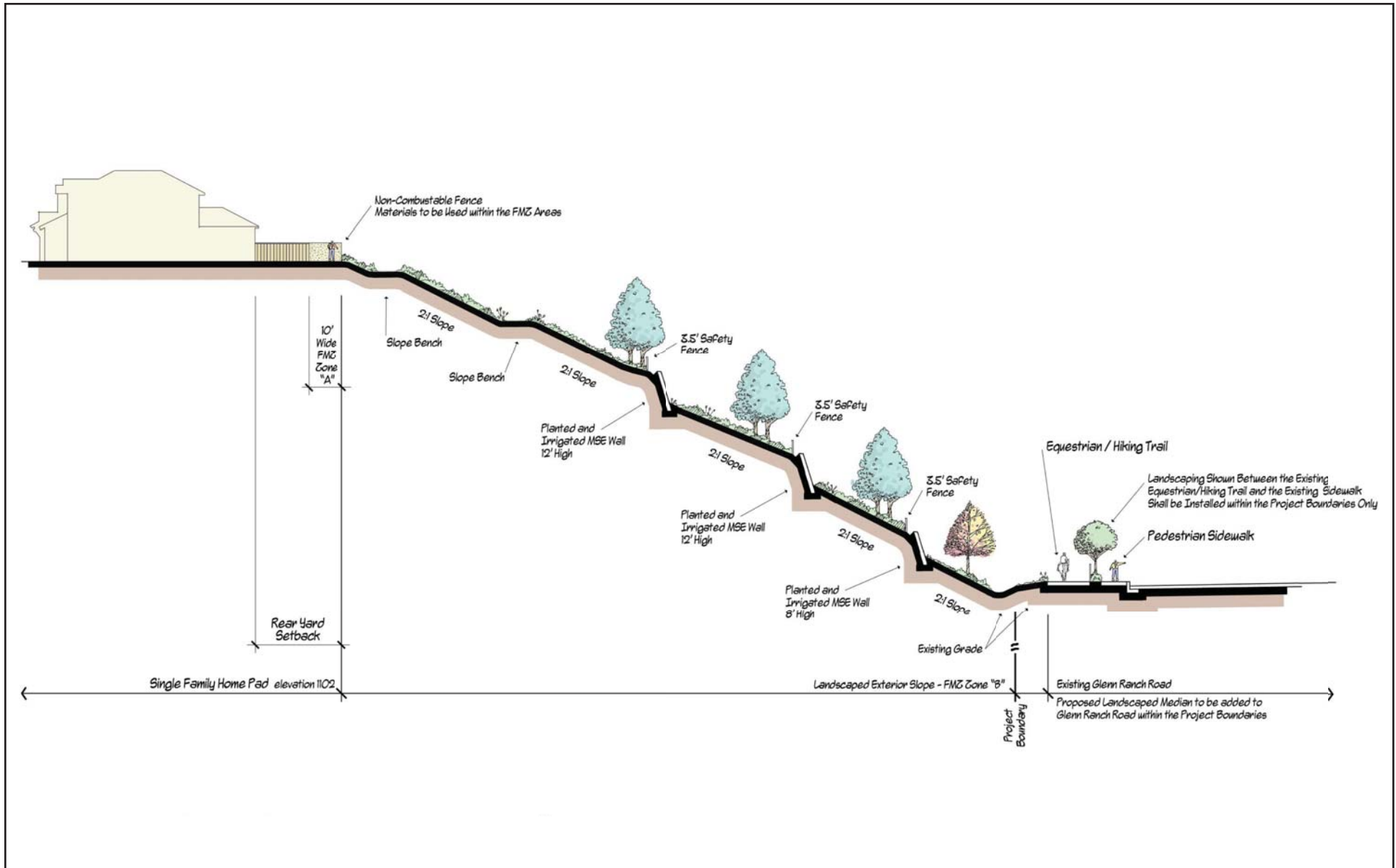
NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Section D-D – Eastern Project Area**

**Exhibit 5.1-17**



Source: Design-Fusion International, Inc., December 21, 2012.

NOT TO SCALE



06/13 • JN 10-107644 [130079]

PORTOLA CENTER PROJECT  
 SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
**Section E-E – Northeastern Project Area**

**Exhibit 5.1-18**



Overall, the proposed project is considered compatible in massing and scale to the surrounding uses, including the existing Portola Hills community to the north and other residential development to the east of the project site. Similar to that analyzed in the OSA PEIR, the proposed project would not detract from the overall image of the City, or result in buildings that exceed or would be in vivid contrast to adjacent development. Further, as the proposed development was anticipated to be similar in style and design to other similar uses to the north and east of the project site, it would not degrade views from adjacent roadways or uses. Although the project site is visually prominent due to topography and location, adherence to development guidelines in the City's Municipal Code, Area Plan Community Design Guidelines and Development Standards (including those pertaining to height, bulk, architecture, and/or signage regulations), and implementation of the recommended Additional Mitigation Measure AES-1, development would not conflict with the surrounding development or environment, or degrade the visual unity of the area. Thus, impacts pertaining to the long-term degradation of character/quality would be less than significant.

***Standard Conditions of Approval:***

- LS1 Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit to the Director of Development Services for review and approval a precise landscape and irrigation construction plan prepared by a licensed landscape architect for the project, considering the Landscape Concept provided in the approved Area Plan, and consistent with the approved Landscape Concept Plans for the project. ~~conceptual landscape plans approved by the Planning Commission on \_\_\_\_\_, 200\_.~~
- LS2 Prior to the issuance of a certificate of ~~use and~~ occupancy for the project, the applicant shall have installed landscaping and irrigation in accordance with the approved Landscape Concept Plans~~plan~~. The applicant shall submit a landscape installation verification letter to the Director of Development Services from a licensed landscape architect indicating that the landscaping for the project was installed in accordance with the approved plan.
- ME2 Prior to issuance of a certificate of occupancy, the applicant shall insure that mechanical equipment placed on any roof such as, but not limited to, air conditioning, heating, ventilating ducts and exhaust fans shall be screened from view through the use of approved roof screens, recessed roof wells and/or use of the building parapets.
- MHC1 Within 60 days after the termination of the use of the subject property as a model home/sales complex, the parking lot and temporary fencing shall be removed or revised as necessary to comply with the current applicable zoning regulations. Within six months following the removal of the parking lot improvement and trailer, the lots upon which the parking lot and trailer were situated shall be either planted with grass or improved with dwellings.

The following are Standard Conditions of Approval considered as part of the City's *Retaining Wall Design Guidelines*, approved by City Council on June 15, 2010.

- RWDG1 An encroachment permit shall be obtained from the Public Works Department for any wall adjacent to or within the public right-of-way.



RWDG2 All retaining walls and associated landscaping shall be maintained in the City-approved condition.

The following conditions of approval shall be applied to any project that contains retaining walls which are: (a) under common ownership and/or (b) traverse multiple, independently-owned parcels:

RWDG3 The Codes, Covenants, and Restrictions (CC&Rs) shall be submitted to the City for review and approval by the Director of Development Services, the Director of Public Works/City Engineer, and the City Attorney, prior to recordation. CC&Rs shall identify the entity (e.g., property owners association) responsible and liable for the maintenance and repair of all common area improvements and shall specify those improvements, including but not limited to: retaining walls, non-retaining walls, slopes, landscaping, irrigation and drainage improvements, private streets, driveways, walkways, and community facilities. The CC&R's shall identify the mechanism for funding all necessary (anticipated and unanticipated) maintenance and repairs.

RWDG4 A property owner's association shall be formed for the purpose of assuming maintenance responsibility for retaining walls in all instances where retaining walls traverse multiple independently owned parcels.

**Applicable OSA Mitigation Measures:** No OSA PEIR Mitigation Measures are applicable to this topical area.

**Additional Mitigation Measures:**

AES-1 To minimize visual impacts caused by the new wall features (i.e., retaining walls, MSE walls, and soundwalls), aesthetic treatments shall be developed consistent with the Portola Hills Area Plan (i.e., terraced, color treatment, textural treatment, varying materials, landscaping, etc.), in consultation with the Director of Development Services, for new walls within the proposed project (per the discretion of the City design review) prior to issuance of a grading permit. Structural themes (i.e., walls, sidewalk, etc.) shall be similar in character to the surrounding environment and shall be in conformance with the Portola Center Area Plan and Portola Hills Planned District, as applicable.

**Level of Significance:** Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated.

## 5.1.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

■ **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT, TOGETHER WITH CUMULATIVE PROJECTS, WOULD NOT RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT AESTHETIC IMPACTS IN THE PROJECT AREA.**

**Impact Analysis:** Section 15355 of the *CEQA Guidelines* requires an analysis of cumulative impacts, which are defined as, “two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable, or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.” Thus, as outlined in



Table 4-1, *Cumulative Projects List*, the following project has been identified as having the potential to interact with the proposed project's viewshed:

- Sky Ridge (South of the intersection of Live Oak Canyon Road and El Toro Road/Santiago Canyon Road; Glenn Ranch Road and Ridgeline Drive are located south and north of the site, respectively) – The Project site comprises 40.26 acres, which includes the proposed Skyridge neighborhood (28.5 acres) and the proposed inclusion of 11.81 additional acres into the City's sphere of influence, are located in an unincorporated area within southern Orange County. The Skyridge site, which includes development of approximately 28.45 acres with 84 homes.
- Saddleback Meadows (Ridgeline Road and El Toro Road) – 266 single-family residential units.

Implementation of the proposed project would result in less than significant impacts pertaining to scenic views/vistas. The project's impacts, in addition to those anticipated as a result of the Skyridge and Saddleback Meadows developments, are not anticipated to incrementally contribute to significant impacts to scenic views/vistas, as implementation of these developments would not result in visual barriers to prominent features (such as the Santa Ana Mountains or the Saddleback Valley floor).

The proposed project, in addition to the Skyridge and Saddleback Meadows developments, is not anticipated to result in significant impacts to the change in character/quality during construction. Although the cumulative development projects are anticipated to take a few years to construct, these projects are anticipated to be constructed prior to commencement of the proposed project, as both developments have already been approved. Further, in the event that these projects along with the proposed project are constructed at the same time, implementation of standard federal, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to grading and construction would ensure that impacts in this regard would remain less than significant.

The proposed project, in addition to the cumulative projects, would increase the developed appearance of the project area, altering the character of the area. However, both the project site and cumulative project sites are located in a developed area. Development of similar character is already present to the north, east, and southeast. Further, these potential impacts would be minimized through the design review process for developments (per each local jurisdiction) that would require the incorporation of architectural features (i.e., material, texture, color, form, type of construction, detail, and building system) and building scales compatible with the surrounding land uses. Potential impacts would also be minimized through incorporation of appropriate setbacks, landscaping design, and buffering and screening techniques. Each project would undergo design review and be analyzed in order to adhere as closely as possible to each of the local jurisdiction's respective Zoning Code requirements. Thus, cumulative impacts pertaining to long-term character/quality would be less than significant, and the proposed project would not cumulatively contribute to long-term visual impacts.

***Standard Conditions of Approval:*** Refer to Standard Conditions LS1, LS2, ME2, and MHC1.



**Applicable OSA Mitigation Measures:** No OSA PEIR Mitigation Measures are applicable to this topical area.

**Additional Mitigation Measures:** Refer to Additional Mitigation Measures TRA-1 and AES-1.

**Level of Significance:** Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated.

## 5.1.7 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Implementation of the proposed project would not result in any significant impacts pertaining to aesthetics upon implementation of Standard Conditions of approval and the Additional Mitigation Measures TRA-1 and AES-1.