

## **3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES**

### **3.1.1 Introduction**

This section describes existing aesthetic and visual resources of the Project Area. In particular, descriptions of existing visual characteristics, both on site and in the vicinity of the Project Area, are presented. Existing plans and policies relevant to aesthetic and visual resource issues associated with implementation of the project are provided. Potential impacts to aesthetic and visual resources due to the project are evaluated, based on analyses of photographs, site reconnaissance, and project data. Impacts associated with increased light and glare and impacts to scenic views are analyzed in detail in this section. Finally, mitigation measures (MM) intended to reduce significant impacts to aesthetic and visual resources are proposed, where appropriate.

Data used for this section were obtained from various sources, including previous environmental documentation and feasibility studies prepared for the city, and other city data sources. Full bibliographic entries for all reference materials are provided at the end of this section. No comments were received regarding visual quality in response to the Notice of Preparation for the proposed project.

### **3.1.2 Environmental Setting**

#### **■ Regional Characteristics**

The City of Lake Forest is located in southern Orange County, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego, on the east side of Interstate 5 (see Figure 2-1, Regional Location). Adjacent cities include Mission Viejo on the east, Irvine on the west, and Laguna Woods and Laguna Hills on the south. The Cleveland National Forest in unincorporated Orange County lies immediately north of the City.

The City of Lake Forest, with a population of approximately 77,700 as of January 2004 (California Department of Finance), 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 (see Figure 2-1, Regional Location). The western portion of the City is near sea level, while the northeastern portion 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, while views of the Saddleback Valley floor and the Pacific Ocean can be seen from higher elevations. The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is a prominent visual feature in the northern portion of the City, located generally between the planned communities of Portola Hills and Foothill Ranch. Aliso Creek, Serrano Creek, and two smaller creeks traverse the city. Significant portions of Aliso Creek and Serrano Creek include trails and open space and have a natural/undeveloped character. The City also has two manmade lakes, which are located within residential developments.

The City has developed as a series of primarily residential planned communities. Development within each planned community is designed to be compatible and form a consistent visual image. In other areas

of the City, particularly near Interstate 5, residential neighborhoods have not developed as part of planned communities.

One- to three-story commercial development is concentrated near Interstate 5 and along the primary arterials of El Toro Road, Lake Forest Drive, Bake Parkway, and Portola Parkway. The southern portion of the City is the most developed.

## ■ Project Area Characteristics

### *Project Location and Boundaries*

The Project Area is the area formerly encumbered by the 65 Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) contours, which restricted the development of noise-sensitive land uses in the Project Area due to aircraft flight patterns at the former MCAS El Toro. Much of the Project Area has been developed with industrial and office buildings similar to those found along Bake Parkway. The remainder of this land, slightly less than 1,000 acres, is privately owned and has been permitted for development of more than 9.8 million square feet of industrial and commercial land uses by the County prior to Lake Forest becoming a city. There are seven properties within the Project Area, ranging in size from 4 acres to 380 acres. Six properties are south of SR-241 and one is north of the Corridor. The majority of the properties are not contiguous. Seven properties are within the Proposed Project area. Figure 2-4 (Proposed Project Land Use Map) in Chapter 2 (Project Description) depicts the project boundaries, specific site locations, and location in the central portion of the City.

### *Development Sites*

As the Project Area is diverse, ranging from hilly and steep to flat terrain, as well as providing a variety of vegetation, each of the parcels is described below. Figure 3.1-1 through Figure 3.1-19 depict existing conditions on each of the sites as noted.

**Site 1 (Shea/Baker Ranch):** This 387-acre parcel is largely vacant. The site is located south of SR-241 and north of Commercentre Drive. The site is bordered on the east by Bake Parkway and on the west by the City of Irvine boundary. The property is bisected by the proposed extension of Alton Parkway. To the west is the open space preserve in the City of Irvine and the Borrego Canyon Wash. Contained on the site are two single-family residences, agricultural uses consisting of grazing, a nursery, avocado grove, and composting area, an RV storage facility, and large vacant graded areas adjacent to Bake Parkway. A small wetlands seep exists near the intersection of Alton Parkway and Commercentre Drive.

**Site 2 (Portola Center):** This site, located north of SR-241 and bisected by Glenn Ranch Road, consists of 243 acres of vacant land with varied topography, ranging from hilly to flat in some areas. Surrounding land uses include the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park to the north and west, residential development to the north and west, and open space in the remaining areas. 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 will be retained as permanent open space.





**Graded Area in Northern Portion**



**Former Grazing Area**

**FIGURE 3.1-1**  
**Site 1 Shea-Baker Ranch**







Homes, Compost Pile, Orchard, and Nursery

FIGURE 3.1-2  
Site 1 Shea-Baker Ranch







**Cliffs**



**Graded Area NW corner of Saddleback and Glen Ranch**

**FIGURE 3.1-3**  
**Site 2 Portola Center**







**Graded Area South of Glen Ranch Road**



**Graded East and West of Saddleback Ranch Road, North of Glen Ranch Road**

**FIGURE 3.1-4**  
**Site 2 Portola Center**







Homes across in Foothill Ranch looking across Whiting Ranch



Looking Southwest from West corner of Site

FIGURE 3.1-5  
Site 2 Portola Center







Next to Whiting Ranch from Whiting Ranch



Next to Whiting Ranch

FIGURE 3.1-6  
Site 2 Portola Center







NW portion of Site next to Whiting Ranch



Powerlines and Coastal Sage Scrub in Western Portion (SCE Corridor)

FIGURE 3.1-7  
Site 2 Portola Center







**Agriculture Areas**



**Coastal Sage Scrub and Stream**

**FIGURE 3.1-8**  
**Site 3 IRWD - Lewis**







**More Serrano Creek West side of Site**



**Oak-Sycamore Stream, Serrano Headwaters**

**FIGURE 3.1-9**  
**Site 3 IRWD - Lewis**







Looking Southwest at stream



Road Bisecting Agriculture and Office Building

FIGURE 3.1-10  
Site 3 IRWD - Lewis







**Turf-Covered Water Tanks and Coastal Sage Scrub**

**FIGURE 3.1-11**  
**Site 3 IRWD - Lewis**







Gravel Operations



Gravel Operations

FIGURE 3.1-12  
Site 4 Baker Ranch







Looking North



Western Portion of Site and Industrial Uses

FIGURE 3.1-13  
Site 4 Baker Ranch







Looking Northeast



Looking Northeast across Site

FIGURE 3.1-14  
Site 5 Whisler - Greystone Homes







Looking Southwest

FIGURE 3.1-15  
Site 5 Whisler - Greystone Homes







Looking East



Looking North across Site from top of Hill (Site 5)

FIGURE 3.1-16  
Site 6 Pacific Heritage







**Looking West across Site**

**FIGURE 3.1-17**  
**Site 6 Pacific Heritage**





Looking West

FIGURE 3.1-18  
Site 6 Pacific Heritage







**Nakase Nursery from Rancho Parkway**



**Nakase Nursery**

**FIGURE 3.1-19**  
**Site 7 Nakase Nursery**





**Site 3 (IRWD/Lewis):** This parcel is located between Bake Parkway and Lake Forest Drive, north of Trabuco Road and south of Commercentre Drive. This site consists of 82 acres that currently support water district facilities as well as agricultural row crops and support structures. The site also contains an office building for the Irvine Ranch Water District. Surrounding land uses include residential areas to the west and east, industrial complexes to the north, and open space to the east and west of the site.

**Site 4 (Baker Ranch):** This 50-acre site, located immediately south of and adjacent to SR-241 and bisected by a proposed extension of Rancho Parkway, contains gravel mining and associated facilities, parking lots, a construction staging area for Southern California Edison's Viejo system project, and a container nursery. Surrounding land uses include industrial complexes to the west, SR-241 to the north, Portola Parkway to the east, and open space and a commercial shopping center to the south. The primary existing land use on this site is a sand and gravel mining operation.

**Site 5 (Whisler/Greystone):** This 13-acre site is undeveloped, with hilly topography. The parcel is generally located at the corner of Regency Lane and Osterman Road. There is a small citrus grove and a single (vacant) residential dwelling with associated pastureland. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the south, a park to the east, and industrial and commercial uses to the north and west.

**Site 6 (Pacific Heritage):** This parcel consists of 18 acres of primarily vacant land with foothill-type topography. The parcel is immediately adjacent to Site 3 (IRWD) and located at the northern end of Peachwood Drive. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the west and south, open space to the north, and the IRWD property to the east.

**Site 7 (Nakase):** This is the site of the current Nakase Brothers Nursery operations, located on Bake Parkway just south of Rancho Parkway. The Proposed Project would utilize the northernmost 45 acres of this parcel bordering Rancho Parkway. The site totals 121 acres and consists of growing grounds and support structures such as greenhouses and office areas. The site is bordered on the east and south by industrial and commercial complexes, and Serrano Creek runs along the eastern edge of the site. Across Bake Parkway to the west are existing business park uses and vacant land. An existing commercial shopping center is located to the north, across Rancho Parkway.

### ***Surrounding Land Use***

The proposed Project Area is located within the City of Lake Forest, north and south of SR-241 and adjacent to the former MCAS El Toro. The City of Lake Forest is generally surrounded by the Cities of Laguna Hills and Laguna Woods to the south, Irvine to the west, Mission Viejo to the east, and unincorporated territory to the north. The surrounding land uses consist of a mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial. SR-241 transects Lake Forest in an east-west direction near the City's northern limits. To the west is the confluence of Interstates 5 and 405. The former MCAS El Toro, consisting of approximately 3,700 acres, is located along the northwestern boundary of the City. A majority of the MCAS El Toro property, which the City of Irvine annexed in the spring of 2004, was recently sold via public online auction and is entitled for a variety of uses, including residential, commercial, educational facilities, agriculture, and a regional great park. The remainder of the former MCAS El Toro was retained under federal ownership for a variety of uses, including open space and

habitat protection. The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is located in southeast Orange County within the foothills of the Cleveland National Forest. A portion of the Wilderness Park is located within the City of Lake Forest. The park is managed by the County of Orange, and encompasses approximately 4,300 acres of riparian and oak woodland canyons, rolling grassland hills, and steep slopes of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. The park is highlighted by scenic rock formations, including the beautiful Red Rock Canyon. There are three intermittent streams: Borrego, Serrano, and Aliso Creek meandering through the park, each hosting an abundance of wildlife. Remnants of the former cattle ranching days can be seen throughout the park. The Cleveland National Forest, bordering Lake Forest to the east and administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the southernmost national forest in California. In the Lake Forest area, Cleveland National Forest includes the Santa Ana Mountain, part of the Peninsular Range, which extends for 800 miles from the Santa Ana Mountains to Baja California.

### **Existing Viewsheds**

Viewsheds refer to the visual qualities of the geographical area that the horizon, topography, and other features—including man-made features—define by providing boundaries or context. Generally, looking north from various vantage points in the City, the Santa Ana Mountains are the most prominent physical feature in the viewshed. The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is also within the viewshed as is located in the foreground of the Santa Ana Mountains. Views to the south, east, and west are of urban development. The City’s General Plan identifies eucalyptus trees, created lakes, natural open space, and panoramic mountain views as some of Lake Forest’s most valuable assets. Policies in the General Plan Recreation and Resources Element applicable to visual resources are listed below in Section 3.1.3. While these policies support high quality design and visual compatibility, they do not afford specific protection to existing viewsheds or identify any scenic vistas.

As described above, views toward the north from the Project Area are of the Santa Ana Mountains. The Santa Ana Mountains are generally seen from all areas of the City. However, depending on one’s vantage point, the intervening terrain, and adjacent development, the view of the mountains may be obstructed. Views to and from each of the project’s parcels are described below.

- **Site 1**—Views to the south, north, and east from Site 1 are generally of urban development and are limited on certain areas of the site by topography. The Santa Ana Mountains are a prominent view to the north east from this site with the developed areas of the Foothill Ranch Planned Community in the near view horizon. Views of the site vary based on location as the site increases in elevation from Bake Parkway, with the highest point of the property located towards the center of the site. From the area east of the highest point of the site, the views are of the urban developed areas along Bake Parkway. Westerly views from Bake Parkway are primarily of the site itself. From the highest point of the property looking west, the views are primarily open space views of the Borrego Canyon Wash and the open space areas of MCAS El Toro. From Bake Parkway, views of the site include primarily vacant, graded pads. Views of the site from Alton Parkway at Towne Center Drive include the Borrego Canyon Wash and existing nursery operations.
- **Site 2**—Views from this site consist primarily of the Portola Hills residential community, Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, and the Santa Ana Mountains to the north. Views to the west are of the Foothill Ranch Planned Community and views to the south and east are of existing urban development. Views of the site are from Glenn Ranch Road and El Toro Road. More distant views of the site are available from Portola Parkway, SR 241, and other north-south arterials.

- **Site 3**—Site 3 is located in a hilly area, views from this site consist primarily of urban development to the north, with the Santa Ana Mountains seen in the distance from higher elevations. Views to the south, east, and west are of residential development with distant views of the City and beyond from higher elevations. Views of the site are limited due to surrounding development and topography and consist of views primarily from surrounding residential uses on the east and from the industrial uses on the north. The only views of the site from an arterial roadway are intermittent views from Commercentre Drive.
- **Site 4**—Existing commercial uses surround Site 4, which is the current location of mining operations. Views of the Santa Ana Mountains to the north may be held from this site, as well as views of surrounding urban development and Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park. Views of the site are held from Portola Parkway and SR-241. It is unknown how the finished grades after mining is completed will affect views of the site from the surrounding roadways.
- **Site 5**—The views from Site 5 include existing residential development to the south, a park to the east, and existing commercial development to the west and north. An undeveloped park site is located on the north side of Regency Lane adjacent to the site. More distant views to the north are of the Santa Ana Mountains. Views of the site are primarily from Regency Lane and Osterman Road, which are not arterial roadways. Views of the western ridgeline of the site are available from Lake Forest Drive.
- **Site 6**—Views from Site 6 includes site 3 to the east, existing residential development to the south and west, and open space to the north. More distant views from the site are of the Santa Ana Mountains to the north and to Laguna Hills and Irvine to the south. Views to the site are primarily from Peachwood, which is not an arterial street. Other views of the site are from the adjacent Site 3 and surrounding residential developments.
- **Site 7**—Existing commercial and industrial uses surround this site, with a view of the nearby SR-241 (Foothill Transportation Corridor). The Santa Ana Mountains may be viewed in the distance from Site 7, although views are partially blocked by the elevation of SR-241. Views of the site are from Bake Parkway and Rancho Parkway. Both of these arterial roadways are at an elevation above the majority of the site and provide sweeping views of the site.

### ***Light and Glare***

Light is generated by various sources in the City. Night lighting is used in commercial districts, parking areas, outdoor sports facilities, and roads, as well as light generated by vehicle headlights. The southern portion of the City is the most developed and experiences the greatest light levels. Light levels gradually diminish in the northeastern portion of the City as open space increases. Lighting on the project sites is sparse to nonexistent. Major streets and developments adjacent to the parcels all contain typical levels of security, roadway, and parking lot lighting.

Glare is generated by sunlight reflecting off reflective surfaces such as windows, paving, building surfaces, and vehicle windshields. Lake Forest receives abundant sunlight and daytime glare levels are naturally high, particularly during the summer months.

### **3.1.3 Planning and Regulatory Framework**

This regulatory framework sets the context for the range of issues related to aesthetics that the City of Lake Forest shall consider in the evaluation of the potential for a project to have a significant effect on



aesthetics. The consideration of potential effects on aesthetic resources within the City of Lake Forest is largely undertaken in relation to the City of Lake Forest General Plan. A portion of land on the northern boundary adjacent to the City of Irvine is regulated by the Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan Central/Coastal Subregion (Central/Coastal NCCP), a state/federal habitat management and conservation plan. The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park is also administered by the County of Orange, and the Cleveland National Forest by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

## ■ Federal

There are no federal statutes related to aesthetics that would apply to projects within the City of Lake Forest.

## ■ State

California's Scenic Highway Program preserves and protects scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish their aesthetic value. There are no state scenic highways designated within the City of Lake Forest.

## ■ Regional

### ***Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide (RCPG)***

SCAG, which is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for six Southern California counties (Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial, and Los Angeles), is federally mandated to develop plans for transportation, growth management, hazardous waste management, and air quality. SCAG has prepared the RCPG in conjunction with its constituent members and other regional planning agencies. The RCPG is intended to serve as a framework to guide decision-making with respect to the growth and changes that can be anticipated in the region through the year 2015. The Plan consists of five core chapters that contain goals, policies, implementation strategies, and technical data that support three overarching objectives for the region, including (1) improving the standard of living for all, (2) improving the quality of life for all, and (3) enhancing equity and access to government. Local governments are required to use the RCPG as the basis for their own plans and are required to discuss the consistency of projects of "regional significance" with the RCPG. There are no specific policies in the RCPG that pertain to aesthetics and visual quality.

## ■ Local

### ***County of Orange General Plan***

The County of Orange General Plan does not contain any goals, objectives, or policies specifically related to visual quality that would apply to the proposed project.

## **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. With this designation, specific guidelines are given for enhancing the scenic amenities of these facilities.

## **City of Irvine General Plan**

The City of Irvine is located adjacent and to the west of the Project Area. Although Lake Forest is not required to conform to the goals and policies of an adjoining city, impacts to designated scenic vistas from adjacent cities should be considered in light of the applicable element of the adopted General Plan. There are no goals, objectives, or policies specifically related to visual quality that would apply to the proposed project.

## **City of Lake Forest**

### **General Plan**

The City of Lake Forest General Plan contains goals, policies, and plans that are intended to guide land use and development decisions. The General Plan consists of a Land Use Policy Map and the following six elements, or chapters, which together fulfill the state requirements for a General Plan:

- Land Use Element
- Housing Element
- Circulation Element
- Recreation and Resources Element
- Safety and Noise Element
- Public Facilities/Growth Management Element

The Lake Forest General Plan Circulation Element does not include any locally-designated scenic highways. Specific goals and policies related to visual quality in the City of Lake Forest are described in the Land Use Element and are listed below.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Goal 2.0</b>   | A distinct image and identity for Lake Forest  |
| <b>Policy 2.1</b> | Enhance the physical attributes of Lake Forest to create an identifiable and distinct community within Orange County.  |
| <b>Policy 2.2</b> | Promote high quality in the design of all public and private development projects.   |
| <b>Goal 3.0</b>   | New development that is compatible with the community.   |
| <b>Policy 3.1</b> | 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, non-conforming buildings and uses.
- Policy 3.4** Blend residential and non-residential development with landscaping and architectural design techniques to achieve visual compatibility.

### Municipal Code

Design guidelines and provisions related to visual quality of development are included in Title 8 (Buildings and Construction, specifically Chapter 8.04, Uniform Sign Code) and Title 9 (Planning and Zoning, Chapters 9.02 through 9.224) of the City Municipal Code. The Proposed Project would be required to comply with all provisions of the Municipal Code and would, therefore, be consistent.

### 3.1.4 Methodology

The analysis of visual impacts focuses on the nature and magnitude of changes in the visual character of the Project Area due to the Proposed Project, including the visual compatibility of the proposed development plans and adjacent uses, vantage points where visual changes would be evident, and the introduction of sources of light and glare. General Plan policies focus on quality design, enhanced physical attributes, and visual compatibility. The Lake Forest General Plan and other City policies do not protect private views. Therefore, this analysis will focus on views from scenic highways and arterial streets of scenic vistas and visual compatibility among existing and proposed uses. Because of its visual prominence, views toward the Santa Ana Mountains and the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, is the only scenic vista identified for purposes of this analysis. Site visits by EIP personnel during 2004 and 2005 documented the existing visual character and context of the Project Area. Visual change that is compatible with existing patterns of development would not be considered to constitute a significant impact.

### 3.1.5 Thresholds of Significance

The City of Lake Forest has developed thresholds of significance related to visual resources. Based on the City's thresholds, the Proposed Project would result in significant impacts related to visual resources if they would:

- 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; OR
  - › 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.
  - › The project would detract from the overall image of the City.
  - › The project would degrade views from the roadways and adjacent uses.



- › 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.
- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista where it obstructs views from a designated scenic highway or arterial roadway, or through removal of natural features or addition of man-made features or structures that degrades the visual intactness and unity of the scenic vista.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area where the project would have outdoor illumination of more than 1-1/4 foot candles from dusk to dawn, where the project will use reflective building materials, or where the project would use neon or similar signage or architectural features.
- Cause an obstruction of public views of scenic resources or a scenic vista as identified.
- Conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect (i.e., development standards, design guidelines, etc.).
- Result in a design that is not permitted by the applicable Planned Community Development Standards and Design Guidelines (including design features such as setbacks, architecture, landscaping, site plan layout, etc.), or the relevant Specific Plan.

### 3.1.6 Impacts

CEQA requires that the Proposed Project's potential environmental impacts be compared to on-the-ground conditions in the Project Area at the time the Notice of Preparation is issued or at the time the analysis of such impacts is commenced. Such on-the-ground conditions are considered, and often referred to as, the environmental or CEQA "baseline." Thus, the following section analyzes the Proposed Project's potential environmental impacts on baseline conditions. However, it should be noted that the land under consideration for the Proposed Project, while currently undeveloped, would not necessarily remain undeveloped. Most sites within the Project Area are subject to existing development agreements or entitlements and, in the absence of the Proposed Project, would in the future likely be developed with approximately 9.8 million square feet of industrial and commercial space under the existing General Plan. Given this, the analysis of alternatives to the Proposed Project in Chapter 4 of this EIR, under the "No Project/Reasonably Foreseeable Development" alternative, analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with buildout of the existing General Plan. That analysis includes a comparison of the impacts of buildout of the existing General Plan with the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project.

**Impact 3.1-1**      **The Proposed Project would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the Project Area by detracting from the overall image of the City or through design features, architectural style, building incompatibility with surrounding uses, degradation of views from roadways or adjacent uses, unscreened outdoor uses or materials, or introduction of building mass that conflicts with the character of surrounding development.**

**Significance Level:**    **Less than significant**

The Proposed Project includes development of 5,415 residential units, over 50 acres of neighborhood parks, 45 acres of sports park, a Community/Civic Center, and up to 648,720 square feet of commercial development. This development would be allocated on specific parcels as indicated on Figure 2-4 (Proposed Project Land Use Map) and in Table 2-5 (Project Summary).

Development on Site 1 (Shea/Baker) would include 2,815 residential units and up to 120,000 square feet of commercial development, which could consist of neighborhood-serving commercial uses such as medium-sized shopping centers with grocery stores and up to 200,000 square feet of business park uses. A potential school site has also been identified on Site 1, as well as a neighborhood park as noted. Land uses adjacent to this site consist primarily of industrial and business park uses to the north and east, open space to the west and Bake Parkway to the south.

Site 2 (Portola Center) would include 1,132 dwelling units and up to 178,720 square feet of commercial development that would include both neighborhood commercial and mixed-use components. The mixed-use component is envisioned to include office or commercial uses at street level with residences above. This site is located in the Portola Hills Planned Community. Surrounding land uses include the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park to the north and west, residential development to the north, and open space in the remaining areas.

Site 3 (IRWD) would include 833 multi-family dwelling units and no commercial development. Surrounding uses consist of industrial and commercial development, as well as some residential. Proposed development on Site 4 (Baker Ranch) includes 475 residential units and up to 150,000 square feet of commercial development that would likely consist of a regional commercial use. Surrounding land uses include industrial complexes to the west, SR 241 to the north, Portola Parkway to the east, and open space and a commercial shopping center to the south.

Development proposed on Site 5 includes 75 single-family residential units and no commercial development. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the south, a park to the east, and industrial and commercial uses to the north and west.

Development on Site 6 includes 85 single-family residential units. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the south, open space to the northwest, and the IRWD property to the east. The southern portion of the site contains a residential street (Peachwood Drive).

Development associated with the Proposed Project would be at densities similar to those existing in Lake Forest and would comply with existing zoning requirements. Generally, commercial uses on Sites 1 and 2 are proposed as neighborhood serving commercial uses consistent with the proposed neighborhoods. On Site 1, the Proposed Project includes the amendment of the existing Planned Community text, which provides development standards for both the commercial and residential development. A regional serving commercial use is proposed on Site 4, which is consistent with the business park and commercial uses along Portola Parkway and SR-241. Therefore, the provision of housing and commercial uses on any of these sites are not anticipated to exceed allowed height or bulk regulations, and would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the Project Area. While development would change the character of the sites from vacant land to development, it would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the Project Area 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 development proposed would be similar in style and design to other similar uses in the City, the Proposed Project would provide a seamless transition visually and would not degrade views from adjacent roadways or uses. While some parcels are more visually prominent than others due to topography or location (e.g., Sites 1, 2, and 7),

because of adherence to development guidelines in the City's Municipal Code, applicable Planned Community Text documents, height, bulk, architecture, and/or signage would not be in vivid contrast to the surrounding development or environment, degrading the visual unity of the area. 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 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 would be less than significant.

Site 7 would be developed with 45 acres of public facilities; i.e., 39 acres of sports park, and 6 acres for a new Civic Center and Community Center. The site totals 121 acres and consists of growing grounds and support structures such as a greenhouse and office area. The Proposed Project would utilize the northernmost 45 acres of this parcel bordering Rancho Parkway. The site is bordered on the east and south by industrial and commercial complexes, and Serrano Creek runs along the eastern edge of the site. Across Bake Parkway to the west are existing business park uses and vacant land (Site 1). An existing commercial shopping center is located to the north, across Rancho Parkway. The public facilities would involve 39 acres of parkland with community and civic center buildings. Due to its location and lack of large structures, the parkland would not create any visual barriers. The community center and civic center buildings would be similar to office buildings found in the surrounding area. Therefore, development of public facilities on this site would be compatible with surrounding land uses in building mass and height and would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the Project Area. Municipal Code regulations would be followed, and proposed design would be submitted to the Planning Commission for design approval. Impacts on visual quality relative to development on Site 7 would be less than significant.

**Impact 3.1-2      The Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista by obstructing public views of scenic resources or scenic vistas from a designated scenic highway or arterial roadway, or through removal of natural features or addition of man-made features or structures that degrades the visual intactness and unity of the scenic vista.**

**Significance Level:    Less than significant**

All of the project development sites maintain views of the Santa Ana Mountains to the north. Site 2 in addition holds a view of the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park. Development on these sites, depending on siting and building height, could partially or completely obstruct views from a given vantage point. As the Proposed Project would convert 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 Project. Because views may be affected differently for the individual parcels in the Project Area, the impact analysis for this threshold is described for each site separately.



**Site 1**

Views to the east and south from Site 1 are generally of urban development and are limited on certain areas of the site by topography. Some distant views of the ocean may be held from the higher elevations. Views to the west consist of permanently preserved open space on the former MCAS El Toro and the Borrego Wash. The Santa Ana Mountains and the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park are prominent views to the north from this site. Views of these scenic resources are currently blocked from viewers to the south and travelers along Bake Parkway on the east side of the parcel by intervening topography and the curvature of Bake Parkway. The proposed development would involve grading of the project site and placement of residential neighborhoods, parks, and commercial uses. Buildings and densities would be similar to those found in the rest of Lake Forest and would be regulated by adherence to the building height, bulk and development standards set forth in the Baker Ranch Planned Community Text, as amended. Because the proposed development does not propose structures that would exceed allowed height or bulk regulations, no significant obstruction of viewsheds or degradation of the visual intactness and unity of the scenic vista by development on Site 1 are anticipated and this impact would be considered less than significant.

**Site 2**

Views from the site consist primarily of the existing Portola Hills and Foothill Ranch communities, Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, and the Santa Ana Mountains 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 would occur south of the existing Portola Hills and east of the Foothill Ranch communities. This site, located north of SR-241 and bisected by Glenn Ranch Road, consists of 243 acres of vacant land with varied topography, ranging from hilly to flat in some areas. The westernmost portion of the site, almost completely surrounded by the Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, is not proposed for development and will be retained as permanent open space. Development on Site 2 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 the 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. North of Glenn Ranch Road, proposed development would be on the existing graded area, which is located at least 30 feet (typically over 100 feet) below the existing residences. South of Glenn Ranch Road, it is anticipated that development would be at least 10 feet lower than Glenn Ranch Road except the south eastern corner of the site proposed to be developed as a neighborhood park which would, on average, be at grade with Glenn Ranch Road. Because there would be no further obstruction of viewsheds by development on Site 2 than what currently exists, this impact would be considered less than significant.

Site 2 is located near the portion of El Toro Road that is designated on the Orange County Master Plan of Scenic Highways. Refer to Figure 3.1-20. El Toro Road is located east of Site 2 and intersects with Glenn Ranch Road. 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





**FIGURE 3.1-20**  
**Aerial View of Site 2**



10953-00

Source: Design Fusion, 2006

City of Lake Forest









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, which are visible from El Toro Road, will 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 designed scenic highway will be less than significant.

### **Site 3**

Site 3 is located in a hilly area, surrounded by commercial, industrial, and residential uses. Views from this site consist primarily of urban development, with the Santa Ana Mountains seen in the distance. Views of the site are limited due to surrounding development and topography and consist mainly of views from the residential uses to the east and industrial uses to the north. Existing residential uses view the site from various elevations. The only views from an arterial roadway are intermittent views from Commercentre Drive. Therefore, development would not obstruct views or impair viewsheds. Because there would be no further significant obstruction of viewsheds by development on Site 3 other than what currently exists, this impact would be considered less than significant.

### **Site 4**

Existing commercial uses surround Site 4, which is the current location of mining operations. Views of the Santa Ana Mountains to the north may be held from this site, as well as views of surrounding urban development and some open space area. The site is on the south side of SR-241. Therefore, views of the Santa Ana Mountains are somewhat limited. Development on this site would consist of residential and commercial uses that would be compatible with the surrounding uses. Because of the elevation of SR 241 and heights of existing commercial development around the site, development on Site 4 would not further obstruct any existing views from Portola Parkway or SR-241, and this impact would be less than significant.

### **Site 5**

This 13-acre site is undeveloped, with hilly topography. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the south, a park to the east, and industrial and commercial uses to the north and west. An undeveloped park site is located across Regency Lane adjacent to the site. The existing hilly topography of the site currently obstructs views of the Santa Ana Mountains from views south of the parcel, and development on this site would not further obstruct currently held views. Some residences along the western edge of the site would be visible to travelers along Lake Forest Drive. Views of the Santa Ana Mountains would be unaffected by those on the east, west, and north sides of the parcel, including travelers along Lake Forest Drive. No other views of scenic resources would be obstructed. Therefore, the impact to viewsheds from development on Site 5 would be less than significant.

## Site 6

Views from Site 6 are similar to those from Site 3, as this parcel abuts Site 3. This parcel consists of 18 acres of vacant land with foothill-type topography. Surrounding land uses include residential development to the west and south, open space to the north, and the IRWD property to the east. Site 6 is not visible from any arterial roadways and does not obstruct views of any scenic resources. Therefore, the impact to viewsheds from development on Site 6 would be less than significant.

## Site 7

The site is bordered on the east and south by industrial and commercial complexes, and Serrano Creek runs along the eastern edge of the site. The primary view from this site consist of SR 241 to the north, with distant, somewhat obstructed views of the Santa Ana Mountains further north, and surrounding urban development on all sides. The public facilities would involve 39 acres of parkland with community and civic center buildings. Due to its location and lack of large structures, the parkland would not create any visual barriers. The community center and civic center buildings would be similar to office buildings found in the surrounding area. As the northern portion of this site sits at a slightly lower elevation than surrounding uses, and is immediately adjacent to existing commercial development and SR 241, development of the community facilities on this site would not obstruct existing views, and this impact would be less than significant.

In summary, the impacts to viewsheds would be less than significant for all sites.

**Impact 3.1-3      The Proposed Project would create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area where the project would have outdoor illumination of more than 1¼ foot-candles from dusk to dawn, where the project will use reflective building materials, or where the project would use neon or similar signage or architectural features.**

**Significance Level:    Significant and unavoidable**

This analysis assesses spill light and obtrusive light and glare that might be associated with the development of the Project Area. The following terms are used in this discussion:

- *Spill light*—The light emitted from an installation that falls outside the boundaries of the property on which the lighting system is installed.
- *Obtrusive light*—Spill light that causes annoyance, discomfort, distraction, or a reduction in the ability to see essential information such as traffic signals.
- *Glare*—The discomfort or impairment of vision experienced when the image is excessively bright in relation to the general surroundings.
- *Foot-candle*—The recognized international unit for the measure of light (luminance) falling onto a surface.

Spill light can be accurately calculated and the effects of spill light can be measured for general understanding and comparison. The effects of obtrusive light are, however, the subject of debate and technical discussion throughout the lighting community. Attempts have been made to quantify obtrusive

light, but this has proven to be difficult, as individuals have a range of reactions to the perceived effects of lighting on the environment. Typical nighttime street lighting requirements are 1 to 3 foot-candles, which is considered to be unobtrusive.

Glare can be measured for impairment of view. A typical example of glare effects is the car headlight. When viewed directly in front of a vehicle with the headlights on full beam, vision is impaired, resulting in disabling glare. However, when viewed from the side, the same headlights would not impair vision.

The following are examples of light levels, expressed in foot-candles:

- Bright and sunny day: 3,000 foot-candles
- Professional baseball-field lighting: 300 foot-candles
- Office: 50 to 75 foot-candles
- Residential lighting at night: 7 to 10 foot-candles
- Main road junction street lighting: 2.5 to 3.0 foot-candles
- Bright moonlight: 0.1 foot-candle

Night illumination of outdoor areas can affect people in several ways. For example, where intense lighting is viewed against a dark background, the contrast attracts the attention of the viewer and could be considered annoying. Under low-light conditions, the human eye adjusts to the brightest light within the field of view. If the range of light intensity to which the eye is exposed is large, the eye will be relatively insensitive to the more dimly lighted areas within the field of view. In addition, increased illumination can affect the suitability of sleeping areas, use of outdoor areas at natural light levels, and privacy. The degree of impacts may be related to the degree of change from the illumination levels to which people have become accustomed.

Nighttime lighting would be included in development under the Proposed Project in the form of security lighting and street and parking area lighting, in addition to interior lighting that would be visible through undraped windows. This would represent a significant increase from the existing, relatively non-lighted conditions that exist on the Project Area. Because current conditions do not involve significant sources of lighting, development under the Proposed Project would convert primarily vacant land to new development, and would significantly increase the ambient light in the Project Area over current levels. The proposed residential areas are anticipated to have lighting levels of 7 to 10 foot-candles, which is considered typical for residential development. These light levels would be consistent with those found in existing residential developments throughout Lake Forest and are not expected to adversely affect nighttime views in the area. Commercial development in the Project Area would be required to submit a lighting plan for City review and approval. As a standard policy, the City requires that all lighting from commercial projects be directed onsite and reviews lighting levels to ensure consistency and compatibility with surrounding uses. Development on all of the sites would involve outdoor lighting of at least 1¼ foot-candles between dusk and dawn because of security lighting for both homes and businesses as well as new street lighting. The Proposed Project is expected to include typical street lighting at levels of 1 to 3 foot-candles. This typical level of lighting is considered unobtrusive and is typically considered a less than significant impact. However, because the City has an adopted threshold, which considers outdoor illumination of more than 1¼ foot-candles to be significant, the impact of the Proposed Project must therefore be considered significant. MM 3.1-1 through MM 3.1-4 would help reduce the impact of the



new sources of light; however, because the mitigation measures proposed would not reduce outdoor lighting to a level less than the City's stated threshold of significance of 1¼ foot-candles between dusk and dawn, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

The proposed 45-acre public facilities include a sports park with lighted fields. This facility would be located on Site 7, adjacent to Rancho Parkway and Bake Parkway. Lighted fields are a significant source of nighttime lighting. The proposed sports park is located adjacent to existing commercial and industrial development and would be compatible with those uses. The proposed sports park lighting would not be located near sensitive receptors such as schools or residences, which are sensitive to high nighttime lighting levels. All lighting would be shielded and directed on-site to avoid spillover or glare effects. However, because the lighting levels would be greater than the City's stated threshold of significance of 1¼ foot-candles between dusk and dawn, the impact of the sports field lighting would be significant and unavoidable.

Glare could occur from building materials of the new structures including glass, concrete, stucco, wood, core-ten steel, and other materials compliant with applicable City design guidelines and architectural standards. The anticipated building materials and proposed uses are typical of those found in the surrounding areas and are not anticipated to create unusual or isolated glare effects. The use of landscaping along roadways would avoid some glare effects to motorists. Impacts from glare would be less than significant.

**Impact 3.1-4            The Proposed Project would not conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.**

**Significance Level:    No impact**

Specific parcels in the Project Area would be rezoned for residential and commercial, and redesignated on the General Plan Land Use Policy Map. All development under the Proposed Project would be required to comply with provisions and design guidelines contained in any applicable planned community, Uniform Building Code requirements, and fire codes, and would therefore not result in any conflicts with plans, policies, or regulations. Specifically, the Lake Forest General Plan Land Use Element contains policies, which promote high quality in the design of all development projects, and to ensure that new development is visually compatible with surrounding uses. There would be no anticipated impact with regard to this threshold as a result of development under the Proposed Project. Individual development projects will be reviewed for consistency with all general plan policies at the site plan level.

**Impact 3.1-5            The Proposed Project would not result in a design that is not permitted by the applicable Planned Community Development Standards and Design Guidelines or the relevant Specific Plan.**

**Significance Level:    No impact**

All development would be required to conform to the applicable Planned Community Development Standards, General Plan policies, and the City's Municipal Code, including building height, setback,

signage, exterior materials, etc. The specific development proposals would be subject to the City's design review process, ensuring that the project would conform to these guidelines and standards. Therefore, there would be no impact from development under the Proposed Project.

### 3.1.7 Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures are designed to eliminate or reduce to a level of less than significant those significant impacts to Aesthetics that are caused by the Proposed Project and that are capable of being feasibly eliminated or reduced to a level of less than significant.

- MM 3.1-1 Prior to issuance of a Site Development Permit for each specific development project, the applicant shall submit a lighting plan to the Development Services Department for review and approval. The plan shall specify the lighting type and placement to ensure that the effects of security lighting are limited as a means of minimizing night lighting and the associated impacts to aesthetics. Prior to completion of final plans and specifications, the City of Lake Forest shall review the plans and specifications to ensure that all light fixtures will use glare-control visors, arc tube suppression caps, and will use a photometric design that maintains 70 percent of the light intensity in the lower half of the light beam. Completion of this measure shall be monitored and enforced by the City of Lake Forest.*
- MM 3.1-2 All lighting and advertising (including signage) shall be oriented in such a manner to reduce the amount of light shed onto adjacent residential development and incorporate "cut-off" shields as appropriate to minimize any increase in lighting at adjacent residential properties.*
- MM 3.1-3 All interior floodlights, exterior parking lot, and other security lighting shall be directed away from adjacent uses and towards the specific location intended for illumination. State-of-the-art fixtures shall be used, and all lighting shall be shielded to minimize the production of glare and light spill onto both existing and proposed residential units. A lighting design plan shall be submitted to the City for approval at plan check for each specific development project.*
- MM 3.1-4 Landscape illumination and exterior sign lighting shall follow the City's Municipal Code and applicable Planned Community design guidelines and be accomplished with low-level unobtrusive fixtures.*

### 3.1.8 Summary of Impacts

Table 3.1-1 summarizes the impacts of the Proposed Project related to aesthetics and visual resources, and identifies the significance of those impacts after application of mitigation measures, if applicable.

**Table 3.1-1 Summary of Impacts**

<i>Impact</i>	<i>Threshold</i>	<i>Significance</i>
3.1-1	The Proposed Project would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the Project Area by detracting from the overall image of the City or through design features, architectural style, building incompatibility with surrounding uses, degradation of views from roadways or adjacent uses, unscreened outdoor uses or materials, or introduction of building mass that conflicts with the character of surrounding development.	Less than significant
3.1-2	The Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista by obstructing public views of scenic resources or scenic vistas from a designated scenic highway or arterial roadway, or through removal of natural features or addition of man-made features or structures that degrades the visual intactness and unity of the scenic vista.	Less than significant
3.1-3	The Proposed Project would create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area where the project would have outdoor illumination of more than 1¼ foot-candles from dusk to dawn, where the project will use reflective building materials, or where the project would use neon or similar signage or architectural features.	Significant and unavoidable
3.1-4	The Proposed Project would not conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.	No impact
3.1-5	The Proposed Project would not result in a design that is not permitted by the applicable Planned Community Development Standards and Design Guidelines or the relevant Specific Plan.	No impact

### 3.1.9 References

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