

4.7 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing aesthetic setting of the project site, the regulatory background that applies to the project, and the potential visual impacts on aesthetic resources associated with implementation of the proposed project.

4.7.1 EXISTING SETTING

The following text describes the existing visual character of the project site and surrounding land. The descriptions of existing conditions are accompanied by photographs of representative views taken during a site visit on October 18, 2006. The locations of project site viewpoints are shown in Exhibit 4.7-1. All exhibits are provided together at the end of this section.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT SITE

The site is visible from Interstate 80 (I-80) and to a lesser extent, Sierra College Boulevard. Small portions of the project site are visible from Dias Lane in Loomis. Topography and vegetation blocks expansive views of the project site from most vantage points.

The project site is relatively flat with elevations ranging between approximately 320 and 340 feet above mean sea level. The project site slopes gently from west to east with Secret Ravine Creek bordering the southeastern boundary. The project site and vicinity are predominantly undeveloped and have historically been used for grazing. The site consists of vacant open areas and oak woodlands. The project site is adjacent to rural residential areas in Loomis and undeveloped parts of Rocklin southwest of the project site. In general, this landscape, typified by rolling grass-covered hills dotted with oak trees, is typical of undeveloped portions of Placer County. The site and the surrounding area are located near the current edge of visually prominent urbanization along Interstate 80. In general, areas east of the project site are undeveloped or developed in a way that is not visually prominent for travelers along I-80. Areas to the west along I-80 are more urbanized moving through Rocklin to Roseville and into Sacramento County.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

The land surrounding the project site generally consists of large undeveloped properties and rural residential land uses. Existing retail-commercial and residential land uses exist to the northwest of the project site across I-80. Areas south, east, and west of the project site consist of large relatively undeveloped areas interspersed with oak woodlands and rural residences. The general character of the surrounding area is described below.

- ▶ **North:** I-80, a 6-lane highway, borders the project site to the north. Areas north of the project site consist of a small residential subdivision in the City of Loomis and small-scale vacant commercial land.
- ▶ **East:** Areas east of the project site consist of large areas of open land interspersed with rural residences and oak woodlands. The Sierra Nevada foothills along with groves of oak trees and oak woodlands can be seen in the distant background. Secret Ravine Creek is directly adjacent to, and east of the project site. This perennial water feature is lined by trees and riparian vegetation.
- ▶ **South:** Areas south of the project site consist of large areas of open land interspersed with rural residences and oak woodlands.
- ▶ **West:** The area west of and adjacent to the project site consists of currently vacant, undeveloped land proposed for future commercial development. Rural residences and a church are located along the western side of Sierra College Boulevard and directly west of the project site.

Views of the Project Site

Distant views of the project site are limited because of the relatively flat topography of the site and the presence of elevated features such as the I-80/Sierra College Boulevard interchange. Views of the project site would be available to people traveling along I-80 in the project vicinity. The elevation of the project site at points near I-80 is similar to the roadway, allowing some views (see photographic inserts below). Views of the site from I-80 are available when travelers pass in front of the site, but views of the site from areas west of I-80 are not available because the elevated interchanges (e.g., I-80/Sierra College Boulevard) block views from the west. However, distant views from the east are available.

Views would also be available to motorists traveling along Sierra College Boulevard between I-80 and approximately 400 feet south of the project site. Because of the I-80/Sierra College Boulevard interchange and existing urban development north of I-80, views from Sierra College Boulevard north of I-80 are not available. Views from the south along Sierra College Boulevard are blocked by elements of the natural landscape, including oak trees and oak woodlands.

Three viewpoint locations discussed below were chosen to represent public viewing areas of the project site that were most sensitive to visual change (Exhibit 4.7-1). The general nature of views of the project site is described from these locations.

View from Sierra College Boulevard (Viewpoint 1)

This viewpoint is located approximately 1,500 feet west of the western edge of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-1). Portions of the project site are just visible in the background from this vantage point along Sierra College Boulevard. The topography slopes toward the southeast, making portions of the project site difficult to see from Sierra College Boulevard. However, as can be seen in Exhibit 4.7-2, the area is characterized by relatively flat undeveloped land interspersed with oak trees extending to the east.

Rows of oak trees and oak woodland are visible in the mid-distant view and block views extending further to the east.

Distant background views, where they are available, consist of Sierra Nevada foothills and groves of oak trees and oak woodlands.

View from Sierra College Boulevard and I-80 Interchange (Viewpoint 2)

This viewpoint is located approximately 1,500 feet west of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-1). As can be seen in Exhibit 4.7-3, foreground views are dominated by relatively flat undeveloped lands interspersed with oak trees extending to the east. From this location, the project site is visible in some locations in the background. From this viewpoint, the approved Rocklin Crossings project site is in the foreground. The areas of dense tree cover in the background represent the project site.

Mid-distant views from this viewpoint include denser natural landscape consisting of oak trees and oak woodlands. Because of the oak tree and woodland density, views from ground level to areas further to the east are limited.

Distant views from this viewpoint are dominated by the Sierra Nevada foothills and groves of oak trees and oak woodlands.

Views from Interstate 80 (Viewpoint 3)

This viewpoint is located approximately 400 feet north of the northern edge of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-1). Foreground views are dominated by relatively flat undeveloped land interspersed with oak trees extending to the

south. The project site is visible in the mid-distant and background of views from Interstate 80. Interstate 80 slopes upward to the northeast in this location. The Sierra College / I-80 interchange is raised in elevation, obscuring views of the project site from I-80 south of the project site. Because the project site slopes away from this vantage point (to the southeast), views of the entire project site are somewhat limited.

Mid-distant views also consist of denser oak trees and oak woodlands. Because of the oak tree and woodland density and topography, views from ground level to areas further to the south and east are limited. Vehicles traveling along Sierra College Boulevard are visible along the western boundary of the project site and further to the south.

Background views consist of Sierra Nevada foothills and groves of oak trees and oak woodlands in the distant background. The topography and vegetation onsite prevent expansive views of the Sierra Nevada foothills from I-80 and Sierra College Boulevard, the two primary public viewshed areas, across the project site. Topography slopes downward toward Secret Ravine Creek, obscuring views of the project site from Viewpoint #3. However, east of Secret Ravine, the topography slopes upward again, making residences southeast of the project site just visible in the distant background.

Views from Dias Lane (Viewpoint 4)

This viewpoint is located adjacent to, and east of the northernmost extent of the project along Dias Lane (Exhibit 4.7-1). Foreground views consist of relatively flat, undeveloped land covered by grasses. Background views include tree covered and more topographically varied lands (Exhibit 4.7-4). Foreground views from this location along Dias Lane include the northern “panhandle” extent of the project site. Background views of the tree-covered undeveloped land also are of the project site from this vantage point.

4.7.2 REGULATORY SETTING

CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. No State-designated scenic highways are located in the vicinity of the project site (Caltrans 2006).

CITY OF ROCKLIN GENERAL PLAN

The Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Element of the City of Rocklin General Plan (1991) includes the following relevant policies related to visual resources.

- ▶ **Policy 1.** To encourage the protection of natural resource areas, scenic areas, hilltops, open space areas and parks from encroachment or destruction by incompatible development through the use of conservation easements, buffers, setbacks or other measures. Developments shall be required to provide usable land areas outside of conservation easements or established natural resource buffers.
- ▶ **Policy 20.** To consider development projects in terms of their visual qualities and compatibility with surrounding areas, especially those urbanizing areas abutting rural or semi-rural areas.

4.7.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHODOLOGY

This visual impact analysis evaluated the visual changes that would occur at the project site using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. The visual impacts are compared against the thresholds of significance discussed below.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The project would cause a significant impact related to aesthetic resources, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G), if it would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT 4.7-1 *Impacts on Scenic Vistas. Views on or near the project site are not considered scenic vistas. Therefore, development of the project site would not alter or obscure a scenic vista. This impact would be less than significant.*

A scenic vista is generally considered a view of an area that has remarkable scenery or a resource that is indigenous to the area. The City acknowledged significant and unavoidable adverse impacts regarding changes to the existing visual environment as a part of the 1991 General Plan EIR. In a generalized impact statement, the City acknowledged significant impacts attributable to implementation of the General Plan related to viewsheds, vistas, substantial alteration to the existing aesthetic character, and light and glare. The impact analysis in this document focuses on aesthetic impacts particular to the project site and the specific development contemplated.

The project site itself does not provide any aesthetic resources that would be considered a scenic vista. The project site does not provide expansive, distant views. The vacant spaces, oak trees, and oak woodlands that make up the project site do not provide scenery of a unique character because surrounding properties consist of similar qualities. Although the current land uses provide views of undeveloped lands and oak woodland landscape that is representative of the Sierra foothills region, the project site does not contain resources that are exemplary or unique of the area. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills to the east could be considered a scenic vista due to the rolling terrain and relatively dense vegetation. However, due to topography and onsite vegetation, distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills are generally not available from I-80, Sierra College Boulevard, or other public viewing vantage points across the project site. Several residences to the east of the project site along Makabe and Dias Lanes would be directly affected by the changes in the project's visual character. Existing vegetation surrounding these homes would screen portions of views of the site, but some views of the project site would be available from these residences. However, there are no existing expansive or scenic views across the project site from these residences that would be affected by project implementation.

A soundwall and project buildings could obscure views outside the project site. The soundwall would measure roughly 9 to 11 feet above existing grades, and would be constructed along the northern and western boundaries of the project site. The soundwall is proposed to attenuate traffic noise originating from I-80 and operational noise

from retail, commercial uses as part of the Rocklin Crossings project which is located adjacent to the project's western boundary. Because the soundwall would be constructed near I-80, this wall would be more visually prominent from I-80 than would the proposed housing structures located on the site.

The project's addition of a soundwall and housing structures between I-80 and background views of the Sierra Nevada foothills could obscure views across the project site. However, the public viewing sites in the vicinity include Sierra College Boulevard and I-80. Topography and onsite vegetation obscure views of the Sierra Nevada foothills across the site from these public viewing areas. For the existing rural residences and the church located west of the project site, views to the east are currently obstructed by existing vegetation. Development of the project site would not be expected to adversely affect views of scenic vistas. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista and this impact is considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-1: Impacts on Scenic Vistas.

No mitigation is necessary.

IMPACT 4.7-2 **Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway.** *The project site is not visible from a State Scenic Highway and would not damage scenic resources. The project would result in **no impacts** to scenic resources within a scenic highway.*

A scenic resource is generally a resource, landmark, or area that has been noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is thereby protected because of those qualities. A scenic resource within a State Scenic Highway is a resource that is noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is visible from a State-designated Scenic Highway. The project site is not located along nor is it visible from a Scenic Highway segment. Therefore, the project would have **no impact** on scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-2: Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway.

No mitigation is necessary.

IMPACT 4.7-3 **Change in Visual Character.** *The project would convert views of an approximately 57-acre oak woodland/grassland landscape to urban development. This would substantially alter the visual character of the project area. This would represent a **significant and unavoidable** impact to the visual character of the area.*

The City acknowledged significant and unavoidable adverse impacts regarding changes to the existing visual environment as a part of the 1991 General Plan EIR. In a generalized impact statement, the City acknowledged significant impacts to viewsheds, vistas, substantial alteration to the existing aesthetic character, and light and glare. The impact analysis in this document focuses on aesthetic impacts particular to the project site and the specific development contemplated.

The project site consists primarily of undeveloped lands. Implementation of the project would result in the conversion of these undeveloped lands to urban development. Grass covered undeveloped spaces and oak woodlands would be converted to residential homes, a soundwall, streets, street lighting, ornamental landscaping, and other visually apparent aspects of a suburban-scale, single-family residential subdivision. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the removal of a large number of trees that give the site its current visual character, including 11 heritage trees. Conversion from undeveloped spaces to urban development would result in a substantial alteration of the visual character of the project area.

Because I-80 borders the project site, the altered visual condition of the project area would be visible to residents living in the area and travelers alike. Sierra College Boulevard also provides partial views of the project site. After development of the project, visual conditions of the project site from I-80 would change from the current

undeveloped space, with grasslands and oak woodlands, to a soundwall with roof peaks and tops of homes visible above the top of the soundwall. Views of the project site from I-80 are limited to a short stretch of the highway just east of the interchange with Sierra College Boulevard. Similarly, the limited views of the project site now available from Sierra College Boulevard would change as a result of project implementation. From Sierra College Boulevard, the project site is a part of middle-distant views (not in the foreground or distant background). Much of the existing project site is obscured by existing vegetation. The views of trees and grass-covered hillside on the project site from Sierra College Boulevard would be altered as a result of the project to include houses, streets, ornamental landscaping, and other visually apparent aspects of a suburban-scale, single-family residential subdivision.

Public views of the project site from Sierra College Boulevard, which are already limited by the various factors described above, will be further obscured by an approved commercial project commonly known as “Rocklin Crossings,” which is located directly adjacent and to the west of the project site. The Rocklin Crossings site is between the Rocklin 60 project site and Sierra College Boulevard. The buildings, signage, and other elements of this commercial project would obscure public views of the project site from Sierra College Boulevard.

In addition to the travelers on I-80 and Sierra College Boulevard, several residents living to the east of the project site on Makabe and Dias Lanes would be directly affected by the changes in the project’s visual character. Although existing vegetation surrounding these homes would screen portions of views of the site, views from these residences would not be completely obscured. Residents and travelers along Dias Lane at the northern extremity of the project site would have relatively unobstructed views of the project, as the existing vegetation is not dense in this location and one part of the project is directly adjacent to Dias Lane. The removal of vegetation proposed as a part of the project would open views of the project site from neighboring locations. Whereas previous views of the project site would have consisted of grass-covered hills, oaks and other trees, rock outcroppings, and other aspects of the natural environment, the parts of the project that would be visible from different neighboring locations could include residential homes, streets, fencing, street lights, planted street trees, and other visually apparent portions of the proposed residential subdivision.

The land uses to the north of I-80 would experience changes in their views of the site, such as the commercial uses on Sierra College Boulevard. For the residences on Hunters Drive directly to the north, backyard views would generally be screened by existing property fences, the freeway and intervening vegetation and berms. However, the site would likely be clearly visible from second-story windows.

An open oak woodland/grassland landscape, especially when located in an urbanizing setting, is valued for its visual relief. Some residents in the vicinity and travelers on Interstate 80 may not perceive this as a substantial degradation of the visual character or quality of the site because one common type of view found in the area (open woodland/grassland) would be replaced by another common local view of residences and large soundwalls. Other area residents and travelers through the area would perceive changes in the visual environment attributable to project development as adverse due to the loss of an aesthetically pleasing view. Because of the visual prominence of the site from Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard, and the potential to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site, this impact is considered **significant**.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-3: Change in Visual Character.

No mitigation is available.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

Because of the scale and location of the project, there is no feasible mitigation available to address aesthetic resource impacts associated with the conversion of undeveloped land to urban development. There is no mechanism to allow implementation of the project while avoiding the conversion of the local viewshed from undeveloped, open land to urban development. Impacts related to the degradation of the local viewshed through conversion of undeveloped property to urban development are considered **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 4.7-4 **Impacts from Lighting and Reflective Surfaces.** *The project would require lighting of new development and could construct facilities with reflective surfaces that could inadvertently cause light and glare for motorists on I-80 and Sierra College Boulevard under nighttime conditions. In addition, the degree of darkness in the City of Rocklin and on the project site would diminish as a result of development, potentially diminishing views of stars and other features of the night sky. This impact is considered **significant**.*

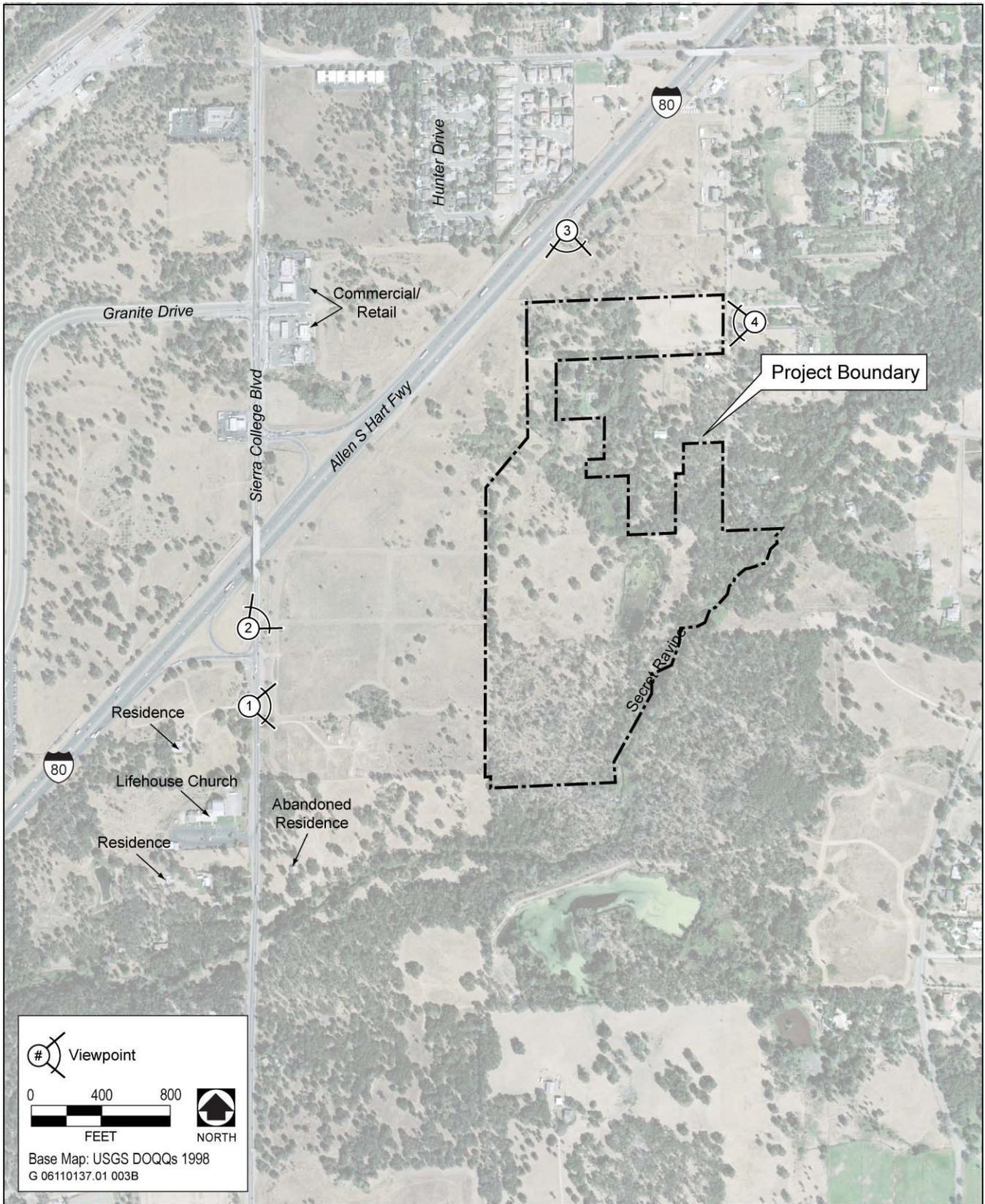
Under current conditions, the project site does not have any sources of light, glare, or light trespass into the night sky. Development of the project would involve lighting along streets and from individual houses. As areas develop, light and glare add to a change in the night sky; the degree of darkness is lessened and the contrast that allows viewers to clearly see stars, planets and other night sky features is diminished. An increase in the amount of nighttime light and glare would result from the development of the project site, potentially contributing to obscuring views of stars and other features of the night sky. In addition, nighttime lighting along the streets could result in light and glare to offsite areas, including to motorists traveling past the site. With the construction of a soundwall, this reflection and the light and glare spillage onto I-80 would be limited. The project will be required to provide street lighting consistent with City standards, which are structured to minimize adverse light and glare. Because the project has the potential to create a substantial new source of light in the project area that would adversely affect nighttime views, this is considered a **significant** impact.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-4: Impacts from Lighting and Reflective Surfaces.

- ▶ All exterior street light fixtures shall be aimed downward and shall be shielded to prevent light spillage onto adjoining properties.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

By directing light sources away from adjacent properties and directing light downward, implementation of the above mitigation measure would reduce impacts related to light and glare and views of the night sky to a **less-than-significant** level.



Source: EDAW 2007

Viewpoint Locations

Exhibit 4.7-1



View from Sierra College Boulevard (Viewpoint 1)



View from the I-80/Sierra College Boulevard Interchange (Viewpoint 2)

Viewpoints 1 and 2

Exhibit 4.7-2



Views from Interstate 80 (Viewpoint 3)

Exhibit 4.7-3



Looking west from Dias Lane across northernmost extent of project site

