

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing aesthetic character of the Specific Plan Area and evaluates the potential impacts to visual resources associated with the proposed Specific Plan, both at the individual and cumulative levels.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

The following sections provide an overview of the physical setting of the Specific Plan Area, as well as the regulatory setting established by the proposed Specific Plan.

4.1.1.1 Specific Plan Area

The majority of the Specific Plan Area is currently undeveloped, and is used for agriculture production. Although the Fresno River is located adjacent to the southern boundary of the Specific Plan Area, there are no unique or distinguishing visual or aesthetic characteristics within the Specific Plan Area. Much of the Specific Plan Area's aesthetic value can be attributed to its agriculture uses.

There are a number of existing residential and associated agricultural structures within the Specific Plan Area. These structures consist of seven existing residences and associated structures; agriculture-related structures; and four public roadways (i.e., Cleveland Avenue, Avenue 16, Road 23, and Avenue 17).

Agricultural lands offer a break from the urban landscape by providing a viewshed of open land with minimal structures or human-made features. Agricultural lands surround the City of Madera and include row crops, field crops, orchards, vineyards, and dairies, as well as grazing land for cattle.

4.1.1.2 Visual Character of the Surrounding Area

The Specific Plan Area is generally surrounded by agriculture and row crops to the north and west. The southern boundary of the Specific Plan Area is adjacent to the Fresno River which is an intermittent river that is typically dry in the summer months. South of the Fresno River is additional agriculture and row crops.

The Madera Municipal Golf Course is located north of Avenue 16 and east of Road 23, and east of the golf course is the Madera Municipal Airport.

Representative photos of the project site and far-field views are shown in Figure 4.1-1 and Figure 4.1-2.

4.1.1.3 Scenic Vistas

Expansive views of agricultural land and distant Sierra Nevada mountains can be seen to the east from various locations within and around the Specific Plan Area. However, depending on the agriculture uses, views of the mountains to the east are somewhat obstructed, as shown in Figure 4.1-1 and Figure 4.1-2.

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FIGURE 4.1-1

The Villages at Almond Grove Specific Plan EIR
Photos of Specific Plan Area

SOURCE: LSA 2021.

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FIGURE 4.1-2

The Villages at Almond Grove Specific Plan EIR
Photos of Specific Plan Area

SOURCE: LSA 2021.

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4.1.1.4 Regulatory Setting

This section summarizes existing laws, policies, and regulations relevant to a review of aesthetic impacts in Madera. For the most part, the aesthetic quality of the project would be subject to the state and local laws, policies, and regulations, as there are no recent federal regulations pertaining to aesthetics.

State Regulations

Nighttime Sky – Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards. The California Legislature passed a bill in 2001 requiring the California Energy Commission (CEC) to adopt energy efficiency standards for outdoor lighting for both the public and private sector. In November 2003, CEC adopted changes to the Title 24, parts 1 and 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards. These standards became effective on October 1, 2005, and included changes to the requirements for outdoor lighting for residential and nonresidential development. The new standards were intended to improve the quality of outdoor lighting and help to reduce the impacts of light pollution, light trespass, and glare. The standards regulate lighting characteristics such as maximum power and brightness, shielding, and sensor controls to turn lighting on and off. Different lighting standards are set by classifying areas by lighting zone. The classification is based on population figures of the 2000 Census. Areas can be designated as LZ1 (dark), LZ2 (rural), or LZ3 (urban). Lighting requirements for dark and rural areas are stricter in order to protect the areas from new sources of light pollution and light trespass.

Local Regulations

City of Madera General Plan. The General Plan Update contains several goals, policies, and action items that are related to aesthetics and visual resources. Table 4.1-A includes General Plan policies and action items related to aesthetics.

Madera Municipal Code. Title IV, Chapter 6 of the City's Municipal Code provides guidelines for replacing and protecting trees located within public places.

4.1.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The following section presents a discussion of the impacts related to aesthetics that could result from implementation of the proposed Specific Plan. The section begins with the criteria of significance, which establish the thresholds to determine if an impact is significant. The latter part of this section presents the impacts associated with implementation of the proposed Specific Plan and the recommended mitigation measures, if required. Mitigation measures are recommended, as appropriate, for significant impacts to eliminate or reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Cumulative impacts are also addressed.

Table 4.1.A: General Plan Policies Related to Aesthetics

Policy/Action Item Number	Policy
Policy CD-1	The City of Madera will require that all new development is well-planned and of the highest possible quality. The City will seek to build an image of Madera as a contemporary small city with vibrant, livable neighborhoods and walkable pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented development.
Action CD-2.1	Adopt a set of comprehensive Design Guidelines to establish basic design standards and criteria for public and private development projects.
Policy CD-5	New development shall be approved only if it meets the design principles set forth in this Community Character Element and to any local, project-specific, or citywide design guidelines.
Policy CD-7	All new development projects requiring site plan approval, shall establish landscape and façade maintenance programs for the first three years, ensuring that streetscapes and landscapes areas are installed and maintained as approved.
Policy CD-8	In order to improve and protect the quality of neighborhoods and commercial districts, the City will enforce established building codes and community standards.
Policy CD-10	Madera will seek to transition the density and intensity of uses from an urban to rural character while maintaining a clear City edge and establishing a sense of entry and arrival to the City. To implement this policy, the City will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the County of Madera to preserve undeveloped lands outside of the Sphere of Influence. • Apply and implement land use designations and open space preservation techniques to create a clearly identifiable edge to the city.
Policy CD-45	New development in the Downtown shall be designed to be similar in character to the existing pattern of development, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement of buildings adjacent to the sidewalk; • Building heights (although multi-story mixed use is encouraged); • Use of storefront display windows; and • Other features as determined appropriate by the City based on the location of the new building and the desirable features of adjacent and nearby structures.
Policy LU-10	The Growth Boundary is considered by the City to define the physical limits of development in Madera. The City shall direct all future growth in Madera and in the unincorporated area outside the city limits to occur inside the Growth Boundary shown on the Land Use Map in this General Plan. Within the City's Planning Area, the City encourages the County to assist the City in maintaining an agricultural green belt around the Growth Boundary by only allowing agricultural uses where land is designated for such use on the City's General Plan Land Use Map. The following apply to the Growth Boundary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Growth Boundary may only be revised as part of a comprehensive update of the General Plan involving, at a minimum, the Land Use and Circulation elements. • Any revision to the Growth Boundary shall be accompanied by a statement of findings which demonstrate the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the revision is consistent with the intent of the Growth Boundary and all other applicable policies in this General Plan 2. That the revision is necessary to accommodate planned growth in Madera
Action LU-12.1	Develop and implement programs and strategies that support the Growth Boundary and keep urban growth inside the Growth Boundary.

Source: City of Madera General Plan (October 2009).

4.1.2.1 Significance Criteria

The thresholds for impacts related to aesthetics used in this analysis are consistent with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Development of the proposed Specific Plan would result in a significant impact related to aesthetics if it would:

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| Threshold 4.1.1 | Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista; |
| Threshold 4.1.2 | Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway; |
| Threshold 4.1.3 | In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; |
| Threshold 4.1.4 | Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. |

4.1.2.2 Project Impacts

The following discussion describes the potential impacts related to aesthetics that could result from implementation of the proposed Specific Plan.

Threshold 4.1.1 Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

The General Plan does not identify any view corridors or scenic vistas in Madera. Many roads outside the Madera City Limits pass through agricultural areas and provide views of the mountain ranges in the distance. Although not located within or adjacent to the Specific Plan Area, State Route (SR) 99 and SR 145 are located in Madera and pass through agricultural and rural lands. In addition, the Fresno River is located immediately south of the Specific Plan Area and is visible from several vantage points within the Specific plan Area. Conversion of agricultural land to urban uses would cause a change in these views and would result in a change in the views. On days of good air quality, these State Routes provide views of the distant Sierra Nevada to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west. However, given the flat topography and limited long-distance viewshed available, as shown in Figure 4.1-1 and Figure 4.1-2, scenic vistas and far-field views from public vantage within the Specific Plan Area points (i.e. the four public roadways of Cleveland Avenue, Avenue 16, Road 23, and Avenue 17) are currently partially obstructed by existing agricultural uses. Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would result in mixed-use urban development, including single- and multi-family housing, public schools, parks, and commercial buildings, adjacent to public vantage points within the Specific Plan Area. The proposed Specific Plan includes Design Guidelines that provide direction for community design, neighborhood design, landscape design, entry treatments, open space, signage, lighting, architectural design, and site planning. Section 7.14, Architectural Guidelines, of the proposed Specific Plan (included as Appendix B of this Draft EIR), provides architecture styles for residential development in the Specific Plan Area. Architectural styles include American Farmhouse, American, Foursquare, Bungalow, Craftsman, Monterey, Ranch

and Spanish Eclectic. Although the architectural styles are not limited to these residential styles, these styles establish an architectural character of the Specific Plan Area. The Design Guidelines are intended to result in high-quality design, however, given the substantial change in land uses that would occur through implementation of the proposed Specific Plan, existing views from the Specific Plan Area and across the Specific Plan Area would be substantially altered. As a result, implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would substantially effect long range views and a significant impact would occur.

Significance Without Mitigation: Significant and unavoidable. The primary objective of the proposed Specific Plan is to implement a long-term buildout plan that would convert existing agriculture land uses to mixed-use urban land uses. As a result of this change in land uses, a substantial effect on scenic vistas would occur but cannot be mitigated.

Threshold 4.1.2 Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

No officially designated state scenic highways are located within the Specific Plan Area, or the City of Madera. Portions of SR 49 and SR 41 are eligible, but those highway segments are located in the Sierra Nevada, over 30 miles northeast of the Specific Plan Area. As a result, implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would not affect scenic resources within a state scenic highway. No impact would occur.

Significance Without Mitigation: No impact. No mitigation is required.

Threshold 4.1.3 In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would result in the conversion of approximately 1,900 acres of agricultural farmland to urban uses. This conversion would substantially change the visual character of the Specific Plan Area. As discussed above, Chapter 7 of the proposed Specific Plan (included as Appendix B of this Draft EIR) includes design guidelines and direction for community design, neighborhood design, landscape design, entry treatments, open space, signage, lighting, architectural design, and site planning in order to provide a high-quality community design. However, the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses would result in a substantial change in visual resources of the Specific Plan Area. There is no feasible mitigation as implementation of the Specific Plan would irreversibly change the visual resources within the Specific Plan Area. As a result, a significant impact would occur.

Significance Without Mitigation: Significant and unavoidable. Although the proposed Specific Plan would include design guidelines to minimize visual impacts related to the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses, there are no feasible mitigation measures available to address the change in visual resources. Because the proposed urban uses are fundamentally different and result in a

permanent change to the visual character of the Specific Plan Area, this impact would be considered significant and unavoidable.

Threshold 4.1.4 Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

The main sources of daytime glare are generally sunlight reflecting from structures and other reflective surfaces and windows. Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would introduce new sources of daytime glare through the construction of new structures and use of automobiles associated with the proposed Specific Plan. The proposed land uses consist of various densities of residential, commercial, and other public uses. Building materials (i.e., reflective glass and polished surfaces) are the most substantial sources of glare. Daytime glare would result in adverse impacts in the Specific Plan Area because the area currently contains primarily agriculture and non-developed areas.

Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would also introduce new light sources into the Specific Plan Area, including temporary light and glare resulting from construction activities that would adversely affect day or nighttime views. Although construction activities are anticipated to occur primarily during daylight hours, it is possible that some activities could occur during dusk or early evening hours (construction activities are allowed in Madera between 6:00 AM and 8:00 PM). Construction during these time periods could result in light and glare from construction vehicles or equipment. However, once construction of any Specific Plan phase is completed, light and glare from these activities would cease to occur.

Nighttime lighting levels would increase substantially over current levels in the Specific Plan Area, and incrementally with future projects in developed areas. New light sources would include new residential developments, street lighting, parking lot lights, and security-related lighting for non-residential uses. These new light sources could result in adverse effects to adjacent land uses through the “spilling over” of light into these areas and increased light pollution. In addition, implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would result in intensified nighttime lighting levels associated with increased traffic levels and further residential and commercial development.

The General Plan contains policies and action items that are intended to prevent light and glare impacts. The following General Plan action items and policies contain specific, enforceable requirements and/or restrictions and corresponding performance standards that address potential impacts related to implementation of the proposed Specific Plan:

Action CD-2.1: Adopt a set of comprehensive Design Guidelines to establish basic design standards and criteria for public and private development projects.

Policy CD-5: New development shall be approved only if it meets the design principles set forth in this Community Character Element and to any local, project-specific, or citywide design guidelines.

Policy CD-8: In order to improve and protect the quality of neighborhoods and commercial districts, the City will enforce established building codes and community standards.

Policy CON-38: The City supports the use of green building practices in the planning, design, construction, management, renovation, operations, and demolition of all private buildings and projects, including:

- Land planning and design techniques that preserve the natural environment and minimize disturbance of the land.
- Site development to reduce erosion, minimize paved surfaces and runoff and protect vegetation, especially trees.
- Water conservation indoors and outdoors.
- Energy efficiency in heating/cooling systems, appliances, lighting and the building envelope.
- Selection of materials based on recyclability, durability and the amount of energy used to create the material.
- Waste reduction, reuse and recycling during construction and throughout the life of the project.
- Other new aspects of green design and construction included in LEED or other certification programs.
- Control nighttime lighting to lower energy use, reduce glare, and prevent illumination of the night sky.

Implementation of the above policies and action item would minimize impacts associated with light and glare through the adoption and enforcement of development design standards, building codes, and community standards, as well as the control of nighttime lighting. In addition, the proposed Specific Plan includes the following lighting guidelines:

1. Lighting design should be an integral part of the overall site and building design. Lighting design should complement the surrounding streetscape and architecture, and be incorporated into other nearby design elements.
2. Street lights, walkway lighting, architectural lighting and landscape accent lighting should be aesthetically pleasing and subdued, while providing for public safety. Use low-energy, shielded light fixtures that direct light downward to minimize glare. Up-lighting of architectural features and landscaping may be permitted.
3. Street lights should be located at regular intervals along streets and at intersections, cul-de-sacs, corners, and areas where pedestrians might commonly encounter vehicular traffic, or as required by the City of Madera.

4. Public Right of Way and parking areas should be adequately illuminated for public safety as required by City of Madera. Human-scaled light poles, bollards or path lights should clearly mark the path of travel to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort.
5. Lighting for non-residential development should be screened from direct view from adjacent residential uses. Lighting for non-residential development should be designed to minimize glare, obtrusive light and artificial sky glow by limiting lighting that is misdirected, excessive or unnecessary, while at the same time maintaining a safe environment.
6. Lighting that represents movement, flashes, blinks or is of unusually high intensity or brightness is prohibited, except during holiday seasons when flashing lights used for holiday displays are permitted.
7. Lighting in residential areas and along streets and trails should be designed to minimize artificial lighting from reflecting into adjacent natural open space.
8. Incorporate energy-saving light fixtures, where feasible.
9. Lighting should conform to local codes and ordinances, applicable safety and illumination requirements, and California Title 24 requirements.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AES-4, which requires implementation of the lighting guidelines included in the proposed Specific Plan, would reduce potential impacts related to daytime glare and nighttime light. In addition, compliance with Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards related Nighttime Sky would reduce potential impacts related to nighttime light. However, even with implementation of this mitigation, due the substantial change in land uses within the Specific Plan Area, potential impacts related to lighting would result in a significant and unavoidable impact.

Mitigation Measure AES-4 During Development Plan review of future discretionary projects developed under the Specific Plan, the City shall ensure that proposed projects demonstrate that the lighting guidelines identified in the Specific Plan are implemented through preparation of a lighting plan. The lighting plan shall be approved by the City of Madera Community Development Director or designee.

Level of Significance With Mitigation: Significant and unavoidable. The conversion of existing farmland with no nighttime lighting to urban uses would result in a significant increase in both daytime glare and nighttime light that cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels.

4.1.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would result in the conversion of approximately 1,900 acres of farmland which would contribute to the alteration of the visual character of the region anticipated from growth and development in the region (e.g., growth and development in Madera and Fresno counties).

Implementation of policies included in the proposed Specific Plan would reduce the potential cumulative impacts on visual resources through the adoption and enforcement of development design standards, landscape guidelines, and community standards, as well as the implementation of open space, building design standards, and nighttime lighting controls. However, with implementation of the proposed Specific Plan, development would occur in an area that is currently used for active agricultural uses. As a result, impacts associated with the conversion of land uses would result in permanent changes to scenic resources as well as an increase in daytime glare and nighttime light. Therefore, this impact would be considered cumulatively considerable and significant and unavoidable.

Level of Significance With Mitigation: Significant and unavoidable. Refer to Mitigation Measure AES-4.

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