12. Aesthetics

12.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This section analyzes a project's potential impact on scenic resources and glare.

12.1.1 Scenic Resources

Scenic resources consist of distinctive aesthetic resources that the County has determined are worthy of conservation. The *Area Plans* for Lake Sherwood, Oak Park, the Ojai Valley, and Piru recognize these resources. Scenic resources may include:

- *Viewsheds* from a publicly accessible vantage point
- *Viewsheds* from designated state or county scenic highways
- Areas publicly accessible for recreational use
- Areas such as ridgelines, hillsides, and rock outcroppings
- *Viewsheds* with scenic water features such as creeks, rivers, and lakes
- *Viewsheds* from publicly accessible open space areas with natural features such as dense vegetation cover and stands of trees
- Scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas comprised of landscape patterns and features which are visually or aesthetically pleasing, and which are visible from a *public viewing location*, including but not limited to the beach or ocean, coastline, mountains, canyons, ridgelines, significant hillsides and open space, estuaries, wetlands and lagoons, other unique natural or human-made features such as the Channel Islands Harbor.

12.1.2 Glare

Glare is the sensation produced by a bright source within the visual field that is sufficiently brighter than the level to which the eyes are adapted causing annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance and visibility.

Conditions that create glare are typically caused by the reflection of sunlight from highly reflective surfaces at or above eye level, or the reflective surfaces of buildings with materials such as metal or glass that lead to *disability glare* or *discomfort glare* for motorists travelling on roads where the traffic volumes/speeds are generally high (e.g. *Regional Road Network*).

12.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The determination of significance shall be made on a case-by-case basis and evaluated using the following thresholds of significance as specified below.

AES-1 A project may have a significant impact if it would:

a. have a substantial adverse effect on a *scenic vista*;

b. substantially damage scenic resources; or

c. substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of a *public viewing location* of the site and its surroundings.

AES-2 A project may have a significant impact if it would include materials that would produce *disability glare* or *discomfort glare* for motorists traveling along one or more roadways within the *Regional Road Network*, which exceeds the glare source to the median of the background ratio of 3:1 in a *luminance histogram*.

12.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

Guidance on addressing the questions from the Initial Study Checklist is provided below. In order to determine whether project impacts exceed or meet the criteria of the thresholds of significance in Section 12.2, the level of impact shall be evaluated based on the appropriate assessment methodologies as outlined below.

After acquiring the information relevant to each question, the *Lead Agency* must compare the project plans, project description, and (if requested) visual simulations and/or line of sight diagrams to the existing environment, as well as the goals and policies that apply to the project. The *Lead Agency* must analyze both project-specific and cumulative impacts relating to scenic resources and glare effects. Determinations as to the significance of the visual impact shall be made by the *Lead Agency* in light of applicable CEQA case law on visual and aesthetic impacts.

(a) Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista; substantially damage scenic resources; or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of a public viewing location of the site and its surroundings?

The evaluation of a project's potential impacts on scenic resources involves a degree of subjectivity because it is a qualitative assessment of the aesthetic characteristics of a physical feature(s) or *viewshed*. Therefore, it is important that the evaluation of a project's potential impacts on scenic resources be supported by *substantial evidence* in the public record for the project and conducted in accordance with the thresholds of significance.

Compliance with Public Resources Code Section 21081.3

Determine whether the project is subject to Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21081.3, which states that a *Lead Agency* is not required to evaluate the aesthetic effects of a project and aesthetic effects shall not be considered significant effects on the environment if the project involves the refurbishment, conversion, repurposing, or replacement of an existing building that meets all of the following requirements:

- The building is abandoned, dilapidated, or has been vacant for more than one year. Pursuant to PRC Section 21081.3, "dilapidated" means decayed, deteriorated, or fallen into such disrepair through neglect or misuse so as to require substantial repair for safe and proper use.
- The building site is immediately *adjacent* to parcels that are developed with qualified urban uses or at least 75 percent of the perimeter of the site adjoins parcels that are developed with qualified urban uses and the remaining 25 percent of the site adjoins parcels that previously have been developed for qualified urban uses.

- The project includes the construction of housing.
- Any new structure does not substantially exceed the height of the existing structure.
- The project does not create a new source of substantial light or glare.

However, a project meeting one of the above requirements must be evaluated for potentially significant aesthetic impacts if it would have an adverse effect on either of the following:

- an official state scenic highway established pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code
- historical or cultural resources

Note that Section 21081.3 will remain in effect until January 1, 2029, and as of that date is repealed unless extended through new legislation.

Public Viewing Location Assessment

The *Lead Agency* should request a *public viewing location* map from the Ventura County Resource Management Agency Geographic Information System (RMA GIS) ~~Viewer~~ Division and conduct a site visit to ascertain the following and, if necessary, obtain photo documentation:

Any scenic resources that may exist on-site or *adjacent* to the project site, and the visibility of the scenic resources from surrounding *public viewing location*s; and,

The degree to which the project site is visible from, and defines the context of, any *scenic vista* from surrounding *public viewing locations*.

Maps of Scenic Resources

In evaluating the potential significance of impacts to scenic resources, consult the Scenic Resource Areas map (Figure 8-7) and Scenic State Highways map (Figure 8-8) in Section 8.3 of the Ventura County General Plan Background Report or as depicted on *County View* and *RMA GIS Viewer*, applicable *Area Plan* scenic resource policies, and zoning and land use maps to:

- Determine whether the project site is located within a *Scenic Resource Protection Overlay Zone*, which includes *viewsheds* of selected county lakes and State or County designated scenic highways, and other scenic resource areas as determined by an *Area Plan* (see Section 8109-4.1.1 of the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance). The lakes included in this overlay zone are Lake Casitas, Lake Matilija, Lake Piru, and Lake Sherwood. Highway 33 (Jacinto Reyes Scenic Byway) is in the Los Padres National Forest and was designated scenic by Caltrans in 1988. Several other county highways are eligible for State listing;
- Obtain the land use and zoning designations for the project site and surrounding area; and
- Determine which land use and scenic resource policies apply to the project.

The Scenic Resource Protection Overlay Zone is depicted on the Scenic Resource layer on *County View* and *RMA GIS Viewer*. If the project is located within the *Scenic Resource Protection Overlay Zone*, the *Lead Agency* should request a *public viewing location* map from the RMA GIS ~~Viewer~~ Division and visual simulations and/or line of sight diagrams from the project applicant in order to evaluate impacts relating to scenic resources. While areas within the *Scenic Resource Protection Overlay Zone* should be carefully considered, potential impacts to scenic resources are not limited to those areas.

The *Lead Agency* must consider past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects that are located within the same *scenic vista* as the project site in order to assess the project's contribution to cumulative impacts to scenic resources.

(b) Would the project include materials that would produce disability *or discomfort glare for motorists traveling along one or more Regional Road Network roadways, which exceeds the glare source to the median of the background ratio of 3:1 in a luminance histogram?*

Review the Project

The *Lead Agency* must review the project description materials and note any potential sources of glare pursuant to General Plan Program COS-FF, including the use of reflective surfaces such as metal, glass, or other materials that could produce glare and that the *Lead Agency* determines would potentially be visible to motorists traveling along one or more *Regional Road Network* roadways.

Site Visit

If the project proposes to use reflective materials, the *Lead Agency* should request a *public viewing location* map from *RMA GIS Viewer* and visit the project site, the roads within the *Regional Road Network* within the vicinity of the project site, and document (with photographs, if necessary) any sources of potential glare.

If the project would not be visible from a roadway within the *Regional Road Network*, the project would have a less than significant glare impact.

Pursuant to General Plan Program COS-FF, if the *Lead Agency* determines that the project would include materials that would produce *disability* or *discomfort glare* for motorists traveling along one or more *Regional Road Network* roadways then the *Lead Agency* shall either require the use of alternative materials, such as high-performance tinted non-mirrored glass, painted (non-gloss panels), and pre-cast concrete or fabricated textured wall surfaces, or require that the applicant submit a study demonstrating that the project would not introduce a glare source that exceeds 3:1 in a *luminance histogram*, which consists of inputting a set of digital photographs from a subject glare source into a computer simulation program and generating a graph that identifies the brightness level of different sections of that scene, from darkest to brightest.

The study of potential glare upon nearby *Regional Road Network* roadways should utilize a computer simulation program that determines the intensity of glare that would occur at a given project site, based upon the geography of the site, in relation to how the sun may cause a strong reflection at different times of the day. The type of building materials should be incorporated into the simulation. The level of increase in ambient light (i.e., light surrounding an environment or subject) from a new project to the surrounding area can be determined by a *luminance histogram*. The source of glare can be classified into two categories: *disability glare* and *discomfort glare*. In a *luminance histogram*, the source of most extreme brightness to one's vision is the sun, which is beyond the capacity of the eye to adapt. This is considered to be an "absolute value" of glare. Some sources of glare could be below this threshold and would still be considered a significant source of glare when a viewer's vision adapts to the lower background level of the subject environment. Thus, glare impacts would be considered significant when the glare source to the median of the background ratio exceeds 3:1 in a *luminance histogram*.

Impact Mitigation

Glare impacts could be reduced by ensuring that building materials for the project consist of materials such as high-performance tinted non-mirrored glass, painted (non-gloss) panels, and pre-cast concrete or fabricated textured wall surfaces.

12.4 RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Source	Managing Agency/Organization	Online Access
Resources		
Ventura County CEQA Implementation Manual	Ventura County Resource Management Agency (RMA) Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, Introduction	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County Initial Study Checklist Template	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
References		
California Environmental Quality Act	California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, formerly Office of Planning and Research	Website
County View	Ventura County Geographic Information Systems	Website
Ventura County General Plan, Area Plans	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County General Plan Background Report, Chapter 8	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County RMA Geographic Information Systems Viewer	Ventura County Information Technology Services	Website