

INTRODUCTION

This section identifies and describes the visual characteristics of the RiverPark Specific Plan Area and surrounding areas and assesses the significance of the changes to the visual character of the area that would result from the implementation of the RiverPark Project. Sources utilized in the preparation of this section include the Community Design Element of the City's 2020 General Plan (1990), the proposed RiverPark Specific Plan, and a visual reconnaissance survey.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Citywide Visual Setting

The RiverPark Specific Plan Area is located on the relatively low-lying Oxnard Plain toward the northern end of the City of Oxnard. The Oxnard Plain is bordered by the Pacific Ocean and extends inland for approximately 10 miles between Ventura and Point Mugu. The topography of the Plain is predominantly level to gently sloping. Prominent visual features within or adjacent to the Oxnard Plain include the Camarillo Hills to the north, the Santa Monica Mountains to the east, and the Pacific Ocean and coastline to the west and south.

The City of Oxnard is visually defined by natural and man-made visual resources, including open spaces, beaches and coastline, agricultural areas, low rise commercial and residential development, as well as tall buildings which are visible in the City's skyline. The western and southern edges of the City are framed by the Pacific Ocean, the northern edge is bounded by the Santa Clara River, and the northeastern and eastern sides by the agricultural land in the Oxnard-Camarillo Greenbelt. Inland views to the foothills and mountain ranges of the Los Padres National Forest and the Santa Monica Mountains are visible from many of the City's north-south and east-west oriented streets. Land uses located within the northern portion of the City include residential, commercial, open space, and agricultural uses.

On-Site and Surrounding Areas Visual Setting

The Specific Plan Area currently contains four main types of land uses that define the visual setting of the site. RiverPark Area 'A' consists primarily agricultural, commercial, and institutional land uses.

The visual character of this area is defined by the existing strawberry fields, the El Rio Maintenance Yard, and the two existing commercial office buildings in the southwest corner of the Specific Plan Area. The County El Rio Maintenance Yard is surrounded by a fence and contains small one and two-story buildings, ornamental trees, and paved parking areas. The two existing office buildings, the Nordman, Cormany, Hair and Compton Building, located on Town Center Drive, and the State Compensation Insurance Fund Building, located on Ventura Road are low to mid-rise structures. The RiverPark 'B' Area contains the existing sand and gravel mine site and mine pits and two drainage basins. The mine site contains a small number of one-story wood frame buildings, as well as a eucalyptus windrow along the boundary of RiverPark Areas 'A' and 'B'. A smaller row of cottonwood trees is also located near Vineyard Avenue along the northern edge of El Rio Detention Basin No. 2. Overall, the Specific Plan Area has an open space visual character due to the small number of existing structures.

The Specific Plan Area is immediately bounded on the east by Vineyard Avenue and the El Rio West Neighborhood, on the south by the Ventura Freeway, on the west by Santa Clara River and its associated levee, and north by existing industrial, agricultural, and vacant areas. Surrounding land uses include the El Rio residential community to the east of Vineyard Avenue, the Wagon Wheel and Esplanade commercial areas to the south, the Financial Plaza commercial area to the southeast, and agricultural fields to the north and northeast.

Prominent visual features found near the Specific Plan Area include the Ventura Freeway to the south, the high-rise City National and Dean Witter Buildings in the Financial Plaza area, open space and agricultural lands located at the east and north; and the Santa Clara River and its associated levee.

The Community Design Element of the City of Oxnard *2020 General Plan* identifies the agricultural areas found in the eastern, northeastern, and northwestern portions of the City's Planning Area as natural scenic resources. Most of the agricultural spaces, often marked by eucalyptus and cypress windrows, are contained within greenbelts that serve as green buffers surrounding the City's developed core. These agricultural areas and the views to the mountain and hills to the north and are considered scenic resources that contribute to the unique character and visual image of the City.

Public Views

Based on a visual reconnaissance of the project area, two types of public views were identified: (1) those observed from the roadways that bound the Specific Plan Area, and (2) views as seen from adjacent land uses. In order to document the existing visual character of the Specific Plan Area and its

surroundings, photographs were taken from locations where public views of the site are most attainable.

Primary Roadways

The Community Design Element of the City of Oxnard *General Plan* identifies scenic resources within the City. Roadways which provide views of the scenic resources and agricultural lands within and around the City are designated as image corridors. The primary roadways that bound the proposed Specific Plan Area are Ventura Freeway and Vineyard Avenue. The Ventura Freeway is designated as Regional Image Corridor, and Vineyard Avenue is a City Image Corridor. In addition, the intersection of the Ventura Freeway and Vineyard Avenue is designated as a Regional Gateway. Although Oxnard Boulevard, which is proposed to be extended into the Specific Plan Area, is also identified as a City Image Corridor, views between the project site and Oxnard Boulevard are currently obstructed by the Ventura Freeway. In addition to the City designations, the Ventura Freeway and the portion of Oxnard Boulevard below the Ventura Freeway are eligible for designation as State Scenic Highways.¹

The Ventura Freeway forms the southern boundary of the site. It is a six-lane freeway crossing the Oxnard Plain, including the northern portion of the City of Oxnard. Starting at the eastern end of the Specific Plan Area, the foreground view to motorists on the Ventura Freeway includes portions of the existing strawberry fields, a few homes on El Rio Drive, the Newport Boat Showroom building, the County El Rio Maintenance Yard, and mid-rise the Nordman, Cormany, Hair and Compton State Compensation Insurance Fund Buildings. The midground view from the freeway includes the agricultural fields and tree windrows on the Specific Plan Area, and in the background are hills and mountains. **Figure 4.2-1** presents a representative northward view of the El Rio Maintenance Yard from south of the Ventura Freeway. As shown, the Ventura Freeway is only slightly elevated above street level. Although the buildings in the El Rio Maintenance Yard site are only one and two stories in height, they obstruct views of the agricultural field and the hills and mountains. **Figure 4.2-1** presents a representative northward view of the existing agricultural field from south of the Ventura Freeway. The metal fencing behind it results in limited view of the agricultural fields from the Ventura Freeway.

Vineyard Avenue forms the eastern boundary of the Specific Plan Area. Vineyard Avenue is a four-lane, north-south street. **Figure 4.2-2** provides a representative northward view of Vineyard Avenue as seen from the intersection of Myrtle Street and Vineyard Avenue. In the foreground to the left and right

¹ California Scenic Highway Mapping System, California Department of Transportation. (http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm) January 2001.

are existing retail commercial uses. Portions of the Specific Plan Area are visible in the midground to the west of Vineyard Avenue, and the mountains and hills in the Los Padres National Forest appear in the background. As shown in the photographs in **Figure 4.2-2** and **Figure 4.2-3**, paved sidewalk, street trees, lights, ornamental landscaping, and utility poles are located along the road.

Views from Nearby Areas

El Rio West Neighborhood

Figure 4.2-4 presents a westward view of the Specific Plan Area from the El Rio West Neighborhood, specifically from the end of Sycamore Street. As shown, there is a clear line of sight from this location to the strawberry fields in the Specific Plan Area in the foreground, the Nordman, Cormany, Hair and Compton Building, the eucalyptus windrow, and other off-site urbanized land uses in the midground. The mountains and hills in the Los Padres National Forest are visible in the background

Industrial Area to the North

Figure 4.2-5 shows the Specific Plan Area as viewed southward from South Bank Road in the Montgomery/Lambert Industrial Area. As can be seen, the topography of the site is flat, offering a clear view of the project site and beyond. In the foreground of the view is the existing mine pit containing water with some vegetation along the banks. The midground view is characterized by the flat agricultural fields on the project site. In the background to the far right and left are the hills and mountains and in center are the City National and Dean Witter Buildings, which are located across the Ventura Freeway.

City of Ventura and the Santa Clara River

To the west of the site is the Santa Clara River. A levee along the Santa Clara River is separated from the project site by a wall. At ground level both the levee and the wall form an effective visual barrier to the river. However, expansive views of the Specific Plan Area are provided from across the river in the City of Ventura. Agricultural uses are located directly across the river with and residential neighborhoods further west. Views are available from several parks along the eastern edge of the City of Ventura including the Bristol Bay Linear Park, Riverview Linear Park, and Northbank Linear Park, as well as along streets bordering agricultural fields that are adjacent to the river. The major roadway in the City of Ventura closest to the project site is Telephone Road. **Figure 4.2-6** shows the view from Telephone Road towards the project site. As shown, agricultural fields are located in the foreground, trees and other vegetation along the Santa Clara River are present in the midground, and in the background are the City National and Dean Witter Buildings.

Figure 4.2-1
Existing View of Project Site from the South

Figure 4.2-2

Existing Northward View of Vineyard Avenue from Myrtle Street

Figure 4.2-3

Existing Southwesterly View of the Project Site from Vineyard Avenue

Figure 4.2-4

Existing View of the Project Site from El Rio West Neighborhood

Figure 4.2-5

Existing View of the Project Site from the North

Figure 4.2-6

Existing Westward View of the Project Site from Telephone Road

South of Ventura Freeway

The Ventura Freeway forms a visual barrier between the Specific Plan Area from the south. The Ventura Freeway, which is elevated above the level of the surrounding streets, obstructs ground-level views to the Specific Plan Area from Oxnard Boulevard, which offers the closest public northward view from south of the Ventura Freeway. The retail and office commercial buildings located to the south of the Ventura Freeway further obstructs views to the project site from south of the Ventura Freeway.

Plans and Policies

The visual quality of the area is addressed by policies in the City of Oxnard *2020 General Plan*. The City of Oxnard *2020 General Plan* contains a variety of goals, objectives, and policies related to aesthetics in the City. Relevant goals and objectives from the Community Design Element are listed below. Policies are discussed in the Project Impact portion of this section.

Community Design Element of the 2020 General Plan

The Community Design Element of the *2020 General Plan* identifies the aesthetic resources and land uses that define Oxnard's image and visual character. The element addresses the City's natural setting including the agricultural areas, windrows, views of mountains, image corridors, city gateways.

- A unified and high quality visual image for the City.
- A thoughtful and sympathetic relationship between the build environment and natural environment.

Objectives

- Maintain the unique coastal and agricultural character of Oxnard.
- Preserve the visual identity and character of existing neighborhoods.
- Preserve the City's natural features and historic structures.
- Revitalize areas of the City which are currently deteriorated or detract from the visual quality of the City.
- Achieve quality architectural and landscape architectural design that recognizes its surrounding natural environment.
- Upgrade Major Entryways to the City with landscaping and/or signage to enhance the City's image and sense of place.
- Enhance the visual identity of the City's activities nodes.
- Preserve important view corridors.

The Existing Community Design Structure Map contained in the Community Design Element of the 2020 *General Plan* identifies scenic resources in the general vicinity of the Specific Plan Area. **Figure 4.2-6** presents the scenic resources located in the general vicinity of the Specific Plan Area. The City of Oxnard regards agricultural lands as a natural scenic resource. As a result, the agricultural land to the east and northeast of the Specific Plan Area is shown on **Figure 4.2-7** as a scenic resource. The agricultural area provides an open space buffer between the developed areas of Oxnard and Camarillo, and provides a sense of identity for the community. Eucalyptus windrows are also identified as a dramatic vertical visual element on the predominantly flat topography.

Views to the mountains and image corridors are considered important scenic resource of the City. The Ventura Freeway is identified as a Regional Image Corridor, while the Santa Clara River, Vineyard Avenue, and Oxnard Boulevard are City Image Corridors. Vineyard Avenue and Oxnard Boulevard are further identified as view corridors that allow long-range panoramic views that characterize the agricultural image of the City and provide scenic views of the foothills and mountains from urbanized areas. As discussed above, in the vicinity of the Specific Plan Area, these long range scenic views are only available from Vineyard Avenue.

The established urban patterns are considered scenic resources that contribute to the unique character and visual image of the City. The RiverPark 'A' Area, most of which is located in the Oxnard Town Center Specific Plan Area, is identified as an area of visual significance. The Oxnard 2020 *General Plan* assumes the retail, visitor-serving, and office commercial uses allowed by the Oxnard Town Center Specific Plan would be built. The Oxnard Town Center Specific Plan allows the development of 18 to 24-story high-rise buildings. These uses would have created a visually significant activity node for the City. However, since adoption of this Specific Plan in 1986, only the two mid-rise office buildings in the southwest corner of the Specific Plan Area have been developed.

The Community Design element contains numerous goals, objectives, and policies intended to maintain and enhance the unique scenic features found within the City of Oxnard. A discussion of the consistency of the proposed project with applicable policies is found later in this section.

Figure 4.2-7
General Plan Community Design Structure Map

PROJECT IMPACTS

Thresholds of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA *Guidelines*, the City of Oxnard considers the aesthetic impact of a project to be significant if it would:

- have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on a scenic vista;
- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of a site and its surroundings; or
- substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway;
- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views of the area;
- be inconsistent with any applicable policies in the *2020 General Plan Community Design Element*.

Project Characteristics

The proposed RiverPark Specific Plan would allow the development of the 701-acre site with residential, commercial, open space and public facilities uses. **Section 3.0, Project Description**, presents a description of these design features of the proposed project. The Specific Plan also includes design guidelines for streetscape and buildings that prescribe such elements as park design, trees and shrubs, public art, lighting system, and architectural style.

Section 5 of the RiverPark Specific Plan Area is the Landscape Master Plan. The conceptual landscape and open space plans included in this section of the Specific Plan define the landscaping to be provided along the edges of the project site and along the interior streets. A diverse range of native and ornamental landscaping is proposed throughout the community. **Figure 4.2-8** presents the Streetscape Master Plan and **Figure 4.2-9** presents the Open Space Master Plan. As shown in the Streetscape Master Plan a visual hierarchy of streets will be created through the use of different landscape designs for the boulevards, avenues, commercial drives and residential neighborhood streets and drives. The Open Space Master Plan shows the variety of open spaces planned throughout the community. The RiverPark Specific Plan would create an array of parks, gardens, village squares, and community greens into the project design. These facilities are designed to be conveniently located within the community and serve as visual focal points in addition to providing recreational opportunities. The slopes of the reclaimed mine pits and the areas around the mine pits will be landscaped with native vegetation. The schools, neighborhood parks, and open spaces on the major streets will create a network of landscaped open spaces throughout the community.

The Landscape Master Plan includes native vegetation along the western edge of the Specific Plan Area and around the edges of the reclaimed mine pits. A linear landscaped riparian edge, composed of native vegetation communities, is proposed within the western edge of the Specific Plan Area in RiverPark Area 'B'. The goal of this native landscape edge is to create a multi-layered habitat that utilizes native vegetation communities to attract and support a wide range of wildlife species, especially birds. Selected tree species, including Fremont Cottonwoods, black cottonwoods, red willow and native sycamores, are proposed to create a cottonwood-willow woodland. Creation of this new forest of trees along the river edge will complement the existing visual character of the river. Overall, open space will make up 269 acres of the 701 acre Specific Plan Area.

Project Impacts

Scenic Vistas

Views of the surrounding topography are considered an important scenic resource of the City, and many of the City's north-south streets serve as important view corridors to the foothills and mountains. As shown in **Figure 4.2-8**, Vineyard Avenue north of the Ventura Freeway is identified as the only view corridor in the vicinity of the Specific Plan Area. The *General Plan* states that view corridors should be maintained and enhanced.

The proposed development on portions of the Specific Plan Area along Vineyard Avenue consists of commercial uses between the Ventura Freeway and Myrtle Street and institutional uses, including schools and fire stations, north of the El Rio West Residential Neighborhood. The commercial uses would be visually consistent in terms of height and character with other commercial uses on the eastern side of the Vineyard Avenue interchange. North of the El Rio West Neighborhood, the uses would largely have an open space character. The elementary/intermediate school site located between Santa Clara River Boulevard and Northpark Drive will contain grass playfields along Vineyard Avenue. The existing El Rio Retention Basin No. 1 will be reconfigured and incorporated into the project as a water quality treatment detention basin. The Brigham-Vickers and Large Woolsey Mine Pits will also remain. The Specific Plan would maintain uses with an open space character along a majority Vineyard Avenue, thereby minimizing any obstruction of views to the mountain and hills. As such, the visual impact on this scenic vista would be less than significant.

Figure 4.2-8
General Plan Community Design Structure Map

Figure 4.2-9
Open Space Master Plan

Visual Character

The RiverPark Project will change the visual character of the Specific Plan Area. Due to the visually prominent location of the Specific Plan Area on the Ventura Freeway between Vineyard Avenue and the Santa Clara River, the project will also change the visual character of this portion of north Oxnard. The project's effects on the existing visual character of the Specific Plan Area and the surrounding area will differ depending on the location of the view. Motorists travelling by or through the area would see the site primarily from the Ventura Freeway and major roadways in the area. Views are also available from some adjacent and nearby land uses. Discussion of these views as affected by the proposed project is provided below.

The Community Design Element of the 2020 *General Plan* designates the Ventura Freeway as a Regional Image Corridor and Vineyard Avenue and Oxnard Boulevard as City Image Corridors. In addition, the intersection of Ventura Freeway and Vineyard Avenue is designated as a Regional Gateway.

The Ventura Freeway runs along the southern border of the site. As part of the project, two sets of landscape treatment are proposed along the Ventura Freeway, as shown in **Figure 4.2-10**. First, in consideration of the highway speed of the passers-by, a single row of 30 feet tall Mexican Fan Palms spaced at 30 feet on center is proposed along the freeway frontage. Second, the Specific Plan proposes the creation of a landscaped retention zone, planted with an appropriate mix of native and indigenous grasses, perennials, shrubs, and trees, acting as a ground level visual edge zone abutting the proposed parking areas and streets. Development visible from the freeway will be one to three stories in height, with the exception of the hotel building allowed in Planning District C, immediately west of Oxnard Boulevard. The proposed Specific Plan allows the hotel building to be up to 210 feet in height (18-stories). As such, the height of the proposed development would be similar to existing buildings along nearby stretches of the Ventura Freeway. While the buildings and landscape treatments would fill the foreground and midground view from the freeway, background views to the mountains and hills in the Los Padres National Forest to the north would not be obstructed. Views of the existing agricultural fields on the site from the freeway would be lost. Presently, the view of the fields is limited at travel speed by the existing County El Rio Maintenance Yard, other development visible along El Rio Road, and the two existing mid-rise office buildings in the southwest corner of the Specific Plan Area. Given this, and as the landscape treatment and the types of buildings on the site that would be visible from the Ventura Freeway would be similar to nearby land uses that are visible from the Ventura Freeway, less than significant visual character impact on views from the Ventura Freeway would occur.

Vineyard Avenue runs along portions of the eastern border of the Specific Plan Area. As discussed above, the RiverPark Specific Plan places mostly open space uses along Vineyard Avenue. The existing mine pits and drainage basin in the northeastern corner of the Specific Plan Area will be preserved. The playfields for the new elementary/intermediate school site will be placed along Vineyard Avenue. The new City of Oxnard and County of Ventura Fire Stations will be the only new buildings allowed by the Specific Plan along Vineyard Avenue. As shown in **Figure 4.2-11**. There would be no significant impact on the visual character of Vineyard Avenue.

The intersection of Vineyard Avenue and the Ventura Freeway is identified as gateways to the City. The proposed project site contains one corner of one of this intersection. The proposed use allowed in this location in Planning District E, would be 1 to 3 story commercial buildings, which will be visually consistent in terms of scale and use with the existing commercial development to the east of Vineyard Avenue. As a result, there will be no significant impact on the visual character of this gateway intersection.

Oxnard Boulevard, which currently does not extend north of the Ventura Freeway, is proposed to be extended north from the new Oxnard Boulevard interchange with the Ventura Freeway. Oxnard Boulevard will serve as the predominant north/south connector through RiverPark, functioning as the primary visual and functional gateway into RiverPark. In the commercial Planning Districts, between the Ventura Freeway and Santa Clara River Boulevard, Oxnard Boulevard would transition from a six lane arterial near the freeway to a four lane section with a median extending continuously through the commercial core. Oxnard Boulevard would intersect Santa Clara River Boulevard in a landscaped traffic circle. North of Santa Clara River Boulevard, this street would assume a more residential scale, becoming narrower and smaller in scale with its landscape treatment reflecting more the adjacent residential neighborhood character. Along most sections of this street, pedestrians will be separated from vehicular traffic by a landscaped parkway. Travelling north from Santa Clara River Boulevard, Oxnard Boulevard will split around a large central park space located between Southpark and Northpark Drives, contain a landscaped traffic circle at the intersection with Riverpark Avenue and split around a neighborhood park at its north end.

While the high-rise hotel will be visible along Oxnard Boulevard this building will only partially obstruct views to the hills and mountains to the north. The proposed landscape and streetscape treatment would create a scenic street that still offers a northward view of the mountains and hills. The proposed project would, therefore, enhance background and foreground views for motorists and pedestrians traveling Oxnard Boulevard and would not detract from any long range views. As a result, the change in the visual character of Oxnard Boulevard, which is a City Image Corridor and a scenic route, would not be significant.

Figure 4.2-10

View of Project from the South - Post-Development

Figure 4.2-11

Southwesterly View of the Project Site from Vineyard Avenue - Post Development

Views From Adjacent Areas

As mentioned, The El Rio West residential neighborhood is located immediately east of the Specific Plan Area. At the northern edge of this neighborhood, a fifty-foot wide landscape buffer is proposed to separate Santa Clara River Boulevard from the neighborhood. This buffer area would include an eight-foot parkway and a six-foot sidewalk immediately south of Santa Clara River Boulevard. The remaining thirty-six feet will be bermed and landscaped with dense plantings of evergreen trees and shrubs, such as *Pinus eldarica*, as shown in **Figure 4.2-12**.

Along the western perimeter of the El Rio West Neighborhood, a continuous landscape buffer, including a variety of taller shade trees is proposed. This landscape buffer will run continuously along the western edge of the El Rio West Neighborhood with the exception of the new neighborhood park located in the center of this edge. A representative westerly view from the El Rio West Neighborhood is shown in **Figure 4.2-13**. The existing views from the ends of the streets in this neighborhood of the adjacent agricultural fields will be replaced with a view of the landscape buffer, new neighborhood park and residential development. There will be no adverse change in the views from this neighborhood and the change in view, is therefore, not significant.

Figure 4.2-5 depicts the existing Specific Plan Area as viewed southward from the terminus of South Bank Road, which is located in the Montgomery/Lambert industrial area to the northeast of the Specific Plan Area. Development of the proposed project would include landscaping that will utilize native, indigenous plant materials in order to stabilize the existing edges of the basin, as well as fencing to restrict physical access to the bank's edges. Beyond the basin, the project proposes residential uses. No significant adverse visual impact will result.

To the west of the Specific Plan Area are the Santa Clara River, beyond which are agricultural fields, residential communities, and parks in the City of Ventura. Expansive views of the Santa Clara River and the project site are visible from elevated portions of these agricultural, recreational, and residential land uses. The City of Ventura Comprehensive Plan (1989) calls for the creation of a linear park system along the eastern edge of the City, portions of which would be located along the Santa Clara River. This linear park is intended to link public and private open space areas, provide an alternative circulation system, protect natural values, and accommodate leisure time pursuits. The Circulation Element of the City of Ventura's Comprehensive Plan further states that the linear park is intended to preserve public access and views of the ridgeline, river, and ocean corridors. Development of the RiverPark Project would replace agricultural fields and the existing sand and gravel with a variety of landscaped urban uses while only landscaping and maintaining the groundwater recharge

basins, as shown in **Figure 4.2-14**. The project would also create a new riparian woodland along the on the Santa Clara River in RiverPark Area 'B'. The tall native trees proposed in this location would be visually compatible with the native vegetation and visual character of the river and screen views of the new residential neighborhoods. The commercial development in the southern portion of the Specific Plan Area will be similar in character to other existing commercial development around the Vineyard Avenue freeway interchange visible from the eastern edge of Ventura. There will be no adverse change in the visual character of views from the eastern edge of the City of Ventura. The change in views from the City of Ventura, therefore, is not significant.

Consistency with Applicable Plans and Policies

Community Design Element of the 2020 General Plan

In order to determine the Specific Plan's consistency with the Oxnard *2020 General Plan* as well as to determine the project's effects on the visual character and quality of the site, consistency with the policies from the Community Design Element are discussed below. Policies are designed by the City for the achievement of stated objectives and goals of the *General Plan*, and, therefore, compliance with the policies results in compliance with the goals and objectives. The following provides a discussion of the consistency of the proposed project with applicable policies. Included below is discussion pertaining to scenic resources that are shown in **Figure 4.2-6**, including agricultural buffer, eucalyptus windrows, views to the mountains and image corridors, and the established urban patterns.

Policies and Discussion

- Freeway corridors should be improved aesthetically through the use of landscaping and adjacent architectural treatment.

As mentioned, the proposed project includes two sets of landscape treatment for the border along the Ventura Freeway. First, in consideration of the highway speed of the passers-bys, a single row of 30 feet tall Mexican Fan Palms spaced at 30 feet on center is proposed along the freeway frontage. Second, the Specific Plan proposes the creation of a landscaped retention zone, planted with an appropriate mix of native and indigenous grasses, perennials, shrubs, and trees, acting as a ground level visual edge zone abutting the proposed parking areas and streets. The RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- The street tree program should be expanded to include ground covers and other landscaping for median strips and to include landscaping for major entryways

Figure 4.2-12

Cross Section of El Rio West Neighborhood Buffer - Northern Edge

Figure 4.2-13

View of the Project Site from El Rio West Neighborhood - Post-Development

Figure 4.2-14

Westward View of the Project Site from Telephone Road - Post-Development

The Streetscape Master Plan shown in **Figure 4.2.8**, creates different landscape treatments for the four primary types of streets in the Specific Plan Area. Oxnard Boulevard, Ventura Road and Santa Clara River Boulevard make up the first type, which are called “Boulevards.” The second type of street is the “Avenue.” Avenues in RiverPark include Myrtle Street, Riverpark Avenue, Oxnard Boulevard between Santa Clara River Boulevard and the neighborhood park near its north end and Northpark and Southpark Avenues east of Oxnard Boulevard. The Streetscape Master Plan also addresses the main commercial drives and large parking areas that will be located in the commercial Planning Districts between the Ventura Freeway, Ventura Road, Santa Clara River Boulevard and Myrtle Street. The Boulevards and Avenues have landscaped medians and unique landscape features such as landscaped traffic circles, additional landscaping at major intersections, and along Oxnard Boulevard north of Santa Clara River Boulevard, two major park spaces. As proposed, the project is consistent with this policy.

- Incentives for windrow preservation along freeway corridors, where feasible, should be developed, as well as for special edge treatments along greenbelt areas. A landscape buffer corridor at least 30 feet in width should be developed along freeway corridors.

The Specific Plan Area contains a eucalyptus windrow that is proposed to be incorporated into a linear park space connecting the Central Park in Oxnard Boulevard west to a park at the western edge of the Specific Plan Area immediately north of the elementary school site. In addition to preserving this windrow, the new cottonwood forest proposed along the western edge of the Specific Plan Area in RiverPark Area ‘B’ will introduce additional tall trees visible from the Ventura Freeway. As previously mentioned, two sets of landscape treatments are proposed along the Ventura Freeway. This landscape buffer along the freeway varies in width but is more than thirty feet wide. The Specific Plan Area is not adjacent to any greenbelt areas. Vineyard Avenue separates the Specific Plan Area from the agricultural land to the east in the Oxnard-Camarillo-Del Norte Greenbelt. The portions of the Specific Plan Area closest to the greenbelt consist of open space uses, including the reclaimed mine pits and a water quality detention basin. The school site located between Northpark Drive and Santa Clara River Boulevard will consist of grassy playfields along Vineyard Avenue. This edge of open space uses along Vineyard Avenue ensures land use compatibility with the agricultural uses in the greenbelt. The RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- The City shall continue to require that the Staff Development Advisory Committee review new development projects for consistency with the City’s development design policies and appropriateness for the proposed sites.

The RiverPark Specific Plan has been reviewed by the City's Development Advisory Committee. In addition, all individual building projects built within the Specific Plan Area will be subject to review by the Development Advisory Committee. The RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- Urban development on a human scale, especially in the three identified activities nodes, shall be encouraged. These areas constitute the focus of pedestrian activity within the City and therefore should include pedestrian-oriented street furniture such as benches, planters, and landscaping.

The Oxnard 2020 *General Plan* identifies the Oxnard Town Center Specific Plan Area, which is contained in the proposed RiverPark Specific Plan Area, as an activity node in the City. As proposed the RiverPark Specific Plan is inspired by the design principles of the 'New Urbanism' and 'Smart Growth' movements, which emphasize the importance of mixed land uses, communities scaled for pedestrian movement, limiting automobile usage and the importance of physical design in creating communities that people want to live, work and shop in. Pedestrian-scaled safe travel routes link throughout the Specific Plan Area. Parks and open space elements are strategically distributed to not only enhance neighborhood identity but to provide an array of both passive and active recreation experiences. Street section design incorporates and encourages convenient, safe and attractive pedestrian linkages. The Specific Plan emphasizes pedestrian movement throughout the community and includes a Pedestrian Circulation Master Plan. Furthermore, a consistently used and well-designed system of street furniture will be utilized within the RiverPark Specific Plan Area. The intent is to provide a unified, functional and visually appealing array of elements including pedestrian and vehicular street lights, transit waiting canopies, kiosks, tree grates and guards, benches and trash receptacles. The RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- The City shall continue and formalize in area plans the architectural design themes established in visually distinctive areas of the City, including the activity nodes.

The RiverPark Specific Plan contains design standards addressing the design characteristics of development in each Planning District. Depending on the type of uses within each Planning District, the Specific Plan contains different types of guidelines. For Commercial/Entertainment uses, the Commercial Land Use Master Plan of the Specific Plan contains street-, place- and building-specific recommendations on design concept, building details, fenestration, sidewalk uses, trees, planters, paving, lights, and wayfinding/environmental graphics, and other elements. For Residential uses, the Residential Land Use Master Plan of the Specific Plan further divides the Planning Districts into Sub-Districts that define the blocks and lots within which specific building types may be built to ensure harmonious streetscapes and unique neighborhood characters. The Master Plan further prescribes elements of the building types, including materials, configurations, methods for building envelope,

roofing, windows and doors, and signage. Given the extensive design guidelines included in the Specific Plan, the RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- The City shall continue to implement the Art-In-Public Places Program, and encourage the placement of art in major new residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and government development projects.

The Specific Plan identifies locations for art in the public places in the Commercial Planning Districts and in the parks and other planned open spaces. While additional locations may be identified as detailed development plans are created for individual building locations, the identified site opportunities represent areas of significant visual prominence and focus suitable for art or sculpture features. Given these features in the Specific Plan, the RiverPark Project is consistent with this policy.

- The design of municipal buildings throughout the City shall be in accordance with any specific plan guidelines or community design guidelines that may apply to a particular geographic area, or consistent with the strong, unified, and harmonious architectural design concept of a specific area if one has been established. In the absence of the above, then architectural style shall be compatible with adjacent existing or proposed development.

The only municipal building planned for the Specific Plan Area is the new City of Oxnard Fire Station planned on the northwest corner of Vineyard Avenue and Northpark Avenue. This new fire station will be designed by the City to consistent with the existing visual character of Vineyard Avenue consistent with this policy.

- The design of new neighborhoods in specific plan areas is encouraged to consider themes and principles of design, such as neo-traditional town planning, which will help achieve a sense of community and place which is often not found in standard single-family divisions. Elements may include central parks, schools and community and commercial facilities, strong pedestrian orientation and de-emphasis of automobile related elements, strong streetscape elements and residence orientation to the street.

The RiverPark Specific Plan follows the design principles of the 'New Urbanism' and 'Smart Growth' movements, which emphasize the importance of mixed land uses, communities scaled for pedestrian movement, limiting automobile usage and the importance of physical design in creating communities that people want to live, work and shop in. Accordingly, the RiverPark Project is designed as a diverse, environmentally-conscious, mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented community with a complete range of facilities for living, learning, working, entertainment, and recreation. As these design principles are applied within the Commercial Land Use, Residential Land Use, Landscape, and other Master Plans within the Specific Plan, the project is consistent with this policy.

- High-rise development (which is considered to be any type of inhabitable structure which has nine or more stories) shall be limited to the following areas: Financial Plaza/Oxnard Town Center/Wagon Wheel, Mandalay Bay Specific Plan Area, and the Rice Avenue/Highway 101 Interchange.

The RiverPark Specific Plan is consistent with this policy, because the only structure that may be more than nine stories tall in the Specific Plan Area is the hotel allowed in Planning District C, the Convention/Hotel District. This District is located within the boundaries of the existing Oxnard Town Center Specific Plan.

- In order to achieve a varied and interesting skyline, high-rise development shall be required to provide roof features and caps which avoid a “flat-top” appearance and provide relief of exterior vertical planes with vertical setbacks. Specific plans and zoning ordinances shall be amended to provide appropriate design criteria.

As mentioned, the only structure that may be more than nine stories tall in the Specific Plan Area is the hotel allowed in Planning District C. The Specific Plan contains design requirements applicable to this building that are consistent with this policy.

- High-rise buildings should be limited to 25 stories.

The Specific Plan is consistent with this policy, as the height of the hotel building is limited to 18 stories (210 feet).

Light and Glare

The development of the RiverPark Project would introduce new sources of nighttime lighting in the area. These sources would primarily be the form of street and parking lot lights and exterior security lights on buildings. These sources of lighting would all be required to meet existing zoning ordinance performance for lighting. The Specific Plan provides landscape buffers around the most sensitive adjacent residential uses in the El Rio West Neighborhood that would further screen any lighting. As a result of the standard types of lighting that will occur and existing City codes, no significant impacts will result from the permitted uses.

The Specific Plan also permits development of a 5,000 seat multi-use ballpark in Planning District D, the Town Square Commercial District, subject to the issuance of a Special Use Permit (SUP) by the City of Oxnard. Planning District D is located between the Ventura Freeway, Oxnard Boulevard, Santa Clara River Boulevard and Myrtle Street. The RiverPark Specific Plan would permit the ballpark facility to be used by a minor league baseball team and be available for other public and entertainment

events, such as festivals, fairs, and concerts. The ballpark would also be made available for use by high school and college baseball teams. The precise location, specific design and operational characteristics of this facility would be proposed at the time an application for a SUP is submitted to the City.

This type of ballpark is likely to be lighted for nighttime use. Use of high intensity lighting for the field could result in light and glare impacts. While the precise location of such a facility within District D is not known at this time, the potential for impacts can be assessed based on the type of lighting design typical for such a facility. Light and glare effects are considered significant if they exceed typical light levels that would be found on land uses that are sensitive receptors, including residential uses. The proposed RiverPark Specific Plan would permit development of high density housing in along portions of Oxnard Boulevard, Santa Clara River Boulevard and Myrtle Street. High and medium density housing is also permitted to the west, north and east of Planning District D. Housing in these areas would be separated from Planning District D by major streets including Oxnard Boulevard, Santa Clara River Boulevard and Myrtle Street. Spill light around the ballpark is likely not be significant, because modern lighting technology prevents glare from the lamp fixtures to passers by. All lamps within a fixture on a pole would be installed with reflector cones and aiming shrouds to make more efficient use of the light. Although they will always be seen, in a similar fashion as lights from distant high school football or amateur softball fields often are, properly aimed sports lights will produce no glare to surrounding areas.

A preliminary lighting design for a ballpark was prepared based on the lighting standards for minor league ballpark facilities.² This lighting plan includes eight light poles with light fixtures around a ballpark. Potential light and glare effects can be assessed by calculating light level values at the farthest point that may be affected by spill light, which is the overflow of residual light away from the targeted area. Spill light is calculated from the edge of the target area for each light, because the lights are all aimed at the playing field. Based on typical measurement standards for ballpark lighting, the calculation line around the ballpark extends 250 feet away from, and perpendicular to, the baselines of the baseball diamond. Due to the proximity of the light fixtures to the field, the calculation line extends 150 feet beyond the outfield fence. Any light outside the calculation line is considered negligible, and in most cases is not even measurable. The vertical fc values in these areas vary from 1.5 to 3.0 fc, which are equal or less than typical parking lot lighting that will generally vary from 1.5 to 5.0 vertical fc, with an average of 3 fc. The horizontal fc values listed in these areas are typically less than 0.75 fc, which are equal or less than typical parking lot lighting that will

² HNTB Design/Build, Inc., Sports Lighting Study for Oxnard Ballpark, January 2001

generally vary from 0.5 to 1.0 horizontal fc. In other words the maximum light spillage within 150 feet of the ballpark would likely not be greater than 3 fc. Areas within 250 feet of a ballpark are likely to consist of parking areas and other areas associated with the ballpark use. The potential for sensitive uses to be impacted is, therefore, minimal.

As the Specific Plan would allow residential development in and adjacent to Planning District D, there is some potential for lighting from a ballpark facility to impact residential uses, depending on the location and orientation of the ballpark in relation to areas where residential uses are permitted and the lighting design. This potential impact is considered significant. This potential impact can be further assessed at the time an application for a Special Use Permit for a ballpark is submitted.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

There are several related projects proposed, approved or under construction in the vicinity of the RiverPark Specific Plan Area. These projects include the Esplanade Plaza Shopping Center, located across the Ventura Freeway from the Specific Plan Area; the Financial Plaza III Tower office building, located south of the freeway and east of Vineyard Avenue; the Ventura County Juvenile Justice Center, located immediately east of the Large Woolsey mine pit; and a single family residential project in the El Rio West Neighborhood, located immediately east of the Specific Plan Area between Stroube and Sycamore Streets.

The Esplanade Plaza Shopping Center involves the redevelopment of an existing regional mall project. The Financial Plaza Tower III project involves the extension of a previously approved Special Use Permit for a high-rise office building located adjacent to the existing high-rise City National and Dean Witter Buildings. These projects are both consistent with the *2020 General Plan* commercial designations for these areas and uses around these sites. No significant visual impact will result from development of these commercial projects and the commercial Planning Districts in the Specific Plan Area. The residential project in the El Rio West Neighborhood consists of single family homes that will be visually consistent with the existing homes in El Rio West and the proposed homes in the adjacent portion of the Specific Plan Area. No significant visual impact will result from the development of this project and the RiverPark Project. The Juvenile Justice Center is under construction on a site located between the Montgomery/Lambert and Beedy Street Industrial areas. This complex will be visually consistent in terms of height with the adjacent industrial uses. No significant visual impact will result from the development of this project and the RiverPark Project.

MITIGATION MEASURES

- 4.2-1 Any application for a Special Use Permit for a ballpark facility in Planning District D shall be accompanied by a lighting study, based on a lighting plan for the facility, demonstrating that no areas where residential uses are permitted by the Specific Plan would have light levels over 3 fc from the ballpark lighting.

UNAVOIDABLE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

No unavoidable significant aesthetic impacts are anticipated as a result of the RiverPark Project.