

## 4.1 Aesthetics

### 4.1.1 Introduction

This section evaluates the potential for the proposed project, which includes the Housing Element Update (HEU), the Stanford Community Plan (SCP) update, and related rezonings (collectively, the “project”) to result in substantial adverse effects related to aesthetics. The Environmental Setting describes visual conditions and scenic resources in Santa Clara County and in areas within the County where development under the proposed project is expected to occur. Further below, existing plans and policies relevant to aesthetics associated with implementation of the project are provided in the Regulatory Setting section. Finally, the impact discussion evaluates potential impacts to aesthetics that could result from implementation of the project in the context of existing conditions.

### Notice of Preparation Comments

A Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Draft EIR was circulated on August 8, 2022, and a scoping meeting was held on August 23, 2022. A revised NOP reflecting changes to the HEU’s list of opportunity sites was circulated on March 21, 2023. Both NOPs circulated for a period of 30 days, and the NOPs and the comments received during their respective comment periods can be found in **Appendix A** of this EIR.

### Information Sources

The primary sources of information referenced in this section include those listed below. Please note that a full list of references for this topic can be found at the end of this section.

- Santa Clara County General Plan (1994).
- Stanford University Community Plan (2000).
- City of San José 2040 General Plan Draft Program EIR (2011).

### 4.1.2 Environmental Setting

#### General Visual Overview

##### *Santa Clara County Overview*

Santa Clara County is located in the San Francisco Bay Area and encompasses approximately 1,300 square miles. The County is located at the southern end of San Francisco Bay and is the Bay Area’s most populous county. Prominent topographical features of the County include the Santa Clara Valley, the Diablo Range to the east, and the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west. The Santa Clara Valley extends through the entire length of the County from north to south and is largely surrounded by rolling hills. The Diablo Range covers the entire eastern half of the County and is covered by chaparral and oak woodlands at lower elevations adjacent to the valley, and pine forests at the higher elevations. The Santa Cruz Mountains consist of rolling grasslands and

oak woodlands in the foothills adjacent to the valley, and more dense hardwood and evergreen forests at the higher elevations. The Baylands lie in the northwestern part of the County, adjacent to the waters of the southern San Francisco Bay, and include expansive areas of salt marsh and wetlands.

The north valley portion of the County is extensively urbanized, housing approximately 90 percent of the County's residents. Thirteen of the County's fifteen cities are located in the north valley, while the remaining two cities, Gilroy and Morgan Hill, are located in the south valley. The south valley differs in that it remains predominantly rural, with the exception of Gilroy, Morgan Hill, and the small unincorporated community of San Martin. Low-density residential developments are also scattered through the valleys and foothill areas (County of Santa Clara, 1994).

### ***San José Overview***

San José is the largest city in Santa Clara County and one of the largest cities in the United States. Located in the center of the Santa Clara Valley on the southern shore of San Francisco Bay, San José covers an area of approximately 180 square miles. Prominent visual features include the Diablo Range to the east and the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west. Baylands and saltmarsh border the northern end of the City. Approximately 80 percent of the City's urban service area is developed with a mix of urban and suburban development of varying ages. The densest development occurs in the downtown area, with high-rise buildings visible from most freeways and from other vantage points in and adjacent to the City. The City is crossed by a number of major and heavily traveled multi-lane roadways, including U.S. Highway 101 (US-101), Interstate 880 (I-880), I-280, I-680, SR-87, SR-237, Capitol Expressway, Almaden Expressway, and Lawrence Expressway (City of San José, 2011).

### ***Stanford Lands Overview***

Lands owned by Stanford University and subject to the County's SCP broadly consist of the Stanford central campus located between El Camino Real, Sand Hill Road, Junipero Serra Boulevard, Stanford Avenue, and Page Mill Road, and the largely undeveloped Stanford foothills south of Junipero Serra Boulevard. Stanford's central campus, including academic and academic support facilities and housing, is concentrated within Stanford's Academic Growth Boundary. The largely undeveloped Stanford lands within the Stanford foothills are located outside of Stanford's Academic Growth Boundary.

The Stanford campus includes a diverse mix of land uses, including classrooms, academic offices, laboratory space, athletic venues, museums, performance and arts venues, lands for outdoor learning, student housing, faculty/staff housing, support facilities, and open spaces. The central campus academic area is characterized by short buildings (mostly four stories or less) with sandstone exteriors and red-tiled roofs, interspersed with numerous plazas, courtyards, fountains, pathways, and ornamental landscaped areas. Academic buildings are arranged on a formal rectangular pattern based on the master plan designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, in partnership with Leland and Jane Stanford. The Main Quadrangle (Quad) is centered on a north-south axis with the mile-long Palm Drive extending north from the Oval to El Camino Real. The rectangular

plan of the Main Quad was designed to provide for expansion through a series of quadrangles developed on an east-west axis.

Areas surrounding the academic core include the 126-acre Arboretum open space area, which is dominated by oak and eucalyptus trees trimmed to maintain line of sight, and nonnative grasses in the understory mowed for fire safety; Stanford Stadium, which is partly below ground level and screened by surrounding vegetation; several natural and synthetic turf athletic fields interspersed with vegetation and athletic facilities (e.g., Maples Pavilion and the Taube Family Tennis Stadium), located southwest of the Stadium and along El Camino Real; multiple-unit graduate student housing complexes in Escondido Village, including many small 2-story buildings, larger 3-4 story buildings, and seven towers up to 12-stories tall; and single-family faculty/staff housing.

The Stanford foothills are undeveloped for the most part and consist of low, rolling hills generally 200 to nearly 500 feet in elevation, and consist of a mix of nonnative and native grasslands, oak woodland, and riparian areas. Individual oak trees or small, open-canopied groupings of oaks occur within the grassland areas. Riparian woodland is located along Matadero Creek, Deer Creek, and the creeks in the San Francisquito watershed. Vegetation along the creeks consists primarily of a moderately closed canopy of oak and California buckeye. Small clumps of native and nonnative grasses are present in the understory of the riparian woodland. Chaparral and scrub are also present in the foothills. The Felt Reservoir is located in the southwestern portion of the foothills. Other water features include several artificial ephemeral ponds and some small semi-natural seasonal pools. The radio telescope (“the Dish”) is the most prominent structure in the foothills due to its size and location along the ridgeline. Most of the Stanford Golf Course is located in the foothills (County of Santa Clara, 2000).

## **Housing Opportunity Sites Visual Setting**

As described in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, and as discussed in this section, the project would identify sites appropriate for the development of multifamily housing, and the County would rezone those sites as necessary to meet the requirements of State housing law. Table 3-2 in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, identifies the potential housing opportunity sites identified by the County and their proposed development densities, and Figure 3-2 in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, shows their locations. This section generally describes the visual characteristics of the housing opportunity sites, which are spread out throughout the County in the following areas.

### ***San José Housing Opportunity Sites Visual Setting***

The HEU identifies 21 housing opportunity sites in six areas of San José.

The first area comprises two adjoining parcels immediately east of I-680 and south of Hostetter Road. The larger of the two parcels is a rural residential parcel with a single-story residence and associated structures on the eastern edge of the property, with the remainder and majority of the parcel comprising undeveloped land with several mature trees. The smaller of the two parcels is currently occupied by a paved and minimally landscaped Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Park and Ride Lot for the Hostetter light rail station. Residential development,

primarily single-family homes, are located to the south and east, with a small shopping center across Hostetter Road to the northwest.

The second area includes several properties on Vaughn Avenue, West San Carlos Avenue, and Rutland Avenue in the Burbank neighborhood. West San Carlos Avenue is a commercial corridor with residential neighborhoods to the north and south. The housing opportunity sites comprise single-story commercial and residential structures and paved parking areas in an urbanized setting.

The third area includes two properties on Thornton Way and Moorpark Avenue southeast of SR-17 and I-280. The area includes a mix of single-family and multi-family homes, as well as Chandler Tripp elementary school, commercial, and office buildings. The housing opportunity sites comprise paved and minimally landscaped parking areas.

The fourth area includes one property on Camden Avenue in the Cambrian Park neighborhood. This portion of Camden Avenue is a combination of residential and commercial properties. The commercial property is located on the southwest corner of Camden and Leigh avenues and consists of a small low-rise strip mall and associated parking lot.

The fifth area includes five housing opportunity sites on North White Road, Vista Avenue, Kirk Avenue, Corralitos Lane, and East Hills Drive between I-680 and the foothills. The North White Road property comprises a small low-rise strip mall and associated parking lot north of McKee Road in an area of concentrated commercial development surrounded by residential buildings. The remaining housing opportunity sites in this area comprise residential parcels and vacant lots in a suburban residential setting.

Long-range views from housing opportunity sites in San José are available from certain locations but are generally limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. Partial views of the Diablo Range to the east and the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west are available from certain vantage points; however, these views are effectively screened by existing buildings and vegetation from many locations.

The HEU also identifies two large housing opportunity sites on the east side of South White Road in East San José. The parcels currently comprise the 114-acre decommissioned Pleasant Hills Golf Course, which closed in 2004. The former golf course is primarily comprised of lawn grass with hundreds of trees distributed across the property. In addition, several non-residential buildings are present and are assumed to have been vacant since the closure of the golf course. The golf course is largely surrounded by dense residential development except for Lake Cunningham Regional Park to the west.

Long-range views from the two housing opportunity sites at Pleasant Hills are limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. Several views of the Diablo Range to the east are available from certain areas within these sites due to their proximity to the range. Conversely, views of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west from these sites are effectively screened by the mature trees that line the eastern portion of Lake Cunningham Regional Park along South White Road.

### **Stanford Lands Visual Setting**

The HEU identifies three housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands. Two of the sites are on Quarry Road near El Camino Real in an area of commercial development on the northern edge of the Stanford campus. The two Quarry Road sites flank the Stanford Health Care facility at 211 Quarry Road and are across the street from the Stanford Shopping Center. The northernmost site, which fronts El Camino Real, is undeveloped and includes several mature trees. The second site includes a paved parking lot and a surrounding largely undeveloped fringe. The third housing opportunity site on Stanford lands is located in Escondido Village, a graduate residential community between Campus Drive and Stanford Avenue. The housing opportunity site includes several multiple-unit graduate student housing complexes, including many small 2-story buildings, larger 3-4 story buildings, mature trees, and paved internal roadways and pathways.

In addition to the three housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands described above, Stanford lands under County jurisdiction also include an area immediately adjacent to and southeast of Sand Hill Road that is currently used for sports fields and a golf course. This area is in the West Campus Development District and is part of the SCP update evaluated in this EIR and provides an alternative potential future school location in lieu of the location in the central portion of the campus that was previously identified in the existing SCP adopted in 2000.

Long-range views from housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands are generally limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. Partial views of the Stanford foothills and the Santa Cruz Mountains to the south and west are available from certain vantage points; however, these views are effectively screened by existing buildings and vegetation from many locations.

### **Scenic Highways**

The State Scenic Highway Program identifies SR-9 (in the vicinity of Saratoga and Los Gatos and approximately 4 miles southwest of the nearest HEU housing opportunity site in San José) as the only officially designated State scenic highway in Santa Clara County (Caltrans, 2023). The program also identifies portions of SR-17, SR-35, SR-152, and I-280 as eligible for State scenic highway designation but not officially designated as such.

The Parks and Recreation chapter of the Santa Clara County General Plan expands the County Scenic Road System and includes all present and proposed State scenic routes within the County, as well as County scenic routes (County of Santa Clara, 2008). County scenic routes include scenic freeways and expressways, scenic arterial routes, and scenic rural roads. In addition to the scenic road system, local roads requiring scenic protection are included. Freeways and expressways have been included in the County Scenic Road System to give recognition to several outstanding examples of urban road design, and to promote the protection of scenic surroundings of notable urban and rural routes.

### 4.1.3 Regulatory Setting

#### **Federal**

There are no federal regulations pertaining to aesthetics that are applicable to the proposed HEU and SCP update.

#### **State**

##### ***California Scenic Highway Program***

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the state Legislature in 1963 with the purpose to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. The State Scenic Highway System includes highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways, or have been designated as such. The status of a state scenic highway changes from eligible to officially designated when the local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for scenic highway approval, and receives the designation. While local jurisdictions may propose adding routes with outstanding scenic elements to the list of eligible highways, state legislation is required for them to become officially designated.

##### ***Senate Bill 743: Modernization of Transportation Analysis for Transit Oriented Development***

Public Resources Code Section 21099 exempts infill projects located in transit priority areas from a finding of a significant impact under CEQA if they meet defined criteria. The law defines an "infill site" as "a lot located within an urban area that has been previously developed, or on a vacant site where at least 75 percent of the perimeter of the site adjoins, or is separated only by an improved public right-of-way from, parcels that are developed with qualified urban uses." "Transit priority areas" are defined as an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop that is existing or planned, if the planned stop is scheduled to be completed within the planning horizon included in a Transportation Improvement Program or applicable regional transportation plan."

Under the law, a project on a site meeting the above criteria cannot be determined to create significant aesthetic impacts under CEQA. However, the law does not affect, change, or modify the authority of a lead agency to consider aesthetic impacts pursuant to local design review ordinances or other discretionary powers provided by other laws or policies. Under the law, aesthetic impacts do not include impacts on historical or cultural resources.

#### **Local**

##### ***Santa Clara County General Plan***

The Santa Clara County General Plan includes strategies and policies that address visual and scenic resources. The following policies regarding Scenic Highways included in the Parks and

Recreation chapter of the Santa Clara County General Plan are relevant to visual and scenic resources.

***Policy C-PR 37:*** The natural scenery along many of Santa Clara County’s highways should be protected from land uses and other activities which would diminish its aesthetic beauty.

***Policy C-PR 38:*** Land use should be controlled along scenic roads so as to relate to the location and functions of these roads and should be subject to design review and conditions to assure the scenic quality of the corridor.

***Policy C-PR 41:*** Signs should be strictly regulated, with off-site signs and billboards prohibited along scenic routes.

***Policy C-PR 42:*** Access and commercial development along scenic expressways should be limited to prevent strip commercial development.

***Policy C-PR 43:*** New structures should be located where they will not have a negative impact on the scenic quality of the area, and in rural areas they should generally be set back at least 100 feet from scenic roads and highways to minimize their visual impact.

***Policy C-PR 44:*** Landscaping with drought-resistant native plants should be encouraged adjacent to scenic roads and highways.

***Policy C-PR 45:*** Activities along scenic highways that are of a substantially unsightly nature, such as equipment storage or maintenance, fuel tanks, refuse storage or processing and service yards, should be screened from view.

The following policies regarding Scenic Resources included in the Resource Conservation chapter of the Santa Clara County General Plan are relevant to visual and scenic resources:

***Policy C-RC 59:*** Scenic values of the natural resources of Santa Clara County should be maintained and enhanced through countywide growth management and open space planning.

***Policy C-RC 60:*** Hillsides, ridgelines, scenic transportation corridors, major county entryways, and other areas designated as being of special scenic significance should receive additional consideration and protections due to their prominence, visibility, or symbolic value.

***Policy C-RC 61:*** Public and private development and infrastructure located in areas of special scenic significance should not create major, lasting adverse visual impacts.

***Policy C-RC 62:*** Urban parks and open spaces, civic places, and public commons areas should be designed, developed and maintained such that the aesthetic qualities of urban settings are preserved and urban livability is enhanced. Natural resource features and functions within the urban environment should also be enhanced.

### **Stanford Community Plan**

The current SCP was adopted in 2000 (County of Santa Clara, 2000). The primary purpose of the SCP is to guide future use and development of Stanford lands in a manner that incorporates key

County General Plan principles of compact urban development, open space preservation, and resource conservation. The SCP was adopted as an amendment of the General Plan in the manner set forth by California Government Code Section 65350 et seq. All revisions to the SCP must also be made according to the provisions of State law for adopting and amending general plans. Community strategies and policies related to aesthetics and visual resources relevant to implementation of the project are listed below.

***Policy SCP-RC 27:*** Protect the scenic and aesthetic qualities of the natural setting of Stanford lands in the County by means of appropriate land use designations, growth management tools, and careful review of individual development projects.

***Policy SCP-RC 28:*** Emphasize development within the Academic Growth Boundary.

***Policy SCP-RC 29:*** Ensure adequate screening and reduction of visual impacts of any development in designated open space areas through the development review process.

***Policy SCP-RC 30:*** Preserve and enhance attractive, scenic urban settings on the Stanford campus and within Stanford's residential areas.

***Policy SCP-RC 31:*** Preserve significant historic landscape elements within the fabric of the campus' architecture and design.

***Policy SCP-RC 32:*** Maintain elements of the native landscape in Campus Open Space areas and throughout the developed portion of the campus.

***Policy SCP-RC 33:*** Maintain sign standards to ensure that signs are harmonious with the character of scenic area.

## ***Santa Clara County Zoning Ordinance***

### **Architecture and Site Approval**

Architecture and Site Approval (ASA) is required as specified in Chapter 5.40 of the County Zoning Ordinance and Sections C12-350.1 through C12-350.7 of the County Ordinance Code. ASA is typically required in conjunction with commercial, institutional, office, industrial or multiple family residential uses. The purpose of ASA is to maintain the character and integrity of zoning districts by promoting quality development in harmony with the surrounding area, through consideration of all aspects of site configuration and design, and to generally promote the public health, safety and welfare. The procedure commonly augments the Use Permit process by providing a means for establishing detailed conditions on proposed developments.

### **Scenic Roads Combining District**

As specified in Chapter 3.30 of the County Zoning Ordinance, the Scenic Roads Zoning Overlay protects the visual character of scenic roads through special development and sign regulations. Under Section 3.30.030 of the Scenic Roads Combining District, any proposed structure, including signs, located within 100 feet of the right-of-way of a designated scenic roadway would be subject to design review, as described in Chapter 5.50 of the Zoning Ordinance. Some structures may be eligible for exemption from Design Review per Chapter 5.50.



## 4.1.4 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

### Significance Thresholds

The thresholds used to determine the significance of impacts related to aesthetics are based on Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*. Implementation of the proposed project would have a significant impact on the environment 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.
- In non-urbanized 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). In an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

### Methodology and Assumptions

The analysis of potential impacts related to aesthetics in this EIR relies on qualitatively comparing the existing built and natural environment to the future built and natural environment and evaluating the visual changes that would result from implementation of the HEU. Anticipated visual changes are evaluated in the context of adopted County policies and regulations. The evaluation also considers that, as detailed in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, the project would include adoption of general plan amendments that would add or modify policies and implementation programs related to housing. Similarly, the evaluation also considers that the project identifies specific sites appropriate for the development of additional housing, and those areas if/as necessary would be rezoned to meet the requirements of State law.

As detailed in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, and in this section, the proposed project identifies several areas where housing sites could potentially be located with implementation of the project to meet the requirements of State law. Various possible distributions of housing sites and densities in these areas have been and will be considered for inclusion in the HEU by the County Department of Planning and Development, the Planning Commission, and/or the Board of Supervisors, and other bodies/agencies as needed.

Further, and as noted above in Section 4.1.3, *Regulatory Setting*, State law exempts infill projects located in transit priority areas from a finding of a significant impact under CEQA if they meet defined criteria relating to infill locations and proximity to transit opportunities. Many of the HEU's housing opportunity sites are likely to meet these criteria. Under the law, a project on such a site cannot be determined to create a significant aesthetic impact under CEQA. Presumably, the provisions of this law would be applied to those HEU sites that meet the criteria if development is proposed at those locations. A determination of which HEU sites meet the criteria is not made in this EIR. Rather, such a finding would be made by the applicable lead agency at the time of a

project's application and during any subsequent environmental review that may be required for the project.

## Impacts and Mitigation Measures

### *Impacts*

**Impact AES-1: Implementation of the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

#### **Housing Element Update and Stanford Community Plan**

As described in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, the proposed project identifies sites appropriate for the development of multifamily housing, and the County would rezone those sites as necessary to meet the requirements of State law. For the purposes of this evaluation, a scenic vista is defined as a public view along or through an opening or corridor that is recognized and valued for its scenic quality. The Santa Clara County General Plan considers the undeveloped hillsides and ridgelines visible from the Santa Clara Valley floor as valuable scenic resources (Policy C-RC 60). The SCP similarly recognizes the scenic and aesthetic quality of the natural setting of Stanford lands in the County (Policy SCP-RC 27).

#### **San José**

The HEU identifies 21 housing opportunity sites in six unincorporated areas of San José. Long-range views of these housing opportunity sites in San José are available from certain locations but are generally limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. Further, none of the housing sites are located in an area that has been identified as a scenic vista. All of the San José sites are located in urbanized areas with structures, roadways, and landscaping that is typical of an urban setting. Development of the sites with residential development would be consistent with that which is already present in the area. It thus follows that development of these sites would not adversely affect a scenic vista.

#### **Former Pleasant Hills Golf Course**

The HEU identifies two large housing opportunity sites on the east side of South White Road in East San José. The parcels currently comprise the 114-acre decommissioned Pleasant Hills Golf Course. Long-range views of these two housing opportunity sites are limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. As with the San José sites discussed above, the former Pleasant Hills Golf Course and surrounding environs has not been identified as a scenic vista. The sites are located in urbanized areas with structures, roadways, and landscaping that is typical of an urban setting. Development of the sites with residential development would be consistent with that which is already present in the area. It thus follows that development of these sites would not adversely affect a scenic vista.

#### **Stanford Lands**

The HEU identifies three housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands, and the SCP update identifies a potential future school site in the West Campus Development District in the northerly

portion of the campus. Long-range views of these locations are generally limited by flat topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. Of the two housing sites on Quarry Road, for instance, one is currently configured as a surface parking lot immediately south of the multi-story Hoover Pavilion parking garage. Additional parking garages and surface parking lots lie immediately to the west across Quarry Road from the site. The Other Quarry Road site is currently a vacant lot comprised of ruderal grassland and trees. The multi-story Hoover Medical Center lies immediately to the south, the Stanford Shopping Center and associated surface parking lots and parking garages lie across Quarry Road to the west, and the multi-lane El Camino Real (SR-101) lies immediately north of the site. Neither of these sites nor the surrounding parcels possess the characteristics of a scenic vista and have not been designated as such. It thus follows that development of these sites would not adversely affect a scenic vista.

The other housing opportunity site on the Stanford campus is located in the Escondido Village area of the campus, which is a densely built area primarily comprised of existing campus housing. This area is also not identified as a scenic vista.

Finally, the potential future school site in the West Campus Development District is currently occupied by recreational playing fields and undeveloped parcels. While pleasant, the views of and from the site are not particularly scenic and have not been identified as such.

### Summary

Based upon each of these considerations, and the visual character of the potential development sites associated with the project, development of the project would not adversely affect a scenic vista. None of the sites possess characteristics associated with a scenic vista and are typical of highly urbanized and developed locations in the Bay Area. It thus follows that the project's impact to scenic vistas would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-2: Implementation of the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

### Housing Element Update and Stanford Community Plan

The State Scenic Highway Program identifies a segment of SR-9 between Los Gatos and Saratoga as the only officially designated State scenic highway in Santa Clara County (Caltrans, 2023). This roadway segment is four miles from the nearest HEU opportunity site, and views of the site and other project areas from the highway are substantially distant as to be unnoticeable. Any development at the HEU sites would essentially blend in with existing urban development in the region if they could be seen at all from SR-9.

The program also identifies portions of SR-17, SR-35, SR-152, and I-280 as eligible for State scenic highway designation but not officially designated as such. The Parks and Recreation chapter of the Santa Clara County General Plan expands the County Scenic Road System and includes all present and proposed State scenic routes within the County, as well as County scenic routes. County scenic routes include scenic freeways and expressways, scenic arterial routes, and scenic rural roads. In addition to the scenic road system, local roads requiring scenic protection are included. Freeways and expressways have been included in the County Scenic Road System to give recognition to several outstanding examples of urban road design, and to promote the protection of scenic surroundings of notable urban and rural routes. Like the officially designated segment of SR-9, views of the HEU sites and other SCP project areas from these roadways would be substantially distant as to be unnoticeable. Any development of the sites would essentially blend in with existing urban development in the region if they could be seen at all. Ultimately, development on the project sites would be consistent with the types of urban development that are already present in the area.

Further, and as specified in Chapter 3.30 of the County Zoning Ordinance, the scenic roads zoning overlay protects the visual character of scenic roads through special development and sign regulations. Under Section 3.30.030 of the Scenic Roads Combining District, any proposed structure, including signs, located within 100 feet of the right-of-way of a designated scenic roadway would be subject to design review, as described in Chapter 5.50 of the Zoning Ordinance. Some structures may be eligible for exemption from Design Review per Chapter 5.50. The cumulative construction of multiple exempt projects on a lot may, at the discretion of the Zoning Administrator, be subject to Design Review, based on the characteristics and visibility of the property, the potential visual impact of the buildings or structures, and any other relevant considerations as defined in Section 5.50.040 of the ordinance. Potential damage to scenic resources within the County Scenic Road System occurring as a result of potential development under the proposed project would be reduced through compliance with the County's scenic roads overlay regulations.

Based upon each of the above considerations, the project would not substantially damage scenic resources, particularly those viewable from scenic highways. The impact would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-3: Implementation of the proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

### **Housing Element Update and Stanford Community Plan**

As described in Chapter 3, *Project Description*, the HEU and SCP update would identify sites appropriate for the development of multifamily housing, and the County would rezone those sites as necessary to meet the requirements of State law.

As noted in the preceding discussion for Impacts AES-1 and AES-2, none of the project locations are located in areas that are identified as a scenic vista, and none of the sites are located in such a place as to damage scenic resources as viewed from a designated scenic highway. All of the project sites are located on infill parcels within areas that have been urbanized for at least several decades. These areas do not possess scenic characteristics, and development on the sites in the manner facilitated by the project would be consistent with the existing development that is already present on the sites themselves and/or the areas around them. The sites are located on Stanford lands or unincorporated County “islands” within a broad sea of existing urban development.

### **San José**

The HEU identifies 21 housing opportunity sites in six areas of San José, as listed in Table 3-2 in Chapter 3 of this EIR, *Project Description*. Eighteen of the sites are quite small, ranging in size from 0.1 acres to 3.5 acres. Six of these smaller sites are currently occupied by surface parking lots, eight are occupied by older commercial development, including three used car lots, three are occupied by single residential homes, and one is a small vacant lot. None of the sites possess scenic or unique qualities. One of the larger sites, near Hostetter Station, has a single-family home and several outbuildings on it, with the rest of the site occupied by a former orchard that appears to have been unmaintained for many years. The site is sandwiched between I-680 to the west, North Capitol Avenue to the east, Hostetter Road and a shopping center to the north, and single-family residential to the south. While not unattractive, neither the site nor its surroundings are particularly scenic, and are typical of views that would be seen while traveling on any freeway or arterial roadway in the region.

The HEU also identifies two large housing opportunity sites on the east side of South White Road in East San José. The parcels currently comprise the 114-acre decommissioned Pleasant Hills Golf Course. The former golf course is primarily comprised of lawn grass with hundreds of trees distributed across the property. In addition, several non-residential buildings are present and are assumed to have been vacant since the closure of the golf course. The golf course is surrounded by dense residential development to the north, south, and east, and Lake Cunningham Regional Park to the west. Owing to the fact that the former golf course has been nonoperational for many years, it is not maintained and has taken on an abandoned appearance, with scores of dead and downed trees, along with large piles of dead vegetation. The site is surrounded by a chain link length fence topped by barbed wire and posted with no trespassing signs. In its current condition, the site presents with a derelict appearance, and is out of character with the surrounding residential and parkland development. The site does not possess scenic value, and could be subjectively viewed as possessing just the opposite.

### **Stanford Lands**

The HEU identifies three housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands. Two of the sites are on Quarry Road near El Camino Real in an area of commercial development on the northern edge of the Stanford campus. The two Quarry Road sites flank the Stanford Health Care facility at 211 Quarry Road and are across the street from the Stanford Shopping Center. The northernmost site, which fronts El Camino Real, is undeveloped and includes several mature trees. The second site

includes a paved parking lot and a surrounding largely undeveloped fringe. The third housing opportunity site on Stanford lands is located in Escondido Village, a graduate residential community between Campus Drive and Stanford Avenue. The housing opportunity site includes several multiple-unit graduate housing complexes, including many small 2-story buildings, larger 3-4 story buildings, mature trees, and paved internal roadways and pathways. None of these sites possess particularly scenic qualities, and are representative of typical urban development in the area.

In addition to the three housing opportunity sites on Stanford lands described above, Stanford lands under County jurisdiction also include an area immediately adjacent to and southeast of Sand Hill Road that is currently used for sports fields. This area is in the West Campus Development District and is part of the SCP update evaluated in this EIR and provides an alternative potential future school location in lieu of the location in the central portion of the campus that was previously identified in the existing SCP adopted in 2000. This potential future school location is currently occupied by playing fields and a small undeveloped area. It is surrounded by roadways and existing urban development on all four sides. Though not unattractive, the site is not unusual for the area and does not possess unusual scenic qualities.

### **Analysis**

For the same reasons described under Impacts AES-1 and AES-2 above, development of individual projects under the HEU and SCP would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views. Individual projects under the HEU and SCP would require submittal of an application to the County at the time proposed to determine what type of review and approval process is required for the proposed project. Some projects may be exempt from CEQA either because they are ministerial or qualify for another CEQA exemption. Further, some projects that are subject to CEQA could be exempt from a finding of a significant aesthetic impact if they meet the criteria defined in SB 743 (Public Resources Code Section 21099). This could apply to projects located in infill areas and within a transit priority area. Such a finding would be made by the County or other applicable lead agency at the time of a project's application and during any subsequent environmental review that may be required for the project.

Regardless of whether an individual project is subject to ministerial or discretionary approval, the project would be required to comply with all applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality, including but not limited to quantitative standards such as maximum densities and building heights and additional objective standards that address visual character and the quality of public views to the extent feasible while ensuring the County can still meet its State-mandated housing requirement.

Projects that are subject to discretionary review may also require Architecture and Site Approval (ASA). The ASA application process includes submittal of various types of information that would assist the County in evaluating whether specific development projects would affect the visual character and quality of the site and its surroundings. Among these requirements are a project description, site plan, and exterior elevations. In addition, the application requires that an Environmental Impact Form (EIF) be completed. As part of the EIF, photographs of the site must

be provided that include the building site, unique features of the property, and views from the site to surrounding areas.

Changes to the existing visual character or quality would occur in specific locations with the development of individual projects under the HEU and SCP. Visually, certain areas would gradually become denser over time as new buildings are constructed in proximity to existing buildings or on sites that are currently vacant or not developed with buildings or other structures. New projects would be required to meet all County and Stanford guidance and policy documents that would limit adverse aesthetic effects of such projects. While changes to the visual properties of the sites would incrementally change over time, these changes would be consistent with the existing urban environment and would not be substantially adverse. Thus, the impact would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-4: Implementation of the proposed project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

#### **Housing Element Update and Stanford Community Plan**

Development proposed under the proposed project could increase ambient light levels due to light dispersion from new buildings. Increases in night lighting could result in spillover lighting within housing sites or in adjacent neighborhoods that could adversely affect nighttime views. Light sources could include additional streetlights, exterior safety lighting, light emitted from building windows, and headlights from vehicles. These types of light sources are already present in the area and are typical of an urban setting. Any additional lighting associated with the project would not be unexpected in these areas and would not represent a substantial change from what is already present.

As noted above, development of housing that could occur under the proposed project would be subject to compliance with objective County policies and standards, including provisions regarding signs and outdoor lighting. By employing appropriate standards, including objective standards for ministerial projects and those described in the ASA Guidelines for discretionary projects, impacts related to light and glare would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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#### ***Cumulative Impacts***

This section presents an analysis of the cumulative effects of the proposed project in combination with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects that could cause cumulatively considerable impacts. Significant cumulative impacts related to aesthetics could occur if the

incremental impacts of the project combined with the incremental impacts of one or more of the cumulative projects or cumulative development projections included in the project description and described in Section 4.0.3, *Cumulative Impacts*.

**Impact AES-5: Implementation of the proposed project, when combined with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable projects, would not result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

Development that could occur with implementation of the proposed project and the cumulative development discussed in Section 4.0.3 of this EIR would introduce new housing and other development of increased density, scale, and height than currently exists within the areas of the HEU housing sites and a one-mile radius. This new development could block or limit views of the natural environment, including the Diablo Range, the Santa Cruz Mountains, undeveloped hillsides and ridgelines, and other scenic and visual resources. However, views of these features are already limited by topography as well from intervening obstructions from both the built and natural environment. In addition, abundant views of these features would remain only marginally changed with implementation of the proposed project and the cumulative development. The potential loss of certain limited views of undeveloped hillsides and ridgelines due to implementation of the proposed project and cumulative development would not significantly diminish scenic views of these areas. The cumulative impact would therefore **be less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-6: Implementation of the proposed project, when combined with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable projects, would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

As previously discussed, the State Scenic Highway Program identifies SR-9 as the only officially designated State scenic highway in Santa Clara County. The program also identifies portions of SR-17, SR-35, SR-152, and I-280 as eligible for State scenic highway designation but not officially designated as such. No officially designated State scenic highways are located in or easily visible from areas that could be developed under the HEU or SCP Update (Caltrans, 2022). While the Parks and Recreation chapter of the Santa Clara County General Plan identifies the Scenic Road System of Santa Clara County, and adds all present and proposed State scenic routes within the County and County scenic routes to the list of scenic highways in the County, development associated with the proposed project would be infill in nature and would largely blend in with the existing urban development that is present around all of the sites and within the larger region. Further, and as specified in Chapter 3.30 of the County Zoning Ordinance, the scenic roads zoning overlay protects the visual character of scenic roads through special development and sign regulations. Based upon all of these considerations, cumulative impacts related to damage to scenic resources within the County Scenic Road System would be **less-than-significant**.



**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-7: Implementation of the proposed project, when combined with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable projects, would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

Development that could occur with implementation of the proposed project and the cumulative development described in Section 4.0.3 would be subject to compliance with County (or City of San José) policies and standards established and enforced to ensure that adverse impacts to scenic resources and visual character are minimized. Further, both the proposed project and the cumulative projects would be urban infill in nature and would occur within areas that are already densely urbanized with similar types of development. None of the developments would be out of character with what is already present and would largely blend in with the existing urban environment. Therefore, cumulative impacts related to substantial degradation of visual character or quality of public views or conflicts with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AES-8: Implementation of the proposed project, when combined with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable projects, would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views. (*Less than Significant Impact*)**

Development proposed under the proposed project and the cumulative development described in Section 4.0.3 could increase ambient light levels within the areas of the project's development sites and a one-mile radius due to light dispersion from the additional urban uses. Increases in night lighting could result in spillover lighting within project sites or in adjacent neighborhoods that could adversely affect nighttime views. However, development that could occur under the proposed project and the cumulative development described in Section 4.0.3 would be subject to compliance with objective County (or City of San José) policies and standards implemented to avoid or minimize adverse impacts related to light and glare, which would ensure that cumulative impacts related to light and glare would be **less than significant**.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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### 4.1.5 References

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2023. California State Scenic Highways. Available online: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>. Accessed June 4, 2023.

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