

### **INTRODUCTION**

*This section of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) describes the existing visual character of the Project site and surroundings and evaluates the potential project-related changes in the visual character of the Project site and surroundings through a combination of methods that (1) identify corridors in which the project can be viewed; (2) identify “viewsheds” within these corridors where the development area would be visible; (3) identify within those viewsheds “prominent visual features;” and (4) describe post-development changes in the viewsheds.*

#### **3.1.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

##### **3.1.1.1 Regional Setting**

The City of Moorpark is situated in and around the Little Simi Valley, named for the Arroyo Simi, which flows from the eastern part of Simi Valley west to Arroyo Las Posas. Little Simi Valley is about four miles long, about one mile wide, and is surrounded by the southwestern portion of the Simi Hills to the north and northeast, the Las Posas Hills to the south and southeast, and the Arroyo Las Posas to the west. Developed portions of the City are located primarily on the valley floor. However, substantial urban development has recently occurred in the lower hillside areas primarily north, south, and east of the valley floor. A by-product of this development pattern is the maintenance as open space of the higher hillside areas that surround the City and separate the City of Moorpark from other nearby urban areas. The result is the maintenance of a natural character as well as the protection of the higher ridgelines, slopes, and hillsides that are integral to the City's visual character.

##### **3.1.1.2 Project Vicinity and Site**

The site is situated along the southern margin of the Simi Hills and is bound to the south by the Union Pacific Railroad line. Topographic conditions along the southern margin of the site vary from small areas of nearly flat land to relatively steep hillsides that form the southern margin of the Simi Hills. From the southern site boundary, elevations rise to the north where topographic conditions are variable. Small areas in the central and western portions of the site maintain little topographic relief. However, the majority of the site can be characterized as an area of rolling hills. Drainage on the site occurs from north to south. The principal drainage feature on the site is situated in the western portion of the site and occurs near Gabbert Road. The most visible portions of the Project site occur along the southern margin of the site, adjacent to the railroad tracks and Poindexter Avenue. Visible portions of the site from this area include the flat areas between the railroad tracks and the hills and the south facing slopes and vegetation that occur along the southern perimeter of the site. These hills generally preclude any significant visibility

of interior portions of the Project site when viewed from the south. Due to the elevation gain on the site, large portions of the site are visible from the southern part of the City between Home Acres and Spring Road.

Maximum elevations of approximately 720 feet (above mean sea level) occur near the northern site perimeter, while minimum existing site elevations range from approximately 475 feet to 495 feet along the southern margin of the site adjacent to the Walnut Canyon Channel. Eighteen percent of the site has slopes of 20 percent or greater. Areas of slopes greater than 20 percent occur randomly throughout the Project site and are not concentrated in any one particular part of the site.

Land uses in the vicinity of the site are varied. The southern boundary of the site is bounded by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, the Walnut Canyon Channel, and Poindexter Avenue which are all parallel and extend in an east-west direction. South of Poindexter Avenue, land uses include Chaparral Middle School, a single-family detached residential neighborhood, public parks, retail, commercial, and industrial uses. The eastern perimeter of the site is bound by small areas of open space; an elementary school; an area of small, older homes; and vacant land. The western perimeter on the site is generally comprised of natural vacant land and an enclave of single-family homes that occur east of Gabbert Road north of Poindexter Avenue. The northern perimeter of the site is dedicated open space with residential neighborhoods beyond.

### 3.1.1.3 Existing Views

To visually characterize the site and illustrate potential impacts, three viewing locations were selected for analysis. These locations were selected in the field based on their being identified as having the highest visibility from surrounding public roadway viewing to audiences located south, east, and west of the Project site. Each viewing location is publicly accessible. **Figure 3.1-1, Key to Viewpoints**, depicts the location of each viewing location. As shown, one viewing location is located on Casey Road entering the Project site from an existing neighborhood to the east of the site between the Walnut Canyon School and the older residential neighborhood. A second location is shown from the south looking north across Poindexter Avenue from Gisler Road. A third viewing location is located east of Gabbert and north of Poindexter Avenue. **Figures 3.1-2 through 3.1-5** illustrate existing views of the Project site from each of the four viewing locations.

**Viewing Location A – Casey Road.** Viewing Location 1 (**Figure 3.1-2, Existing View, Location A: Casey Road**) is situated west of residential homes and Walnut Canyon School located along the eastern perimeter of the Project site. Higher topography and vegetation in the background are visible to the west of the site from residences or the school. Where the site is visible, substantial site panoramas can be seen.

From Viewing Location A, foreground views are dominated by vistas of the eastern half of the Project site. Topographic conditions in this portion of the site can be described as rolling terrain with topographic conditions becoming flatter in the northern portion of the site as opposed to the southern portion of the site, which is more deeply incised. Vegetation in this area is dominated by nonnative grassland with only small areas of coastal sage scrub occurring on the upper reaches of the slopes. A few trees and large shrubs are present. No man-made features, other than dirt roads, are present and no prominent visual features occur within the foreground vistas of the Project site. The visual character of this portion of the site can be characterized as natural vacant land, which is typical of the region.

**Viewing Location B – Poindexter Park.** Viewing Location B (**Figure 3.1-3, Existing View, Location B: Poindexter Park**) is from Poindexter Park, just east of Gisler Road, south of Poindexter Avenue. At this location, there is a substantial mobile and residential viewing audience. This viewing location is situated immediately south of the Project site. The majority of the site is visible from this location. Given the distance of the Project site from Viewing Location B, site topography is not readily apparent, as well as the general character of the vegetation present.

From Viewing Location B, a visual panorama is present and the Project site is a component of that panorama. The Project site occurs in the upper portion of a natural vacant area north of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. In this area, natural hills rise to the north and little man-made disturbance is apparent. The most prominent visual features within this landscape are the small hills and low ridges that occur along the southern portion of the Project site.

**Viewing Location C – Gabbert Road.** Viewing Location C (**Figure 3.1-4, Existing View, Location C: Gabbert Road**) is along the western perimeter of the Project site at the intersection of Gabbert Road and Poindexter Avenue. From Viewing Location C, foreground and mid-ground views are similar and their discussion here is combined. Due to site topography, foreground and mid-ground views from Viewing Location C are limited to portions of the western half of the Project site. Views include the north- and northwest-facing slopes and a broad valley that occurs in the west-central portion of the Project site. Vegetation in this area is variable and includes non-native grassland, and areas of disturbed/grazed California sagebrush scrub that occurs primarily in the valley floor. From Viewing Location C, trees are generally absent with the exception of the upper portions of eucalyptus trees that occur in the central portion of the Project site. Man-made improvements are limited to high voltage power poles, some fencing, and utility locations (gas line).

**Viewing Location D – Gabbert Road and North Hills Parkway.** Viewing Location D (**Figure 3.1-5, Existing View, Location C: Gabbert Road and North Hills Parkway**) is along the western perimeter of the Project site approximately one-quarter mile north of the intersection of Gabbert Road and Poindexter

Avenue, along Gabbert Road looking east toward the future right-of-way for North Hills Parkway. Due to site topography, foreground and mid-ground views from Viewing Location D are limited to portions of the western half of the Project site. Views include the north- and northwest-facing slopes in the distance. Vegetation in this area is limited, and includes non-native grassland, and areas of disturbed/grazed California sagebrush scrub, trees are limited to two small black walnuts, a small Chinese elm, and a Peruvian pepper tree. No man-made improvements other than dirt trails are visible.

#### 3.1.1.4 Hillside Management Ordinance

The City's Hillside Management Ordinance (Chapter 17.38 of the Moorpark Municipal Code) established standards and procedures for development of hillside areas within the City of Moorpark. The stated purpose of these standards "is to implement the goals and policies of the *Moorpark General Plan* and the various elements contained therein as they relate to development and resource management in hillside areas within the City of Moorpark. The provisions contained [in the ordinance] will allow for orderly and sensitive development of hillside areas in conjunction with the preservation of natural open space." The following specific goals and policies of this ordinance reflect those contained in the general plan:

- To allow for development patterns in hillside areas that minimize erosion and geologic hazards and that provide for the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare.
- To encourage grading techniques that blend with the natural terrain, minimize earth-moving activity, minimize impacts of large cut and fill slopes and provide for the preservation of unique and significant landforms.
- To encourage the retention of natural drainage patterns and the preservation of significant riparian areas.
- To reduce water use in slope replanting and retention by encouraging grading design that minimizes manufactured slopes.
- To allow density transfers, where appropriate, to facilitate development in more appropriate locations while retaining significant natural slopes and areas of environmental sensitivity.

#### 3.1.1.5 Scenic Corridors/Highways

There are no roadways, highways, or areas within or immediately adjacent to the Specific Plan site that has been designated by the City of Moorpark or Ventura County as scenic corridors or highway. According to the City of Moorpark's *Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Element*, the nearest scenic corridor is Walnut Canyon Road located approximately 500 feet to the east of the Project site. No

highways in the vicinity of the Specific Plan site are currently on the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) list of officially designated state or county scenic highways. The *County of Ventura General Plan Resources Element* designates SR-118 as eligible for state scenic highway status.

### **3.1.1.6 Light and Glare**

Presently, there is no light and glare from the Specific Plan site, as the site is vacant. Off-site residential and institutional uses (Walnut Canyon Elementary School) generate light from street and other outdoor lighting, such as parking lot lighting. Glare is very limited because most uses in the area are not constructed with reflective materials.



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2021.

FIGURE 3.1-1

Key to Viewpoints



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-2



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-3

Existing View, Location B - Poindexter Park



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-4



**Existing View**

SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2021.

FIGURE **3.1-5**

Existing View, Location D - Gabbert Road and North Hills Parkway

### 3.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1.2.1 State Laws and Regulations

##### *California Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program*

The California Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program was created in 1963 to preserve and protect highway corridors located in areas of outstanding natural beauty from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the adjacent lands. Caltrans maintains its State Scenic Highways and Historic Parkways Program, through which segments of the State highway system are designated as being of particular scenic value or interest. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. Interstates, state highways, byways, and parkways are eligible for designation or for recognition as eligible for designation. The program is governed by the regulations found in the California Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq.

California Streets and Highway Code Section 261 requires local government agencies to take the following actions to protect the scenic appearance of the scenic corridor:

- Regulate land use and density of development,
- Provide detailed land and site planning,
- Prohibit off-site outdoor advertising and control of on-site outdoor advertising,
- Pay careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and
- Scrutinize the design and appearance of structures and equipment.

California Streets and Highway Code Section 263 allows the California State Legislature the authority to identify highways as eligible for designation as a scenic highway. The government with jurisdiction over land abutting a highway considered to be scenic is required to adopt a "scenic corridor protection program" that restricts development, outdoor advertising, and earthmoving activities along the affected segment or corridor (Corridor Protection Program). Caltrans must also indicate that the highway segment meets established criteria in order for the roadway or segment to be designated as scenic.

### *California Code of Regulations Title 24 Part 6*

The California Energy Code (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 24 § 6) creates standards in an effort to reduce energy consumption. The type of luminaries and the allowable wattage of certain outdoor lighting applications are regulated.

### *California Environmental Quality Act*

CEQA affords protection for the environment, including aesthetic resources. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) updated the Guidelines in late 2018, including guidelines regarding impacts to aesthetic resources. Changes to the thresholds include clarification of aesthetic resources within non-urbanized and urbanized areas, as well as clarification of what constitutes a public view. The *State CEQA Guidelines* provide four criteria that may be used to evaluate the significance of visual quality impacts: negative effects on a scenic vista, damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway, degradation of the visual character or quality of a site and its surroundings, and creation of a new source of substantial light or glare affecting views.

#### **3.1.2.2 Local**

The following goals and policies of the *City of Moorpark General Plan* related to aesthetics and visual resources are applicable to the proposed Hitch Ranch Specific Plan project.

#### *Land Use Element*

**Goal 16:** Enhance and maintain the suburban/rural identity of the community.

**Policy 16.2:** Hillside development standards shall be adopted which restrict grading on slopes greater than 20 percent and which encourage the preservation of visual horizon lines and significant hillsides as prominent visual features.

**Policy 16.3:** The overall density and intensity of development should decrease as the slope increases.

**Policy 16.4:** New residential development should complement the overall community character of the City, establish a sense of place, and ensure compatibility with important existing local community identities.

- Goal 17:** Enhance the physical and visual image of the community.
- Policy 17.1:** New development shall be compatible with the scale and visual character of the surrounding neighborhood.
- Policy 17.2:** Identifiable entryways for the overall community, and unique or principal business/commercial districts of the City (i.e., City core and transportation corridors) should be encouraged.
- Policy 17.4:** Design concepts should be established for the overall community and for special treatment areas, such as the downtown district, which may include guidelines for architecture, landscape architecture, signage, streetscape, and infrastructure.
- Policy 17.5:** New development should incorporate a variety of landscape architecture themes and techniques to help organize and delineate land uses and to enhance the overall visual quality of the City.
- Policy 17.6:** Enhanced landscaping shall be used around residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, and parking areas as well as along easements of flood control channels, roadways, railroad right of ways, and other public and private areas to soften the urban environment and enhance views from roadways and surrounding uses.
- Policy 17.7:** Design features which provide visual relief and separation shall be required between land uses of conflicting character.
- Policy 17.8:** Undergrounding of utilities shall be required in conjunction with development projects whenever feasible.
- Policy 17.9:** Visual impacts of above-grade utility structures, such as water storage tanks, water check valves, electric and telephone boxes, etc., shall be minimized through use of landscaping, materials, and colors that blend with the environment.

### *Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Element*

**Goal 1:** Preserve and enhance the unique aesthetic and visual qualities of Moorpark as a city with scenic topographic features and elements that promote the quality of life that Moorpark citizens pursue.

**Policy 1.1:** Protect the scenic viewsheds both to and from the City of Moorpark. This shall include those views extending north to the Santa Susana Mountains and south to Tierra Rejada Valley. This will extend to any new development and to any future renovations and additions that may potentially obscure a viewshed.

**Goal 6:** Maintain and enhance the open space and designated non-growth areas for conservation, agriculture, ranching, recreation, leisure, and aesthetic purposes.

**Policy 6.2:** Maintain open space lands that are well suited to their intended uses and that will result in the most efficient use of land. All such lands should be designed and managed for the convenience, health, safety, and pleasure of intended users and should represent positive examples of open space planning and energy conservation.

#### **3.1.3 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE**

According to Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines* (Environmental Checklist Form), a project could have a significant impact when 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 a publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

### 3.1.4 METHODOLOGY

Vantage points around the Specific Plan site were selected to show potential visual changes that would result from project development. These views from public areas are representative of views from locations surrounding the Specific Plan site.

A viewshed analysis was prepared by VisionScape Imagery in March 2020. Photographs of existing view conditions were taken at three locations around the Project site. The visual simulation process uses computer technology to translate the two-dimensional architectural and landscape plans/elevations into three-dimensional computer-generated images that depict a conceptual appearance of the project from off-site locations. Simulations provide renderings of the site from existing conditions, construction of preliminary roads and grading, initial site construction and landscaping, and the proposed project five to seven years after the start of development.

### 3.1.5 PROJECT IMPACTS

The visual impacts of a project include both the objective visual resource change created by the project and the subjective viewer response to that change. Distance from the project, frequency of view, length of view, viewer activity, viewer perception, and viewing conditions contribute to the assessment of a visual impact. The physical limits and changes of the views and the quantity of viewers are objective. Viewer perception is subjective. As noted in the Specific Plan prepared for the Hitch Ranch Plan Area, and consistent with City's General Plan Goals and Policies, Hitch Ranch will concentrate development in proximity to existing infrastructure, roadway and public services and will retain significant open space. The Specific Plan permanently preserves approximately 75 acres of open space. Development will not visually dominate ridgelines; development is planned to respect view sheds and natural open spaces to the extent possible, all proposed development is to occur proximate to where other suburban land uses already exist.

The perception of different viewer groups to the visual environment and its elements varies based on viewer activity and awareness. Activities such as commuting in heavy traffic can distract an observer from many aspects of the visual environment. Conversely, pleasure driving or relaxing in a scenic environment can encourage an observer to look at the view more closely and at greater length, thus increasing the observer's attention to detail. Sensitivity is also determined by how much the viewer has at stake in the viewshed. Typically, people who own property in an area are more sensitive to change than those just passing through.

**Impact AES-1                    Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.**

*Significant and Unavoidable*

**On-Site Features**

The implementation of the Hitch Ranch Specific Plan project would occur incrementally over a period of several years, with market conditions ultimately dictating phasing of the remaining portions of the project. Short-term impacts would fall within several categories of visual impacts. Mass grading would affect existing topography, vegetation cover, and vistas. Throughout much of the grading, large construction vehicles would be visible from adjacent (and some distant) vantage points. Barren slopes and new development in various stages of construction would be intermittently visible throughout the development of the project.

Landscape plans to be implemented as part of the project would involve replanting slopes with native vegetation to reduce the visual impacts associated with cut, fill, and other slope-alteration activities. Proposed cut slopes would be contour graded or left natural to match surrounding terrain, thereby reducing viewshed impacts that may occur on surrounding uses from grading activities. The use of native species to replant graded and other revegetated areas would reduce the “hard edge” of the project as it relates to off-site natural areas, thereby reducing the project’s visual presence and providing a transition zone from natural to suburban uses. However, the short-term changes to the Specific Plan site would result in significant impacts.

Implementation of the Specific Plan would significantly alter the visual characteristics of the site. Grading activities would affect several of the significant ridgelines that transverse the Specific Plan site. The westernmost viewshed (Open Space) would be generally unaffected by development; under the proposed project this portion of the Specific Plan site would be retained as open space. The remainder of the Project site would be converted from undeveloped open space to the development as provided for by the Specific Plan. Existing vacant land would be developed with residential, and recreational uses that would be visible from public viewpoints. As a result of the implementation of the Specific Plan, the project would have a significant impact to this viewshed.

**Surrounding Views**

A visual analysis was conducted from several viewpoints within the project area. The viewpoints were selected as representative locations based on the Specific Plan site’s visibility from off-site public and private locations. **Figure 3.1-1** shows the location of these viewpoints. The following provides a description of these viewpoints. Visual simulations depict development of the roadway improvements

and project construction, and landscaping of the proposed project five to seven years after construction begins.

*Visual Simulation Location A – East Along Casey Road.* The first simulation (**Figure 3.1-6, Proposed View, Location A – No Landscaping**) shows the project after the completion the construction of Casey Road west from its current terminus near Walnut Canyon School. Improvements include streets and sidewalks. The site development to the north of Casey Road involves the installation of noise walls and construction of single-family residences with associated landscaping; the development of multi-family units east of “A” Street is also shown. The view along Casey Road five to seven years after development is show in **Figure 3.1-7, Proposed View, Location A – with Landscaping.**

*Visual Simulation Location B – Poindexter Park, East of Gisler Road, South of Poindexter Avenue.* The first simulation (**Figure 3.1-8, Proposed View, Location B – No Landscaping**) shows the completion of manufactured slopes along the south portions of the site in Planning Area 4 and the completion of a detention basin north of Poindexter Avenue, along with later stages of initial improvements and additional grading of the upper portion of slopes. Landscaping improvements surrounding the detention basins along Poindexter Avenue and multi-family units in Planning Area 4 are shown, along with single family residences to the west. Finally, views of the Project site five to seven years after the start of development are provided **Figure 3.1-9, Proposed View, Location B – with Landscaping.**

*Visual Simulation Location C – West from Gabbert Road.* The first simulation (**Figure 3.1-10, Proposed View, Location C – No Landscaping**) in the near view shows the railroad level crossing gate, and a stop sign at the Poindexter Avenue intersection; single family residences along the newly constructed North Hills Parkway are visible in the distance to the east. Finally, views of the Project site five to seven years after the start of development are provided **Figure 3.1-11, Proposed View, Location C – with Landscaping.**

*Visual Simulation Location D – West from future North Hills Parkway at Gabbert Road.* The first simulation (**Figure 3.1-12, Proposed View, Location D – No Landscaping**) in the near view shows the North Hills Parkway roadway to the east; the multi-use trail and sidewalks along North Hills Parkway; single family residences within Planning Area 1 in the distance on the left in the image; single family residences in Planning Area 2 on the right above North Hills Parkway are visible to the east. Finally, views of the Project site five to seven years after the start of development are provided **Figure 3.1-13, Proposed View, Location D – with Landscaping.**

### ***Hillside Management Ordinance***

The intent of the Hillside Management Ordinance (Chapter 17.38 of the Moorpark Municipal Code) is to implement the goals and policies of the *City of Moorpark General Plan*, as they relate to the development and resource management in hillside areas of the City. The directive of the Hillside Management Ordinance is to allow for “orderly and sensitive development of hillside areas in conjunction with the preservation of natural open space.” **Figure 3.1-14, Slope and Ridgeline Map**, illustrates the slopes and prominent ridgeline area on the Project site. The Project site is comprised of approximately 183.2 acres with slopes less than 20 percent slopes, approximately 58.1 acres with slopes between 20 to 35 percent, approximately 27.6 acres with slopes between 35 to 50 percent, and approximately 8.4 acres with slope greater than 50 percent. Overall, the approximately 277.30-acre Project site has an average slope of 19 percent. In general, grading of the Project site would involve the mass grading and cut and fill approximately 5.4 million cubic yards of earth, which would be balanced on site. Maximum cut slopes would be approximately 70 feet high, and maximum fill areas would be approximately 75 feet high. Approximately 198.7 acres (72 percent) of the Project site would be graded under of implementation of the proposed Specific Plan. Approximately 55.2 acres (20 percent) of the Project site would remain undisturbed.

Accordingly, the proposed project does not intend to disturb some of the steeper areas of the site, specifically the area west of Gabbert Road (Area A on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**) and the area north of Planning Area 1 (Area B **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**).

Generally, the steeper slopes on the site which are being disturbed are relatively minor intermediate ridge spurs within the site. Most of the "prominent" ridgelines and landforms are retained.

Section 17.38.030.B exempts properties with 20% or greater slopes when those slopes are associated with minor drainage courses that do not impact significant natural drainage patterns or ridgelines.

From a visibility/view perspective, most of the "prominent" slopes or ridgelines are preserved; the larger slopes north of Planning Area 1 (Area B on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**), the larger slopes west of Gabbert Road (Area A on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**), and the existing ridgeline/knoll southwest of Planning Area 2 (Area C on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**).

Much of the site was graded for ranching and farming purposes sometime in the last century so most impacts to the existing topography are not impacts to natural slopes because the natural grade has long since been disturbed.

Most of the impacts to existing topography within Planning Areas 1 & 2 are generally in areas with existing slope gradients less than 20%. Some of the more noteworthy impacts to existing slopes with gradients greater than 20% are within Planning Areas 3 & 4 on the east side of the site. However, there are a few considerations which limit the applicability of the ordinance in these areas:

As mentioned, many of these are smaller and more localized areas that likely do not qualify as "prominent" landforms (most of the impacts actually just involve filling-in existing local valleys so visual impacts are much less significant than significant cuts to ridgelines). Filling-in local valleys/ravines is permissible per Section 17.38.090.



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-6

Proposed View, Location A - No Landscaping



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-7

Proposed View, Location A - with Landscaping



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-8

Proposed View, Location B - No Landscaping



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-9

Proposed View, Location B - with Landscaping



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-10

Proposed View, Location C - No Landscaping



SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2020

FIGURE 3.1-11



**Proposed View**

SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2021.

FIGURE **3.1-12**

Proposed View, Location D - No Landscaping



**Proposed View**

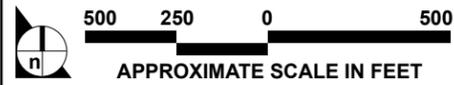
SOURCE: VisionScape Imagery, 2021.

FIGURE **3.1-13**

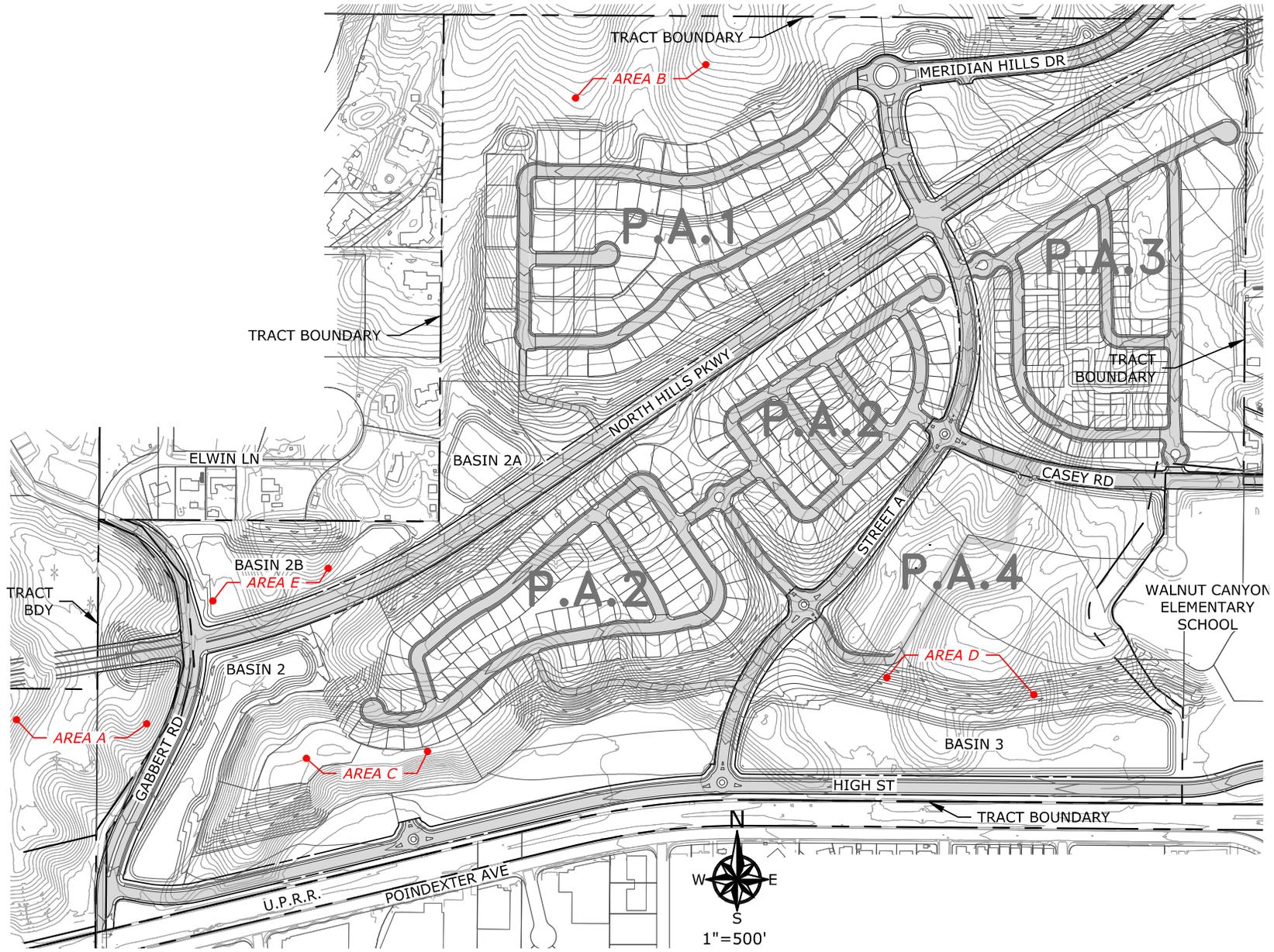
Proposed View, Location D - With Landscaping

Slopes Table				
Number	Minimum Slope	Maximum Slope	Area	Color
1	0.00%	20.00%	183.2 Acres	Lightest Green
2	20.00%	35.00%	58.1 Acres	Light Green
3	35.00%	50.00%	27.6 Acres	Medium Green
4	50.00%	>50.00%	8.4 Acres	Darkest Green

Mean grade/slope 18.79%  
277.3ACRES



SOURCE: Golden State Aerial Surveys, Inc., April 2006



SOURCE: Encompass Consultant Group, 2022.

FIGURE 3.1-15

Hillside Grading Area Identification Map

These impacts are in denser planning areas which is generally in-line with the intent of the ordinance - increase density in one area to minimize impacts on the rest of the site where more prominent landforms are located.

A key reason for the fills in Planning Area 4 (Area D on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**) is to support Detention Basin 3, which provides a regional benefit by diverting significant quantities of storm water runoff from Walnut Canyon Channel so that existing downstream flood control infrastructure is not overwhelmed.

Similarly, the area northeast of the intersection of Gabbert Road and North Hills Parkway (Area E on **Figure 3.1-15, Hillside Grading Area Identification Map**) requires some excavation cuts to provide sufficient volume storage for Detention Basin 2B.

It should be noted that a portion of the storage volume that will be provided within Basin 2B is for sediment/debris storage for the existing watershed northwest of the project. In the existing condition, sediment/debris storage for this existing watershed is not adequately provided. The proposed improvements will provide a regional benefit by ensuring that sediment and debris from the existing watershed is not transported downstream.

The Specific Plan would provide remedial measures to reduce erosion and geologic hazards; limit the alteration of visible ridgelines; preserve natural drainages; develop the densest portions of the site in the flatter portions of the site; and use native vegetation for replanting and other water-conserving techniques. In addition, the project would incorporate landscape intended to transition developed areas from natural open space areas, as well as provide buffering of views of the Specific Plan site from surrounding land uses.

It should be noted that construction of the North Hills Parkway and other General Plan Circulation Element Roadways within Hitch Ranch, with or without development of the Specific Plan, would result in significant encroachments to the slopes greater than 20 percent. Approximately 34 percent of the Specific Plan site with slopes of 35 to 50 percent would be retained in dedicated open space; the Hillside Management Ordinance requires 50 percent. The 50 percent or greater slope areas proposed for development are small, isolated areas that would be graded as part of the development plan. In addition, the project does include the preservation the prominent ridgeline on the Specific Plan site, but does include homes built along the hillside visible from the very near-field perspective, but not visible from the majority of the Moorpark valley floor area (refer to visual simulations **Figures 3.1-6 to 3.1-13**). Preservation of this area is consistent with the Hillside Management Ordinance requirements. Further, Section 17.38.030 M of the Hillside Management Ordinance allows the City to approve a development agreement to exempt a project from the requirements of the Ordinance. The Applicant will be requesting

a Development Agreement for this project, once negotiated and granted, impacts under the Hillside Management Ordinance would be less than significant.

### ***Silhouetting***

A review of plans indicates that the proposed development would be built below higher ridgelines that occur off site to the north. However, from Viewing Locations A, B, and C, development is proposed above the viewer or at a higher or similar elevation. Therefore, project elements viewed in the foreground would obscure the higher and more distant hills and appear as silhouettes or a form of ridgeline development. This condition would apply where the southern margin of Planning Area 3 is observed from Viewing Location A, where the northern margin of Planning Area 2 is viewed from Viewing Location B, and where Planning Area 3 is viewed from Viewing Location C.

Given the change in the visual character of the site, and that background visual features would be removed and replaced with the silhouettes of the new homes, impacts to the visual resource environment would be considered significant when measured against this assessment criterion.

### ***Landform Alterations***

Terrain on the Project site consists of low hills and broad channel areas. Project construction would require substantial grading that would result in the creation of six large, generally flat pad areas. Given the substantial change in the site's existing landform from a natural rolling terrain to a series of "super pads," impacts to the visual resource environment would be considered significant when measured against this assessment criterion.

### ***Effects on Views from Surrounding Residences***

Views from residential areas are emphasized here for several reasons. First, many residences are directly oriented towards the Project site. Second, vistas of and across the site can be considerable. Third, the impact associated with project implementation (for these residents) would likely be the greatest alteration to their existing environmental condition. Last, residents with views of the site requested that this issue be evaluated during the project scoping meeting.

***Residences South of Poindexter Avenue.*** Most homes south of Poindexter Avenue are oriented away from the site. Where visible, project elements that would be observable include (proceeding from east to west) (1) the contour-graded manufactured slope that occurs north of detention basin 1, (2) the high-density residential structures proposed as part of Planning Area 4, (3) the contour graded slopes and natural open space that occurs south and west of the Planning Area 4, and (4) the southern margins of the residential structures associated with development along the southern margin of Planning Area 2. Homes

along the southern margin of these development areas would obscure views of homes proposed to the north.

Because most homes from this viewing location are not oriented towards the site, and rear yard walls preclude most vistas of the site, no significant impacts from this location are expected.

**Residences to the North.** New construction with residential uses are located north of the Project site; some of these have partial vistas of the Project site. Project elements that may be visible include (proceeding from north to south): (1) residential development in Planning Area 1; (2) a corridor for the North Hills Parkway roadway consistent with the general plan (as shown in Figures 3.1-12 and 3.1-13); and (3) residential development in Planning Area 3.

Because homes from this viewing location are oriented towards the site with no rear yard walls to obstruct vistas of the site, and elements of the Project would be partially visible, impacts associated with Project visibility to this residential viewing audience are considered significant.

**Residences to the West.** Residences to the west of the Project site are at elevations similar to those found within the Project site and would thus have views into the Project site. Areas of the Project site adjacent to these residences are planned to be preserved as open space, which would reduce the potential for impacts to views from this location. The Project site's topography would further obscure Project development from view, and no significant impacts from this location are expected.

**Residences to the South and East.** Residences to the east of the Project site occur at a lower elevation and residents would have no direct vistas of the Project. Therefore, these residents would not be directly impacted by the Project. Residents to the east of the site would observe an incremental change in the existing condition. However, developments would be observed as an incremental encroachment of development into the lower hillsides that is not out of character with existing development practices in the City and are not considered significant.

Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would help mitigate impacts to the scenic vista during construction, and implementation of the Project Design Features of the Specific Plan and **Mitigation Measure AES-2** would help mitigate impacts to the scenic vista following construction; however, impacts to the overall Project site would remain significant and unavoidable.

**Impact AES-2**                    **Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.**

*No Impact*

There are no roadways, highways, or areas within or immediately adjacent to the Project site that have been designated by the City of Moorpark or Ventura County as scenic corridors or highways. According to the City of Moorpark's *Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Element*, the nearest scenic corridor is Walnut Canyon Road located approximately 500 feet to the east of the Project site. No highways in the vicinity of the Project site are currently on the Caltrans list of officially designated state or county scenic highways. The *County of Ventura General Plan Resources Element* designates SR-118 as eligible for state scenic highway status; SR-118 is approximately 1/2-mile south the Project site and is not visible due to the relatively flat topography and intervening structures.

As such, 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, as none of these resources exist on or near the Project site and there would be no impact.

**Impact AES-3**                    **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). If the project is in an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.**

*Less than Significant*

The Proposed Project is in an area defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as an 'Urban Cluster'<sup>1</sup>, implementation of the Specific Plan would not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing the visual character and quality of public views. Further, the Project would be required to adhere to the City's Standard Conditions regarding visual character and quality (see **Section 3.1.7.1**, below). Refer to **Section 3.10, Land Use** for a full discussion and analysis regarding the Proposed Project's consistency with the City of Moorpark's General Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas:

- Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people
- Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/faq/2010-urban-area-faq.html>, accessed November 23, 2021.

**Impact AES-4                    Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.**

*Less than Significant with Mitigation*

## **Light and Glare**

Currently, the primary sources of light and glare in the vicinity of the Project site are streetlamps and motor vehicles on roadways to the south. Secondary sources of light are light fixtures on nearby residential, commercial, and industrial units. With implementation of the proposed project, nighttime lighting would increase with the illumination of homes, parking lots, streets, and the associated headlamp illumination. No night lighting of recreational areas is planned. Lighting of the proposed project would constitute a substantial new light source in the City and would alter the current character of the site. It is anticipated that there would not be any direct lighting into unshaded windows of surrounding residents that would disturb sleep. However, new street lighting associated with the project would still provide additional illumination in the area and, thus, would be considered a potentially significant impact. However, implementation of **Mitigation Measures AES-3** and **AES-4** would mitigate this impact to a less than significant level.

### **3.1.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

Cumulative impacts would result from implementation of the Specific Plan. When considered together, this development would continue the trend within the City that has resulted in the conversion of natural open space to a man-made condition. This cumulative development would not impact reasonably foreseeable projects on properties within the same local viewshed area assessed in this EIR. The Project site is located north of Poindexter Avenue, west of Walnut Canyon Road and east and west of Gabbert Road. With the exception of the proposed project, residents from these two principal local viewing audiences (Poindexter Avenue and Gabbert Road) would not observe other development that would cumulatively act to exacerbate project specific impacts. Based on the above, no cumulative impacts are expected with respect to these viewing audiences.

From a distance, the site would be visible to observers in the vicinity of Spring Road at higher elevations. From this viewing location, a large visual panorama is available, and development of the Specific Plan would cumulatively act with other residential and industrial projects to the south and west north and east that are proposed or reasonably foreseeable. The net effect of this cumulative development from this viewing location would be the continuation of the trend towards the loss of open space by its conversion to a suburban setting. All proposed development would occur in areas already dominated by suburban land uses or below ridgelines, where it would not alter the visual backdrop of the City. Based on the

above, no cumulative impacts on the visual resources are expected with respect to viewing audiences occurring in the Spring Road viewshed.

### **3.1.7 MITIGATION PROGRAM**

#### **3.1.7.1 Project Design Features**

The Hitch Ranch Specific Plan Design Guidelines provides the design framework for streetscape, landscape, and buildings to convey a unified and unique community character. The architectural and landscape guidelines have been developed to complement each other.

The following principles will guide the community design to ensure quality implementation:

- Use architecture that is reminiscent of the character of Early California.
- Use architectural elements and details that reinforce the architectural styles.
- Choose appropriate massing, roof forms, colors and materials to define the architectural styles.
- Ensure that plans and styles provide a degree of individual identity while being compatible.
- Provide a varied and interesting street-scene that enhances the overall community.
- Use a plant palette that is drought tolerant, compatible with the natural open spaces, and reduces fire hazards.
- Celebrate the views of the surrounding area and reduce disturbance to natural topography where possible.

#### **3.1.7.2 Standard Conditions**

- Prior to the issuance of a Zoning Clearance for building permits, the applicant shall submit to the Community Development Director for review and approval a full set of Landscaping and Irrigation Plans prepared by a licensed landscape architect and drawn on a plan that reflects final grading configuration, in conformance with the City of Moorpark Landscape Standards and Guidelines, policies and NPDES requirements.

#### **3.1.7.3 Mitigation Measures**

The following mitigation measures are required to mitigate significant project view impacts of on-site features.

**AES-1:** To help minimize the short-term visual effects of mass grading, all manufactured slopes shall be hydro-mulched in conjunction with the grading process to prevent soil erosion and provide an environment conducive to plant growth. The seed mix used in the hydro-mulch slurry shall consist of a blend of fast-growing annual grasses and summer flowering forbs.

**Timing/Implementation:** During grading activities

**Enforcement/Monitoring:** City of Moorpark Community Development, Public Works, and Parks, Recreation & Community Services Departments

**AES-2:** To minimize the change in the visual character of the site landscape screens must be placed around detention and debris basins in Planning Area 1, and below Planning Area 4 to limit views of these areas. These plantings must emphasize native species and shall comply with the City's Landscape Guidelines. At maturity, the landscaping shall be of a sufficient size to screen the detention basins.

**Timing/Implementation:** Prior to grading permit issuance

**Enforcement/Monitoring:** City of Moorpark Community Development Department

**AES-3:** Prior to issuance of a grading permit, a lighting plan prepared by a lighting consultant consistent with the Specific Plan Design Guidelines Lighting Concept shall be submitted to the City of Moorpark Department of Community Development for review and approval by the Community Development Director. The lighting plan shall incorporate 0.5 foot-candle as a threshold for spill and the minimum streetlamp glare level of 2.0 foot-candles. All fixtures shall utilize shields to direct light downward, and the lighting plan shall also incorporate other "dark sky" friendly measures to the extent feasible. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, the following or other comparable measures:

- Use lighting fixtures that are adequately shielded to a point below the light bulb and reflector and that prevent unnecessary glare onto adjacent properties.
- Restrict the operation of outdoor lighting for construction and operation activities to the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
- Use high pressure sodium and/or cut-off fixtures instead of typical mercury-vapor fixtures for outdoor lighting.

- Use unidirectional lighting to avoid light trespass onto adjacent properties.
- Design exterior lighting to confine illumination to the project site, and/or to areas which do not include light-sensitive uses.
- Provide structural and/or vegetative screening from light-sensitive uses.
- Shield and direct all new street and pedestrian lighting away from light-sensitive off-site uses.
- Architectural lighting shall be directed onto the building surfaces and have low reflectivity to minimize glare and limit light onto adjacent properties.

(Identical to MM BR-13)

**Timing/Implementation:** Prior to grading permit issuance

**Enforcement/Monitoring:** City of Moorpark Community Development Department

**AES-4:** When installed, all street lighting fixtures shall be tested and adjusted to ensure that light levels do not exceed 2.0 foot-candles of glare and 0.5 foot-candle of spill at the project boundaries. Testing of street lighting fixtures shall be conducted by factory-trained and -employed technicians only contracted for by the master developer and subject to the approval of the Community Development Director. (Identical to MM BR-14)

**Timing/Implementation:** Following street lighting installation

**Enforcement/Monitoring:** City of Moorpark Community Development Department

### 3.1.8 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Implementation of the Specific Plan would significantly alter the visual characteristics of the site. Grading activities would affect several of the significant ridgelines that transverse the Specific Plan site. The westernmost viewshed (Open Space) would be generally unaffected by development; under the proposed project, this portion of the Specific Plan site would be retained as open space. The remainder of the Project site would be converted from undeveloped open space to the development as provided for by the Specific Plan. Existing vacant land would be developed with residential and recreational uses that would be visible. As a result of the implementation of the Specific Plan, the project would have a significant impact to the existing scenic vista. **Mitigation Measures AES-1 and AES-2** would help mitigate the impacts both during and following construction. However, impacts to the existing scenic vista of the undeveloped site would remain significant and unavoidable.

The project overall would largely be consistent with the Hillside Management Ordinance. Further, Chapter 17.38.030 M of the Hillside Management Ordinance allows the City to approve a Development Agreement to exempt a project from the requirements of the Ordinance. The applicant will be requesting a Development Agreement for this project and an exemption will be required. Once negotiated and granted, impacts related to the Hillside Management Ordinance would be considered less than significant.

Implementation of the Specific Plan would result in potentially significant project light impacts with respect to the surrounding residences. However, implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-3** and **AES-4** would mitigate this impact to a less than significant level.