
4.2 AESTHETICS

4.2

AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

This section of the EIR describes existing visual and aesthetic resources for the project area and the region, and evaluates potential impacts of the project. In addition, the Brentwood General Plan goals and policies pertaining to aesthetics are described. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) describes the concept of aesthetic resources in terms of scenic vistas, scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway), the existing visual character or quality of the project area, and light and glare impacts. The following impact analysis is based on information drawn from the *Brentwood General Plan*¹ and the *City of Brentwood General Plan Update Draft & Final EIR 2001*².

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following setting information provides an overview of the existing condition of visual resources in the project area, which is located in Contra Costa County within the City limits of Brentwood.

Project Area Visual Setting

A significant visual feature outside the Brentwood Planning Area is Mount Diablo. Rising to an elevation of 3,849 feet above sea level, Mt. Diablo is a prominent landmark dominating the western skyline. Scenic routes within the Brentwood Planning Area include State Route 4, Camino Diablo Road, Marsh Creek Road, Walnut Boulevard, Deer Valley Road, Lone Tree Way, and the planned State Route 4 Bypass as designated by the City of Brentwood General Plan Update EIR (p. 3.3-2). These roadways have been identified as Scenic routes due to the distant panoramic vistas of the Diablo Range and Mount Diablo in particular, as well as rural farmland views located in the flatland areas and the surrounding hillsides. The designated scenic routes provide a pleasant viewing experience for motorists along these thoroughfares.

The project area consists of approximately 205 developed, urbanized acres within Contra Costa County, California (Figure 3-1, Regional Location Map). The project area is generally located in the southeast portion of Brentwood in the downtown district, with the Union Pacific Railroad transecting the project area in a northwest to southeast direction near the western boundary of the area (See Figure 3-2, Project Location Map). Brentwood Boulevard runs contiguous to the railroad tracks on the western boundary and continues along the northwest border of the project area.

Land uses within the project area include commercial, residential, office, schools, parks, and civic facilities. Adjacent land uses include existing residential areas on every side of

the project area, as well as commercial uses to the north and south, public facility uses to the east, and vacant land designated for residential use/planned development north and east of the area.

Project Area Unique Visual Features

The Downtown area has a small town identity that is characterized by a variety of residential, civic, and retail structures dating back over one hundred years and is complemented by mature street trees and a pedestrian-scaled main street and park. The Brentwood General Plan EIR identifies the Downtown area as the “historic center of the city” (p. 3.3-2). The physical characteristics of the Downtown area are considered essential to the character of the entire community of Brentwood, which has been largely homogenized by the numerous suburban residential subdivisions that transition outward from Downtown Brentwood.

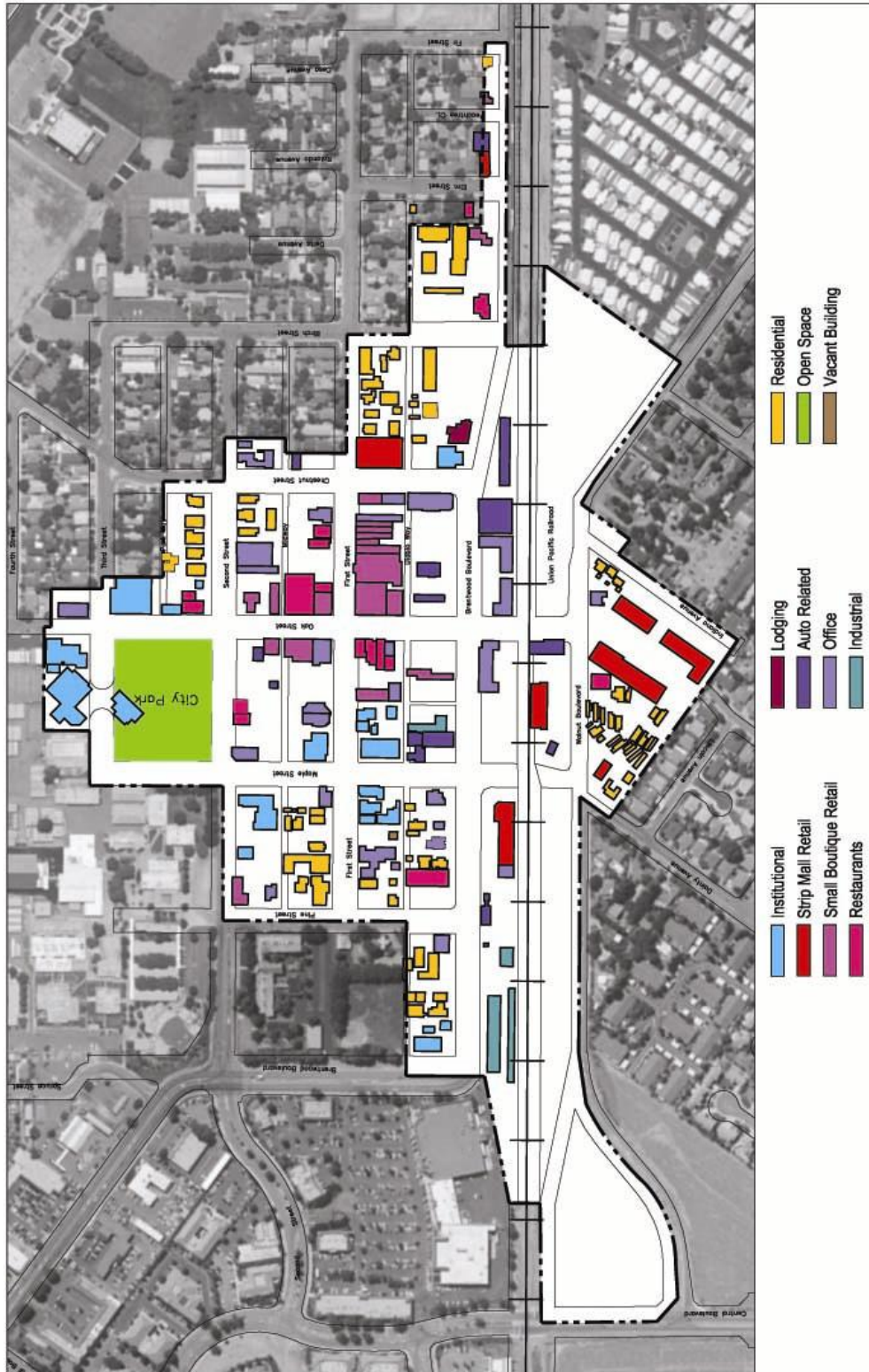
The Downtown Core

As defined in the Downtown Specific Plan, the Downtown Core is located between Brentwood Boulevard and Maple Streets, and Second Street between Oak Street and Maple Street. Development within the core is of a fairly low intensity; single-story buildings predominate, and are interspersed among surface parking lots, underutilized parcels, and vacant lots. Building frontage is inconsistent (see Figure 4.2-1, First Floor Land Use Map) with a low level of development currently at street level. The Downtown Specific Plan identifies the west side of City Park and the west side of Brentwood Boulevard as notably underutilized spaces.

Oak Street is downtown’s primary shopping street with a distinctly pedestrian character, linking Brentwood Boulevard near the historic train depot to the Civic Core. However, between Diablo Way and the intersection of Oak Street and Brentwood Boulevard, the lack of building wall creates a weakened pedestrian realm. On the north side of Oak Street, a surface parking lot exposes pedestrians to traffic, and on the south, a service station and accompanying curb cuts create less safe pedestrian access.

First Street consists of retail shopping. Civic uses are located at the eastern edge of the Downtown Core, including City Park, City Hall, and the Library. The Liberty High School campus occupies much of the land north and east of the Civic Core as well as most parcels north of Pine Street. Second Street is described as having “an unwelcoming pedestrian environment” in the Downtown Specific Plan.

**Figure 4.2-1
 First Floor Land Use Map**



Downtown Neighborhoods

A mix of residential, office, and civic uses occupy the majority of the area north of the downtown core between Second Street and Brentwood Boulevard. Immediately south of the Downtown Core, commercial uses transition into a predominantly single-family residential neighborhood with new multifamily housing developments interspersed. The middle school is located adjacent to this residential neighborhood. According to the Downtown Specific Plan, new suburban development in areas further east is inconsistent with the design and character of existing residential uses.

Within the Downtown area, Brentwood Boulevard “has the look, feel, and function of a typical suburban commercial arterial,” (Downtown Specific Plan, p. 11) with four lanes of traffic and an additional turn lane, no on-street parking, very narrow sidewalks, dilapidated buildings without setbacks from the sidewalk, and single-story strip commercial retail and office environments set behind roadside parking lots.

North of Oak Street, the majority of parcels on the west side of Brentwood Boulevard are either “vacant or sparsely developed” (Downtown Specific Plan, p. 13). North of Oak Street However, the east side of Brentwood Boulevard contains a number of Brentwood’s historic buildings that have been renovated and are now occupied by office uses.

Downtown Historic Buildings and Districts

Many historic structures are located in Downtown Brentwood, including Victorian houses and Craftsman bungalows, historic churches, and other buildings dating from the 1880s through the 1930s. Figure 4.2-2 identifies the locations and provides images of these buildings. Although a formal inventory of downtown buildings has not been completed to identify eligibility for listing on the California and National Historic Registers, many of the buildings appear to retain their original integrity and are potentially eligible for listing.

Figure 4.2.2
Historic Buildings in Downtown Brentwood



Project Features

Key visual characteristics of the Specific Plan include its multi-use form as well as pedestrian-friendly and civic features to be protected under the provisions of the Specific Plan.

The Downtown Specific Plan establishes goals, objectives, and standards for development that will help ensure the intent of the plan. One of the stated goals of the Downtown Specific Plan is to “ensure that the Downtown is a living example of the aesthetic qualities and characteristics that form the basis of what it means to build in ‘the Brentwood Way’” (p. 13). In addition, as the Downtown grows, the Downtown Specific Plan seeks to “ensure that the character of new buildings and site improvements draw from the social and cultural aesthetic qualities that furnish this evolving suburb with its well-renowned ‘small town’ identity” (p. 18).

While the Downtown Specific Plan does not contain site-specific projects, general features of the Plan are identified in Figure 4.1-2, Downtown District Zones (see the Land Use chapter of this EIR). The Specific Plan seeks to “protect and maintain the small town character” of Downtown Brentwood by enhancing the pedestrian features of the streets, and maintaining the small scale restaurants and shops; linking downtown to the surrounding community by enhancing visual cues and access to downtown, making downtown a primary civic and retail destination, and preserving downtown’s role as a future citywide transit hub; and creating a “vibrant heart of the city” by attracting new restaurants and specialty retail uses, encouraging new mixed-use and adaptive re-use development, and locating a significant entertainment feature in the heart of downtown (see Figure 4.2-3, Entertainment Anchor in the Downtown Core).

Most of the planned uses for the Downtown area are located within a ¼-mile walking radius, with only a few uses outside this pedestrian zone, such as the high school, junior high school, and elementary school. The “retail core” of downtown would generally be located approximately in the center of the downtown core. The “civic core” of the planning area would be located in the northeast and southeast area of downtown. Scattered single and multi-family residential uses would be interspersed throughout the downtown core in a mix of live-work spaces, small-scale single-family residences, townhouses, apartment, and mixed-use buildings (see Figure 4.2-4, Single Family Residential Concept Alternative), and the transit station would continue to be located within a walkable radius in order to maintain Brentwood’s role as a hub to other major cities in the surrounding area. Adjacent uses would predominantly consist of residential neighborhoods that would support the downtown framework both economically and aesthetically.

Figure 4.2-3
Entertainment Anchor in the Downtown Core

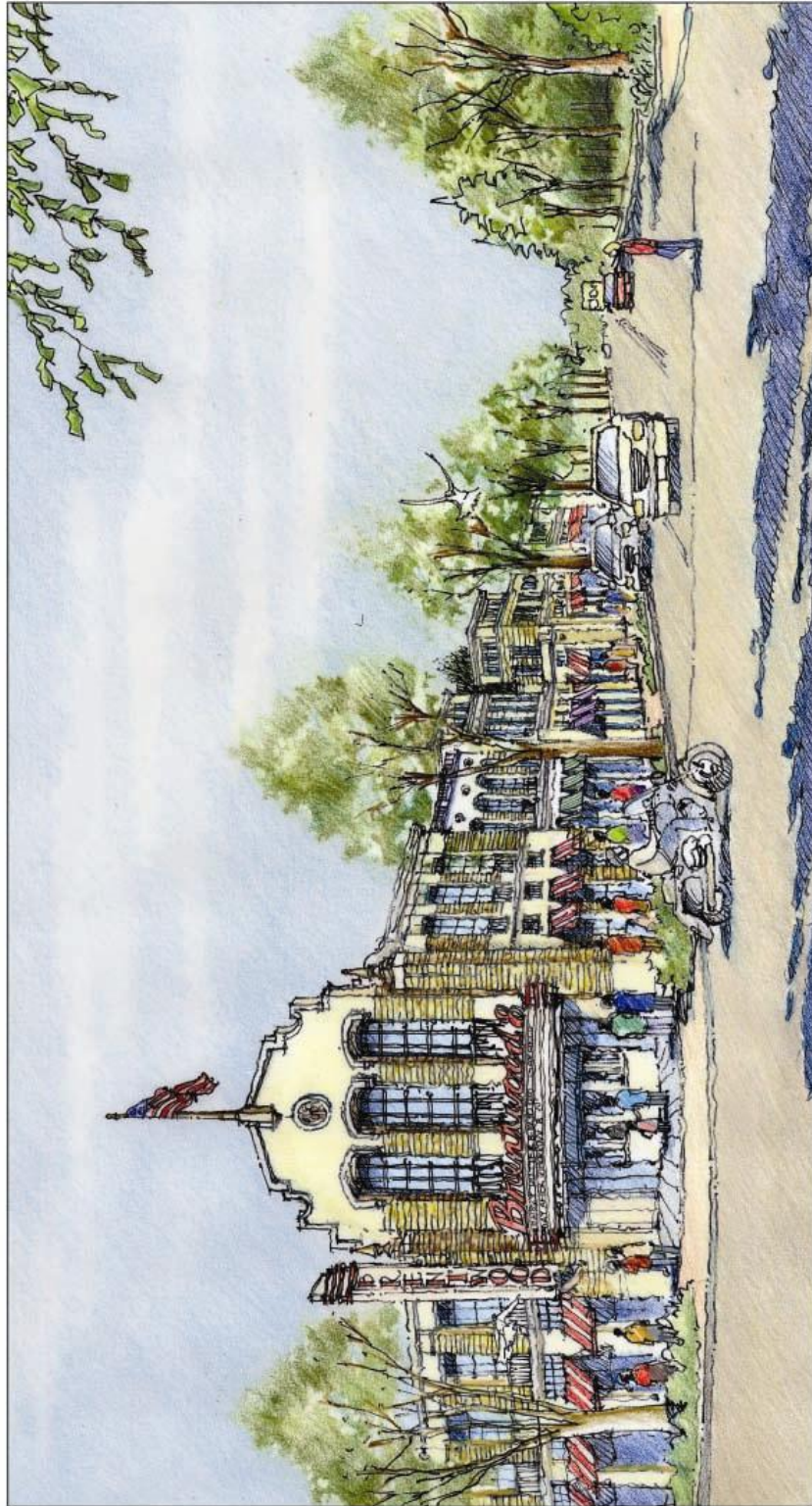


Figure 4.2-4
Single-Family Residential Concept Alternative



REGULATORY CONTEXT

Specific federal or State regulations do not directly pertain to the visual quality of an area. However, existing policies and regulations established in the City of Brentwood General Plan and Municipal Code are listed below, as applicable:

City of Brentwood General Plan

The following are applicable General Plan goals and policies related to aesthetics:

Community Design Element

Goal 1: High Design Standards – Promote the highest standards of architecture and site design for all development projects, both public and private.

Policy 1.1.1: Protect Downtown – Avoid strip commercial development on the periphery of Brentwood that detracts from the economic viability of the Central Business District.

Program 1.1.3: Neighborhood Commercial Centers – Locate neighborhood commercial centers at intersections of major arterial and collectors.

Policy 1.2: Well-defined Neighborhood – Residential neighborhoods should be well defined with park and recreation facilities, schools, open space, and neighborhood commercial land uses that incorporate unifying landscape and architectural themes.

Program 1.2.2: Relationship to Neighborhoods – Encourage developments that relate to existing neighborhoods and infrastructure.

Program 1.2.3: Neighborhood Centers – Create neighborhoods with visible and functional centers (e.g. parks, neighborhood commercial centers, community centers).

Program 1.2.4: Trails Master Plan – Implement the “Trails Master Plan” as development occurs adjacent to the designated areas within the plan.

Policy 1.3: Quality Landscaping and Design – Encourage quality landscape and design.

Program 1.3.3: Commercial Improvements – Improve the appearance of older commercial buildings and assist business through redevelopment programs.

Policy 1.4: Character of Streets – Create streets which are pedestrian friendly and provide views of abutting neighborhoods.

Program 1.4.3: Design Review – Through design review, encourage sidewalks that are separated from the street by a tree planting area.

Program 1.4.4: Street Standards – Review existing residential and collector street standards with the intent to minimize paving to encourage lower vehicle speeds and make residential and collector streets more pedestrian oriented.

Program 1.4.6: Pedestrian Orientation – Establish pedestrian oriented amenities and design features in areas of new development.

Goal 2: View of Natural Features – Preserve and enhance the views of dominant natural features (i.e. Mt. Diablo, the Foothills, and local open space).

Policy 2.1: Preserve Views – Preserve views of the surrounding countryside, landmarks, and significant natural features such as Mount Diablo, nearby hills and ridgelines, and view shed corridors within developments.

Program 2.1.3: Ridgeline Development – The City should not approve any land use change that will place development upon a major ridgeline.

Program 2.1.4: Hillside Development – Development of the hillside areas shall balance the retention of open space areas with areas for new construction.

Program 2.1.5: Height Restrictions - Each development application or Planned Development Zone District shall include consideration of building height limitations and view corridors to preserve views of significant natural features.

Program 2.1.6: Revegetation - The city shall require revegetation of graded slopes with indigenous plant materials, where feasible, to maintain scenic views and assist in slope stabilization.

Goal 3: Small Town Identity – Attempt to create a sense of “place” for the community by preserving and enhancing the identity and small town rural character of Brentwood.

Policy 3.1: Maintain Rural Character – Maintain and enhance the architectural character and rural heritage of the existing Downtown area and the Brentwood community as a whole.

Program 3.1.2: Design Review – Through the design review process, protect designated architecturally and/or historically significant areas, and require infill developments to be architecturally compatible with the surrounding area.

Program 3.1.4: Public Facilities – The design and location of new public facilities such as City Hall, Police Stations, etc. within the Downtown area shall be designed and located to be the focal points of downtown.

Policy 3.2: Neighborhood Integrity – Maintain and enhance the integrity and distinctive qualities of existing neighborhood and districts within the Brentwood community.

Program 3.2.1: Architectural Review – Detailed standards, procedures, and guidelines regulating such items as building mass, materials, color, landscape treatment of front yards, etc., shall be used in architectural review of commercial and residential development and corridors.

Program 3.2.2: Design Review – Utilize design review to address acceptable design features, roof pitch, and the position of structures in relationship to the streetscape.

Program 3.2.3: Infill Development – Respect existing neighborhood scale and character when considering infill projects and/or upgrading existing residential neighborhoods.

Program 3.2.7: Minimize Soundwalls – The use of soundwalls along thoroughfares is often necessary to maintain noise standards. However, the City's preferred method of attenuating adverse noise levels is to utilize a combination of frontage roads, earth berming, and larger building setbacks along thoroughfares in new subdivision design. When soundwalls must be constructed, they should be designed in a meandering pattern and set back a minimum average distance of ten (10) feet from the adjacent right-of-way with extensive landscaping in front of the wall.

Policy 3.3: Strong Transitions – Create strong transitions between the City of Brentwood and neighboring communities. Within Brentwood create major activity centers or nodes with intense development whose intensity decreases as you travel out of the node.

Program 3.3.2: Community Gateways – Establish locations for community gateways that clearly define major entry points of Brentwood and require their dedication.

Conservation/Open Space Element

Goal 2: Cultural Resources – Preserve and enhance prehistoric, historic, and cultural resources in and around the Brentwood Community.

Policy 2.1: Historic Structure – Retain and maintain historic structures.

Program 2.1.2: Restoration Funds – Use Redevelopment funds and other mechanisms to promote historic restoration.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Standards of Significance

An impact to the aesthetic values of the proposed Downtown Specific Plan would be considered significant if the proposed project would do any of the following:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas and natural resources within the City of Brentwood;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area; or
- Have a substantial negative impact on the visual character of the built environment in the City of Brentwood.

Method of Analysis

The section below gives full consideration to the development of the project area and acknowledges the physical changes to the existing setting. Impacts to the existing environment of the project area are to be determined by the contrast between the site's visual setting before and after proposed development. Although few standards exist to singularly define the various individual perceptions of aesthetic value from person to person, the degree of visual change can be measured and described in a reasonably objective manner in terms of visibility and visual contrast, dominance, and magnitude. Current residents in and adjacent to the project area and travelers along Brentwood Boulevard would be considered sensitive to the visual and aesthetic alteration of the Downtown Specific Plan area.

Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.2-1 Impacts related to light and glare.

The Downtown planning area is a currently developed area that consists of a variety of uses, including residential, commercial, office, park, civic, and school uses. Currently, a few vacant parcels exist within the Downtown planning area; however, because the setting is already urbanized and the development of those parcels is included in the General Plan, implementation of the Downtown Specific

Plan is not expected to result in substantially different light and glare impacts from the General Plan. Adding new sources of light and glare in an urban, developed setting would be considered less-than-significant because the overall background light and glare levels are not expected to increase substantially under the proposed project. However, any increases in the amount of light and glare generated by implementation of the Specific Plan, while not adverse, would be reduced by standards and guidelines for lighting design, luminaire types, heights, and uplighting provided by the Downtown Specific Plan. The Specific Plan provides the following measures for the avoidance of unnecessary light and glare, especially on adjacent residences, which are considered receptors sensitive to the effects of increased light and glare (p. 50 - 51):

Design

- Commercial buildings and landscapes can be illuminated indirectly by concealing light features within buildings and landscaping to highlight attractive features and avoid intrusion into neighboring properties.

Luminaire Types

- New area lighting fixtures shall be of the cutoff type to prevent light from being emitted above the horizontal relative to the point of light source.
- New fixtures should use a reflector and/or a refractor system for efficient distribution of light and reduction of glare.
- New fixtures should not cause glare or reflect into upper stories of buildings. House-side shields and internal reflector caps should be used to block light from illuminating residential windows.

Height

- Bollard illumination should be shielded or kept at a sufficiently low level to prevent glare impacts for passing motorists.
- In general, height of light sources should be kept low to maintain pedestrian scale and prevent spill light from impacting adjacent properties.

Uplighting

- Building facade uplighting, roof “wash” lighting, and landscape lighting should be operated on timers that turn off illumination entirely after 2 a.m. nightly.
- Shielding and careful placement should be used to prevent spill light from visibility by pedestrians, motorists, and nearby residential dwelling windows.
- Adjacent to single-family homes, a combination of mounting height and luminaire shield should be used to protect residences from glare.
- Illumination levels of facade uplighting, roof wash lighting and landscape uplighting should use lower brightness levels where the illuminated facades, roofs, or landscaping face residential buildings, except across wider streets or boulevards with landscaped medians and street trees.

As shown in Figure 3-8 in the Project Description chapter of this EIR, Long-Term Envisioned Town Pattern Scenario, residential uses are proposed between Brentwood Boulevard and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The proposed residential uses are currently in an area zoned Industrial Commercial and Commercial/Office Business; therefore, the General Plan EIR conclusions regarding visual impacts of General Plan buildout do not apply to these proposed uses. However, residential uses generally produce less light and glare than industrial, commercial, or office uses. Because the residences would emit less light and glare than currently proposed zoning allows, buildout of this portion of the Downtown Specific Plan would not be considered adverse.

Under CEQA, an environmental analysis should consider both the impacts that would result from the proposed project on existing and/or adjacent uses, as well as effects on the uses proposed from implementation of the project. Residences are considered sensitive to light and glare. Existing light and glare or future projects that emit light and glare could affect the residential uses proposed between Brentwood Boulevard and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. However, the residences would be adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods to the east, and a buffer of trees is proposed across the railroad tracks to the west (see Figure 3-8, Long-Term Envisioned Town Pattern Scenario). Therefore, because the proposed residences would not be adjacent to uses that would expose them to significant amounts of light and glare, buildout of these uses would not be adverse.

Additionally, because the Specific Plan is a policy-level document and does not include any project-level plans, evaluation of light and glare impacts related to specific properties is not required at this time. Should projects within the Downtown area require environmental evaluation in the future, the specific project-related impacts associated with light and glare would be evaluated at that time.

Because any light and glare generated by the Downtown Specific Plan would be reduced with the standards and guidelines provided in the Plan, proposed uses of the Plan would add to the positive aesthetic character of the Downtown area and would emit less light and glare than currently proposed zoning allows, and because future projects would require further environmental analysis, impacts associated with light and glare are expected to be *less-than-significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

4.2-2 Impacts related to scenic vistas and visual resources.

The General Plan EIR indicates that the scenic vistas and visual natural resources within the City of Brentwood contribute to the quality of the community. Uninterrupted views of the Diablo Range and Mount Diablo on the western horizon exist throughout the Brentwood planning area.

However, restrictions regarding building height provided in the Downtown Specific Plan would reduce future project-specific impacts related to implementation of the policy-level Downtown Specific Plan. The Open Space Guidelines within the Downtown Specific Plan identify the following criteria for new buildings within the Downtown area: “New development should aim to embrace... the small-town character and charm that is fundamental to Brentwood’s identity” (p. 49). Because future projects requiring environmental analysis would be subject to the provisions of the Specific Plan, impacts to scenic vistas and other visual resources resulting from building construction would not be considered adverse.

In addition, scenic natural resources would not be altered because urban uses currently predominate throughout the Downtown Specific Plan area. Roadways which transect the project area are not identified as scenic routes within the Brentwood General Plan EIR.

Furthermore, the General Plan EIR found that development associated with the General Plan Update would not have substantial adverse impacts on scenic vistas and visual natural resources. Because the Downtown Specific Plan would be generally consistent with the General Plan, views of scenic resources would not be altered beyond the less-than-significant level found in the General Plan EIR. The only substantial change in use would be the substitution of residential development along the Brentwood Boulevard and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks in place of industrial, commercial, and/or office development in order to provide an aesthetically pleasing visual gateway to the Downtown area for travelers along these thoroughfares. Additionally, the proposed residential uses would be less aesthetically adverse to adjacent existing residential than the existing zoning provides. Because the residences would add to the positive aesthetic character of the Downtown area, buildout of this portion of the Downtown Specific Plan would not be considered adverse.

The Downtown Specific Plan would not result in a loss of open space that is considered a principal scenic resource in the City because development within the Downtown area would be infill development and re-use of currently developed land. Open spaces that exist within the planning area, such as City Park and the various schools, would be preserved. Because the Specific Plan would reduce potential visual impacts to scenic natural resources, the Downtown area is not designated as a natural scenic resource, and open spaces within the Downtown area would be preserved, impacts to scenic resources would be considered *less-than-significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

4.2-3 Impacts related to historical and other characteristic architectural features in the Downtown planning area.

The Downtown area of Brentwood has been identified by the Brentwood General Plan EIR as the historic center of the City. Physical characteristics of the historic buildings and City Park, among other local-serving uses, have been identified within the General Plan EIR as essential to the character of Brentwood. Specialty paving at cross walks, street trees, historical light standards, and street furniture are additional characteristics of the Downtown area which contribute to the pleasing aesthetic qualities of Downtown Brentwood.

The Brentwood General Plan EIR identified buildout of the General Plan would have less-than-significant impacts on the existing visual character or quality and urban design of the Brentwood Planning Area. The General Plan Update's policies include design guidelines to ensure high-quality non-residential development and requirements for compatibility with existing development, as well as urban design elements for maintaining the quality of development in Brentwood.

In addition, the Downtown Specific Plan includes design guidelines for the Downtown area with which future projects would be required to comply. One of the stated goals of the Downtown Specific Plan is to build on the aesthetics of Brentwood's distinctive small-town character: "The City will make certain that future downtown development will embrace architectural styles, forms and details that mesh with historic Brentwood, while looking to the future" (p. 30). In order to accomplish this goal, the Downtown Specific Plan includes design standards focused specifically on the character of development within the Downtown planning area. These development regulations include measures for the following: development standards for each property or lot, including minimum and maximum building heights, setbacks, and frontage coverage policies; requirements for provision of public open space; parking standards and guidelines; and architectural standards and guidelines that would govern the massing and composition of future buildings.

Because development or redevelopment within the Downtown area would be required to comply with the Downtown Specific Plan, which includes specific provisions to preserve Brentwood's existing character, *less-than-significant* impacts on the unique visual characteristics of the Downtown area are expected to result from the project.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.2-4 Long-term impacts to the visual character of the region from the proposed project in combination with existing and future developments in the Brentwood area.

The proposed project is not expected to contribute to a cumulative change in the visual character of the Contra Costa County region. Due to the existing urban setting of the project area and the continued urban uses planned for the project area, the larger context of the visual impact of the proposed project would not be considered cumulatively significant. The properties within the project area are currently developed for a wide range of uses, including residential, commercial, park, school, and civic uses, while the properties predominantly surrounding the project area consist of residential uses. Because one of the purposes of the Downtown Specific Plan is to revitalize the Downtown area for residential uses and to provide a pedestrian-friendly area for surrounding residential uses, the Downtown Specific Plan's broad-brush strategies would not conflict with existing adjacent uses, but would support those uses. Development in the project area would be guided by the development regulations provided in the Downtown Specific Plan as well as General Plan and Zoning standards. Development in the Downtown area would therefore not contribute to a change in the visual character of the area. As mentioned previously, the changes to views associated with development of the project area would be considered less-than-significant. Therefore, cumulative impacts associated with implementation of the Downtown Specific Plan would be considered *less-than-significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

Endnotes

¹ City of Brentwood, *City of Brentwood General Plan, 2001-2021*.

² City of Brentwood, *City of Brentwood General Plan Update Draft & Final EIR, 2001*.