

3.12 Visual Resources

This section presents the environmental setting and impact analysis for visual resources in the Lemoore Planning Area. It evaluates how implementation of General Plan policies will affect the City's visual and aesthetic character, including views of agricultural and wetland habitats at the periphery.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

PHYSICAL SETTING

The City of Lemoore is bordered on three sides by rural Kings County. The forth, eastern border is formed by the Lemoore Canal and low-density housing across the water body. The Planning Area is generally made up of flat, low-lying terrain. The notable physical features in the City are State Routes 41 and 198, which divide the City into three sections; and several 75 to 100 feet high wireless towers on school grounds. Further out, the Coalinga Mountains are visible to the west on clear days. There are no tall buildings in the Planning Area, so visual resources are mostly vistas along straight roadways, views along the edges of the built area looking out to farmland and grassland, and views of notable or aesthetically pleasing architecture or neighborhoods within the City. Though there are canals and creeks near the City, there is presently little in the way of passive or active recreational facilities with views of these natural features.

There are presently no State-designated scenic highways in the Planning Area.

REGULATORY SETTING

CEQA establishes that it is the policy of the State to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state "with...enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic, and historic environmental qualities." [California Public Resources Code Section 21001(b)]

Scenic views provided by the Coalinga Mountains to the west and much of the rural agricultural land surrounding the City are beyond Lemoore's jurisdiction. Kings County retains sole jurisdiction outside the Lemoore Sphere of Influence, and within City limits the City retains authority for land use decisions that could affect scenic views of particular parts of town or the countryside. Within the City, the Lemoore Canal and Irrigation Company retain control over the land uses impacting their canals.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Lemoore's General Plan would have a significant adverse effect on visual resources if it would cause one of more of the following:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, which could be caused by blocking panoramic views or views of significant landscape features or landforms as seen from public viewing areas;

- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the study area and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Generally, the greater the change from existing conditions, the more substantial the impact. For example, the construction of a new development on open rural land usually has a greater visual impact than redevelopment on infill land. Likewise, the construction of a new roadway generally has a greater visual impact than the widening of an existing one. New development and redevelopment can have significant local impacts where they would require the removal of trees and other important landscape buffers or other contrasting visual elements.

METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS

The following qualitative analysis uses a three-step visual impact assessment methodology to evaluate the visual character of the area and identify potential impacts of the proposed General Plan. The first step involved ground-level field studies by the Dyett & Bhatia project team, including photography, site visits, and GIS modeling. The second step involves an evaluation of existing aesthetic conditions, including interviews with stakeholders on “small town atmosphere” to understand visual resources and qualities most important to them. The third step involves interpretation of satellite photographs and site maps, and identifying potential changes in visual resources. All three are considered when determining the level of visual impact and if a substantial adverse effect would result from the General Plan.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Impacts on visual resources are expected to be less than significant in nature owing to implementation of Community Design and other mitigating policies. The development of residential, schools, and industrial land west of SR-41 is the most notable physical change in the Planning Area that will result in a different visual experience when entering and exiting the City. Various Plan policies are designed to regulate the design of new development, as well as the relationship of new development to existing buildings and streetscapes. Preservation of mature trees and street improvements including shade tree planting, street lamps, sidewalks, green buffers and bikeways are expected to maintain, extend or improve the vistas along streets. However, future development will likely be a new source of light or glare, diminishing to some extent nighttime views of the sky.

Figure 3.12-1 Lemoore's Visual Resources



Views of the agriculture land to the north, views of the City edge to the south, and views of West Hills College and the Coalinga Mountains to the west of the Planning Area create a sense of identity for Lemoore.



Visual resources of wetlands at the edges, of the railroad corridor and views of Leprino Factory along SR-41 will remain predominantly unchanged at buildout of the proposed General Plan.



Historic buildings in Lemoore's downtown, neighborhood schools and residential housing contribute to the visual character of the community.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact

3.12-1 Implementation of the proposed General Plan has the potential to adversely affect scenic views of peripheral agricultural lands, grasslands, and wetlands as seen from public viewing areas from inside Lemoore. *(Less than Significant)*

Views of Lemoore's peripheral agricultural lands, grasslands and wetlands from the existing City edge will likely change as the City expands beyond its current size. This is especially so for views from the City outwards along roads such as W.Glendale Avenue, Bell Haven Drive, College Drive, and Idaho Avenue, which forms the City's existing edges. As the City's borders shift outwards, new edges will be formed along Marsh Drive to the west, Jackson Avenue to the south, 17th Avenue to the east, an area mid-way between Glendale Avenue and Lacey Boulevard to the north, and other roads with views of the grasslands and countryside beyond. West Hills College will now be surrounded by residential development. In its place, the new Business Park will form the new western edge of the City. Similarly, views along major circulation corridors will change as development occurs. An observer traveling along SR-41 will see development on both sides of the highway in the future rather than just one. The visual experience along SR-198 will also be affected as new interchanges, gateways and greenways are created along the highway. While changes mentioned above will undoubtedly occur, they are not necessary adverse in nature. Policies in the proposed General Plan are designed to ensure that new development is implemented efficiently from the inside of the City outward and housing profiles are kept low to avoid undesirable and unnecessary visual obstructions. Furthermore, policies are proposed to protect agricultural land and wetlands at the edges to maintain views of surrounding agriculture and wetlands. For these reasons, the impact to views of peripheral agricultural lands, grasslands, and wetlands will be less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

LU-I-3 Require contiguous development within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) unless it can be demonstrated that land which is contiguous to urban development is unavailable or development is economically infeasible.

The City desires to prevent leapfrog development where development skips over available land to outlying and isolated areas. Contiguous development will reduce sprawl, safeguard agriculture land, and reduce the cost of extending services.

LU-I-4 Work with the County on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in which the County will commit to:

- Retaining agriculture and open space areas around the City, consistent with the General Plan; and
- Notifying the City of development applications within the "secondary" SOI adjacent to the City's Planning Area for comment to avoid potential conflicts.

Joint planning agreements have been used successfully in many jurisdictions. This policy is intended to create a mechanism to protect the open space, agriculture, wetlands, and canals that form the backdrop for the City, so that the City can keep a distinct urban edge. The City will also notify NAS Lemoore of development applications on the west side of the Planning Area in order to maintain the open space buffer between the City and the air station land use.

- CD-I-2 Maintain views into the agricultural lands on the rural side of the roadways by not planting within the right-of-way and spacing trees farther apart.
- CD-I-4 Maintain scenic vistas to the Coalinga Mountains, other natural features, and landmark buildings.
- COS-I-1 Protect lands designated for Agricultural/ Rural/ Conservation uses with appropriate zoning consistent with the General Plan.

No additional mitigation is needed.

Impact

3.12-2 Implementation of the proposed General Plan will alter the scale and visual character of the City. (*Less than Significant*)

Buildout of the General Plan and the adoption of the new Land Use Classifications will result in greater mixed use, increased economic growth, more open space, new development on undeveloped lands and increased infill development. This new development would have physical impacts on the scale and character of the City. To prevent any negative impact to the City's aesthetic quality, the Plan contains many policies that apply to community design issues. These policies are carefully designed to ensure new developments maintain a high degree of harmony with the environmental setting and to preserve the small-town feel of the City. These policies call for landscaped roadways, new parkways, visual buffers along commercial and industrial areas, and other measures to maintain or improve the aesthetic quality of the City.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Implementation of the following proposed General Plan policies would help to reduce impacts to the City's scale and character to a level that is less than significant:

- LU-I-11 Ensure that the scale, operation, location, and other characteristics of community facilities, including parks, schools, child care facilities, religious institutions, other public and quasi-public facilities, enhance the character and quality of neighborhoods.

LU-I-12 Require new residential development adjacent to established neighborhoods to provide a transition zone where the scale, architectural character, pedestrian circulation and vehicular access routes of both new and old neighborhoods are well integrated.

CD-I-11 Preserve and protect heritage trees:

- Adopt a Tree Protection Ordinance;
- Require developers to preserve protected trees and submit an inventory and a site plan showing the location of all trees prior to any grading, demolition, or site work. Cutting of protected trees will require a permit and will only be allowed if trees are diseased, dying, or pose a danger to human activity; and
- Require developers to replace a similar tree of like size and species within 50 feet of its original location if a protected tree is removed during construction.

The Tree Protection Ordinance will also stipulate which trees qualify as heritage trees by type and size, permit application details, inventory requirements, violation fines, maximum number of tree cuttings allowed per acreage of development, and different standards pertaining to heritage trees, old oak trees, riparian vegetation, and trees of community interest. These trees typically include Valley Oak, Magnolia Ash, California Sycamore, Cottonwood, Modesto Ash, Italian Stone Pine, California Fan Palm and Eucalyptus.

CD-I-14 Continue the City's utility undergrounding program to replace existing wooden utility poles and overhead lines with underground utility lines along major thoroughfares, and require undergrounding of utilities in all new development.

Where powerlines are too large to put underground, they should be incorporated into the street system such that easy access is maintained.

CD-I-34 Require design of buildings in neighborhood centers to be consistent with Lemoore's small town character.

- *Style:* Buildings must adopt a style that is non-intrusive in character, i.e. they must conform to the surrounding neighborhood and Lemoore's small town character. Inappropriate architecture will not be allowed.
- *Color:* Exterior color and materials must be compatible with those of existing buildings. Proposed external materials must be high quality and durable. Color schemes will be evaluated on a case by case basis during site plan approval.
- *Height:* The height of buildings must not differ by more than one story from adjacent buildings. The rhythm of window openings or architectural elements must be consistent across each block.
- *Landscape:* At least 15 percent of the site must be planted with trees, shrubs, or groundcover.

The City will develop additional standards for building elements such as awnings, commercial signs and window glazing, in a future update of the Zoning Ordinance.

- CD-I-42 Require landscaped buffers and screening along the perimeter of industrial areas abutting residential areas, major streets, and edge of town.

The requirement will include a 15-foot wide landscaped buffer adjacent to the public right-of-way on private property between Iona Avenue and the existing industrial areas.

- CD-I-44 Ensure that new residential development enhances Lemoore's neighborhood character and connectivity by establishing the following standards in the subdivision ordinance:

- *Maximum block length:* 500 feet, except for blocks with single-family residential uses that may be up to 600 feet long (750 feet with a mid-block pedestrian connection);
- *Required connectivity:* All new streets and alleys must connect to other streets and alleys to form a continuous vehicular and pedestrian network. Local, internal streets should be narrow and designed with traffic calming features to control speed.
- *Cul-de-sacs:* Limit use of cul-de-sacs to no more than ten percent of the length of all streets in a subdivision map, where constrained by surrounding land attributes.
- *Loop-outs:* Encourage use of loop-out streets rather than cul-de-sacs.

Long blocks are functionally more suitable for automobile use than pedestrians. If block lengths were too small, cars will need to pause every few seconds of travel. On the other hand, if block lengths were too large, they limit pedestrian connectivity. For optimum walkability, block sizes stated above are ideal.

Where cul-de-sacs are used, require pedestrian and bicycle connections through the end to adjacent streets, if a connection is needed to a school, park, retail, or connector street.

- COS-I-32 Establish an inventory of historical buildings in Lemoore, including schools, churches, commercial buildings and public buildings, and residential buildings.

A historic preservation checklist is the primary planning tool used to identify, record, and evaluate historic properties within a community, neighborhood, project area, or region. The checklist may include items to determine a building's architectural significance, age, historic importance, structural integrity, cost of restoration and other attributes. The inventories generated from these survey activities form an important component in local preservation programs, and ultimately contribute to local knowledge of historical resources.

COS-I-37 Establish an interim design review process for proposed demolitions and exterior alterations and additions to non-residential buildings that are more than 75 years old. The Planning Commission would be the review authority, with their decisions subject to appeal to the City Council. Criteria to be considered in approving or conditionally approving the proposed change will include:

- *For proposed alterations and additions:* The project design is compatible with Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and with the Downtown Revitalization Plan; and
- *For proposed demolitions:* The applicant has demonstrated that the existing use can not generate a reasonable rate of return; the existing building constitutes a hazard to public safety and is economically infeasible to rehabilitate, the design quality of the replacement building will be superior to the existing building and will be compatible with adjacent buildings and the character of Downtown Lemoore, or the proposed demolition or removal is necessary to allow a project that will have public benefits outweighing the public benefits of retaining the existing building.

This process would be in place until the inventory of potential landmarks and historic buildings is completed and zoning for Landmarks and Historic Districts is adopted.

Impact

3.12-3 Implementation of the proposed General Plan will create new sources of light or glare and affect the night sky. (*Less than Significant*)

Buildout of the proposed General Plan will increase the physical size of the City resulting in increased outdoor lighting at car parks, roadways, industrial centers and residential areas. While future development has the potential to increase the amount of light and glare, the existing City is already subject to light and glare from existing land use. Furthermore, policies within the proposed General Plan are designed to mitigate to the extent possible any negative lighting or glare impacts associated with new development, including impacts on the night sky.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Implementation of the following proposed General Plan policies would help to reduce this impact to a level that is less than significant:

CD-I-63 Establish Outdoor Lighting Standards in the Zoning Ordinance where:

- All outdoor lighting fixtures shall be designed, shielded, aimed, located and maintained to shield adjacent properties and to not produce glare;
- New street lighting shall be provided in accordance with the requirements of the California Energy Commission's Outdoor Lighting Standards and follow recommendations put forth by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA) Design of Roadway Lighting (RP-8);

- All outdoor lighting fixtures shall be energy-efficient. Parking lot light fixtures and light fixture on buildings shall be full cut-off fixtures and all permanently installed exterior lighting shall be controlled by either a photocell or an astronomical time switch;
- Lighting design in parking lots, commercial and industrial areas shall be coordinated with the landscape plan to ensure that vegetation growth will not interfere with the intended illumination;
- Light levels in all new development, parking lots, and street lights to not exceed industry and State standards; ; and
- Lighting along the urban-rural edge should be designed to provide one-half the light standard for urban areas.

All new development is to submit an outdoor lighting plan for approval during the design review process and regular site plan review.

- CD-I-64 Create and adopt a Dark Sky Ordinance to minimize glare, light trespass, excessive lighting and other forms of light pollution to preserve the enjoyment of the night sky and night environment.

A Dark Sky Ordinance allows the City to enforce lighting regulations and control light pollution.

- CD-I-65 Do not allow continuous all night outdoor lighting in sport stadiums, construction sites, and rural areas unless they are required for security reasons.

- CD-I-66 Educate the public about light trespass and light pollution and establish a voluntary program to encourage existing sources of light pollution to convert to non-polluting, energy efficient lighting systems.

The City will use its website and newsletter to raise awareness of these issues.

No additional mitigation is needed.

Impact

3.12-4 Implementation of the proposed General Plan will change the existing visual quality of Lemoore's edges and entryways. (*Less than Significant*)

Lemoore's current urban edges are only loosely defined by agriculture lands in the north, West Hills College to the west and some industrial development to the south. There is no visual treatment at the edges to create a sense of arrival. A sharpening of Lemoore's edge will help define its physical form and create an image of a cohesive community. The proposed General Plan has policies to ensure the feathering of land use, development intensity, and landscaping to create a sense of transition at the urban-to-rural boundary. Trees, lighting and signage at gateways will

help accentuate the experience of arrival and exit when traveling along both highways and major arterials into and out of the City. The existing visual quality of Lemoore's edges and entryways will change with implementation of the following policies. The impact is not expected to be significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that will reduce the Impact

CD-I-1 Establish an open country character for new development facing the countryside along Marsh Drive, the Lemoore Canal, and portions north of Glendale Avenue, portions of Belle Haven Drive, Industry Way, Idaho Avenue, Jackson Avenue, and other areas to demarcate the urban edge. This will be accomplished by:

- Enforcing a 50 foot minimum setback requirement on new development along these roads;
- Creating a 30 foot wide landscaped buffer within the public right-of-way or landscape easement;
- Planting multiple layers of trees closely for visual impermeability, and using drought resistant indigenous trees where appropriate;
- Providing only minimal street lighting, at a rate that is 50 percent of comparable City standard;
- Prohibiting the use of solid walls along these edges (all fences must be visually permeable); and
- Ensuring the scale and character of development does not overwhelm the surroundings by stepping down building heights at the edges.

CD-I-3 Work with the Lemoore Canal and Irrigation Company and other canal companies to retain open canals and restore the Lemoore Canal to its natural appearance, and study the possibility of providing a bicycle trail along the canal.

The Lemoore Canal historically has formed the eastern edge of the City and is an important landmark of Lemoore. However, annual dredging activity by the Lemoore Canal and Irrigation Company and a fence erected along its length prevent public enjoyment of this natural resource. To accomplish this policy, the City will need to revise their contract with the Lemoore Canal Company which requires the undergrounding of all canals as development takes place. Where undergrounding of a canal is required to accommodate development, the City will strive for trail access.

CD-I-5 Create entry gateways at the intersection of SR-198 and Houston Avenue, the SR-41 off ramp at Bush Street, the intersection of SR-41 and Hanford Armona Road, along SR-41 south of Idaho Avenue, and the proposed off-ramp at SR-198 near Marsh Drive with distinctive features, as follows:

- *Intersection of SR-198 and Houston Avenue.* This entry is located at an area where the two roads merged to form a triangulated piece of land where commercial uses are existing. Placing vehicle-oriented street lights with welcoming signs at-

tached on each side will accentuate both the City gateway and the development nearby. Lush trees planted closely on each side of the street will provide another transitional element as one enters from the rural area where the roads are marked with fewer trees.

- *SR-41 off ramp at Bush Street.* Regional retail planned around this area will attract traffic from SR-41 to the City. The exit will be clearly marked with regular highway signage at least half a mile in advance of the off-ramp (indicating major resources to be found at this exit), and additional local signage will be placed on Bush Street to direct vehicles to City attractions, such as Downtown and City Hall.
- *Intersection of SR-41 and Hanford Armona Road.* Low density residential developments are planned around this intersection. Existing gas line station should be camouflaged with heavy landscaping on chain link fence area. Densely landscaped trees on both sides of the street and a welcoming sign will announce the entry into the City.
- *SR-41 south of Idaho Avenue.* Industrial development is proposed at this gateway. Improvements to the Lemoore Midget Raceway will be needed if it remains. Landscaping and signage will announce entry to the City.
- *SR-198 near Marsh Drive.* Regional retail is proposed at the northeastern corner to take advantage of the area's high visibility. A welcoming sign, consistent with Caltrans standards, will be placed in the right-of-way or on the Marsh Drive turn-out. A landscaped greenway at the northern edge of SR-198 will create an attractive buffer as well as accommodate storm detention needs. Rural edge treatment will also be provided at the western side of Marsh Drive.

CD-I-15 Establish design standards and architectural guidelines for non-residential development facing SR-41 and SR-198. Design guidelines should address the following:

- Building facades, roofing, and façade materials, and colors;
- Use of focal elements (such as articulated rooflines or towers) to serve as visual landmarks;
- Screening of truck loading and refuse collection areas; and
- Commercial or retail signs and logos.

The sign ordinance will be updated to ensure that the size, height, and placement of signs and logos convey a positive image of the City.

CD-I-16 Require "street friendly" designs in new and transitioning commercial developments along SR-41.

The typical commercial development is designed with parking in front. New development should reflect a positive orientation to the street, with the active ground floor uses and parking areas screened from view, and provide for new uses which can more fully contribute to the vitality, attractiveness and overall viability of the area.

CD-I-17 Work with Caltrans to identify needed improvements to its highway facilities. Improvements include:

- Creating a green buffer along parts of SR-198 and SR-41 adjoining residential land;
- Improving connections to local streets through improvements to off-ramps, through-streets, traffic signs and signals;
- Improving the safety and aesthetics of fencing structures on bridges;
- Establishing aesthetic standards for the design and color of concrete highway dividers and walls; and
- Establishing standards for streetscape improvements, including tree planting along highways, and adding landscaping, artwork, or stamped concrete for future medians.

Standards will include type and spacing of trees, shrubs, and setbacks. A minimum 30 feet between the property lines to the edge of the highway should be set aside for trees and landscaping purposes.

CD-I-21 Design streetscape and landscape elements to enhance the sense of arrival from SR-198 towards Houston Avenue and East D Street.

CD-I-22 Work with property owners, law enforcement officials, and the public in removing abandoned equipment, trailers, and other items that litter open space east of SR-41 along Idaho Avenue, Bush Street, and 19 ½ Avenue.

In addition to the above, policies LU-I-4, CD-I-2 in Impact 3.12-1, and CD-I-42 in Impact 3.12-2 will also help ensure this impact remains less than significant. No additional mitigation is needed.