

4.2 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Three viewing locations of the project site were identified for purposes of this analysis: (1) Gainsborough Road/Valley Center Avenue, (2) Southern boundary of property as viewed from near Walnut Creek Trailhead, and; (3) Southern Boundary of project as viewed from the interior of the Walnut Creek Trail. These locations represent areas where large public viewing audiences could have views of the proposed development. The analysis of the project was conducted with consideration to the grading and drainage concept provided by the applicant and the development standards contained in Specific Plan No. 4 that were pertinent to the project. These standards regulate lot size, building setbacks, building heights, permitted density ranges, define landscaping, lighting, trails and community monumentation and signage.

4.2.2 METHODOLOGY

This section of the EIR evaluates the potential project-related changes in the visual character of the site and surroundings through a combination of methods that: (1) identify corridors in which the project may be viewed; (2) identify “viewsheds” within these corridors where the development area would be visible; (3) identify those viewsheds’ “prominent visual features”; and (4) considers changes in the viewsheds through the review of grading plans, landscape plans, and existing view corridors.

Viewsheds selected for this analysis are those that can be seen by a public viewing audience traveling along nearby roads as well as users of existing public trails (i.e., Walnut Creek Trail). “Prominent visual features” are defined as features that are unique to the project area or to San Dimas and/or those features that stand out in relation to their surroundings.

If portions of the proposed development area cannot be seen by any type of viewer, or if views of the development area are from so far away as to make them visually obscure, those views are not considered visually prominent and are not assessed as part of this analysis. It is not the intent of this analysis to suggest that the project site is visible only from the viewing locations discussed in this section. Rather, an attempt was made to identify a range of viewsheds, which are representative samples of the most prominent public views available in the project area (it is not reasonable or necessary that this EIR study every possible viewing location).

Within each of the viewsheds selected for this analysis, view orientations were selected which would display the maximum amount of the proposed development area possible within that range of public view. Photographs of these viewsheds were taken and are reproduced in this section to illustrate pre-development views.

4.2.3 EXISTING CONDITIONS

a. Landforms and Topography

The project site is presently vacant except for one single family residential unit on the western portion of the property and a barn associated with farming activity that historically occurred on-site. On-site vegetation consists of non-native grasses interspersed with a number of native and non-native trees.

The property is situated below the residential uses found to the north of Gainsborough Road but above Walnut Creek. The site slopes sharply from its high point in the northern portion of the property to the south, where it flattens to form a plateau that sits above Walnut Creek. Elevations range from a high of 735 feet near Gainsborough Road to a low of 630 feet near the bluff overlooking the creek. Thus, the project site sits well below any natural horizontal view observed from Gainsborough Road or Valley Center Avenue.

b. View Corridors and Prominent or Unique Visual Features

While a variety of land use types are located in the area, low-density residential development predominates. Residential development is located to the north and northwest of the project site, while open space associated with Walnut Creek and Walnut Creek Park abut the southern boundary of the property. An equestrian trail is located adjacent to Walnut Creek and a trailhead lies adjacent to the property on the east. Further south beyond the creek is the Voorhees Campus of the California State Polytechnic University system. The Los Angeles International Church of Christ owns property to the northeast of the site.

Based on observations of the property conducted during field reconnaissance, a total of three viewsheds were identified for consideration in this analysis. The selections were made with emphasis placed on public viewing locations and locations considered as scenic by the City's *General Plan* or *Specific Plan No. 4*. While it is acknowledged that the project site is visible from the residences located along the western boundary of the project site, ground level views from this location are restricted by mature vegetation. The project site is more visible when observed from the second story of the residences located along the western boundary, as well as from homes located to the north above Gainsborough Road, but these are private views that are not available to the general public.

Public views of the site are available to motorists and pedestrians traveling on Gainsborough Road and hikers or horseback riders traveling along portions of the Walnut Creek trail. Viewing locations considered for evaluation in this analysis are described in detail below.

c. Existing Conditions of the Viewsheds

1. *Viewshed 1, Looking South along Valley Center Boulevard towards the Site*

Type of Viewing Audience: Mobile, southbound viewers on Valley Center Avenue, and east and westbound viewers on Gainsborough Road.

Figure 4.2-1, View of Site from Valley Center Avenue Traveling Southbound, depicts the degree of site visibility as observed by viewers traveling south on Valley Center Avenue or along Gainsborough Road. As illustrated in this figure, views of the site interior are not visible due to the elevation difference, which places the property below Gainsborough Road. The predominate physical features that can be observed is existing vegetation along Gainsborough Road. Visible in the background is the north-facing vegetated slope that defines the southern boundary of the drainage for Walnut Creek. These features form a prominent backdrop to the project site when viewed from this location.

Prominent Visual Features: Prominent visual features visible within this viewshed is north-facing vegetated slope that forms the visual backdrop from this viewing location.

2. *Viewshed 2, Looking North along Walnut Creek toward Project Site*

Type of Viewing Audience: Pedestrians or riders on horseback traveling along Walnut Creek Trail looking north toward project site.

As illustrated in **Figure 4.2-2, View of Site from Walnut Creek Trail**, views of the site available from the initial segment of the creek trail are obscured due to dense vegetation and site topography that creates a small bluff along the southeastern portion of the site. The primary views available from this location are vegetated slopes on the southern project boundary and moderately dense and green riparian vegetation within and along the banks of Walnut Creek.

Prominent Visual Features: The most prominent features in this viewshed are the southern slopes of the project site and the vegetated area along Walnut Creek.

3. *Viewshed 3, Looking along Walnut Creek Directly Into Project Site Interior*

Type of Viewing Audience: Pedestrians walking along Walnut Creek Trail looking toward project site.

Figure 4.2-3, *View of Site from Walnut Creek Trail-2*, provides a view looking north toward the project site from a different segment of the Walnut Creek Trail. This location affords direct views into the site interior due to an absence of vegetation and the gently sloping nature of the terrain in this area. Visible in this view is non-native grassland framed by coast live oak woodland. The windrow of mature trees planted along Gainsborough Road is also visible in the background of this view.

Prominent Visual Features: The dominant landforms associated with this view are non-native grassland framed by coast live oak woodland.

4.2.4 PROJECT IMPACTS

a. Significance Threshold Criteria

For purposes of this analysis, the following criteria are used to determine whether or not a project's changes in the existing landscape could be considered significantly adverse. If a project meets one or more of the listed criteria to a substantial degree, it can be concluded that the project could result in a significant visual impact. The criteria include consideration of the following:

1. Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or scenic corridor?

For the purposes of this analysis Gainsborough Road and Walnut Creek Trail are considered visual corridors; however, it should be noted that while Gainsborough Road is not considered a "scenic corridor or highway," the San Dimas *General Plan* considers Walnut Creek to be a "scenic resource." Additionally, Specific Plan No. 4 designates a strip of land along Walnut Creek as a "Scenic Easement."

2. Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

Under this criterion, a determination was made as to whether the project would result in a loss of a scenic resource (i.e., tree, rock outcropping, etc.), or be out of character with existing developed uses (i.e., building height and mass).

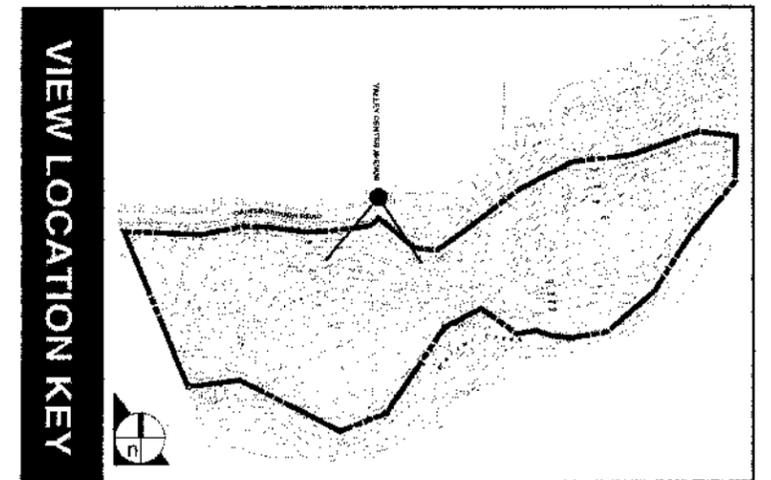
3. Does the project result in sun/shadow effects or light/glare on adjacent land uses?

This criterion is applied to adjacent land use where the project would be next to existing development. In addition, potential daytime and nighttime light and glare (light reflection) impacts of the project are also analyzed.

Each of these criteria is discussed below in relation to the proposed project.



Looking south along Valley Center Boulevard towards the site.



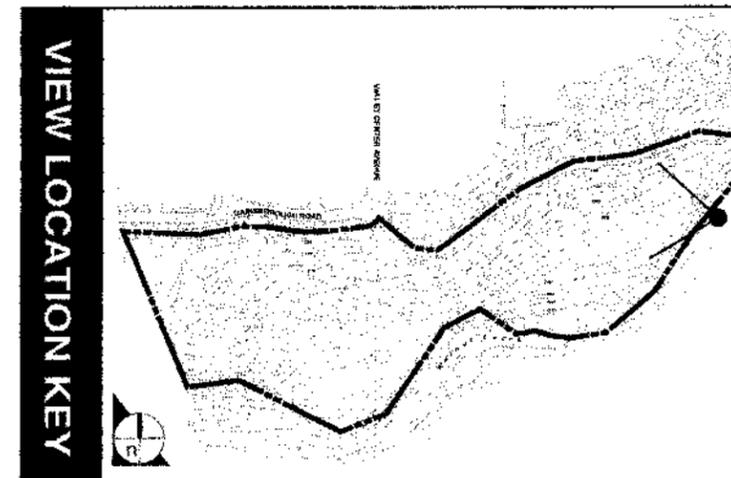
SOURCE: Impact Sciences, December 01.

FIGURE 4.2-1

Viewshed #1



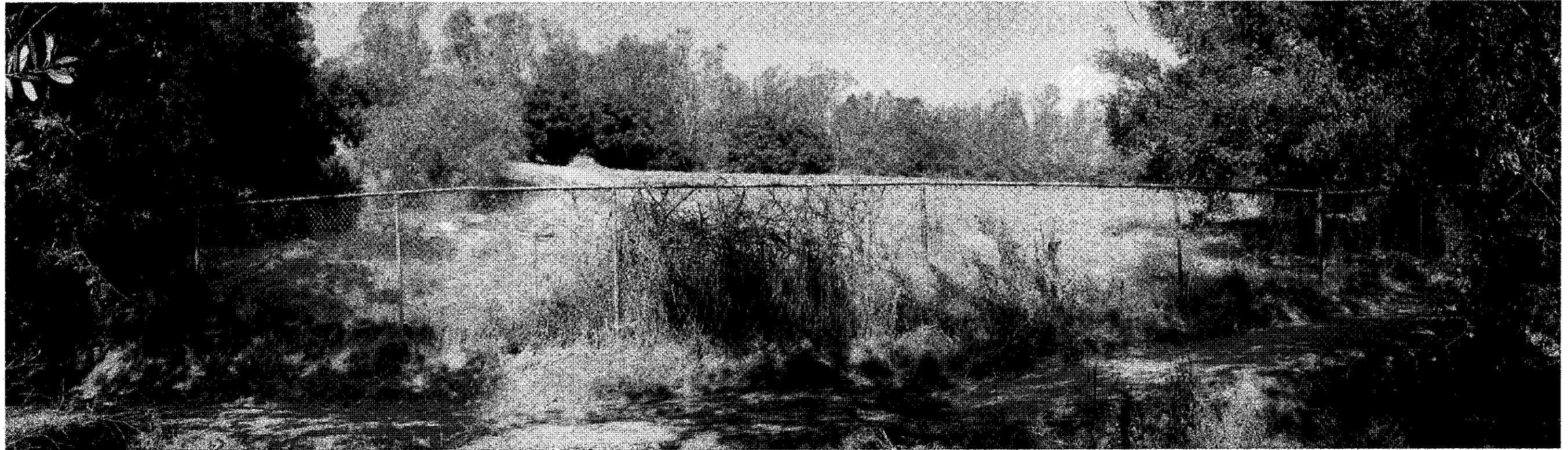
Taken along Walnut Creek looking north toward project site. Note direct views obscured by vegetation and site topography.



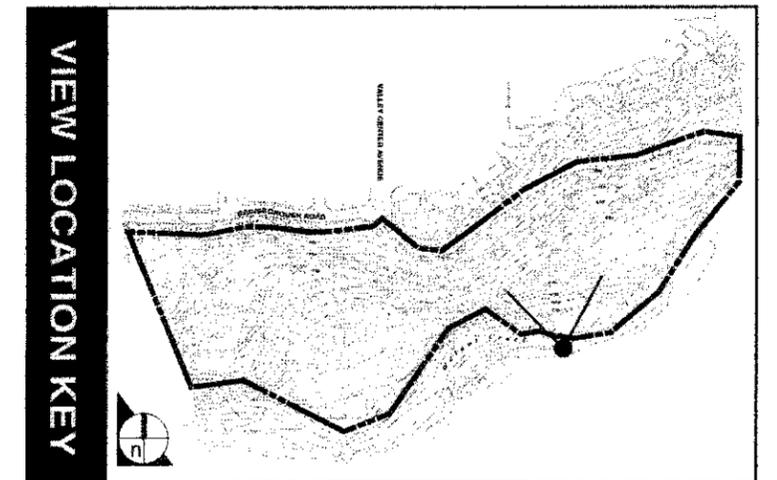
SOURCE: Impact Sciences, December 01.

FIGURE 4.2-2

Viewshed #2



View along Walnut Creek looking directly into site interior.



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, December 01.

FIGURE 4.2-3

Viewshed #3

b. Proposed Landform Alteration

Development of the project would require grading and contouring of the land to establish building pads, and roadway configuration, develop drainage patterns, and provide for necessary infrastructure. As shown in Vesting Tentative Tract Map #52717, the grading concept retains the site's overall topographic relief. Building pads are placed on the natural terrace in the site's midsection in order to minimize landform alteration. Building pad height ranges from 716 feet at the northwestern corner of the project site to a low of 640 along the southern project boundary. Manufactured slopes will be created at various points in the project interior where building pads have been established. Most of the manufactured slopes are less than 10 feet in height, but slopes reach a maximum of 25 feet along the southern boundary of proposed lots 4, 6 and 7. The maximum retaining wall height is six feet and all retaining walls are of masonry construction.

Figure 4.2-4 provides cross sections that compare the pre and post development grades on the property. As clearly evidenced in this figure, the grading concept retains the existing topographic characteristics of the property. Consequently, the project maintains the overall relationship of the property to the land uses located to the north (lower than) and west (at grade). The project grading concept also retains the bluff along the southern property boundary, and incorporates a linear landscaped buffer which separates the site from Walnut Creek. Finally, the site plan preserves the vast majority of trees that are present on the site including all that are highly visible from the viewing locations identified earlier in this section. See **Figure 4.2-5** for a depiction of the applicant's tree preservation plan.

c. Construction Related Impacts

During grading, the bare, graded earth would stand out in contrast to the areas left untouched by such activity; however, this activity would not block views of the north-facing slopes opposite Walnut Creek which form the backdrop to the property. During the construction phases, the frames of the structures would be raised and finished, and parking areas and streets would be paved. As the structures are constructed and finished, the scale of the project and changes in the visual character of the project site would become more evident. Changes in visual character of the project site after development would be apparent from the three locations discussed above.

The duration of these construction activities would be short-term. Although the visual character of the project site will be altered from its current condition, this impact is not considered significant for the following reasons: (1) short-term nature of the activity; (2) grading is occurring primarily within the

flatter parts of the property which preserves the visually dominant landforms, and; (3) there are already urbanized areas surrounding the project site (residential).

d. Operational Impacts -Substantial Effect on Scenic Vista (Threshold Criteria 1) or Character of Site (Criteria 2)

1. Viewshed 1, Looking South from Valley Center Avenue

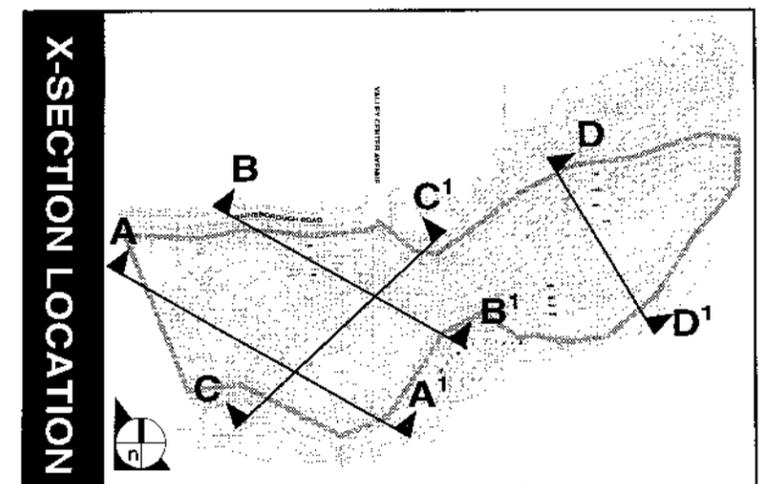
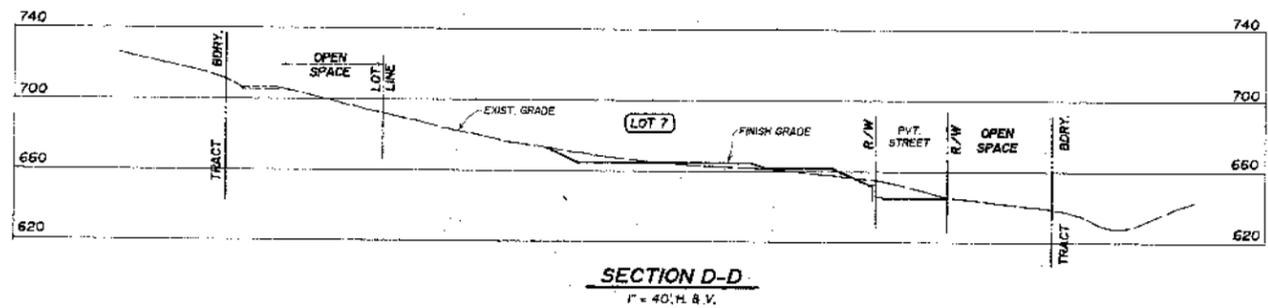
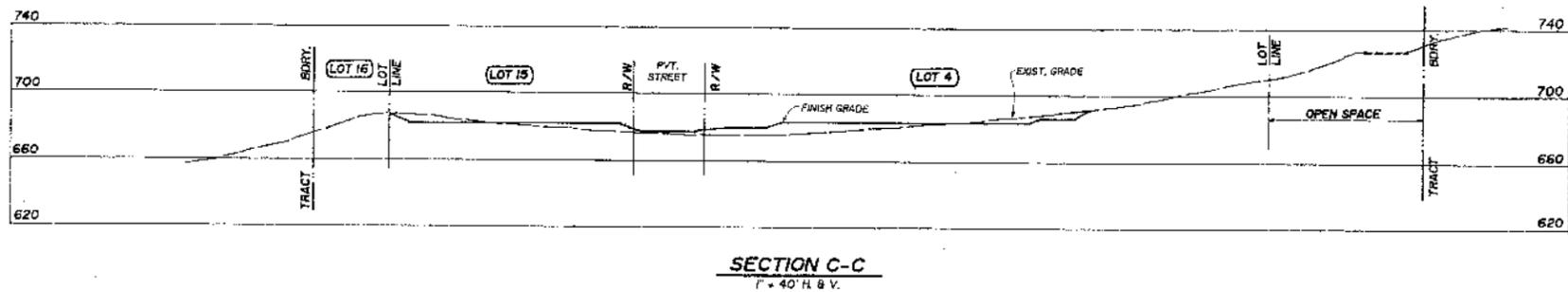
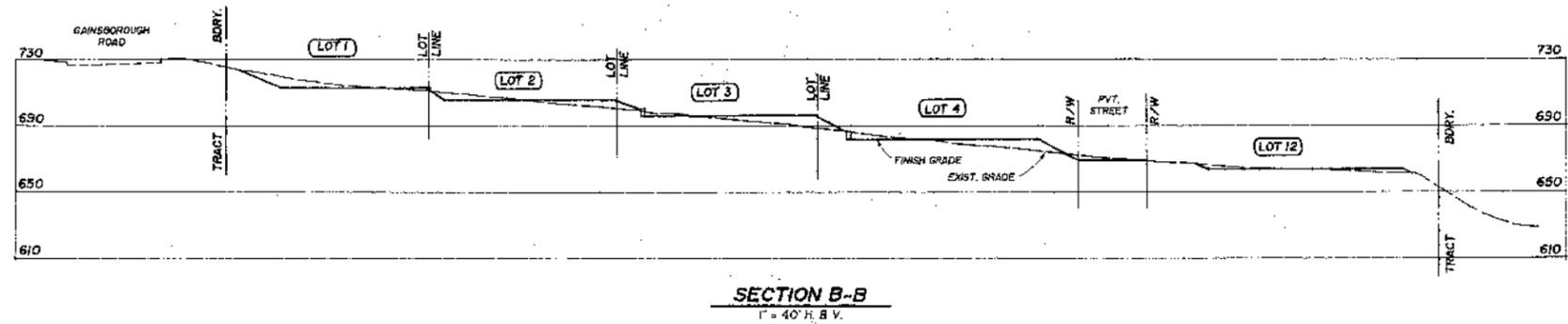
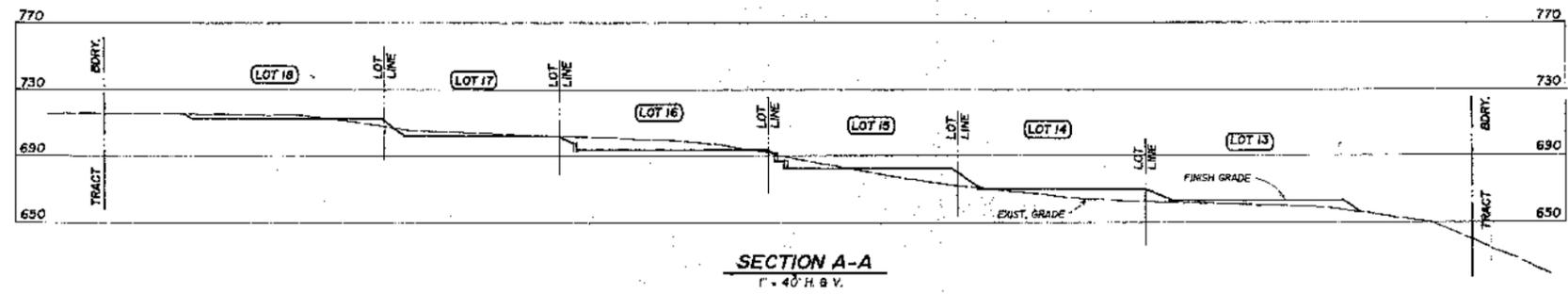
Type of Viewing Audience: Mobile, southbound viewers on Valley Center Avenue, and east and westbound viewers on Gainsborough Road.

Prominent Visual Features: The most prominent visual feature visible within this viewshed is the north-facing vegetated slope that defines the southern boundary of the drainage for Walnut Creek.

Prominent Visual Features Partially or Fully Obstructed: None of the north-facing slope would be obstructed by project development due to the substantial grade separation between this viewing location and proposed building pads. The elevation of building pads ranges along the southern boundary of Gainsborough Road range from 716 to 683 feet, which is substantially below the 735 foot elevation of Gainsborough Road. Since the homes are no taller than two stories (approximately 25 feet), views of proposed structures would be limited to rooftops and portions of the second story. No silhouetting would occur on the prominent ridgeline that is visible in the background, because this ridge has a maximum height of 900 feet.

Level of Impact: Views from this viewing location would not be substantially altered by development, because landform alteration and the placement of homes would occur below the grade of Gainsborough Road (refer to cross-section B depicted earlier on **Figure 4.2-4**). Alterations to on-site topography would be difficult to discern once homes were built, while views of distant ridgelines will be retained. Given the above, and based on the fact that neither Gainsborough Road nor Valley Center Road are considered to be Scenic Corridors by the City of San Dimas *General Plan*, no significant effect to a scenic vista is expected to occur from this viewing location.

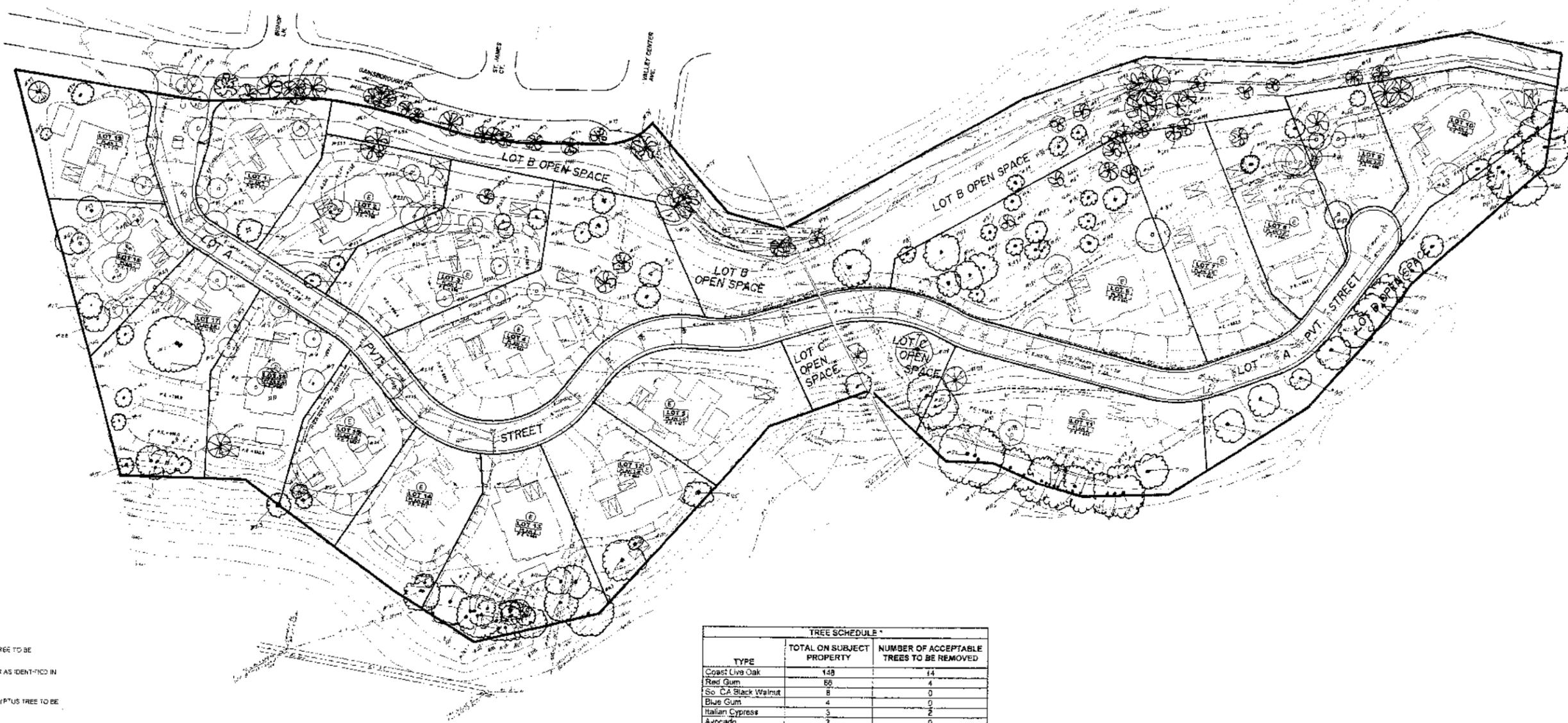
With regard to threshold criteria 2, existing uses in the vicinity of the project site consist of multi-story residential dwellings on comparable sized lots. The community is equestrian in nature and contains open space and equestrian trails. Development of uses within the project will be controlled by Specific Plan No. 4, which contains design guidelines and development standards for the project. These standards regulate lot size, building setbacks, building heights, permitted density ranges, define roadway design



SOURCE: Giron Engineering, February 2001.

FIGURE 4.2-4

Comparison of Pre- and Post-Development Cross Sections



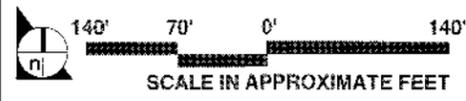
LEGEND/NOTES

- INDICATES EXISTING OAK TREE TO BE PROTECTED IN PLACE
 666 INDICATES TREE NUMBER AS IDENTIFIED IN ARBORIST REPORT
- INDICATES EXISTING EUCALYPTUS TREE TO BE PROTECTED IN PLACE
 666
- INDICATES MISC. "OTHER" TREE TO BE PROTECTED IN PLACE (PLEASE REFER TO TREE NO. AND REPORT FOR SPECIES)
 666
- INDICATES TREE TO BE REMOVED
 666

ARBORIST REPORT INDICATES THAT 15 TREES MAY BE AFFECTED BY GRADING OPERATIONS. THESE TREES SHALL BE SAVED IN PLACE BY PERFORMING ON-SITE GRADING MODIFICATIONS AS REQUIRED AND MONITORED BY THE ARBORIST OR HIS REPRESENTATIVE.

TREE SCHEDULE *		
TYPE	TOTAL ON SUBJECT PROPERTY	NUMBER OF ACCEPTABLE TREES TO BE REMOVED
Coast Live Oak	148	14
Red Gum	66	4
So. CA Black Walnut	8	0
Blue Gum	4	0
Italian Cypress	3	2
Avocado	2	0
Arceuthobium	1	1
Chinese Pistachio	1	0
Jackwanda	1	0
Apricot	1	0
Elderberry	1	0
Brazilian Pepper	1	0
TOTALS	238	21

* INFORMATION TAKEN FROM ARBORIST REPORT PREPARED BY FREDERICK ROTH, P.E., AND AMENDMENT THEREOF.



SOURCE: Giron Engineering, February 2001.

FIGURE 4.2-5

Tree Preservation Plan

and landscaping, parking requirements, and community monumentation and signage. These standards will ensure that height, bulk, and massing of on-site structures are compatible with surrounding development. Moreover, as depicted on Figure 4.2-5, the existing windrow of trees along the southern boundary of Gainsborough Road will be retained. The retention of existing mature trees, and the grade differential separating the project site from this viewing location, act to promote compatibility between structures when viewed from this vantage point. Consequently, no significant height and bulk impacts would be created as a result of the proposed project. For these reasons, no significant visual impacts would occur with respect to Criteria 2.

2. *Viewshed 2, Looking North along Walnut Creek toward Project Site*

Type of Viewing Audience: Pedestrians or riders on horseback traveling along the Walnut Creek Trail looking north toward the project site.

Prominent Visual Features: The most prominent features in this viewshed is the southern bluff of the project site and vegetation and water within and along Walnut Creek.

Prominent Visual Features Partially or Fully Obstructed: Development of the site as proposed will not substantially alter views from this location for two reasons. As illustrated earlier on Figure 4.2-5, the proposed landscape plan retains existing vegetation found along the southern project boundary. The mature trees in this area contain a dense canopy that provides a solid visual barrier to the site interior when viewed from this vantage point. In addition, the proposed grading concept would retain the bluff that occurs along the southeastern most boundary of the project. The presence of this slope face combined with the dense vegetation will prohibit direct views of proposed structures as observed from this viewing location.

Level of Impact: Views from this location would not be substantially altered by development. Direct views of proposed landform alteration and future homes constructed on the property would be obscured from the viewing audience by existing vegetation and intervening topography. For this reason, no significant visual impacts would occur here with respect to Criteria 1.

With regard to threshold criteria 2, no significant height and bulk impacts would be created as a result of the proposed project because uses would not be visible from this location. For this reason, no significant visual impacts would occur with respect to Criteria 2.

3. *Viewshed 3, Looking along Walnut Creek Directly Into Project Site Interior*

Type of Viewing Audience: Pedestrians or horseback riders traveling along Walnut Creek Trail looking north toward project site.

Prominent Visual Features: The dominant landforms associated with this view are non-native grassland framed by coast live oak woodland.

Prominent Visual Features Partially or Fully Obstructed: Development as proposed will substantially alter views of the site as observed from this segment of the Walnut Creek Trail, which is considered a scenic resource. The grading concept would re-contour the gently sloping terrain for the development of residential building pads. Two separate manufactured slopes will be visible from this location in the post-development condition.

Level of Impact: A small portion of the slope created to prepare a building pad on lot 11 will be visible in the foreground of this viewing location. However, this is a relatively small slope of less than 10 feet in height. Much more noticeable will be a 25 foot tall manufactured slope face that forms the southern boundary of lot 6 and 7. The base of this slope begins approximately 250 feet from this viewing location and will be prominently visible in the midground of this viewshed. Moreover, the City of San Dimas *General Plan* considers Walnut Creek Trail a scenic resource, while Specific Plan No. 4 incorporates a scenic easement along the trail boundary. Given that views of the manufactured slopes and residential development represents a substantial change from the gently sloping terrain that presently exists within the site, project impacts are considered significant under Criteria 1, prior to mitigation.

With regard to Criterion 2, development of uses within the project will be controlled by Specific Plan No. 4, which contains design guidelines and development standards for the project. These standards regulate lot size, building setbacks, building heights, permitted density ranges, define roadway design and landscaping, parking requirements, and community monumentation and signage. These standards will ensure that height, bulk, and massing of on-site structures are compatible with surrounding development so no significant mass or bulk impacts are expected.

**e. Operational Impacts Due to Sun/Shadow Effects or Light and Glare
(Threshold Criteria 3)**

1. *Sun/Shadow Effects*

The project would not have sun/shadow effect on existing and planned developed uses to the south of the project site (the Walnut Creek Trail), because the solar path is east to west, with the sun being further to the south during winter solstice. As a result, sun shadows from project development would not be cast to the south, but would be cast to the west during the morning and to the east during the afternoon. During the winter, when the sun is further to the south, sun shadows from project development would be cast to the northwest during the morning, to the north at mid-day, and to the northeast during the afternoon. During late afternoons, sun shadows would be cast across the site by the high ridges to the south. Because the sun is lowest in the southern sky during the winter, project development would cast the longest shadows during this season, but would not impact any existing development located to the north because these uses are located at a much higher elevation than the building pad elevations proposed by the project.

2. *Light and Glare Impacts*

The proposed project would increase the amount of glare (indirect reflected light) generated on the project site during the day, and would increase the amount of light generated during the night. The activities of people, and the sun reflecting off glass windows of structures and automobiles would primarily generate daytime sources of glare. Nighttime sources of light would include lights fixed to poles in residential areas, and the headlights of automobiles. However, a reduced street lighting standard is proposed for this project, with only pedestrian level security lighting proposed. This lighting would be provided along the street on shorter, pedestrian level poles (similar to those used in adjacent areas) and would be operated by the Homeowners Association. The goal is to provide minimum lighting for security purposes rather than completely illuminating the street.

Given that the project site presently produces very little light or glare from existing on-site improvements, a light and glare impact on the surrounding area would occur. The combined effect of all the light and glare generated on the project site would transform the undeveloped portions of the site into that of a developed community similar to the neighboring communities. This transformation and changes in the night sky over the project site would be noticeable to motorists traveling along Gainsborough Road and the public traveling along the Walnut Creek Trail; however, because the project site is located in the vicinity of existing developed uses, that all uses would be subject to the development

and design standards contained in the Specific Plan No. 4, and that light generated by the project would be typical of a rural residential setting, no significant project-related light and glare impacts would occur.

4.2.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The development of the project would not occur in a static, non-changing environment, but would be part of a general trend toward urbanization that is occurring within and around the City of San Dimas. A number of projects are planned for land in the project vicinity. Relevant projects include:

1. Standard Pacific Homes has begun grading for construction of 28 houses on the 10.83 acre property that is directly to the west of McKinley's Children's Center on West Cypress Street. Houses will range from 2,250 to 3,300 square feet in size.
2. Dentec Holding, Inc. proposes to subdivide a 60-acre parcel of land south of Walnut Creek within an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County. Dentec intends to construct 106 single family homes on the site.

Cumulative impacts include landform alteration and the conversion of vacant land to urban or suburban uses. Grading and earthwork needed to support the cumulative development will result in modifications to the natural landform, including encroachment on hillside areas, and will change the appearance of the landscape as viewed from public roads. As part of this conversion, the amount of landscape vegetation visible in the area would increase and the amount of natural vegetation would decrease. Additionally, nighttime illumination and daytime glare would also be increased in the project area as a result of cumulative project development.

As noted above, this development would occur within a generally urban and urbanizing context. The project's visible development areas, in combination with other development expected to occur within a similar time frame, would largely be compatible with the existing aesthetic character of the area that is becoming more urbanized over time. In fact, the City's *General Plan* designates much of the area (including the project site) as residential low. Based on the above, no cumulatively significant impact is anticipated.

4.2.6 PROJECT MITIGATION MEASURES

a. Legal/Regulatory Requirements

4.2-1 Key features incorporated into the project through implementation of standards contained in Specific Plan No. 4 include:

- Landscape easements are provided to ensure continuity along the buffer between the proposed homes and adjacent uses particularly Walnut Creek and existing residences. The scenic easement designated by Specific Plan No. 4 along the Walnut Creek Corridor acts as a transition between the native riparian zone along Walnut Creek and residential development pads. To the maximum extent possible, the scenic area remains in its natural state with no removal of vegetation as a result of project implementation (see **Figure 4.2-5**).
- The overall goal of the proposed grading plan is to respect the natural topography and maximize the amount of trees that are preserved.
- Retaining walls will be constructed of interlocking masonry blocks (e.g., Keystone walls) to allow for better wall undulation with the terrain and better landscape features.
- The project maintains the rural feel of the area through reduced street lighting, reduced street width, tree preservation, architectural standards, and landscaping requirements.

b. Mitigation Measures Recommended by the EIR

4.2-2 A landscape plan shall be prepared by a licensed landscape architect consistent with the provisions outlined in Specific Plan No. 4. This landscape plan shall be prepared for review and approval by the City of San Dimas prior to the issuance of building permits. The design concept for this plan shall be twofold: (1) to maintain the scenic amenity that is represented by the existing natural vegetation in the Walnut Creek Corridor, and; (2) shield views of proposed uses from people traveling along the Walnut Creek Trail in addition to residents located at grade to the west of the project site. Planting of native vegetation, clearing of underbrush that creates a fire hazard and installation of temporary irrigation shall occur where the existing vegetation is not adequate along either of these two locations.

All tree species selected for use in this area shall be a minimum of 15 gallon in size. In addition, one of every four trees shall be a 24" box tree (25% of trees to be 24" box). The plant species selected for use in the landscape plan shall not include any of the non-native species specifically prohibited by mitigation measure 4.5-23 contained in **Section 4.5, Biological Resources**, of this Draft EIR.

4.2.7 UNAVOIDABLE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Development of the project would alter the visual character of the site from vacant land to one that is semi-rural in nature. However, the proposed grading concept retains the existing topographic characteristics of the property. Consequently, the project maintains the overall relationship of the property to the land uses located to the north (lower than) and west (at grade). The grading concept also retains the bluff along the southern property boundary, and incorporates a linear landscaped buffer that separates the site from Walnut Creek. Moreover, the site and surroundings are planned for large lot equestrian uses, and the uses proposed by this project are in keeping with the developed uses that surround the site. Based on the above, and with inclusion of the mitigation measures contained in this EIR, no unavoidable significant visual impact is expected.