

3.1 AESTHETICS

This section of the EIR addresses the effects of building and landscape development with the implementation of the West Village Expansion component of the 2018 LRDP, as well as overall effects of development, including potential loss of existing visual resources, effects on views, and impacts of increased night lighting on sensitive receptors.

In response to the NOP, comments were received that identified concerns with potential building heights, fencing, and the aesthetic changes from loss of open space, primarily associated with potential changes to Russell Field. As they pertain to implementation of the West Village Expansion component of the 2018 LRDP, these impacts are described and addressed within this section.

3.1.1 Regulatory Setting

Plans, policies, regulations, and laws (applicable to and/or considered for the West Village Expansion component) are provided in Volume 1 of this EIR. As the regulatory setting provided in Volume 1 considers potential development, including the West Village Expansion component, within the entirety of the UC Davis campus as envisioned through the 2018 LRDP, no additional regulatory setting is provided for the West Village Expansion component.

3.1.2 Environmental Setting

Section 3.1, “Aesthetics,” in Volume 1 presents the aesthetics setting for the entire UC Davis campus, including the West Village Expansion site. This section of the EIR examines the visual and aesthetic effects of development under the West Village Expansion site in greater detail.

The West Village Expansion site is currently developed with agricultural fields within the west campus of UC Davis. No structures, landscaping, or paved streets are currently located within the site boundary. It is bordered by agricultural fields to the north and west, Hutchison Drive and agricultural fields to the south, and the existing West Village student housing development to the east. The existing West Village development consists of several student housing structures, approximately four stories in height, with a network of two-way streets. The roadways are bordered on both sides by single rows of young trees and drought-tolerant landscaping, paved sidewalks, and parallel street parking. Bicycle lanes are provided along the both sides of each street.

Visual conditions at the site and surrounding area are dominated by agricultural uses on the site and to the north, west, and south. To the east, the existing West Village development precludes long-distance views and is the dominant visual presence. Long-distance views from and through the West Village Expansion site are available to the west of open agricultural lands towards the Coast Range. To the south and north, mid-range views are available but are limited by existing trees associated with agricultural uses and residential development, respectively.

The West Village Expansion site is currently unlit as it currently consists of agricultural fields. The lack of extensive lighting on parts of the proposed site imparts a rural character to the night-time environment that contrasts with the urban night-time character of the existing West Village development. Night lighting at the existing West Village consists of street lights and exterior lighting on existing structures.

The proposed remote parking area is currently undeveloped, disturbed open space that was formerly used for agriculture. Vegetation within and immediately surrounding the site consists of non-native grasses and sparse trees and shrubs. The parking area would be briefly visible through a gap in roadside vegetation to motorists traveling east on Interstate 80 (I-80) and would be visible to motorists along Old Davis Road. Long-distance views from or through the remote parking area are precluded by existing vegetation along the east side of Old Davis Road and I-80, which is elevated to the north and west of the remote parking area.

3.1.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Refer to Section 3.1, “Aesthetics” in Volume 1 of this EIR for a discussion of applicable Significance Criteria.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Refer to Section 3.1, “Aesthetics,” in Volume 1 for a discussion of applicable analytical methods.

ISSUES NOT EVALUATED FURTHER

The following impacts were identified as part of the analysis of the 2018 LRDP, and are either (1) adequately evaluated at the program level of analysis of the LRDP, or (2) not applicable to the West Village Expansion component.

State Scenic Highway

As discussed in Section 3.1, “Aesthetics,” of Volume 1, no state-designated scenic highways are present within or near UC Davis, including the West Village Expansion site and remote parking area. As a result, implementation of the 2018 LRDP would not affect scenic resources within a scenic highway corridor. Therefore, no further project-level analysis of this impact is required.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 3.1-1: Result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

Development of the West Village Expansion could alter scenic vistas from the existing West Village development and surrounding areas across agricultural lands to the Coast Range, located west of UC Davis. However, new construction would be consistent with, and immediately adjacent to, existing development which has already altered long-distance views. Development of the remote parking area would not impede any views of a scenic vista. Therefore, this impact would be **significant**.

As noted in Section 3.1, “Aesthetics,” of Volume 1, a scenic vista is defined as a publicly accessible viewpoint that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape. Within the project area, existing agricultural lands, including those at the site, allow for largely unimpeded views of the Coast Range to the west, which is considered a scenic vista, especially for UC Davis students and residents of the existing West Village. Further development within West Village, including the development of multi-story student housing structures, would further impede/obstruct such views of the Coast Range.

With respect to views from roadways and bicycle paths, persons driving west along Russell Boulevard or Hutchison Drive or those using the bicycle path on the south side of Russell Boulevard currently have mid-range views across agricultural fields to the existing West Village development. As noted above, long-distance views southward and northward are precluded by existing development and trees associated with agricultural operations and residential uses along Russell Boulevard. Although SR 113 has no western views because of its below-grade construction, the SR 113 bike path does provide limited long-distance views to the west, similar to those identified above from the existing West Village development. Subsequent to development, motorists on Hutchison Drive and Russell Boulevard and users of the Russell and SR 113 bicycle paths would continue to have some views toward the west along the road corridors, because development within the West Village Expansion would represent a westward continuation of the existing West Village development. However, development of the West Village Expansion site would further limit long-distance views in the area, especially from Russell and SR 113 bicycle paths, and contribute to disruption of the existing long-distance views from the campus across agricultural lands to the Coast Range. Development of the remote parking area and the presence of parked vehicles on-site would not impede any long-distance views as none are currently available from or through the remote parking area.

As part of the UC Davis design review process, the West Village Expansion would be designed to maintain as much visual access across the site as possible. As stated in Section 3.1, “Aesthetics,” of Volume 1, the UC Davis Design Review Committee would consider scenic views while planning for projects under the 2018 LRDP, such as the proposed West Village Expansion, to maintain scenic views to the extent possible. Through implementation of the Physical Design Framework and adherence to the Campus Design Guide Manual, UC Davis prioritizes maintenance of existing long-distance views along existing view corridors. Design considerations may include establishing open landscaping and deciduous trees along important view corridors to compliment expansive viewing. While new construction at the West Village Expansion site would be consistent with, and immediately adjacent to, existing development which has already altered long-distance views, development of the West Village Expansion site with several student housing structures that could be up to six stories in height would further disrupt or block existing views across agricultural fields toward the Coast Range. As a result, impacts to scenic vistas would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No feasible mitigation measures are available.

Significance after Mitigation

The implementation of design review standards under UC and UC Davis requirements would address this impact and minimize, where possible, impacts on scenic views. However, no feasible mitigation is available to reduce the West Village Expansion’s impact to less than significant. Lesser development and/or greater setbacks could reduce the potential disruption to existing expansive views, however, any development within west campus could further reduce long-distance views westward towards the Coast Range. As a result, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 3.1-2: Degrade existing visual character or quality.

Development of the West Village Expansion would change the visual character of the West Village site and its surroundings from agricultural to an urban condition. However, the proposed West Village Expansion would generally be consistent with the existing character and quality of the existing, adjacent West Village development and would be subject to Design Review Committee approval. This impact is considered **less than significant**.

As noted in Volume 1, an impact to visual character is interpreted in terms of the effect of development under the 2018 LRDP on valued elements of the visual landscape or the effect associated with allowing incompatible development in or near areas with high visual quality. The West Village Expansion site at present is undeveloped agricultural land. While the development of the West Village Expansion site would change the existing visual character from an agricultural use, which is often equated to open space in terms of visual character, the West Village Expansion site surrounds the existing West Village development with three- and four-story residential structures, landscaping, and a street network. The ultimate condition of the West Village Expansion site would be similar in massing and character to the existing condition of the adjacent, existing West Village development. In addition, the proposed development includes a 100-foot wide open space buffer, which would also serve as a stormwater detention purpose and would soften the change in visual conditions from urban to agricultural. Furthermore, the design of the West Village Expansion component emphasizes landscaping (focusing on maximizing tree canopy shading and limiting lawn area; all building frontages would be landscaped with native drought-resistant landscaping) that would soften the contrast between the developed West Village and the open, more natural character of its surroundings, and would be consistent with the small-town visual aesthetic of Davis.

Similarly, while the proposed remote parking area would be modified from an unpaved, undeveloped condition to a paved parking lot, it would be landscaped in a manner similar to adjacent development across Old Davis Road. Views of this area would be largely limited to motorists along I-80 eastbound and would not be visually dissimilar to views for the same motorists of development to the north of I-80 or further east.

While the visual character of specific proposed buildings has yet to be finalized, all new development is required to comply with the UC Davis Physical Design Framework and Campus Design Guide Manual, which establish requirements intended to maintain important aesthetic features and compatibility with existing visual conditions, including the installation of landscaping (both in terms of bulk and color) and exterior features consistent with adjacent development (e.g., exterior lighting and finishings). Prior to design approval of development projects under the 2018 LRDP, the UC Davis Design Review Committee will determine that project designs are consistent with the valued elements of the visual landscape identified in the 2018 LRDP. Although the visual character of the West Village Expansion, including development of the remote parking area, would be different from existing conditions, the visual quality of the area would not be substantially degraded, and impacts would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are necessary.

Impact 3.1-3: Create a new source of light or glare.

Development of the West Village Expansion would create new sources of substantial light or glare that could adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. This impact is considered **potentially significant**.

The West Village Expansion component of the 2018 LRDP would result in the development of student housing with associated recreational uses and surface parking on undeveloped agricultural fields and open space. The primary source of lighting visible from the West Village Expansion site is that of the neighboring West Village development. Lighting visible from the proposed remote parking area is from I-80, which is adjacent to the site. As a result, development of the West Village

Expansion component would introduce new sources of artificial light in an area that is currently not lit. New sources of exterior night lighting associated with the West Village Expansion would include street lighting, exterior security lighting for surface parking and residential buildings, and interior building lighting. Lights and glow from the proposed development would likely be visible off-site to residents of the neighborhood north of Russell Boulevard across from the site and current student residents within the existing West Village development. With respect to perceived lighting from Russell Boulevard, new lighting sources would be visible, and existing trees and other landscaping features along much of Russell Boulevard would screen some of the new lighting to the neighborhood north of Russell Boulevard from direct night lighting associated with the proposed West Village Expansion. The designated open space along the site's northern margin and landscaping that would be installed as part of the development would further buffer between the existing residents from lighting of the site. New light sources would be similar to that of the existing West Village and would complement the existing light sources in character and design. Security lighting would be installed at the remote parking area and not highly visible given its location among land uses that do not have nighttime viewers. Nonetheless, it is possible, as specific architectural features and building materials have yet to be determined, that light and/or glare from development of the West Village Expansion could adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. This impact is considered **potentially significant**.

WVE Mitigation Measure 3.1-3a: Building surfaces.

Implement 2018 LRDP Mitigation Measure 3.1-3a.

WVE Mitigation Measure 3.1-3b: Lighting fixtures.

Implement 2018 LRDP Mitigation Measure 3.1-3b.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of WVE Mitigation Measures 3.1-3a and 3.1-3b would require the use of non-reflective materials and shielding such that spillover onto adjacent uses would be minimized. Further, the UC Davis Design Review Committee, as part of the design review process, shall verify implementation of this measure as part of the West Village Expansion design review. With the implementation of WVE Mitigation Measures 3.1-3a and 3.1-3b, the impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

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