

3.1 AESTHETICS

This section describes the environmental and regulatory setting for aesthetics. It also describes existing conditions and potential impacts related to aesthetics that would result from implementation of the Project, and mitigation for potentially significant impacts, where feasible.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The Project would not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; and the Project impacts would be less than significant.

The residential component of the ORCC Specific Plan Project would be subject to design guidelines and development standards outlined in its Specific Plan; impacts associated with the ORCC Specific Plan Project are being evaluated in a standalone EIR.

3.1.1 Environmental Setting

Visual resources in the City feature the Pacific Ocean coastal waterfront, including beaches, the shoreline, wetlands, and marshlands. There are approximately two miles of beachfront shoreline in the City which is considered to be of regional significance for passive and active recreational activities. The Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge and Los Cerritos Wetlands contain marshlands and ecological areas that provide visual resources for the City. Due to the extremely developed nature of the City, there are not many visual resources and prominent viewpoints available other than the waterfront. Furthermore, the southeastern half of the City encompasses the Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, which consists of vast areas of vacant lands. The northern portion of the City also abuts the Los Alamitos JFTB, which includes military aviation operations and contains some areas with vacant lands.

3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

Federal

There are no federal regulations related to aesthetics that apply to the Project.

State

California Coastal Act

The California Coastal Act (Coastal Act) contains resource planning and management policies applicable to lands within the Coastal Zone. Coastal management policies addressing aesthetics and public scenic views are applicable to the Housing Element Update. "Scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance" (PRC Division 20, Chapter 3, Article 6, Section 30251). In addition, it is noted that development "shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas and where feasible, to restore and enhance



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visual quality in visually degraded areas.” The Coastal Act protects public scenic views, but does not include policies or regulations for the protection of private views.

Local

City of Seal Beach General Plan

The City’s General Plan is a comprehensive long-range general plan for the physical development of the City of Seal Beach (City of Seal Beach 2003). The General Plan contains the current Housing Element Update, which was adopted in 2022, though several revisions have followed in an effort to obtain certification from HCD. The various elements within the General Plan include goals and policies for the physical development of the City. The City’s General Plan goals and policies applicable to aesthetics are presented below:

Land Use Element

The City’s Land Use Element contains the following goals, objectives, and policies related to aesthetics that apply to the Project:

Features of the Community

Despite an increase in regional population experienced throughout the surrounding metropolitan area, the City of Sea Beach has experienced a slight decline in population while maintaining its own identity and preserving its unique character. Seal Beach’s individual small town identity is due to its physical separation from various centers of urban development found in surrounding cities.

People have been attracted to Seal Beach primarily due to its unique geographical location, educational opportunity, attractive beaches, ideal climate, and small town friendly character. A goal of the City is to maintain and promote those social and physical qualities that enhance the character of the community and the environment in which we live.

Waterfront

Seal Beach’s coastal setting distinguishes it from any adjacent coastal communities. The shoreline, one of the City’s most valuable assets, shall be maintained and improved to provide maximum benefits to residents and visitors. Preservation of the ecological balance of the waterfront and the marshlands should be considered during review of any proposed developments in this planning area. In addition, the City of Seal Beach shall actively identify and resolve issues in the preservation and the more efficient utilization of the existing pier parking lots to better serve the community and beach patrons.

Housing Element Update

The Housing Element Update contains the following policies related to aesthetics that apply to the Project:



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Goal 4: Maintain and enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods in Seal Beach.

- **Policy 4h:** Promote a safe, healthful, aesthetically pleasing environment that strengthens individual and family life.
- **Policy 4i:** Preserve and enhance viable residential neighborhoods and strengthen neighborhood identity.
- **Policy 4k:** Encourage the use of innovative land use techniques and construction methods to minimize housing costs without compromising basic health, safety, and aesthetic conditions.

City of Seal Beach Municipal Code

The City of Seal Beach has adopted a Zoning Ordinance and related zoning map. The Zoning Ordinance and zoning map identify specific types of land use, intensity of use, and development and performance standards applicable to specific areas and parcels of land within the City. The Zoning Ordinance includes specific development and building standards for parcels within the City that were adopted to ensure new developments and growth are conducted in an orderly manner and achieve balanced residential, commercial and civic uses.

3.1.3 Environmental Impacts

This section analyzes the Project's potential to result in significant aesthetics impacts. When an impact is determined to be significant, mitigation measures are identified that would reduce or avoid impacts.

Methodology for Analysis

Analysis of the Project's visual impacts is based on an evaluation of the changes to the existing visual resources that would result from implementation of the Project. In determining the extent and implications of the visual changes, consideration was given to: the existing visual quality of the affected environment; specific changes in the visual character and quality of the affected environment; the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that provide unique visual experiences or that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and the sensitivity of viewers and their activities and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the Project.

Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with the CEQA Guidelines' Appendix G Environmental Checklist, the following questions were analyzed and evaluated to determine whether the Project's aesthetic impacts are significant.

Would the Project:

- *In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the public views of the site and its surroundings. (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly*



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accessible vantage point). If the Project is in an urbanized area, would the Project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

The following issues were determined to have no impact or a less than significant impact during the NOP Scoping. These issues are summarized in Section 6.0, Effects Found Not to Be Significant, and are not discussed further in this section.

Would the Project:

- *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?*
- *Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?*
- *Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day- or nighttime views in the area?*

Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

Visual Character and Scenic Quality

Impact AES-1	In an urbanized area, the Project would not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
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Impact Analysis

Implementation of the Project would result in the identification of parcels located within the City that have the potential to be developed or redeveloped to accommodate new housing developments and help the City to meet its RHNA. Implementation of the Project would also result in the creation of a new zoning designation, rezoning of several identified Housing Opportunity Sites, and implementation of the Main Street Program allowing for housing on the second floor of commercial buildings, and the residential components of the ORCC Specific Plan. The Project does not propose any actual development to occur on these sites at this time. However, development of the residential component of the ORCC Specific Plan is being evaluated in a standalone EIR.

As described in Section 2.0, Project Description, all of the identified Housing Opportunity Sites are located within highly urbanized areas of the City and are surrounded by existing urban developments. Many of the Housing Opportunity Sites are located on land that is already developed with urban uses and the Project does not propose Housing Opportunity Sites on land that provides scenic resources or scenic vistas.

Program 1b (MC/RHD Zone) of the Housing Element Update commits to a rezoning program that facilitates housing for lower-income households as required by the state's RHNA allocation for the City. The City would establish a new zoning designation, MC/RHD, which would apply to five of the Housing Opportunity Sites, facilitating residential development at what are generally commercial sites currently. The new MC/RHD mixed-use zoning designation would facilitate a residential density of RHD-46 (up to 46 units per acre) with a minimum density of 40 units per acre, and a maximum building height of five



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stories. Other changes to zoning designations include rezoning a former oil extraction property to the City's existing HDR-33 zoning district to residential use under Program 1a (Provide Adequate Sites for Housing through updates to the General Plan and Zoning Code) (City of Seal Beach 2024).

The actions described above would result in a change to the permitted uses and development standards on six of the Housing Opportunity Sites. The proposed new MC/RHD zoning designation would establish specific development standards that would be prepared in accordance with existing City guidelines, regulations, and General Plan policies related to scenic quality. As the Project does not propose any specific site development at this time, the proposed rezoning of the six Housing Opportunity Sites identified would not result in conflicts with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. The residential component of the ORCC Specific Plan Project would not require rezoning and is being proposed under a Mixed-Use Country Club planning concept with the Specific Plan as the mechanism that would incorporate design guidelines and development standards to ensure development compatibility with adjacent land uses. Specific impact findings associated with the development of the ORCC Specific Plan Project are being evaluated in a standalone EIR.

The remaining two Housing Opportunity Sites are not proposed to be rezoned and are proposed to be developed in the future in accordance with the existing zoning designations and development standards of the site, including those that govern scenic quality. Future development of these sites facilitated by the Project would be anticipated to be developed in accordance with the development standards of the site. Unless exempt, future development projects would also be subject to subsequent and individual environmental review to ensure that the proposed development does not result in conflicts with zoning and regulations governing scenic quality.

The Project also includes implementation of the Main Street Program (Program 1r of the Housing Element Update) which commits to modifying the existing Main Street Specific Plan to allow housing above the ground floor of properties located within the Main Street Program area. As described previously, the Project would not propose any actual development to occur on or within the Main Street Program area at this time and would amend the existing Main Street Specific Plan to allow for future residential developments to be proposed above the ground floor within the Main Street Program area. Though the proposed amendment to the Main Street Specific Plan would result in changes to the allowable development types and subsequently the visual appearance within the Main Street Program area, approval of the proposed amendment would not result in conflicts with regulations governing scenic quality within the Main Street Program area. Additionally, voters approved Measure Z in 2008 which limited the maximum height of residences in the City's Old Town area to 25 feet. Measure Z applies to the area of the City north of the centerline of Ocean Avenue, east of First Street, south of Marina Drive and Pacific Coast Highway, west of Seal Beach Boulevard, and that area south of Ocean between Electric Avenue and Tenth Street. Future developments facilitated by the Project in the Main Street Specific Plan area would be required to comply with the provisions of Measure Z. Future developments proposed within the Main Street Program area would also be required to be developed in accordance with the development standards and regulations governing scenic quality outlined in the Main Street Specific Plan and the City's zoning ordinance. Future developments within the Main Street Program area would be subject to subsequent individual environmental review (except by-right pursuant to state housing law) and



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review per the design criteria of the Main Street Specific Plan to ensure that the proposed development does not result in impacts to scenic quality.

Individual future developments under the Project must comply with the City's objective design criteria to ensure that proposed individual developments would be developed in accordance with zoning standards and existing regulations governing aesthetics and scenic quality. Individual development under the Project would be required to be designed and constructed to design standards and would not be anticipated to construct new structures that would be incompatible with the existing surrounding visual character. As described above, the City's Housing Element Update includes Policies 4h, 4j, and 4k which require developments to maintain and enhance scenic quality in the City.

The Project's new zoning designation would establish specific development standards that would be prepared in accordance with existing City guidelines, regulations, zoning code, and General Plan policies related to scenic quality. The Project does not propose any actual development to occur at this time. Future development projects proposed under the Housing Element Update may deviate from certain development standards of the applicable zoning designations or utilize state housing laws and programs, such as the State density bonus program, resulting in taller buildings and high-density developments. However, future developments would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and subject to the City's objective design criteria, design requirements of the Main Street Specific Plan, the City's Municipal Code, and applicable General Plan policies to ensure future development would be compatible with surrounding land uses. Unless exempt, future developments proposed under the Housing Element Update would also be subject to subsequent environmental review. Therefore, the Project would not conflict with zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality and impacts would be less than significant.

Additionally, the residential component of the ORCC Specific Plan Project is being proposed under a Mixed-Use Country Club planning concept with the Specific Plan as the mechanism that would incorporate design guidelines and development standards to ensure development compatibility with adjacent land uses. The residential component associated with the development of the ORCC Specific Plan Project would be subject to the design guidelines and development standards outlined in the Specific Plan. Specific impact findings associated with the development of the ORCC Specific Plan Project are being evaluated in a standalone EIR.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.



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3.1.4 Cumulative Impacts

CEQA requires that EIRs evaluate the potential cumulative impacts of a project. A project's environmental impacts are "cumulatively considerable" if the "incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15065(a)(3)). The geographic scope for cumulative aesthetic impacts is the immediate project vicinity and area surrounding the site. This geographic scope is appropriate for aesthetics as the area within the view of the Project is most likely to experience changes in visual character and experience light and glare impacts.

As discussed in Section 3.0, Environmental Analysis, CEQA Guidelines Section 15130 requires cumulative impact analysis in EIRs to consider a list of planned and pending projects that may contribute to the cumulative impacts of a project. Section 3.0, Table 3.0-3 identifies all past, present, and probable future residential projects in the City and surrounding areas that may impact the Project. Table 3.1-1 identifies the cumulative past, present, and probable future projects from Table 3.0-3 that may drive a potential cumulative impact related to aesthetics and therefore were analyzed in this cumulative discussion.

Table 3.1-1: Cumulative Projects Related to Aesthetics

#	Project Name	Location	Project Characteristics	Status	Total Dwelling Units
1	Old Ranch Country Club Project	Old Ranch Country Club, City of Seal Beach	Construction of a 116-unit, 4-level (188,500 square feet) multi-family housing development; a 51-unit, 3-level senior housing complex; medical office facility; overnight accommodation, including a bar and lounge and specialty restaurant	Preparation of EIR	167
2	Naval Weapons Station	Pacific Coast Hwy & Seal Beach Boulevard	Potential future housing developments proposed within the Naval Weapons Station	Anticipated	150

Cumulative development identified in Table 3.1-1 are located within close proximity to one of the eight Housing Opportunity Sites and therefore, development under the Project in combination with cumulative development identified in Table 3.1-1 could result in impacts to visual resources and aesthetic quality.



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Development in Seal Beach facilitated by the Project in conjunction with buildout of cumulative projects in the City and surrounding areas could result in impacts to visual resources and aesthetic quality, although visual quality could improve with redevelopment of aging buildings and vacant sites. Implementation of the Project would encourage increased housing development at sites already developed with other uses.

Anticipated Project related impacts, in conjunction with cumulative development allowed per existing regulations, is expected to increase housing development citywide in already developed areas. Therefore, future developments facilitated by the Project in conjunction with cumulative developments could result in impacts to aesthetics. However, similar to future developments under the Project, cumulative developments would be required to comply with existing regulations and policies adopted for the purpose of avoiding aesthetic impacts and protecting visual quality. Cumulative developments would be required to be designed and constructed in accordance with applicable building standards and regulations adopted by the City including, but not limited to, building heights and outdoor lighting regulations. Potential aesthetic impacts of future developments facilitated by the Project would be site-specific and would require evaluation on a case-by-case basis at the project level in accordance with the Housing Element Update and General Plan. Unless exempt, each discretionary cumulative development project would require separate approval and evaluation under CEQA, which would address potential impacts related to aesthetics and identify necessary mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts, where appropriate. Therefore, future developments facilitated by the Project would not result in significant cumulative aesthetic impact and the Project would not cause a cumulatively considerable aesthetic impacts.

3.1.5 References

City of Seal Beach. 2003. City of Seal Beach General Plan, December 2003.

<https://www.sealbeachca.gov/Departments/Community-Development/Planning-Development/General-Plan>. Accessed October 2024.

City of Seal Beach. 2024. 6th Cycle Housing Element 2021-2029, Adopted February 2022, Revised August 2024.

https://www.sealbeachca.gov/Portals/0/Users/027/27/27/Seal%20Beach_HEU%20MainBody_Clean-compressed.pdf?ver=2024-08-20-083139-120. Accessed October 2024.

