

This section provides an overview of the visual character, scenic resources, views, scenic highways, and sources of light and glare that are encountered on the project site and the surrounding area. This section concludes with an evaluation of the impacts and recommendations for mitigating impacts. Comments were received during the public review period or scoping meeting for the Notice of Preparation regarding this topic from the following: Greg Rowe (May 11, 2017), Corinne Gee (April 24, 2017), Robin Whitmore (April 26, 2017), Russ Kanz and Toni Terhaar (May 4, 2017), and County of Yolo (April 18, 2017). Each of the comments related to this topic are addressed within this section. Information in this section is derived primarily from the following:

- *City of Davis General Plan* (City of Davis, May 2001, Amended through 2007).

### 3.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

#### REGIONAL SETTING

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The City of Davis planning area is located 11 miles west of Sacramento and approximately 79 miles northeast of San Francisco. The planning area consists of approximately 160 square miles, and is characterized by agricultural/open space landscapes to the north, west, and south; highly developed urban landscapes within the City Limits; and open space lands, including the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area to the east. Views from agricultural fields are enclosed on the west by the Coast Range hills. Views to other directions are open to the horizon, although the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Sutter Buttes, and Mount Diablo can be seen on clear days. The UC Davis campus is located adjacent to the southwest corner of the City and occupies a total of 2,900 unincorporated acres. General Plan land uses within the planning area include Residential (low, medium, medium-high, and high density); Neighborhood Retail; Community Retail; General Commercial; Business Park; Industrial; Public/Semi-Public; Parks and Recreation; Urban Agriculture Transition Areas; Agriculture; and Natural Habitat.

The planning area has no officially designated scenic highways, corridors, vistas, or viewing areas (Davis General Plan Update EIR, p. 5A-1). Landscapes in and near the City are predominantly urban, with the core area of the community having more established neighborhoods and urban landscaping. Newer developed areas on the edges of the community are more noticeable from a distance due to the immaturity of the landscaping. The City's planning area buffers the City on all sides by extending into areas that are dominated by agricultural uses, and views in this area are open and rural in nature.

#### PROJECT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

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The project site is currently undeveloped and has been previously used for agricultural uses. The site is nearly level at an elevation of approximately 47 to 50 feet above mean sea level (MSL). Existing trees are located along the western and eastern project site boundaries, as well as within the southeastern corner of the site. Risling Court, an existing public access roadway to the Sutter Davis Hospital, is located along the southernmost portion of the eastern project site boundary. An existing drainage channel (known as the Covell Drain) conveys runoff from west to east north of

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Covell Boulevard. Frontage improvements along Covell Boulevard are limited but include a bus shelter, a section of curb, and traffic signs and signals.

The project site has developed or semi-developed land uses on three sides. The land directly to the north of the project site is Binning Ranch, an improved, final mapped, but unbuilt nine lot residential subdivision. Further north is a single-family rural residential development known as the Binning Farms community. Public/Semi-Public land uses such as Sutter Davis Hospital, Sutter Medical Foundation, North Davis Water Tank, and the Sutter Drainage Pond are located directly adjacent to the project site to the east. Further to the east are existing developed General Commercial land uses located west of State Route (SR) 113 and east of John Jones Road. The parcels south of West Covell Boulevard are designated Residential – High Density by the City’s General Plan (including the University Retirement Community and the Saratoga West Apartments). Residential – Low Density land uses also exist south of the project site (including the Evergreen and Aspen Neighborhoods). Additionally, land west of the project site consists of agricultural uses and fallow land with a few ranchette-style single family homes and associated structures located along County Road (CR) 99.

### SCENIC HIGHWAYS AND CORRIDORS

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Scenic highways and corridors make major contributions to the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of a region. The development of community pride, the enhancement of property values, and the protection of aesthetically-pleasing open spaces reflecting a preference for the local lifestyle are all ways in which scenic corridors are valuable to residents.

Scenic highways and corridors can also strengthen the tourist industry. For many visitors, highway corridors will provide their only experience of the region. Enhancement and protection of these corridors ensures that the tourist experience continues to be a positive one and, consequently, provides support for the tourist-related activities of the region's economy.

#### **Scenic Highways**

A scenic highway is generally defined by Caltrans as a public highway that traverses an area of outstanding scenic quality, containing striking views, flora, geology, or other unique natural attributes. As described in the Davis General Plan EIR, there are no Officially Dedicated California Scenic Highway segments, corridors, vistas, or viewing areas in the Davis Planning Area.

#### **Yolo County Scenic Highways/Corridors**

There are no highways in Yolo County listed as Designated Scenic Highway by the Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System. Only one highway section in Yolo County is listed as an Eligible State Scenic Highway by the Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System; the segment of SR 16 from approximately the town of Capay north to the northern edge of the County. The City of Davis and the project site are not visible from this roadway segment.

As identified in the Land Use and Community Character Element of the Yolo County General Plan, designated scenic routes in the county include SR 16 (Colusa County line to Capay), SR 128 (Winters to Napa County line), CR 116 and 116B (Knights Landing to eastern terminus of CR 16), CR

16 and 117 and Old River Road (CR 107 to West Sacramento), and South River Road (West Sacramento city limits to Sacramento County line). Neither the City of Davis nor the project site are visible from these routes.

## LIGHT AND GLARE

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There are two typical types of light intrusion. First, light emanates from the interior of structures and passes out through windows. Secondly, light projects from exterior sources such as street lighting, security lighting, balcony lighting, and landscape lighting. “Light spill” is typically defined as the presence of unwanted and/or misdirected light on properties adjacent to the property being illuminated.

Street lighting is provided within the developed areas of the City, either by the City or through private ownership, such as PG&E. In new developments, the City itself does not install streetlights. Rather, the City requires developers to install lights and dedicate them to the City. Light introduction can be a nuisance to adjacent residential areas and diminish the view of the clear night sky, and, if uncontrolled, can disturb wildlife in natural habitat areas.

Glare is the sensation produced by luminance within the visual field that is significantly greater than the luminance to which the eyes are adapted, which causes annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance and visibility.

Existing sources of light or glare are not currently located on the project site, although existing parking lot lighting, building lighting, and street lighting are located in the vicinity of the site. Sources of glare include the windows located on the Sutter Davis Hospital building to the east and the existing residential area to the south. Existing sources of light near the project site include street lighting along West Covell Boulevard and Risling Court, and building and parking lot lighting associated with the nearby residential areas and the Sutter Davis Hospital.

### 3.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

#### STATE

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##### **California Scenic Highway Program**

The intent of the California Scenic Highway Program is “to protect and enhance California’s natural scenic beauty and to protect the social and economic values provided by the State’s scenic resources.” Caltrans administers the program, which was established in 1963 and is governed by the California Streets and Highways Code (§260 et seq.). The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the adjacent land. Caltrans has compiled a list of state highways that are designated as scenic and county highways that are eligible for designation as scenic.

Scenic highway designation can provide several types of benefits to the region. Scenic areas are protected from encroachment of inappropriate land uses, free of billboards, and are generally required to maintain existing contours and preserve important vegetative features. Only low

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density development is allowed on steep slopes and along ridgelines on scenic highways, and noise setbacks are required for residential development.

As described above, there are no designated Scenic Highway Corridors in the vicinity of the project site.

### LOCAL

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#### City of Davis General Plan

The City of Davis General Plan contains the following goals and policies that are relevant to aesthetics and visual resources:

##### URBAN DESIGN, NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT

**Goal UD 1:** Encourage community design throughout the City that helps to build community, encourage human interaction, and support non-automobile transportation.

**Policy UD 1.1:** Promote urban/community design which is human-scaled, comfortable, safe, and conducive to pedestrian use.

**Goal UD 2:** Maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment and manage a sustainable community forest to optimize environmental, aesthetic, social, and economic benefits.

**Policy UD 2.1:** Preserve and protect scenic resources and elements in and around Davis, including natural habitat and scenery and resources reflective of place and history.

**Policy UD 2.2:** Maintain and increase the amount of greenery, especially street trees, in Davis, both for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitat, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.

**Policy UD 2.3:** Require an architectural “fit” with Davis’ existing scale for new development projects.

**Policy UD 2.4:** Create affordable and multi-family residential areas that include innovative designs and on-site open space amenities that are linked with public bicycle/pedestrian ways, neighborhood centers, and transit stops.

**Policy UD 2.5:** Ensure attractive functional signs.

**Goal UD 3:** Use good design as a means to promote human safety.

**Policy UD 3.2:** Provide exterior lighting that enhances safety and night use in public spaces, but minimizes impacts on surrounding land uses.

**Goal UD 4:** Create an urban design framework that would strengthen the physical form of the city.

**Policy UD 4.1:** Develop an urban design framework plan to consolidate and clarify the relevant design concepts in this chapter and other chapters to promote a positive and

memorable image for the city and to reinforce the functional systems of the city such as land use, circulation, and open space.

**Goal UD 5:** Create and enforce clear and reasonable design guidelines that operationalize the relevant goals, policies, and actions of this general plan.

**Policy UD 5.1:** Develop and implement new design guidelines, which are reviewed periodically.

**Goal UD 6:** Strengthen the city's neighborhoods to retain desirable characteristics while allowing for change and evolution, promoting public and private investments, and encouraging citizen involvement in neighborhood planning.

**Policy UD 6.1:** Recognize the existence of individual neighborhoods with general boundaries and facilitate the development of neighborhood strategies in partnership with residents and property owners. The strategies should recognize the unique characteristics of the individual neighborhood and the potential for change, within the context of a well-planned city. The strategies should be directed toward solving unique neighborhood problems and implementing neighborhood priorities and enhancing livability.

### **Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance**

The City enacted the Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance in 1998. The ordinance, commonly referred to as the City's "Dark Sky Ordinance," provides standards for outdoor lighting in an effort to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass caused by inappropriate or misaligned light fixtures, while improving nighttime public safety, utility, security, and preserving the night sky as a natural resource and thus facilitating people's enjoyment of stargazing. This ordinance does not apply to interior lighting, including lighting at greenhouse facilities. Single-family and duplex properties are exempted.

## **3.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Consistent with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project will have significant impact on aesthetics if it will:

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

### IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

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#### **Impact 3.1-1: Potential to result in substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas and resources or substantial degradation of visual character (Significant and Unavoidable)**

Development of the proposed project would convert the site from its existing use as undeveloped land previously used for agricultural uses to developed residential housing, a mixed-use area, a continuing care retirement community, and park/trail areas.

Project components would include:

- 150 affordable, age-restricted apartments;
- 32 attached, age-restricted cottages;
- 94 attached, age-restricted units;
- 129 single-family detached, age-restricted units;
- 77 single-family detached, non-age-restricted units;
- an approximately three-acre continuing care retirement community, which would likely consist of 30 assisted living, age-restricted detached units;
- an approximately 4.3-acre mixed use area, which would likely consist of a health club, restaurant, clubhouse, and up to 48 attached, age-restricted units;
- a small dog exercise area and tot lot;
- associated greenways, drainage, agricultural buffers;
- off-site stormwater detention facilities; and
- roadways, pedestrian pathways, sewers, storm drainage, and other public infrastructure to allow for access to and development of the site.

The project site is not designated as a scenic vista by the City of Davis General Plan or the Yolo County General Plan, nor does it contain any unique or distinguishing features that would qualify the site for designation as a scenic vista. However, the City's General Plan EIR does note that development could block existing panoramic views.

The project site is highly visible from W. Covell Boulevard, Risling Court, and Shasta Drive. Implementation of the proposed project would change the existing visual character of the site from an undeveloped site to an urbanized site. Impacts related to a change in visual character are largely subjective and very difficult to quantify. People have different reactions to the visual quality of a project or a project feature, and what is considered "attractive" to one viewer may be considered "unattractive" to other viewers. The project site currently consists of undeveloped land previously used for agricultural purposes. Agricultural and vacant lands provide visual relief from urban and suburban developments, and help to define the character of a region. The loss of agricultural lands can have an adverse cumulative impact on the overall visual character and quality of a region.

Upon development of the project site, views from W. Covell Boulevard would include W. Covell Boulevard, proposed landscaping and ornamental trees, the proposed perimeter multi-use trail,

the proposed senior affordable apartment buildings, and the University Retirement Community expansion building(s) in the background. Similarly, views of the project from Risling Court would include Risling Court, landscaping and ornamental trees, the proposed University Retirement Community expansion building(s), the proposed bungalow court residential uses, and the proposed activity and wellness center building(s) and in the background.

The arborist report recommends removal of 45 trees from the project site due to their poor health, structure, or both. The 45 trees which would be removed as part of the project are located along the project site boundary as well as internally, generally near the eastern and western project site boundaries. The site would be re-landscaped upon development of the project site. Removal of 45 trees would have a temporary effect on the visual character of the site until the proposed landscaping matures.

The proposed project would include visual components that would assist in enhancing the appearance of the site following site development. These improvements would include landscaping improvements such as new street trees and other vegetation landscaping, multi-use trails, and a 150-foot agricultural buffer. The proposed Project would also incorporate an urban agriculture transition area along the northern and western project boundary adjacent to existing agricultural lands.

While implementation of the proposed project would change the existing visual character of the site, it would not result in substantial adverse effects on a designated scenic vista. The proposed project would result in the conversion of undeveloped land to urban uses, which would contribute to changes in the regional landscape and visual character of the area. In order to reduce visual impacts, development within the project site is required to be consistent with the General Plan and the Davis Zoning Ordinance which includes design standards in order to ensure quality and cohesive design of the project site. These standards include specifications for building height, massing, and orientation; exterior lighting standards and specifications; and landscaping standards. Implementation of the design standards would ensure quality design throughout the project site, and result in a project that would be internally cohesive while maintaining aesthetics similar to surrounding uses.

Additionally, the project would include pre-zoning to Planned Development (PD). The purpose of the PD District is to allow diversification in the relationship of various buildings, structures, and open spaces in order to be relieved from the rigid standards of conventional zoning. The criteria for PD Districts include the development of sound housing for persons of low, moderate and high income levels, residential developments which provide a mix of housing styles and costs, creative approaches in the development of land, more efficient and desirable use of open area, variety in the physical development pattern of the City and utilization of advances in technology which are innovative to land development. The project applicant would submit a Preliminary Planned Development to the City, which ultimately would require review and approval by the City.

The City of Davis General Plan includes goals and policies designed to protect visual resources and promote quality design in urban areas. The project would be subject to the policies and goals of the Davis General Plan, as well as the City's site plan and architectural approval process. As

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described in Article 40.31.020 of the Davis Municipal Code, the purpose of the site plan and architectural approval process is to determine compliance with the Article and to promote the orderly and harmonious growth of the city and the stability of land values and investments and the general welfare; to help prevent the impairment or depreciation of land values and the development by the erection of structures, additions or alterations thereto without proper attention to siting, or of unsightly, undesirable or obnoxious appearance; and to prepare for and help to prevent problems arising affecting the community due to the nature of existing and planned uses of land and structures, such as traffic, public, safety, public facilities, utilities and services, among others.

Under Article 40.31.020 of the Davis Municipal Code, a site plan and architectural (design review) application shall be approved, conditionally approved, or denied by the Community Development and Sustainability Director, Planning Commission, or City Council. Such application may be approved only if the following findings are made:

- a) The proposed project is consistent with the objectives of the General Plan, complies with applicable zoning regulations, and is consistent with any adopted design guidelines for the district within which the project is located;
- b) The proposed architecture, site design, and landscape are suitable for the purposes of the building and the site and will enhance the character of the neighborhood and community;
- c) The architectural design of the proposed project is compatible with the existing properties and anticipated future developments within the neighborhood in terms of such elements as height, mass, scale, and proportion;
- d) The proposed project will not create conflicts with vehicular, bicycle, or pedestrian transportation modes of circulation; and
- e) The location, climate, and environmental conditions of the site are adequately considered in determining the use of appropriate construction materials and methods. Sufficient conditions are included with the approval to ensure the long-term maintenance of the project.

Various temporary visual impacts could occur as a result of construction activities as the project develops, including grading, equipment and material storage, and staging. Though temporary, some of these impacts could last for several weeks or months during any single construction phase. The loss of existing landscaping and trees would also be a temporary impact until new landscaping matures. However, these construction-related impacts would be temporary and viewer sensitivity in the majority of cases would be slight to moderate.

Nevertheless, the loss of the visual appearance of the existing vacant land on the site will change the visual character of the project site in perpetuity. Compliance with the City's site plan and architectural approval process would reduce visual impacts to the greatest extent feasible; however, the proposed project would permanently convert the undeveloped site to urbanized uses. This is considered a **significant and unavoidable** impact. There is no additional feasible mitigation available that would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.



### **Impact 3.1-2: Project implementation may result in light and glare impacts (Less than Significant with Mitigation)**

Implementation of the proposed project would introduce new sources of light and glare into the project area. New sources of glare would occur primarily from the windshields of vehicles travelling to and from the project site and from vehicles parked at the site. The parking areas are mainly located within the interior of the project site, and are not immediately adjacent to any of the light sensitive land uses in the project vicinity (the residential areas to the south and north, and Sutter Davis Hospital). The majority of the on-site residential parking would be located throughout the northern and central portions of the project site. Thus, headlights and windshields would be shielded by the proposed residential, mixed use, and the continuing care retirement community structures.

Additionally, as described above, the project includes plans for extensive landscaping and a multi-use trail around the perimeter of the site, which would provide visual screening and block potential windshield glare to areas surrounding the project site. Due to the distance between the sources of glare and the nearest sensitive receptors, impacts from vehicle windshield glare would be *less than significant*.

The project would introduce new sources of nighttime lighting, which may result in increased nighttime lighting in the project vicinity. A detailed lighting plan has not been prepared for the project, but for the purposes of this analysis, it has been conservatively assumed that exterior lighting would be located throughout most of the outdoor areas of the project site. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to: street lighting in the residential areas; exterior lighting on the buildings; lighting for the interior and perimeter bicycle path; courtyard lighting; and parking lot lighting for guest parking.

Light sources from the proposed development may have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding areas, by introducing nuisance light into the area and decreasing the visibility of nighttime skies. Additionally, on-site light sources may create light spillover impacts on surrounding land uses in the absence of mitigation. However, the project will be required to comply with the City's Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance which includes provision of a lighting plan as part of the construction documents as a standard City requirement. Compliance with the City of Davis Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance would ensure that all exterior lighting associated with the project is properly shielded and directed downward in order to eliminate light spillage onto adjacent properties, and reduce impacts to "dark skies" to the greatest extent feasible. Compliance with the Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance will ensure that potential impacts would be *less than significant*.

Glare may also be generated from buildings proposed on-site. The use of reflective building materials, including polished steel and reflective glass, could increase daytime glare for sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the project site. This is considered a *potentially significant* impact.

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### MITIGATION MEASURE(S)

**Mitigation Measure 3.1-1:** *In order to reduce the potential for glare from buildings and structures within the project site, the Preliminary and Final Planned Developments for the project shall show that the use of reflective building materials that have the potential to result in glare that would be visible from sensitive receptors located in the vicinity of the project site shall be prohibited. The City of Davis Department of Community Development and Sustainability shall ensure that the approved project uses appropriate building materials with low reflectivity to minimize potential glare nuisance to off-site receptors.*

### SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-1 would ensure that reflective building materials are not used within the project, which would reduce the potential for daytime glare impacts to a ***less than significant*** level.

### **Impact 3.1-3: Project implementation may substantially damage scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway (Less than Significant)**

There are no designated State Scenic Highways in the vicinity of the project site. There are no highways in Yolo County listed as Designated Scenic Highway by the Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System. Only one highway section in Yolo County is listed as an Eligible State Scenic Highway by the Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System; the segment of SR 16 from approximately the town of Capay north to the northern edge of the County. The City of Davis and the project site are not visible from this roadway segment.

As identified in the Land Use and Community Character Element of the Yolo County General Plan, designated scenic routes in the county include SR 16 (Colusa County line to Capay), SR 128 (Winters to Napa County line), CR 116 and 116B (Knights Landing to eastern terminus of CR 16), CR 16 and 117 and Old River Road (CR 107 to West Sacramento), and South River Road (West Sacramento city limits to Sacramento County line). Neither the City of Davis nor the project site are visible from these routes. As such, this is a ***less than significant*** impact, and no mitigation is required.