

3.3.6 Aesthetics

Introduction

The purpose of the Aesthetics section is to identify and evaluate key visual resources in the project area, and to determine the degree of visual impact that would be attributable to a proposed project. Further, the analysis should identify key visual resources that warrant consideration in subsequent plans, so as to ensure, where possible, that the integrity of the landscape and built environment is maintained.

Responsible Agencies:

- *California Coastal Commission* <http://www.coastal.ca.gov/web> for projects in the Coastal Zone.

LRDP EIR

It is common practice for the aesthetics section of an LRDP EIR to be based on a policy evaluation and a site inspection of key viewsheds and visual resources. Additionally, a photo reconnaissance is usually prepared to document key resources. At the LRDP stage, it may not be possible to perform more than a general analysis because detailed design plans have not yet been developed. At a minimum, the LRDP EIR should:

- Identify key visual resources, including viewsheds, as defined by the campus, which are intended to be preserved;
- Describe the site selection and design review process (i.e., how sites are selected and areas that are aesthetically valuable are to be protected, campuswide or area design guidelines, how individual projects are evaluated for their compliance with design guidelines);
- Identify massing, types of building materials, and the overall style and character of facilities, to the extent such information is available; and
- Describe the introduction of and/or increase in amount of light and glare, particularly in rural and residential areas.

Mitigation measures for visual impacts should focus on eliminating conflicts between existing built structures and the proposed project.

Project EIR

The Aesthetics section of a Project EIR should describe the potential aesthetic effects of the proposed project on the existing landscape and built environment. The analysis should focus on the compatibility of new development with existing development. The massing of structures, the types of building materials being used, and the overall style and character of facilities, should be evaluated for their visual compatibility with the existing setting. The section should also consider the effect of the proposed project on visual resources such as viewsheds. Computerized visual simulations will often be useful in this analysis.

Standards of Significance

Would the project:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings within a scenic highway?
- Significantly degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?
- Exceed an applicable LRDP or program EIR Standard of Significance? (Conflict with Campus goals and guidelines related to visual quality? This is used in situations where the campus may have identified an aesthetic standard that is different from or exceeds the state standards.)

Analytical Methods

- Perform a site inspection to identify key viewsheds and visual resources.
- Photograph primary views to and from the site and key visual resources.
- Prepare a visual simulation of the project, if appropriate.
- Evaluate and describe ways in which the project would alter the visual character of the project site.
- Use significance standards to determine the degree of visual impact of the proposed project.
- Identify potential cumulative impacts. Are there other projects planned in the vicinity which will create a cumulative visual impact?

Local general plans often incorporate scenic resource information such as scenic highways, scenic vistas, and other visual resources in a scenic resource or open space element. Historic buildings and/or landscapes may also be identified in a local planning document or register as contributing elements of local visual resources. However, it is important to focus on changes in visual character, rather than conducting an analysis of land use changes or impacts on historic resources. Although the University of California is constitutionally exempt from local land use planning requirements, information contained in the local plans is valuable, and should be considered.

Generally Feasible Mitigation Measures

- Site or design structures in such a way that they do not block or eliminate viewsheds.
- Design structures so that they are sensitive to existing terrain, natural features, and historic structures or landscapes (if any).
- Incorporate vegetative screening to soften architectural structures.
- Use lighting fixtures that focus downward to eliminate potential light and glare. Restrict use of reflective materials.
- Design structures so that they complement the architectural character of buildings in the vicinity. Consider building mass and form, building proportions, roof profile, architectural detail and fenestration, and the texture, color and quality of building materials.
- Consult with affected local planning jurisdiction(s) prior to adopting any land use change or approving any project that could restrict or eliminate views of scenic or visual resources identified in local general planning documents.
- Review project design for compliance with campus visual quality goals and guidelines.