

RANCHO CIELO PROJECT

FOCUSED VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

and

ADDENDUM

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3500-05-043 (STP), 3100-5441 (TM), 3600-05-011 (R),
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Prepared for:

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RCC-28

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Subject: Addendum to the Rancho Cielo Village Estates Project Visual Impact Assessment

Dear Mr. Campbell:

This letter report is being submitted to augment the Rancho Cielo Village Estates Project Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) prepared by HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (HELIX) in April 2013.

The April VIA addresses visual review of proposed changes based on Amendment 7 to the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, consistent with the 2007 County of San Diego Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds. This addendum addresses an additional design alternative of lesser density, and is meant to be read in conjunction with the full VIA. Discussion titles and order of discussion follow those in the VIA for the ease of the reader, as well as demonstrating that elements required for discussion in the 2007 County of San Diego Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds are adequately referenced.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF PROJECT HISTORY

Summary of Project History and April 2013 VIA

The Rancho Cielo Specific Plan was first adopted by the Board on December 9, 1981 (24) and has been subject to six Specific Plan Amendments (SPAs). The 1981-certified Project EIR (ER 80-08-120) and approved addenda (as well as the April 2013 VIA) are available in County files.

Since 1984, the approved Specific Plan has allowed for the development of commercial and civic uses on 28 acres of Neighborhood Commercial and 5 acres of Village Center, as well as 719 dwelling units comprised of 639 Country Estates, 38 Planned Development and 42 Village Estates units, with an overall density maximum of 0.27 du/ac.

Specific to the parcels currently under review, the current Specific Plan allows for an anticipated 42 Village Estate units on one parcel north of Via Ambiente (TM 5441). Current zoning allows those units to be developed upon approval of a Major Use Permit pursuant to the "P" Special Area Regulation for a Planned Development at a height of 60 feet, and at a maximum coverage of 60 percent. A parcel south of Via Ambiente, west of El Brazo (TM 5440), is designated Village Commercial in the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The current zone allows the site to be developed with commercial and residential structures (for Dwellings as Secondary Uses to commercial uses [Zoning Ordinance Section 2980]) reaching 35 feet in height, provides for a density of 29 dwelling units per acre, as well as a heliport, and does not include any provisions that would restrict the maximum site coverage or require a subsequent discretionary action subject to review by the Department of Planning & Development Services (PDS), San Dieguito Community Planning Group, and general public.

Location of these uses on the Project parcels was specifically mandated during the Board of Supervisors (Board) consideration of the Project in 1984. In certifying the 1984 Supplemental EIR, the Board found that Project implementation would modify the aesthetic environment of surrounding communities (including Del Dios, Mt. Israel, Elfin Forest, and Rancho Santa Fe), and balanced the aesthetic issue of visible skylined development (the outline of buildings against a backdrop of the sky) with retention of 1,635 acres of native slopes (County 1984: discussion on p. 39.) Spreading the development density out among the specific plan acres with a larger overall development footprint was found to create an unacceptable worse aesthetic impact than clustering the development on this particular ridgeline. Therefore, the County required preservation of the 1,710 acres of open space in exchange for permission to develop hundreds of residential units, including the 42 units identified for Parcel H (TM 5441) (County 1984: discussion on p. 7). The Board also found that redesign by moving the Village Center to the southwest parcel (to its current location) would have "a positive effect on aesthetic impacts" (County 1984:40), as that parcel is less visible from the Mt. Israel community. Additionally, it was specifically found that:

[a]esthetic impacts created by the Proposed Project revisions are considered mitigated by the Project design. The dedication of 1,710 acres of open space preservation of steep slopes, major drainages, woodland areas, revegetation and landscaping of disturbed areas and clustering of units are aspects of the Project which serve to mitigate aesthetic impacts (County 1984:4).

The April 2013 Specific Plan Amendment 7 (SPA 7) analyzed two changes to the approved Specific Plan area relative to two parcels abutting Via Ambiente in the approximate center of the Rancho Cielo Estates development.

The subdivision (TM 5441RPL³) of one parcel north of Via Ambiente was proposed for subdivision into 31 detached single-family, Village Estate residential units. This would change the number of previously approved units on this parcel from 42 to 31 residential units, thereby lowering the allowed density on the parcel. The associated rezone also would lower the previously approved structure height to a maximum of 35 feet (a reduction in allowable height of over 40 percent), establish variable setbacks, and apply a “D” Special Area Regulation for Design Review, which requires approval of a Site Plan (provided in the Project submittal).

SPA 7 also proposed subdivision (TM 5440RPL³) of the commercial parcel south of Via Ambiente into 11 detached single-family, Village Estate residential units. The SPA would change the designation of the site from Village Center to Village Estates and transfer 11 units from the northerly Village Estates parcel to the southern parcel. The rezone would change the use regulations on this parcel from C36 (General Commercial) to RV (Variable Family Residential) and remove the density allowance of 29 du/ac; thereby, permitting residential development at an overall lower density consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The rezone would retain applicable development regulations allowing structures to a maximum height of 35 feet and three stories with variable setbacks, and would add a maximum coverage of 60 percent and a “D” Special Area Regulation for Design Review, which requires a Site Plan (provided in the Project submittal) subject to review by PDS, San Dieguito Community Planning Group, and general public.

With regard to current visible changes to the approved Rancho Cielo development plan, implementation of SPA 7 on TM 5441 would reduce the number of planned units for this lot from 42 to 31, and lower potential building heights from 60 feet to a uniform 35 feet. Implementation of the proposed SPA on TM 5440 would retain building heights at 35 feet, would eliminate an approved helipad and commercial uses, and implement residential uses only (consisting of 10 to 11 units, depending on development scenario).

Pursuant to the County Title 8, Zoning and Land Use Regulations, Chapter 6 Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO), natural slopes in the County that exceed 25 percent slope and have a gradient of more than 50 feet are protected from excessive encroachment. Steep slope encroachment for both parcels was found to be within allowable limits. SPA 7 implementation also was found to result in grading patterns, retaining walls, architectural features and landscaping generally consistent with other portions of the Rancho Cielo Project development and which have been implemented as part of the ongoing phased development.

Review of visible site changes from five representative viewpoints within a three-mile radius indicates that SPA elements would range from notable to barely visible. Rancho Cielo development would be both incrementally less visible and less dense from off-site locales than it would be if the currently allowed Specific Plan were built. This minimization of potential effects anticipated under the previously approved Specific Plan resulted in findings of less than significant impacts under CEQA relative to the SPA. These findings were supported by three photosimulations prepared in accordance with the County Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds.

Introduction to the 24-Unit Development Scenario

This alternative was developed in response to request by current homeowners in Rancho Cielo to delete the potential for condominium units on TMs 5440 and 5441 and retain the concept of fee title ownership interests for a minimum of 24 custom estate lots. This alternative would result in development of these lots as individually owned single-family residential lots, and would result in individual lots averaging over 0.6 acre, and ranging up to approximately 2.5 acres in size. This alternative development scenario also would reduce the units developed on the two SPA parcels by a total of 18 residences from those assumed in the April VIA.

On TM 5441, grading would be restricted to the footprint identified for the 42-unit development in Section 5.3.1 of the VIA, with the 17 larger pads accommodated within a slightly smaller footprint than was identified for the condominium homes. Large retaining walls would be generally similar to those described for the 31-unit development on this parcel, but structure massing would be minimized for some close-in viewers. With the 7-unit development scenario on TM 5440, extent of grading would be slightly decreased from grading addressed in VIA Section 5.3.1 for the 11-unit development, and two retaining walls would be required.

The analysis of this development alternative has been prepared by two technical specialists listed on the County-accepted list of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) consultants for Visual Analysis; one of whom is a California registered landscape architect and one of whom is also on the County-accepted list for EIR Preparer. Similar to the 42-unit development scenario analyzed in the April 2013 VIA, this alternative also would result in less than significant impacts under CEQA, as detailed below.

24-UNIT DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTION

Alternative Design, Land Use and Zoning

TM 5441 consists of approximately 14.4 acres (refer to Figure 10 of the VIA for the location of the parcel, identified as parcel "H" and shown in the approximate center of the Rancho Cielo development). As part of this 24-unit alternative, TM 5441 would be subdivided into 17 lots and would contain a maximum of 17 (rather than 42) residences. The parcel lots and landscaping plan are shown on Figures 1, Alternative 17-Unit Proposed Lots and Landscaping, and 2, Alternative 7-Unit Proposed Lots and Landscaping. The fewer lots would be a reduction of approximately 46 percent from the number of residences proposed under the primary SPA 7 discussion in the VIA.

Under this alternative, TM 5441 homes also would be oriented in roughly three tiers of dwellings, on lots of variable size (up to approximately 2.5 acres), with pads graded at elevations ranging from 1,124 to 1,148 feet AMSL. Structures would step slightly down the slope from the hilltop on the northern side. Consistent with the 42-unit development, the associated rezone would lower the previously approved structure height to a maximum of 35 feet (a reduction in allowable height of over 40 percent), and establish variable setbacks. Given the expanded lot

size and lowered number of dwellings, no lots are restricted to single-story residences under this alternative.

TM 5440 is located on approximately 5.6 acres (see “Village Center” on VIA Figure 10). An existing knoll would be cut down to accommodate the structures on a relatively flat pad. The seven residences would be located along a cul-de-sac at elevations ranging from 1,162 to 1,172 feet AMSL, with the parcel layout shown on Figure 2. The rezone would change the use regulations on this parcel from C36 (General Commercial) to RV (Variable Family Residential) and remove the density allowance of 29 du/ac; thereby, permitting residential development at an overall lower density consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The rezone would retain restriction of structures to a maximum height of 35 feet.

Architectural detailing would be consistent with Rancho Cielo Design Guidelines, including tile roofs, stucco, and stone exteriors in earth tones, and use of wrought iron and deck/balcony features. Home size would vary depending on the home-owner’s preference. Retaining walls would be similar to those discussed for the 42-unit development. All landscaping (see Figures 1 and 2) would be consistent with Rancho Cielo design guidelines, which also conform to Fire Marshal requirements, as presented in the plant list contained in the Firewise 2000 Conceptual Fire Protection Study for Rancho Cielo Estates TMs 5440 and 5441 (2011, as amended in 2012).

Regulatory Framework

As noted in Section 2.2 of the April VIA, the parcels are within a geographic area addressed by the San Diego County General Plan (2011) and San Dieguito Community Plan (2012), as well as the Zoning Ordinance. Overall design elements of the existing Specific Plan were previously evaluated and approved. This alternative addresses approximately 20 acres of the larger 2,846-acre Project (*less than one percent of the previously approved Project acreage*). This alternative also would be consistent with the approved Specific Plan as amended, Semi Rural 2, Open Space – Conservation, and Public/Semi-Public Facility designations of the General Plan because it proposes residential and open space uses in compliance with the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, which permits an overall density of 0.27 dwelling unit per acre and identified development of these parcels with similar (although more intense) uses.

This alternative would be consistent with the San Dieguito Community Plan because it proposes residential and open space uses that conform to the RC Specific Plan use classifications and maximum unit count as outlined in that Community Plan. Visual design policies are additionally addressed below.

Steep slopes are shown on Figure 3, TM 5441 17-Unit Alternative Steep Slopes Analysis for TM 5441. The encroachment footprint is the same for either the 39 units or 17 units on the parcel, but the analysis for the individually owned properties requires evaluation by lot rather than by overall parcel. As shown, steep slopes are located on six of the TM 5441 lots (Lots 1 through 6). Encroachment into steep slopes would occur on four of the six lots (Lots 1 through 4). The proposed encroachment on each of these lots meets the allowable percentage of 14.0, 18.0, 16.0 and 19.0 percent (at 14.0, 17.9, 16.0, and 19.0 percent) respectively.

Figure 4, TM 5440 7-Unit Alternative Steep Slopes Analysis, shows the grading for the seven unit parcel. Steep slopes are located on three of the lots (Lots 5, 6 and 7). The proposed encroachment on each of these lots meets the allowable percentage of 10.0, 10.0 and 12.0 percent (at 10.0, 8.2 and 11.9 percent) respectively.

Steep slope encroachment for both parcels would conform to allowable limits defined in RPO Section 86.604(e)(2) as development would not exceed the allowable encroachment into steep slopes on each parcel.

Design Policies and Guidance

As discussed in VIA Section 2.3, the San Dieguito Community Plan has a number of design policies relevant to discussion of this alternative and its potential visual effects. Each of these policies is also applicable to the current alternative design scenario.

Initial review of design policy conformity was completed for the Rancho Cielo development overall as part of previous approvals. Those approvals anticipated development of the two parcels with 42 residential units of up to 60 feet in height on small lots north of Via Ambiente and commercial/residential uses up to 35 feet in height south of Via Ambiente. Specific plans demonstrating compliance with approved elements would have been required prior to implementation, but the types and extent of uses were approved. This review was updated for the SPA evaluated in the body of this VIA (the 42-unit development scenario).

Therefore, this analysis does not evaluate alternative plans for these parcels in a vacuum. The prior approvals provide the existing condition, as demonstrated in the Community Plan. The following discussion: (1) addresses the level to which the currently proposed uses on those two specific parcels would visually vary from previously approved uses and the 42-unit development on those parcels; and (2) analyzes the level to which any change might vary under CEQA.

VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

All of the information provided in VIA Section 3.0 relative to the overall topographic setting, viewshed, and landscape units are directly applicable to this alternative. As noted, of the 28.26 square miles encompassed within the viewshed, views would be available from an anticipated maximum of only 3.48 square miles, or approximately 12 percent of the surrounding area. Based on topography alone, approximately 88 percent of the locations within three miles of the Proposed Project would not have views to these two Project parcels. A lower percentage would experience actual views to these two parcels based on intervening structures and existing vegetation. From distances beyond three miles, the location uniformly would be seen as one small aspect of a much larger view, and atmospheric conditions generally would be expected to diminish details.

EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

Each of the elements discussed in VIA Section 3.0 relative to the existing visual setting (visual character and quality), as well as components that make up viewer response sensitivity, viewer group [motorists, recreationalists or residents], viewer exposure [duration and numbers of viewers], and viewer awareness) remains accurate for evaluation of this alternative. The remainder of this discussion addresses variation in evaluation between the 42-unit and 24-unit design scenarios based on the types and magnitude numbers of viewers in the area; and the location, type and frequency of views.

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Guidelines of Significance

Each of the CEQA significance guidelines from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007) and described in VIA Section 5.1 pertain to this alternative. As noted, a project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it would (1) introduce features that contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area, or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines; (2) result in the removal or change of valued visual elements; or (3) substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista.

Key Views

Similarly, each of the publicly accessible key views detailed in VIA Section 5.2 would be relevant to this alternative. The reader is referred to that section of the VIA for additional general information relative to viewer location, orientation and exposure, existing visual character and quality. As applicable, alternative features visible from this location, change to visual character and quality, anticipated viewer response, and resulting visual impact comprise the remainder of this discussion.

Key View 1 – Mt. Israel Road

The eastern elevation and manufactured slopes of TM 5441 on the ridgeline would be visible from this location. Although the amount of detail discernible is somewhat dependent on the time of day and sun angle, at distances of less than one mile architectural features such as windows, railings, rooflines, building materials, and Project landscaping generally are easily seen (see VIA Figure 17). Visible elements of Project design would be most prominent in the morning, with the late afternoon view to the west becoming more of a silhouetted ridgeline view as the sun sets. The change in residence size and density associated with change in residence count from 31 to 17 is expected to be visible, with separation between residences being visible for the first line of homes in the observer's view.

The viewer response is anticipated to be adverse. As described in the VIA, the great majority of people on Mt. Israel Road are homeowners arriving to or leaving their neighborhood. Viewer

sensitivity to change is expected to be high. The number of viewers, however, is low; approximately 40 homes are located in the Mt. Israel Road residential enclave, and much of the Road is highly vegetated, obscuring off-road views.

The resulting visual impact is expected to be important to these local viewers, but less than significant under CEQA, due to the limited number of viewers and consistency with existing area development. Reduction in visual effect from the approved Project (as well as the 42-unit development scenario analyzed in VIA Section 5.0 for this parcel) would (further) incrementally lower the less than significant findings made for both of those design scenarios.

Key View 2 – Camino Del Sur

Key View 2 (VIA Figure 7) was taken from Camino Del Sur, looking northerly to a portion of TM 5440 on the ridgeline across the San Dieguito River Valley. The TM 5441 location is not visible from this site.

A small portion of proposed development on TM 5440, primarily the rooftops and parts of second floors of units on the southwest side, would be visible. The majority of the proposed ridgeline development is blocked by the existing topography. At this distance individual design features such as windows, railings, and building materials would not be discernible. Similarly, it is not anticipated that the reduction in number of dwellings from 11 to 7 would be discernible, especially given the largely blocked nature of views to the site.

Alternative-related change to existing visual character as seen from this key view with the proposed development, therefore, would be negligible. The resulting visual impact was identified as less than significant for the SPA addressed in VIA Section 5.0. Additional reduction in visual massing from this location due to the 24-unit development scenario would not be visible. There would be no discernible difference between the 42- and 24-unit development scenarios from this viewpoint.

Key View 3 – Artesian Road

Key View 3 (VIA Figure 8) was taken from the western portion of Artesian Road looking northeast, looking toward at a portion of TM 5440 on the hilltop across the San Dieguito River Valley. The TM 5441 location is not visible from this site.

A small portion of proposed development on parcel TM 5440, primarily the rooftops and parts of second floors of units on the southwest side, would be visible. The majority of the proposed development is blocked by the existing topography. At this distance, individual design features such as windows, railings and building materials would not be discernible. Similarly, it is not anticipated that the reduction in number of dwellings from 11 to 7 would be discernible, especially given the largely blocked nature of views to the site.

The SPA-related change to existing visual character as seen from this key view with the 42-unit development would be negligible. The resulting visual impact was identified as less than

significant. Additional reduction in visual massing from this location due to the 24-unit development scenario would not be visible. There would be no discernible difference between the 42- and 24-unit development scenarios from this viewpoint.

Key View 4 – Elfin Forest Road

Key View 4 (VIA Figure 8) is located on the eastern portion of Elfin Forest Road. The view orientation is southeast, looking toward and up at portions of both TMs 5440 and TM 5441 on the ridgeline, although the two parcels are indistinguishable at this distance.

As depicted, the parcels are at a distance, and only comprise approximately 13 percent of the horizontal view seen in this photograph. Project development in general would be noticeable, but not substantial, from this view point. It also would meld with similar changes currently being built out as part of the approved Project along abutting hilltop areas. Changes in structure number and spacing (between the original project and 42-unit or 24-unit development scenarios) would not be visible from this distance.

The resulting visual impact is expected to be noticeable, but would not vary from visual impacts approved under the overall Rancho Cielo Project from this vantage point. Less than significant visual impacts were identified for SPA implementation (refer to VIA Figure 19). A similar assessment is made for the 24-unit development scenario.

Key View 5 – Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve

Key View 5 (VIA Figure 9) was taken from the Ray Brooks Overlook within the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve (Reserve). The view looks southerly across the valley to both TMs 5440 and 5441.

Existing homes toward the valley and along the ridgelines are also visible toward Rancho Cielo, with the majority of view elements on the north-facing slopes consisting of Rancho Cielo-protected slopes and vegetation.

The visual character of the ridgeline and the implementation of retaining walls to support the clustered development (rather than impact additional native vegetation) would be the most prominent changes to this view with SPA implementation. These modifications are discussed in detail in VIA Section 5.5, with visual effects of the 42-unit development depicted in Figures 18a and 18b. Because there is some distance between the residential pads and the observer from this viewpoint and the overall development footprint is the same, the difference between the 42-unit and 24-unit development scenarios is not expected to be very noticeable.

The resulting visual impact is expected to be discernible, but would not vary from visual impacts approved under the overall Rancho Cielo Project from this vantage point. Less than significant visual impacts were identified for SPA implementation. A similar assessment is made for the 24-unit development scenario.

Key View Summary

As noted, the original development scenario proposed for these lots is not expected to constitute development that would visually read as substantially different from that in the surrounding area. As a result, it would not be expected to particularly draw the eye for the casual viewer. In other words—for a viewer gazing at the slopes and hilltops in this vicinity from public roadways or overlooks in the area—following landscaping maturity it would not be expected to be visually substantially different from surrounding development patterns in this location. The modifications would constitute important and adverse changes from the existing condition, but are considered less than significant under CEQA for the reasons enumerated in VIA Section 5.0, including overall visual consistency with the approved and developing Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. Reduction in effect from the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan that would occur with implementation of the 42-unit SPA is addressed in VIA Section 5.5, and supported by key view simulations completed in accordance with County guidelines. These effects would be further reduced by implementation of the 24-unit development scenario.

ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY/ANALYSIS OF PROJECT EFFECTS DURING SPA CONSTRUCTION

The reader is referred to VIA Sections 5.2 through 5.5, for important information related to visual character and quality relative to effects associated with SPA implementation. These sections specifically addresses the proposed changes that alternative implementation may cause to the visual character and quality within the Project viewshed, during Project phasing (i.e., alternative construction through alternative buildout and vegetation maturity), and the potential response of viewers to those changes.

Construction-Period Effects

Project construction-period visual effects are described in four phases:

- Existing Conditions
- During Grading and Cut/Fill Operations
- End of Construction
- At Maturity

The existing conditions information is identical to that provided for the 42-unit development in VIA Section 5.3.

During Grading and Cut/Fill Operations

During grading and cut/fill operations, both parcels would have approximately 58 percent of the existing vegetation cleared. Cut and fill operations would create flatter stepped pads on site surrounded by 1.5:1 manufactured slopes, as approved by the Project geotechnical engineer and landscape architect, consistent with the County grading ordinance. Steep slope encroachment for

both parcels is within allowable limits defined in RPO Section 86.604(e)(2), as development would encroach into less than the allowable percentage of the steep slopes on each parcel.

The primary built element implement during grading would consist of retaining walls. For this alternative, two walls would be required on TM 5440 to provide the larger pads. A 12-foot high and 170-foot long wall would be located at the southern edge of Lot 5. A 9-foot high and 190-foot long wall would be located along the southern boundary of Lot 7. These walls would be visible to viewers on Via Ambiente or El Brazo during the grading phase.

Parcel TM 5441 lots would be supported by a series of retaining walls. The 22 to 28-foot-high retaining wall approximately 380 feet in length at the north end of the parcels (edging Lots 6 and 7) would be the same as that constructed for the 31 units on this parcel. For the 31-unit development, an additional wall up to 16-feet in height and approximately 780 feet long (the whole length of the western pad limit) would be located at edge of pads. Under the 17-unit development, this western wall would vary from 5 to 10 feet and would be located at the toe of grading (i.e., west of Project landscaping). It would be approximately 640 feet long. Given the varying height of this wall, and existing four to five-foot tall scrub vegetation located on the slope section abutting it, this wall is expected to be visually consistent with privacy walls throughout the County. Two additional small walls generally trending north-south are also located west of the Lot 1 pad. A wall wrapping around the northwestern-most pad and extending to the pad to the south would range from 10 to 16 feet in height and would be 290 feet long. On the southeastern edge of pad creation (along Via Ambiente), two 8-foot high abutting walls would be built, one at 160 feet and one at 140 feet in length. A 6- to 14-foot high retaining wall would be constructed to support four SPA pads on the northeastern side of the lot. This wall would be approximately 160 feet long under the 42-unit design scenario. For the 17-unit scenario (at the toe of slope for two pads) that wall would be reduced to 110 feet in length and a maximum of 11 feet in height. The storm water basin walls identified adjacent to Via Ambiente at the northeastern extent of the Project in the VIA would be eliminated for the 24-unit development scenario. Similar to other walls completed for residential pads and roads in Rancho Cielo, walls greater than six feet in height would be modular segmental concrete systems (or precast segmented walls), and can be selectively colored and textured to harmonize with surroundings.

During grading and cut/fill operations, approximately 60 percent of both parcels would be exposed as raw, unvegetated soil. The bare soil would visually contrast with adjacent vegetated areas and during this 8- to 12-month period the site would be expected to stand out from its immediate surroundings. As soon as the manufactured slopes are complete, hydroseeding operations could commence which would minimize the temporary visual impact. Approximately 40 percent of both parcels consist of steep slopes that would not be disturbed.

End of Construction

At the end of the construction period all the homes would be constructed, including all final color and finishes. On TM 5440, the two eight-foot walls adjacent to Via Ambiente as part of the seven-unit residential development scenario would appear visually consistent with privacy

walls in this area due to their relatively low height and association with residential pads. On TM 5441, some safety fencing, as well as privacy and/or large retaining walls would be visible to off-site viewers. The exterior boundary walls that might be seen would be located throughout the parcel, as described above. For walls at the edge of development on the north, west and east sides, some shielding would occur from adjacent existing native scrub.

All SPA-related landscaping and erosion control measures would be installed and a three- to six-month plant establishment period would begin for trees and shrubs. Architectural features such as wall color and finishes, roof materials, etc., would constitute the dominant visual elements associated with the SPA parcels during this period. The manufactured slopes would have had approximately a year to establish cover, but sections of bare soil would likely remain. Trees would be immature, and would not provide retaining wall coverage that would occur at maturity.

At Maturity

Approximately five years following the end of construction, landscaping would mature to the point where all the shrub/vine planting would be at its full mature size and all groundcover would achieve 100 percent of planned coverage. Trees mature more slowly and vary amongst species. On average, it is anticipated that the trees in the landscape would be 30 to 50 percent taller and fuller than at initial planting. Overall, the landscape elements would by then effectively visually soften the architectural features and create a much more cohesive aesthetic. This would continue into the future as the trees reach full maturity.

These construction-period effects are consistent with those occurring for other developing areas within the overall Rancho Cielo development. No new significant impact is identified.

VIEWER RESPONSE

As noted and defined in VIA Section 4.2, viewer response, or awareness, is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. The discussion below provides an assessment of viewer response relative to the 24-unit development alternative for the same four construction phases described above.

Information provided for existing conditions and the period of grading and cut and fill operations in VIA Section 5.4 is identical; with response assessed as neutral for the existing condition, highest (and generally adverse) during grading, and adverse at the end of construction. Those analyses are not reiterated here. The real difference between the two development scenarios would be seen at Project maturity, as discussed below.

At Maturity

This phase reflects a post-construction time period. Landscaping would be installed and would have reached full maturity, which would provide substantially more cover than depicted in the simulations discussed in VIA Section 5.5.1 (per County guidelines, the SPA vegetation has been

depicted five years after installation). All ground cover would be in place, no “raw” soil associated with construction would be visible. Walls and structures with planting in place would be obscured or softened.

Similar to the analysis of the 42-unit development scenario, viewer response at this point is expected to become more varied. It is expected that some viewers would be deeply connected to past land use patterns and would find any change to those patterns to be visually adverse. Some viewers would accommodate the changed condition and find it less impactful than originally anticipated. Other viewers would be new to the area, and the SPA lots would simply be part of the existing condition. For those viewers, their response would be expected to be generally neutral, and may be positive.

There would be visible differences between the 42-unit and 24-unit development scenarios. A reduction of 14 homes on TM 5441 and 4 homes on TM 5440 would allow for larger individual pads and subsequently larger individual homes. As individually built residences, both the pads and homes would be expected to be more visually consistent in closer views with immediately abutting existing homes than the 42-unit development scenario. Architectural renderings are provided below in the discussion of Rancho Cielo Interior Views. These views depict on-site visibility from Via Rancho Cielo and Via Ambiente to structures under this alternative and can be compared with Figures 22, 25 and 26 in the VIA.

These dwellings would be subject to the overall Rancho Cielo Design Guidelines—and therefore a level of consistency in terms of architectural detailing and landscaping would be ensured. For close-in viewers (e.g., along Via Ambiente) personal variation in planting preference also would be visible. This may be seen as preferable to the more uniform features anticipated under the 42-unit development scenario. The changes in height and extent of the long walls along the western and northeastern slopes of TM 5441 may also be preferable to the generally longer and higher walls identified for the 42-residential unit SPA. As noted in discussion in Section 5.3.1, however, these walls would not be visible to viewers from the same vantage point, and generally would be lateral to viewers, so that they would not stand out as engineered elements in the same way that walls perpendicular to the viewer would. The viewer’s response is expected to be negative (especially in the short term), although perhaps incrementally less negative than the response for the 42-unit development scenario.

Response of the more distant viewer is expected to be neutral due to an inability to distinguish Project detail.

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

The discussions below address long-term potential impacts to off-site viewers. The simulations prepared for off-site vantage points along Mt. Israel Road, Elfin Forest Road, and the Ray Brooks Overlook area in the Reserve and located in VIA Section 5.5 provide reference points in this analysis. Please see discussion in Section 5.5 for assumptions incorporated into the simulations.

Guideline 1: Contrast with Existing Visual Character and/or Quality by Conflicting With Important Visual Elements or the Quality of the Area, or by Being Inconsistent With Applicable Design Guidelines

Design guidelines from both the 2012 San Dieguito Community Plan and the approved Rancho Cielo development are relevant to this evaluation. The San Dieguito Community Plan identifies several criteria to be considered during planning. Each of the criteria regarding site topography and protection of steep slopes, view orientation and view protection of adjacent properties, protection of ridgelines, preservation of dark skies, and design of buildings reasonably appropriate to the site in order to harmonize with its surroundings, would be applicable to the 24-unit development. The majority of these elements would be assessed identical to the analysis in VIA Section 5.5.1.

Of particular relevance is that these homes would be built on ridgeline/knoll top topography. Steep slopes are on the site and would be affected by Project construction, as described above in this addendum. The walls required for pad support under this alternative also are described above. As noted in the introduction to this addendum, implementation of the clustered development on TM 5441 is a Rancho Cielo design element required as mitigation to minimize steep slope and vegetation impacts. Grading would be the minimum required for parcel implementation. Slopes not affected during pad creation would not be affected by SPA implementation. Undeveloped areas would be left in existing native habitat.

The view to this specific part of the Rancho Cielo ridgeline would change. The ridgeline is a substantial topographic feature, and is both close enough to be visible and far enough away to provide the horizon line. Structures built on the TM 5441 pad would be skylined and would change the current more natural aspect of the ridgeline. The implementation of the 17-unit residential development (TM 5441) would be notable on a portion of a ridgeline that, from points north in particular, currently appears undisturbed. Likely viewers would include private residential viewers, travelers along Mt. Israel, and users of southerly trails in the Reserve. One overlook (Ray Brooks), in particular, has views directly to the site (see discussion for Key View 5). These views are illustrated in VIA Figures 17 and 18, representing simulations from Mt. Israel Road and the Ray Brooks Overlook in the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, respectively.

As described in detail in VIA Section 5.5.1, the potential significance of these visual effects must be weighed in conjunction with their setting. Hilltop development in this particular part of the County is both common and a hallmark of the estate residential uses in the area. As depicted on VIA Figures 12, such development is wholly consistent with the existing character of lot development in this area. It is also wholly consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo development build-out surrounding these parcels.

Both the General Plan and San Dieguito Community Plan assume full Rancho Cielo implementation. Based on proposed elimination of a number of residential structures, the 24-unit development would provide visually similar, but less dense, uses than are currently assumed. Project landscaping, assumed as part of SPA design, would be included to soften

structural lines. As a result, ridgeline effects that would result from SPA implementation would result in an incrementally lessened from the less than significant visual impact identified for the 42-unit development under Guideline 1 related to contrast with valued visual elements or quality or inconsistency with applicable design guidelines.

The San Dieguito Community Plan requests that design of a building be reasonably appropriate to its site, and in harmony with its surroundings. This alternative proposes 24 detached single-family residential units. These homes would match the theme and style of the rest of the Rancho Cielo development, which is already visible to off-site viewers. The color, architecture, building materials, etc., all would be consistent with the structures already existing and under construction within the development, as would the height of the structures (up to 35 feet, or two stories).

As described in VIA Section 5.3.1, the large retaining walls associated with the 17-unit residential development on TM 5441 would vary in visibility. This reflects view restriction resulting from turns in public roads and abutting vegetation. More direct (closer) and longer duration views from private roads and residences are available. In addition, the number of walls seen from any single view point would be limited in nature. From points south and east, the walls to the north and west would not be visible. From the north and west, walls to the south and east would not be visible. From the north, the longest and highest wall would be visually attenuated to some extent due to the wall not being in a straight line. As it wraps around the base of the slope, it would extend away from the viewer on both its west and east extents and would no longer be perpendicular to a line of sight. This is also true for the west and east walls. They largely trend north-south in orientation, and as a result would not provide the same visual mass as a wall located perpendicular to the viewer. For the long western wall located beyond Project landscaping, as noted above, this wall would vary from 5 to 10 feet in height. Given the varying height of this wall, and existing four to five-foot tall scrub vegetation located on the slope section abutting it, this wall is expected to be visually consistent with privacy walls throughout the County. Walls at the south end of the parcel would be obscured for viewers to the north. Another point relative to the largest northern wall is that it would not be located along the ridgeline. It would be down slope, with skylined homes above. As a result, the visual effect of the wall would be minimized as the eye would naturally be drawn up to the skyline. The two eight-foot walls adjacent to Via Ambiente as part of the 17-unit residential development scenario also would appear visually consistent with privacy walls in this area due to their relatively low height and association with residential pads. The viewer's eye would be expected to be drawn upwards toward the home, and any lot landscaping installed by the owner. Finally, the storm water basin walls identified adjacent to Via Ambiente at the northeastern extent of the Project in the VIA would be eliminated for the 24-unit development scenario, which would be preferred over the 42-unit development.

The visibility of the proposed SPA 7 Project features is depicted in the simulations provided in VIA Figures 17, 18 and 19. The overall discussion of individual structures, architectural detailing, retaining walls, etc. is also largely directly applicable to this 24-unit development alternative.

Figure 17 depicts the reduction in massing that would occur under the SPA relative to the currently approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan as seen from Mt. Israel Road. With implementation of the current alternative, the evident spacing and design/color variation between residential structures would become even more evident. They would appear more similar to the large-lot estate homes located adjacent to these SPA lots along the ridgeline. As depicted in Figures 13, however, a viewer's distance from specific parcels can result in a number of structures being seen at the same time without perceiving intervening space. This results in the structure mass "combining" as the lots seem to merge together. This is an existing visual condition in the area.

Overall, individual architectural features, such as gabled roofs, split level design and varied window treatments, individually chosen landscaping elements and similar heights would result in a level of unity that results in "harmony" with the surroundings; consistent with the San Dieguito Community Plan goal stated in VIA Section 2.3.

Although somewhat hazy, as shown in VIA Figures 18a and 18b, the lines of residential structures on TM 5441 would be visible as they trend along, and slightly down slope from, the ridgeline. To some extent, the residences would draw the eye, as they would be located close to a ridgeline that could be directly in front of the viewer. This visual impact would be somewhat diminished; however, by distance and other visible elements, such as homes down slope and other residences along the ridgeline. It is also clear from the simulation that the lot provides only a portion of a much larger view experienced from this location. From this viewpoint, the full expanse of the panorama provided in Figure 12a is available to the viewer. Equally dominant to the visible (on- and off-Rancho Cielo) developed elements are the undeveloped slopes with native vegetation. Both of these terrestrial elements are additionally visually balanced by the expanse of sky seen from this elevated viewpoint. For viewers sited just a bit further back from the overlook, the reservoir itself also would provide a powerful visual element, due both to the infrequency of large bodies of water in the County, as well as the highly engineered nature of the dam. The incremental change in Project design between the 42-unit and 24-unit residential development scenarios is expected to be visually negligible from this viewpoint when seen without magnification.

As depicted in VIA Figure 19, although potentially centered in the view for travelers along this roadway, the distance to the site renders changes to the view somewhat minimal. The ridgeline development would be seen, but would be substantially visually outweighed by the intervening slopes and immediately adjacent vegetation.

Relative to the currently approved Rancho Cielo Project, the alternative-proposed reduction in units within the parcel from 42 to 17 (25 fewer residences) would result in uses approximately 60 percent less dense than those allowed under the approved Rancho Cielo Project for TM 5441, and approximately 45 percent less dense than development proposed under the SPA addressed in VIA Section 5.0. Restriction of structure height to 35 feet rather than the anticipated 60 feet also would result in rooftops being 40 percent less visible than originally anticipated. Any view of development at TM 5440 would result in less impactful views than those originally planned as part of the existing zoning district, as the commercial development allowed by the existing

zoning would have been more intense than the residential development proposed at TM 5440. The reduction in development intensity combined with the lower structure height result in a less than significant impact.

Based on the above discussion, implementation of the 24-unit alternative would not result in a significant visual impact under Guideline 1 related to contrast with existing visual elements or quality of the area. The SPA is also found consistent with applicable design guidelines. Although the San Dieguito Community Plan contains prohibitions against ridgeline development, it also expressly contains the approved Specific Plan as a specific element; and as discussed throughout this report, is consistent with the development pattern and visual character of this part of the County. As an already approved project, the SPA is not evaluated in a vacuum as a new proposal, but is evaluated relative to the approved Rancho Cielo development. As noted above, the current amendment reduces footprint, number of dwellings, and heights of dwellings proposed for TM 5441, and is therefore identified as consistent.

Visual effects described above also occur, but to a lesser level, for more westerly viewers. These viewers would see more of TM 5440 than 5441. Under the 24-unit development scenario, separate residences would visually read as built features, but they may visually meld into one larger structure given landscaping and viewer distance (as illustrated in VIA Figures 13, which show existing separated structures on large lots appearing to be immediately adjacent to one another when viewed from a distance). Other Rancho Cielo (and off-site) structures also would be part of the view, detracting from a focus on the two parcels. Regardless, the view would be consistent with, and less impactful than, the one originally approved, and may also be visually preferable to some viewers than the 42-unit development scenario.

Guideline 2: Result in the Removal of/or Change to Valued Visual Elements

As noted in VIA Section 5.5.2, no designated landmarks (e.g., landmark trees) or visible rock outcrops or historic resources (structures or landscaping) are present on the two parcels. They do not form part of the seen environment, and no impact is identified.

As discussed in the analysis for Guideline 1, above, the ridgeline can be considered a valued visual element. It is a substantial topographic feature that is both close enough to be visible and far enough away to provide the horizon line. Structures built on these pads would be skylined and would change the current more natural aspect of the ridgeline. Also as discussed above, hilltop development is wholly consistent with the entire ongoing Rancho Cielo Specific Plan and the character of this area. The review of this type of construction and its visual effects was included within the previous Rancho Cielo approvals. The 42-unit development proposes visually similar, but less intense, uses than have already been approved, through the existing zoning districts. These uses would be further minimized in intensity under the 24-unit development scenario. Landscaping, assumed as part of design and shown in Figures 1 and 2 of this addendum, would be included to soften structural lines. As a result, the less than significant ridgeline effects associated with the 42-unit development would be further reduced under the 24-unit scenario.

Guideline 3: Substantially Obstruct, Interrupt, or Detract From a Valued Focal and/or Panoramic Vista

The analysis for this guideline matches that provided in VIA Section 5.5.3. The Project parcels are not visible from scenic roadways, and visibility to the site from the Coast to Crest Trail could occur from one limited location that is over 2.5 miles distant. No impact is identified.

The SPA development would be visible from public roads, and trails within Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve. No substantial obstruction or interruption of views would occur, however, as discussed in VIA Section 5.5.3. To an incremental extent, the less than substantial obstruction could be further minimized with the 24-unit development.

As discussed, many views towards the SPA area are eliminated due to existing road orientation or vegetation that screens views. Although potential public views are likely to incorporate all or a portion of the Project parcels due to the panoramic nature of area views, Project parcels would only form one element within a larger and expansive view, incorporating other hills, structures, roads, etc. Although it is expected that some viewers will find that the SPA would detract from a valued focal point or panoramic vista, the scope of the views result in the effect being less than *substantial*, with associated impacts being less than significant under Guideline 3. No noticeable change would result to this conclusion based on implementation of the 24-unit development scenario.

RANCHO CIELO INTERIOR VIEWS

Similar to the interior site simulations prepared for the 42-unit development on TMs 5441 and 5440, the Applicant has also prepared some architectural renderings of the lesser density 24-unit development that are provided here for the readers' information and interest. VIA Figure 20 provides an orientation graphic showing the locations from which the base photographs were taken. VIA Figures 21 through 26 depict views within Rancho Cielo, from west to east. Addendum Figures 5, 6 and 7, Alternative On-Site Key View Renderings, match the vantage point of these renderings, and can be compared with VIA Figures 22, 25, and 26 for differences between the two development densities.

Comparison of VIA Figure 29 with Figure 5 of this addendum shows that the larger pads would support larger homes, consistent with abutting development. The reconfiguration of the pads results in the homes being closer to the viewer. None of the larger pads require the reduction to a single level that is proposed for the 42-unit development. As a result, although both scenarios would comply with the overall Rancho Cielo Design Guidelines, the architect's rendering projects some taller homes than would occur with the 31 residential units on these pads (that design scenario would restrict some of the homes to one story in height). In addition, landscaping designed, installed and maintained by individual homeowners (although in compliance with the Design Guidelines) could be less dense and more varied than would be implemented by a homeowners association for planting within common areas. As noted on page viii of the 2001 Design Guidelines supplement, Cielo homes "will set contemporary architecture

within the tradition of Southern California eclecticism, [and] distinctly juxtapose ‘lush’ gardens against dramatic, natural land form and native plant life.”

Comparison of VIA Figure 30 with Figure 6 of this addendum shows that from this vantage point on Via Rancho Cielo, differences between the 17-unit and 31-unit developments on TM 5441 would be visible. Although both development scenarios would be visually consistent with perceived massing for existing homes on Lots 30, 69 and 71, more open space between the homes would be visible and individual design details chosen by the individual homeowners would be apparent.

Comparison of VIA Figure 31 with Figure 7 of this addendum shows that the sense of individuality would be highlighted for viewers on Via Rancho Cielo. From this vantage point, separation between structures would be clearly apparent, which was not the case (ref. VIA Figure 26) for the 42-unit development scenario. Individual architectural styling and landscaping chosen by the homeowners would clearly differentiate the individually owned lots, consistent with surrounding development.

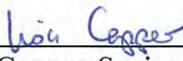
CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

As discussed in VIA Section 5.6, the assessment of cumulative effects reaches beyond Project-specific impacts to address incremental changes that may contribute to significant adverse changes in a regional setting or character, even if those changes are not identified as significant adverse impacts on a project level. As discussed in detail throughout the VIA and this addendum, the visual effect of the proposed implementation of TMs 5441 and 5440 would be focused in location and most visible to close-in viewers. The 42-unit development was not identified as resulting in a substantial contribution to an existing cumulative change. The 24-unit development would result in the same less than substantial contribution. Although the 24-unit development could make an even smaller incremental contribution to the cumulative condition than the 42-unit development, the visible level of change is expected to be negligible.

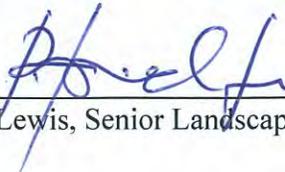
VISUAL MITIGATION AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Several design features such as landscaping, building setbacks, and architectural details would help to reduce the contrast between the Proposed Project and the surrounding area. These elements largely are part of the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. As noted in the April 2013 VIA, the reduction in residential units on TM 5441 under the 31- or 29-unit development scenarios, combined with reduction in structure height to 35 feet and elimination of approximately 30 percent of two-story dwellings, would result in diminution of visual effects over those anticipated as part of the currently approved Specific Plan. Similarly, the further reduction in residential units on this parcel under the 17-unit development scenario, combined with reduction in structure height to 35 feet, would result in addition consistency of this alternative with existing nearby development in Rancho Cielo over those anticipated as part of the currently approved Specific Plan.

As noted at the beginning of this addendum, this analysis presents discussion of an additional development design scenario and augments the April 2013 VIA. If you have any additional questions about report methodology or findings, please contact us.



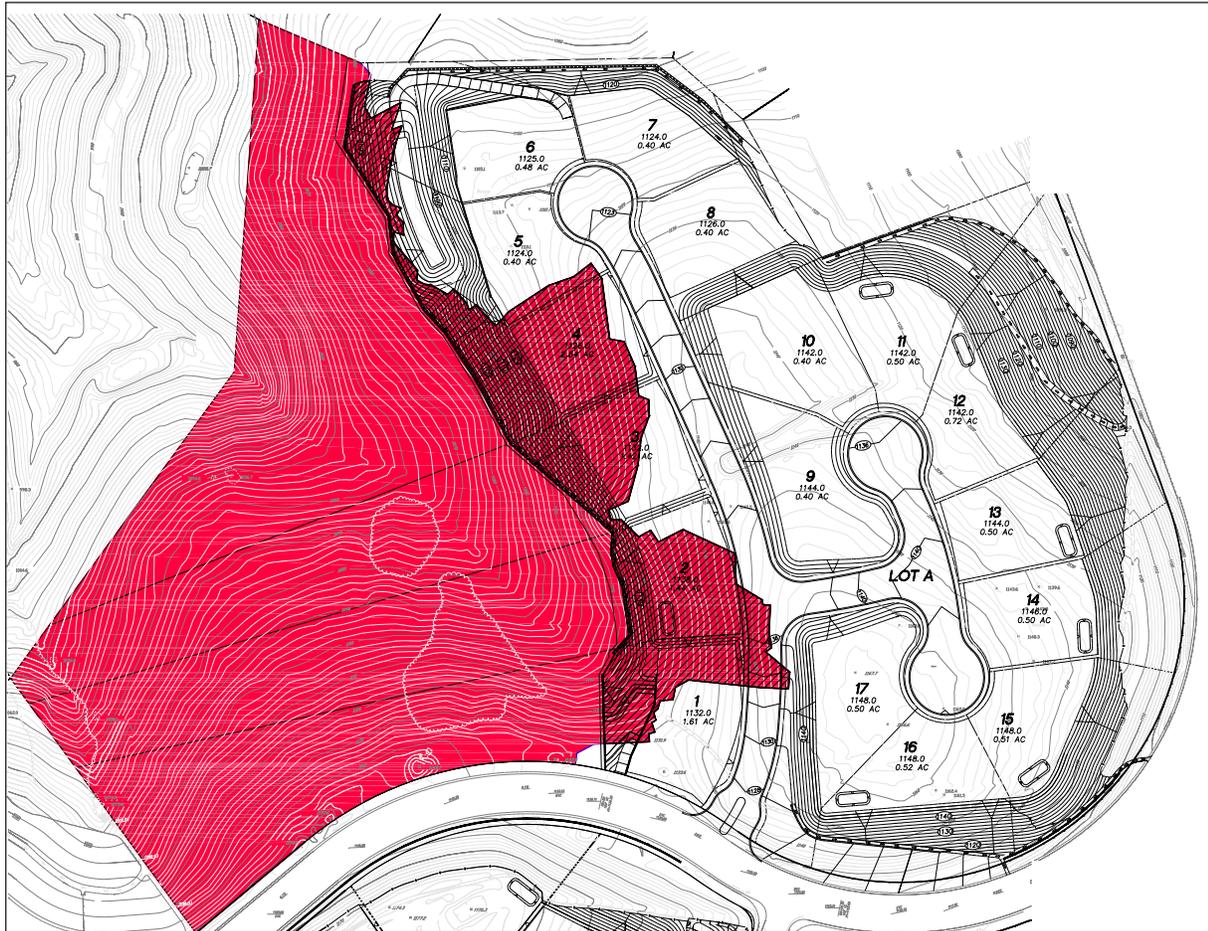
Lisa Capper, Senior Project Manager



Brad Lewis, Senior Landscape Architect

Attachments:

- Figure 1: TM 5441 Alternative 17-Unit Proposed Lots and Landscaping
- Figure 2: TM 5440 Alternative 7-Unit Proposed Lots and Landscaping
- Figure 3: TM 5441 Alternative 17-Unit Steep Slopes Analysis
- Figure 4: TM 5440 Alternative 7-Unit Steep Slopes Analysis
- Figure 5: Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 1
- Figure 6: Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 2
- Figure 7: Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 3



LEGEND



RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS HAVING A SLOPE WITH A NATURAL GRADIENT OF 25% OR GREATER AND A MINIMUM RISE OF 50 FEET.



PROPOSED ENCROACHMENT INTO RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS

Source: Fuscoe Engineering 2013

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TM 5441 Alternative 17-Unit Steep Slopes Analysis

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ADDENDUM



LEGEND



RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS HAVING A SLOPE WITH A NATURAL GRADIENT OF 25% OR GREATER AND A MINIMUM RISE OF 50 FEET.



PROPOSED ENCROACHMENT INTO RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS

Source: Fuscoe Engineering 2013

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TM 5440 Alternative 7-Unit Steep Slopes Analysis

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ADDENDUM



Existing Conditions

PROPOSED PROJECT



Proposed Configuration



EXISTING HOME LOT 21

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Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 1

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ADDENDUM



Existing Conditions

EXISTING HOMES
LOTS 30, 69, & 71

PROPOSED PROJECT
17 PRIVATE HOMES
ON PARCEL H



Proposed Configuration

VIA RANCHO CIELO

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Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 2

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ADDENDUM



Existing Conditions



PROPOSED PROJECT AT PARCEL H

Proposed Configuration

VIA RANCHO CIELO

EXISTING SLOPE LOT
94

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Alternative On-Site Key View Rendering 3

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ADDENDUM

RANCHO CIELO PROJECT

FOCUSED VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

3813-05-004 (SPA), 3100-5440 (TM), 3600-05-010 (R),
3500-05-043 (STP), 3100-5441 (TM), 3600-05-011 (R),
3500-05-044 (STP), 3910-86-06-026B (ER)

April 2013

Prepared for:

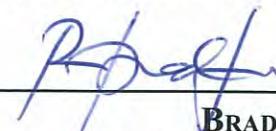
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**Focused
Visual Impact Analysis
Rancho Cielo Project**

3813-05-004 (SPA), 3100-5440 (TM), 3600-05-010 (R), 3500-05-043 (STP),
3100-5441 (TM), 3600-05-011 (R), 3500-05-044 (STP), 3910-86-06-026B (ER)

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April 2013

**FOCUSED
RANCHO CIELO PROJECT
VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Board	San Diego County Board of Supervisors
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
DU	Dwelling unit(s)
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
PDS	San Diego County Department of Planning and Development Services
Project	Approved Rancho Cielo project, currently in development
Proposed Project	The SPA, the current action
Reserve	Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve
RPL	Replacement Map
RPO	San Diego County Resource Protection Ordinance
SP	Specific Plan, generally the approved Rancho Cielo project
SPA	Specific Plan Amendment, the current action
TM	Tentative Map
VIA	Visual Impact Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This focused Visual Impact Analysis (VIA) has been prepared to provide visual review of proposed changes based on Amendment 7 to the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, consistent with the 2007 County of San Diego Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds. It has been prepared by two technical specialists listed on the County-accepted list of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) consultants for Visual Analysis; one of whom is a California registered landscape architect and one of whom is also on the County-accepted list for EIR Preparer.

PROJECT HISTORY

The Rancho Cielo Specific Plan was first adopted by the Board on December 9, 1981 (24) and has been subject to six Specific Plan Amendments (SPAs). The 1981-certified EIR (ER 80-08-120) and addenda on the Project are available in County files.

Currently, the approved Specific Plan allows for the development of commercial and civic uses on 28 acres of Neighborhood Commercial and 5 acres of Village Center, as well as 719 dwelling units comprised of 639 Country Estates, 38 Planned Development and 42 Village Estates units, with an overall density maximum of 0.27 du/ac.

Since 1984, the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan has allowed for an anticipated 42 Village Estate units on one parcel north of Via Ambiente (TM 5441). Current zoning allows those units to be developed upon approval of a Major Use Permit pursuant to the “P” Special Area Regulation for a Planned Development at a height of 60 feet, and at a maximum coverage of 60 percent. A parcel south of Via Ambiente, west of El Brazo (TM 5440), is designated Village Commercial in the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The current zone allows the site to be developed with commercial and residential structures (for Dwellings as Secondary Uses to commercial uses [Zoning Ordinance Section 2980]) reaching 35 feet in height, provides for a density of 29 dwelling units per acre, as well as a heliport, and does not include any provisions that would restrict the maximum site coverage or require a subsequent discretionary action subject to review by the Department of Planning & Development Services (PDS), San Dieguito Community Planning Group, and general public.

Location of these uses on the Project parcels was specifically mandated during the Board of Supervisors (Board) consideration of the Project in 1984. In certifying the 1984 Supplemental EIR, the Board found that Project implementation would modify the aesthetic environment of surrounding communities (including Del Dios, Mt. Israel, Elfin Forest, and Rancho Santa Fe), and balanced the aesthetic issue of visible skylined development (the outline of buildings against a backdrop of the sky) with retention of 1,635 acres of native slopes (County 1984: discussion on p. 39.) Spreading the development density out among the specific plan acres with a larger overall development footprint was found to create an unacceptable worse aesthetic impact than clustering the development on this particular ridgeline. Therefore, the County required preservation of the 1,710 acres of open space in exchange for permission to develop hundreds of residential units, including the 42 units identified for Parcel H (TM 5441) (County 1984: discussion on p. 7). The Board also found that redesign by moving the Village Center to the southwest parcel (to its current location) would have “a positive effect on aesthetic impacts”

(County 1984:40), as that parcel is less visible from the Mt. Israel community. Additionally, it was specifically found that

“[a]esthetic impacts created by the Proposed Project revisions are considered mitigated by the Project design. The dedication of 1,710 acres of open space preservation of steep slopes, major drainages, woodland areas, revegetation and landscaping of disturbed areas and clustering of units are aspects of the Project which serve to mitigate aesthetic impacts”(County 1984:4).

PROPOSED ACTION

This focused VIA addresses two changes to the approved Specific Plan area proposed as part of the current SPA.

The SPA proposes the subdivision (TM 5441RPL³) of one parcel north of Via Ambiente into 31 detached single-family, Village Estate residential units. This would change the number of previously approved units on this parcel from 42 to 31 residential units, thereby lowering the allowed density on the parcel. The associated rezone also would lower the previously approved structure height to a maximum of 35 feet (a reduction in allowable height of over 40 percent), establish variable setbacks, and apply a “D” Special Area Regulation for Design Review, which requires approval of a Site Plan (provided in the Project submittal).

The SPA also proposes subdivision (TM 5440RPL³) of the commercial parcel south of Via Ambiente into 11 detached single-family, Village Estate residential units. The SPA would change the designation of the site from Village Center to Village Estates and transfer 11 units from the northerly Village Estates parcel to the southern parcel. The rezone would change the use regulations on this parcel from C36 (General Commercial) to RV (Variable Family Residential) and remove the density allowance of 29 du/ac; thereby, permitting residential development at an overall lower density consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The rezone would retain applicable development regulations allowing structures to a maximum height of 35 feet and three stories with variable setbacks, and would add a maximum coverage of 60 percent and a “D” Special Area Regulation for Design Review, which requires a Site Plan (provided in the Project submittal) subject to review by PDS, San Dieguito Community Planning Group, and general public.

In sum, the revisions to planned uses on these two parcels would result in the maximum number of detached, single-family homes (42) on the two parcels, as was originally approved for the northern parcel alone. On the southern parcel, approved commercial and residential uses (for Dwellings as to commercial uses [Zoning Ordinance Section 2980]) would be developed as only residential, consistent with the approved 35-foot structure height. The homes would range in size from 2,300 to 3,800 square feet and have architectural styles and colors consistent with the Rancho Cielo community, in which they are located. Substantial retaining walls to minimize grading into slope area and native habitat would support pad creation on the northern parcel. Both parcels would be landscaped in a manner consistent with approved landscaping for the previously approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan.

The current amendment has been reviewed for conformance with the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan and the “D” Special Area Designator, through the Tentative Maps and Site Plan review process. The current amendment would preserve the existing Specific Plan density maximum of 0.27 du/ac and maximum unit count of 719.

One alternative development scenario is evaluated. This alternative would implement most of the Rancho Cielo elements noted above, but would reduce total residential units on the two parcels from 42 to 39 (the 39-Unit Development Scenario). This alternative would retain all other elements of the SPA discussed in the body of this report (housing style, housing type, etc.). The reduction in residential units on the smaller pads would allow for deletion of a large retaining wall at the northern extent of TM 5441 lot development.

CONFORMITY FINDINGS

Pursuant to guidance in the 2007 County of San Diego Visual Resources Report Format and Content Requirements, public views form the primary focus of this analysis.¹ Although visibility of the SPA area to viewers from both private and public viewpoints are discussed throughout the report, because the SPA would result in less dense development than anticipated under the approved Specific Plan (and would therefore be visually less intrusive), impact assessments focus on public viewers. The overall less impactful nature of the proposed SPA is summarized below.

As discussed in “Project History,” these two parcels and their uses were identified during approval of the 1984 Supplemental EIR for Rancho Cielo as mitigation for aesthetic impacts that would otherwise have occurred with greater incursions into steep slopes, major drainages and wooded areas located throughout the approved Project. Hilltop development and visibility of this clustered development was therefore assumed as part of the approved Project design. This included anticipated skylining, as lot configuration was intentionally clustered along ridgelines.

With regard to current visible changes to the approved Rancho Cielo development plan, implementation of the Proposed SPA on TM 5440 would retain building heights at a maximum height of 35 feet, would eliminate an approved helipad and commercial uses, and implement residential uses only (consisting of 10 to 11 units, depending on development scenario). Implementation of the proposed SPA on TM 5441 would reduce the number of planned units for this lot from 42 to 31, and lower potential building heights from 60 feet to a uniform 35 feet. An alternative development scenario would reduce residential units on TM 5441 to 29.

Pursuant to the County Title 8, Zoning and Land Use Regulations, Chapter 6 Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO), natural slopes in the County that exceed 25 percent slope and have a gradient of more than 50 feet are protected from excessive encroachment. Steep slope encroachment for both parcels is within allowable limits; defined in Section 86.604(e)(2) as

¹ Under the County Visual Resources Report Format and Content Guidelines, private views are considered when an action would result in a “substantially different” visual result than would occur without the action (County 2007:9). In this case, implementation of the proposed amendment would reduce the visual magnitude of allowable uses, but would not result in something “substantially different.”

development encroaching into less than 10 percent of the steep slopes on each parcel. SPA implementation would result in grading patterns, retaining walls, architectural features and landscaping generally consistent with other portions of the Rancho Cielo Project development and which have been implemented as part of the ongoing phased development.

Review of visible site changes from five representative viewpoints within a three-mile radius indicates that SPA elements would range from notable to barely visible. Rancho Cielo development would be both incrementally less visible and less dense from off-site locales than it would be if the currently allowed Specific Plan were built. This minimization of potential effects anticipated under the previously approved Specific Plan results in findings of less than significant impacts under CEQA relative to the SPA, regardless of development scenario. These findings are supported by three photosimulations prepared in accordance with the County Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds, and provided in Section 5.5 of this VIA.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Purpose

The following Visual Impact Analysis was prepared for the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Amendment 7 (SPA; Proposed Project). The purpose of this study is to:

1. assess the visual impacts of the Proposed Project,
2. determine consistency with visual effects that would occur relative to the previously approved Project, draw conclusions regarding significance of the impacts under CEQA, and
3. propose measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse visual impacts associated with the construction of Proposed Project on the surrounding visual environment, as appropriate.

This analysis has been prepared per the County of San Diego (County) 2007 Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds using the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines of significance.

1.2 Key Issues

This report evaluates potential impacts to the visual character and quality of the Rancho Cielo site and surrounding area as viewed from public view points within the Project viewshed. It focuses on variation in visual effects of the Rancho Cielo development as proposed under the SPA versus the previously approved Project.

1.3 Principal Viewpoints to be Covered

This report describes the two parcels and evaluates principal views of the Proposed Project from public roads, recreational trails and designated scenic corridors in the Project vicinity.

The Project parcels are located approximately two miles north of the Rancho Cielo Project entrance, at the Del Dios Highway intersection with Calle Ambiente (Figure 1, Regional Location Map, and Figure 2, Project Location Map). Figure 3, Viewshed Map, depicts surrounding land uses on an aerial photographic base, and identifies locations of the photographs and viewpoints discussed below.

Figures 4 through 6, Existing Conditions, provide orientation information and existing visual character for the parcels. Figure 4, Photograph A, depicts the parcel addressed in TM 5440 from the viewer's location on TM 5441. Photograph B is the high point of TM 5441. Figure 5, Photograph C, was taken from parcel TM 5440 looking westerly and depicts typical hilltop structure development within the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. Photograph D was taken from Rancho Cielo Lot 95 and looks northeasterly down slope to TM 5440 and shows planned development at higher elevations than the current SPA.

Figure 6 includes a series of photographs taken at the end of the County-maintained portion of Mt. Israel Road and an orientation map. Taken from this point and looking toward the Project, on photograph illustrates the general vegetative cover in this area that shields views to the Project from many portions of this road. This is also the end of potential public views toward the Project from this vantage point. Although the road continues, it is private, and signs are posted stating that no public access is available to pedestrian/equestrian/bicycle trails in the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve (Reserve; see additional discussion in Figure 9, below) from this locale.

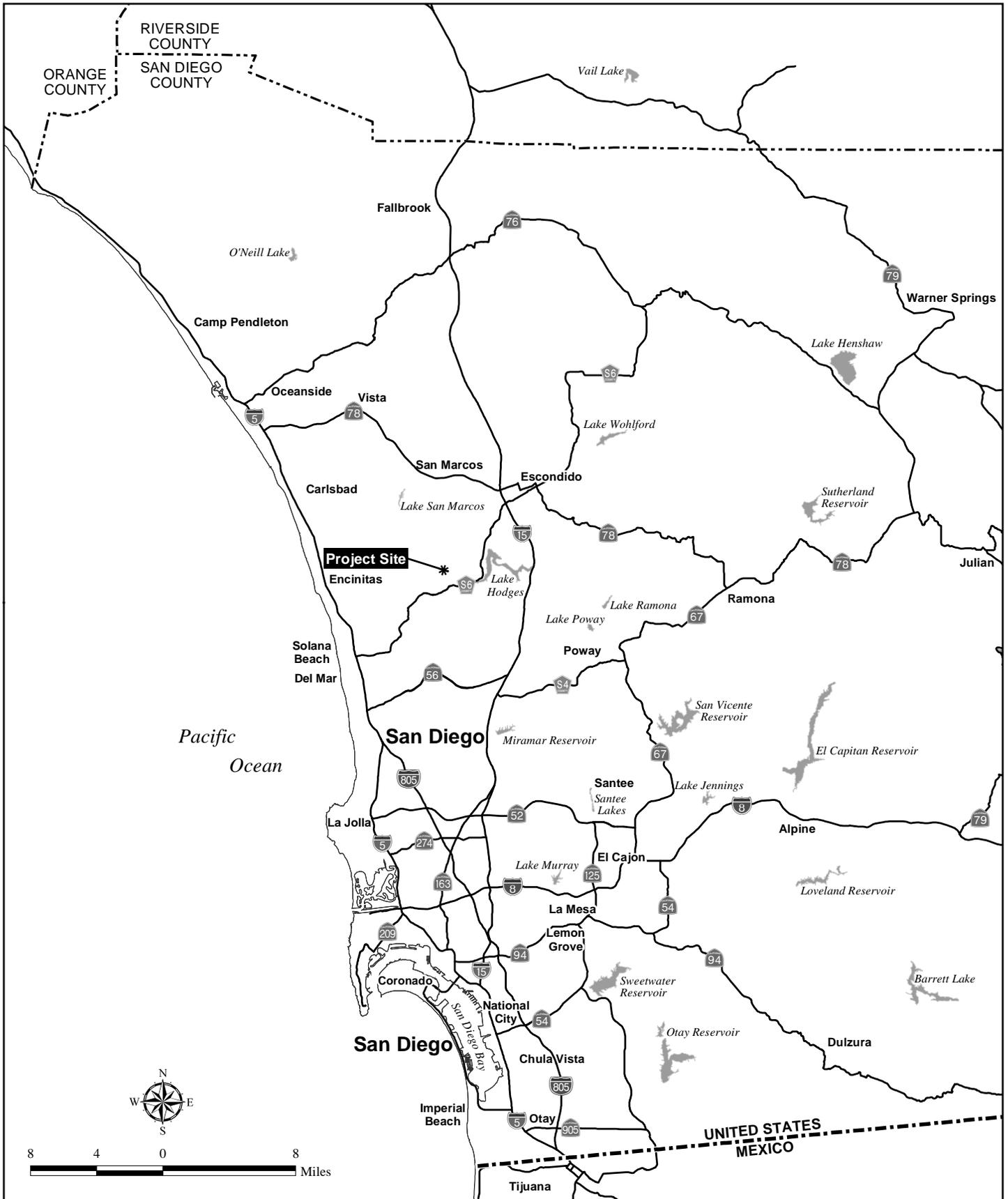
Figures 7 through 9, Key Views, depict visibility within the viewshed described in Section 3.2 below. Consistent with County Guidelines for Photo-simulations provided in the Report Format and Content Requirements, these photographs were taken using a 50 millimeter lens and without “zoom” as it most closely represents the 60 degree “cone of vision” perceived by the human eye.

Figure 7, Key View 1, is a view from Mt. Israel Road looking west toward parcel TM 5440, and was sited approximately 0.5 mile from the parcel. This depicts the closest public view to the parcel. Key View 2 is a view from the vicinity of the intersection of Camino del Sur and Casey Glen south of Crosby National Golf Club. The site is in the distance (approximately three miles away), beyond open space and the San Dieguito River Valley. Intervening uses with visibility to the SPA parcels are private and gated.

Figure 8, Key View 3, was taken from 7100 Artesian Road, looking northeast to the SPA area, approximately three miles from the Project. Residential lots are in the foreground, and the view looks across to the Rancho Cielo hilltops. Key View 4 was taken from Elfin Forest Road looking southeast toward the Project. Both parcels are visible from this location, which is approximately 1.75 miles distant.

Figure 9, Key View 5a and 5b, were taken from the Ray Brooks Overlook in the Reserve. Among other views, this vantage point provides views down the Rancho Cielo Trail toward the Project parcels. It is acknowledged that the base photographs lack some clarity. The area was visited multiple times during preparation of this report. Photographs were taken two months apart (January and March) in an effort to obtain a clearer base photograph. Unfortunately, the orientation of the Reserve toward the proposed Project parcels, combined with intermittent haze in this portion of the County, and the time required to hike in to the viewpoint following opening of the Reserve, result in either shadow or glare based on the sun’s location in the southern hemisphere during the winter months. Both photographs are included in this report. The January photograph (Figure 9, Key View 5a) was taken in accordance with County requirements for simulations as noted above—it shows the area normally seen by the human eye at the correct level of magnification. In deference to interest in visual effect from this viewpoint, Key View 5b is zoomed in to get the reviewer visually “closer” to the site. Although lacking absolute clarity, these photographs are the best of the available photographs. They are adequate to portray the open nature of the views seen from the Reserve, the visibility of surrounding hilltops to the viewer, and the limited extent of development on hillsides in the immediate vicinity.

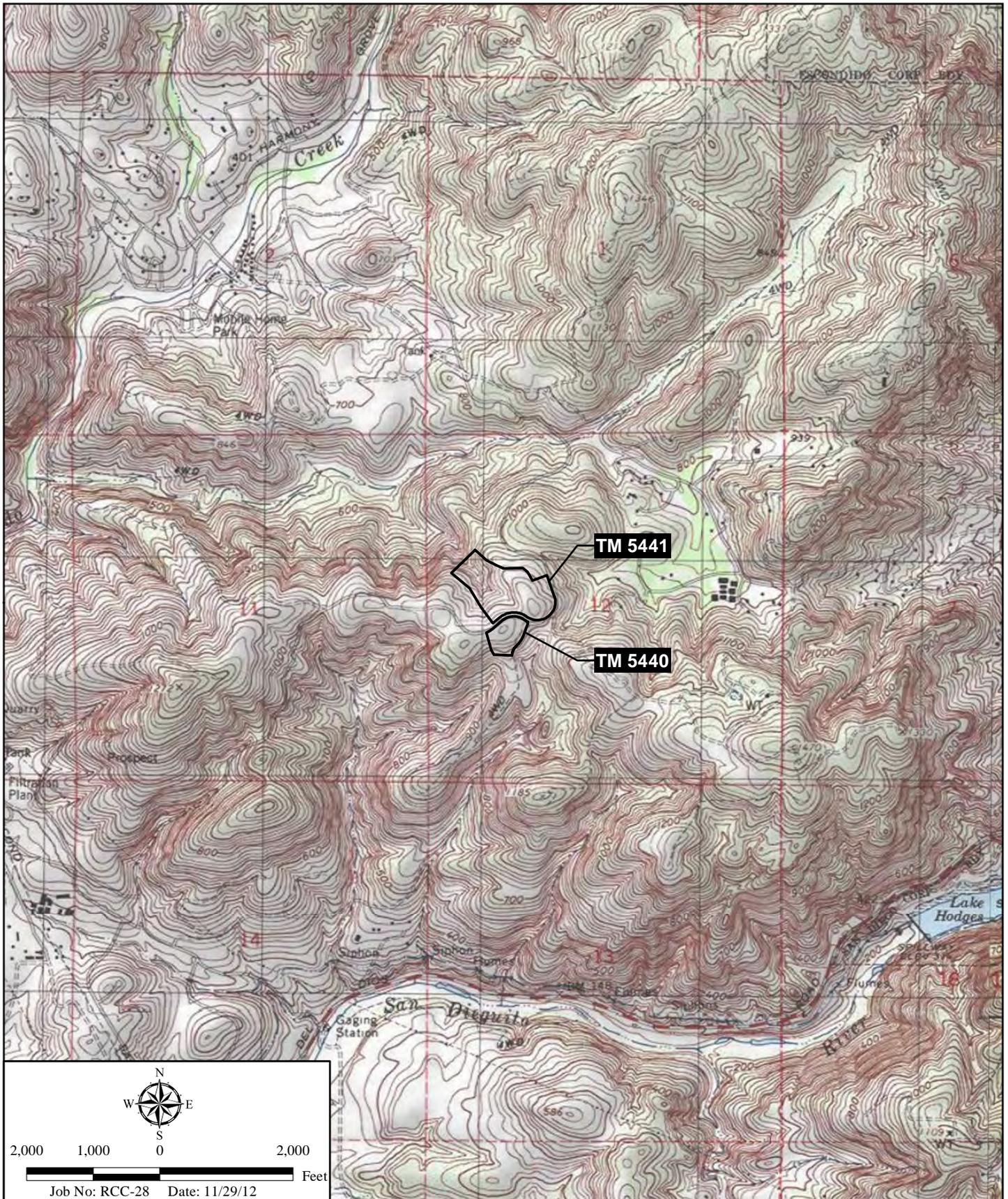
Views also may be obtained from private residences, private roads, and a private golf course. Under the County Visual Resources Report Format and Content Guidelines, private views are considered when an action would result in a “substantially different” visual result than would



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Regional Location Map

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

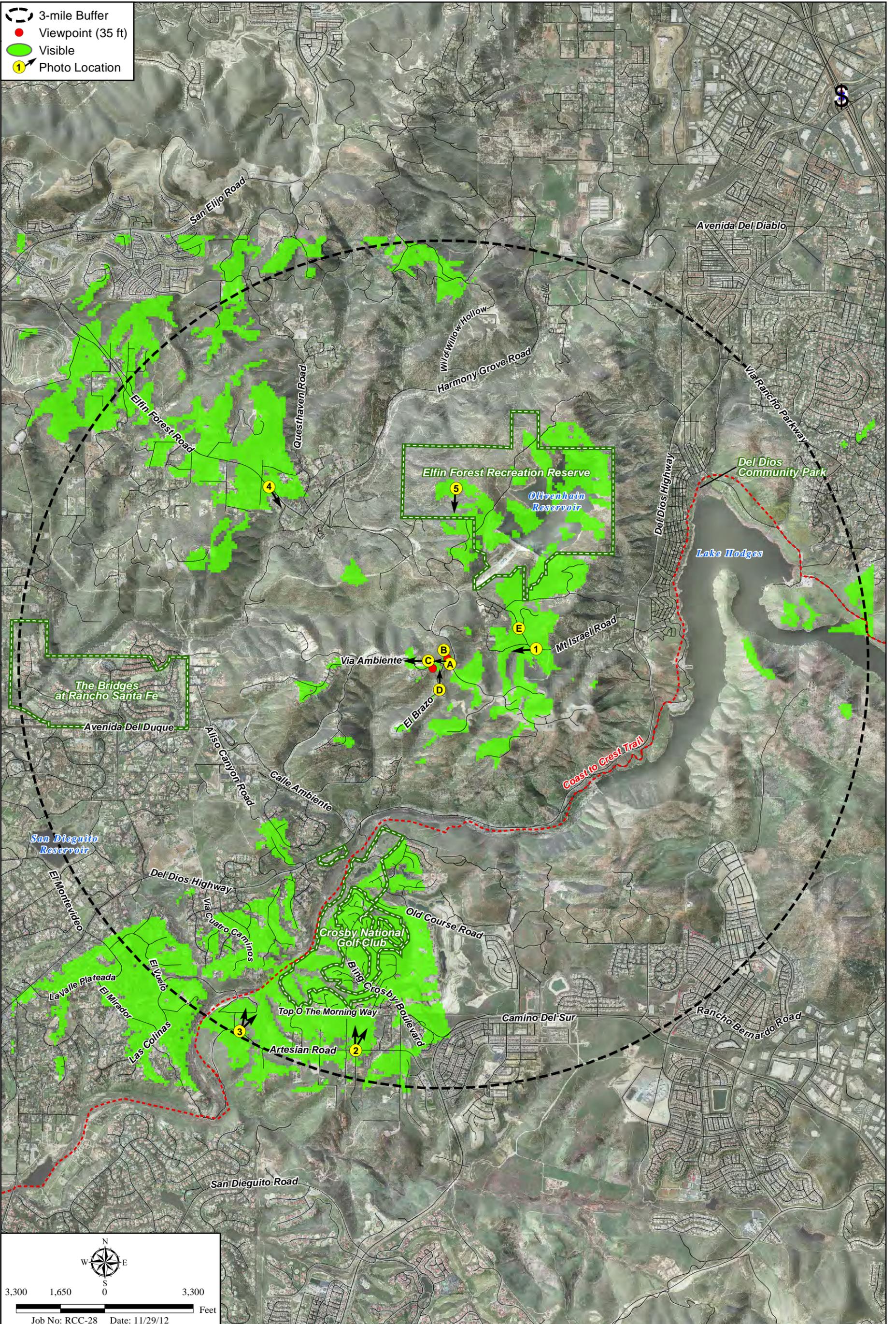


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Project Location Map

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

-  3-mile Buffer
-  Viewpoint (35 ft)
-  Visible
-  Photo Location



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Viewshed Map

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Photograph A - Looking west from parcel TM 5441 towards TM 5440



Photograph B - High point of TM 5441

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Existing Conditions

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Photograph C - View of ridgetop development from TM 5440



Parcel TM 5441

Parcel TM 5440

Photograph D - View from building pad 95 looking northerly

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Existing Conditions

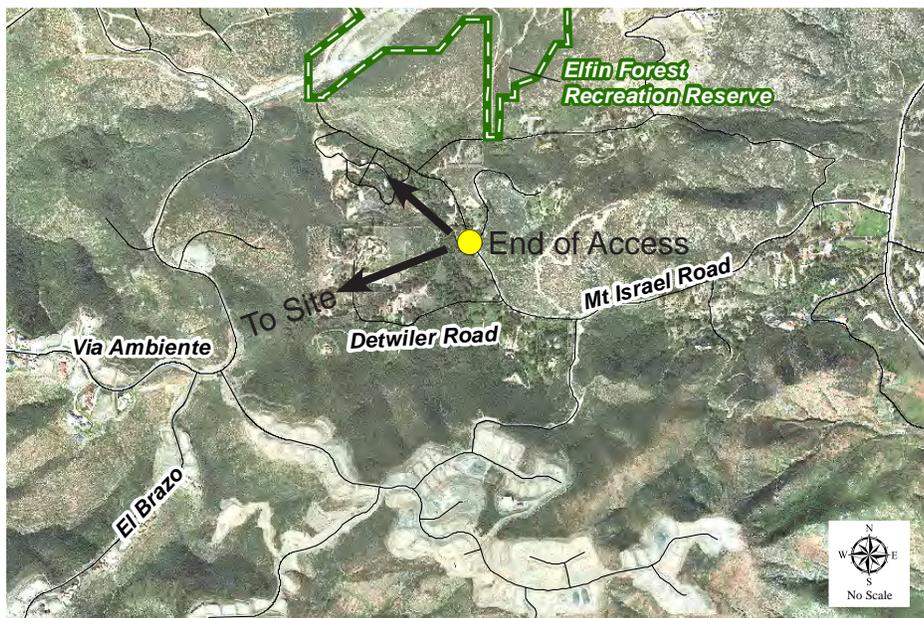
RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



End of County-maintained portion of Mt. Israel Road: no public access



View toward project from end of County-maintained portion of Mt. Israel Road

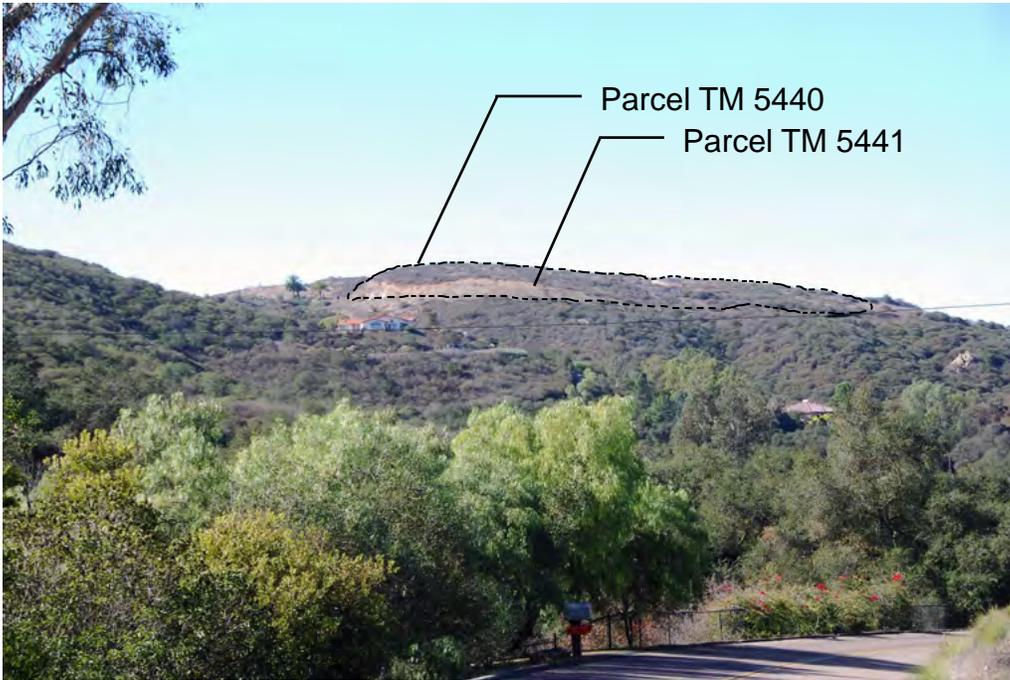


Location of photographs, Mt. Israel Road

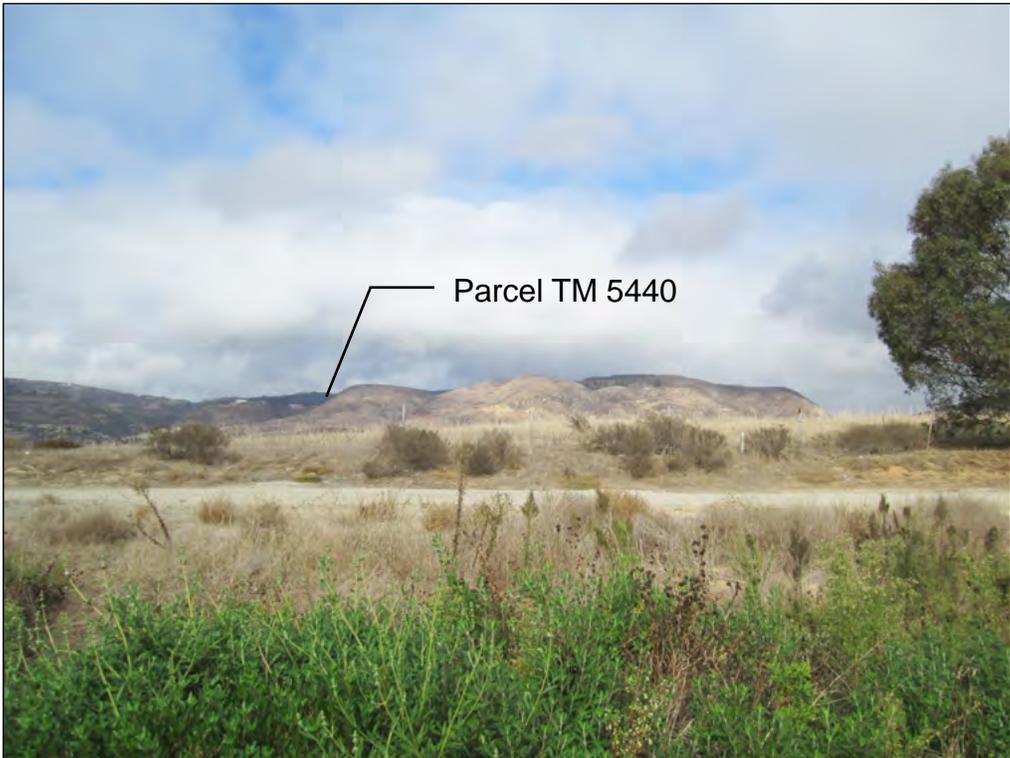
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Existing Conditions

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Key View 1 - Mt. Israel Road



Key View 2 - Camino Del Sur

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Key Views

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Key View 3 - Artesian Road

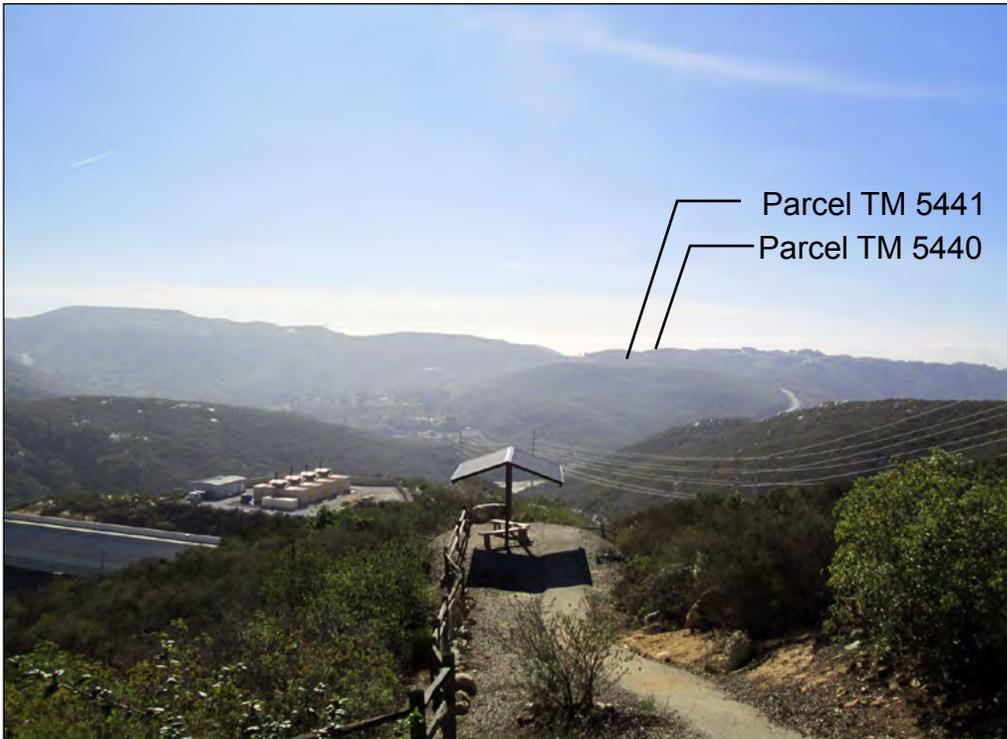


Key View 4 - Elfin Forest Road

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Key Views

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Key View 5a - Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, vicinity of Ray Brooks Overlook



Key View 5b - Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, vicinity of Ray Brooks Overlook

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Key Views

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

occur without the action (County 2007:9). In this case, implementation of the proposed amendment would reduce the visual magnitude of the Specific Plan's anticipated uses, but would not result in development that is "substantially different." These private viewpoints are considered, but they do not provide a focus of this analysis, as the proposed SPA does not propose increasing density, height or a change in use that could change neighborhood perception (e.g., changing from a residential zone to an industrial zone) over uses already approved.

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2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Land Use Designations and Zoning

The Rancho Cielo Specific Plan was first adopted by the Board on December 9, 1981 (24) and has been subject to six Specific Plan Amendments. The 1981-certified EIR (ER 80-08-120) and addenda are available in County files.

Currently, the Specific Plan allows for the development of commercial and civic uses on 28 acres of Neighborhood Commercial and 5 acres of Village Center, as well as 719 dwelling units comprised of 639 Country Estates, 38 Planned Development and 42 Village Estates units, with an overall density maximum of 0.27 du/ac.

The overall layout of the approved Rancho Cielo Project is shown on Figure 10, Rancho Cielo Approved Specific Plan Lots.

Location of these uses on the two parcels was specifically mandated during Board of Supervisors (Board) consideration of the Project in 1984. In certifying the 1984 Supplemental EIR, the Board found that Project implementation would modify the aesthetic environment of surrounding communities (including Del Dios, Mt. Israel, Elfin Forest, and Rancho Santa Fe), and balanced the aesthetic issue of visible skylined² development with retention of 1,635 acres of native slopes (County 1984: 39, with shifting of the Village Center and the Village Estate lots). Spreading the allowable development density out among the Specific Plan acres was found to result in an unacceptable level of impact to slopes with native vegetation. Therefore, the County required preservation of 1,710 acres of open space as part of the Specific Plan approval.

That approval included 42 units identified for Parcel H (TM 5441) (County 1984: 7, with a “P” Designator). The Board also found that redesign of the area to move the Village Center to the southwest parcel (current location) would make it less visible from the Mt. Israel community, and would have “a positive effect on aesthetic impacts” (County 1984:40). Additionally, it was specifically found that:

[a]esthetic impacts created by the Proposed Project revisions are considered mitigated by the Project design. The dedication of 1,710 acres of open space preservation of steep slopes, major drainages, woodland areas, revegetation and landscaping of disturbed areas and clustering of units are aspects of the Project which serve to mitigate aesthetic impacts(County 1984:4).

As a result, since 1984, the approved Specific Plan has allowed for an anticipated 42 Village Estate units on one parcel north of Via Ambiente (TM 5441). Current zoning allows those units to be developed upon approval of a Major Use Permit pursuant to the “P” Special Area Regulation for a Planned Development at a maximum height of 60 feet, and at a maximum coverage of 60 percent. A parcel south of Via Ambiente, west of El Brazo (TM 5440), is designated Village Commercial in the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The current zone

² A skylined feature is one that is seen against a backdrop of sky and may be natural, as in ridgelines, or man-made, as when development is sited along hilltops or ridgelines.

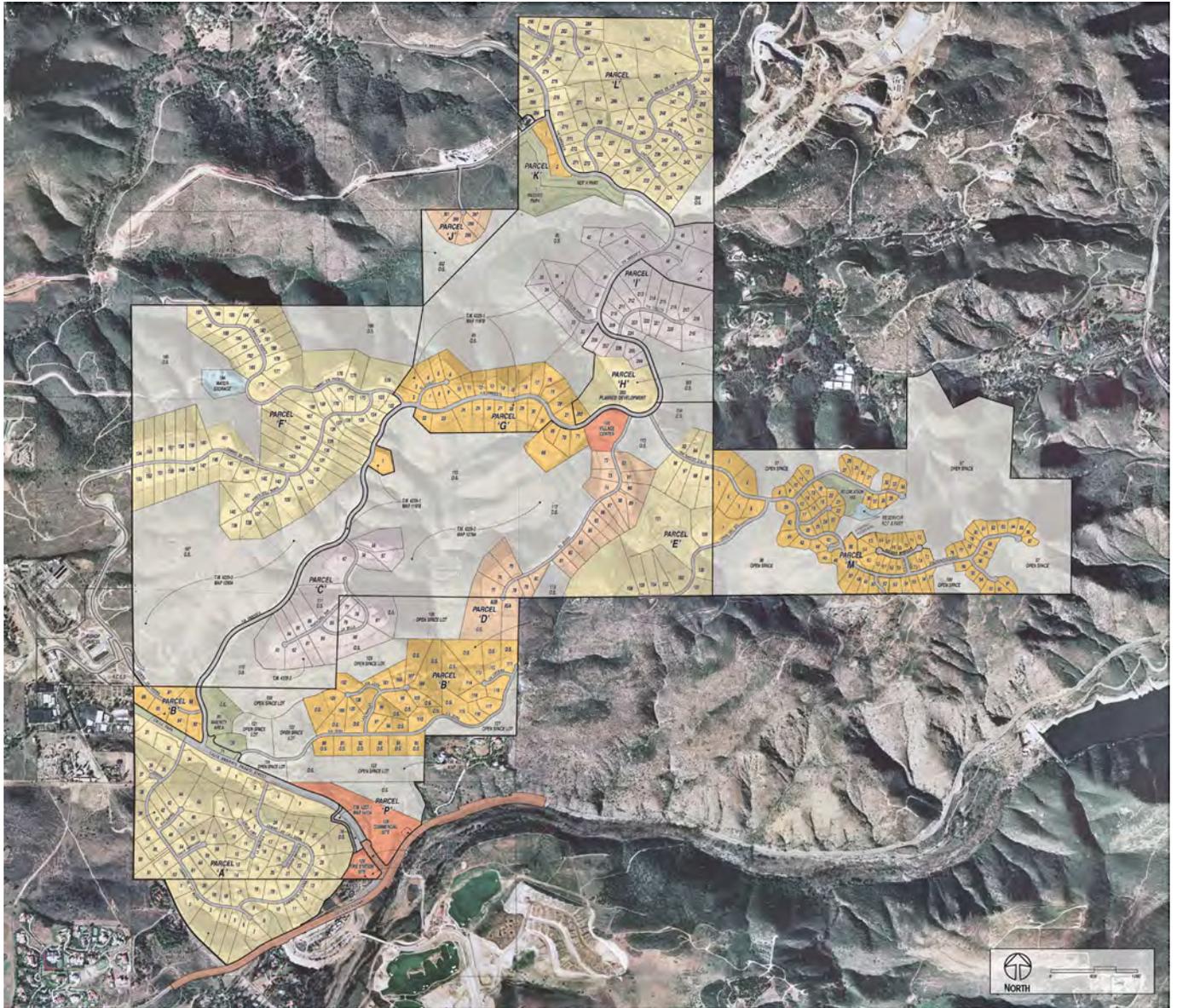
allows the site to be developed with commercial and residential structures (for Dwellings as Secondary Uses to commercial uses [Zoning Ordinance Section 2980]) reaching 35 feet in height, provides for a density of 29 dwelling units per acre, as well as a heliport, and does not include any provisions that would restrict the maximum site coverage or require a subsequent discretionary action subject to review by the Department of Planning & Development Services (PDS), San Dieguito Community Planning Group, and general public. Rancho Cielo and SPA elements applicable to aesthetics review (e.g., grading, site design, architectural features, and landscaping/fire management) are summarized below.

TM 5441 consists of approximately 14.4 acres. As part of Amendment 7, 31 (rather than 42) residential units would be placed in three lines of dwellings, with pads graded at elevations ranging from 1,125 to 1,149 feet AMSL. Structures would step slightly down the slope from the hilltop on the northern side. Since last reviewed, several modifications have been recommended that would affect visible elements. The associated rezone also would lower the previously approved structure height to a maximum of 35 feet (a reduction in allowable height of over 40 percent), and establish variable setbacks. In addition, approximately one-third of the residential units has been replaced with single-story residences; thereby removing approximately 10,000 square feet of building mass.

TM 5440 is located on approximately 5.6 acres. An existing knoll would be cut down to accommodate the structures on a relatively flat pad. The 11 residences would be oriented in a horse-shoe pattern (cul-de-sac) at elevations ranging from 1,166 to 1,171 feet AMSL, or with a variance between pads of approximately 5 feet. The rezone would change the use regulations on this parcel from C36 (General Commercial) to RV (Variable Family Residential) and remove the density allowance of 29 du/ac; thereby, permitting residential development at an overall lower density consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The rezone would retain restriction of structures to a maximum height of 35 feet and would add a maximum coverage of 60 percent.

Architectural detailing would be consistent with Mediterranean style and finishes, including tile roofs, stucco and stone exteriors in earth tones, and use of wrought iron and deck/balcony features. The homes would range in size from 2,300 to 3,800 square feet and have architectural styles and colors consistent with the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, as amended. Second floor setbacks would be incorporated to provide elevation variation. Landscaping would be provided between the structures and Via Ambiente and El Brazo, on slopes, and between dwellings. All landscaping would be consistent with Rancho Cielo design guidelines, which also conform to Fire Marshal requirements, as presented in the plant list contained in the Firewise 2000 Conceptual Fire Protection Study for Rancho Cielo Estates TMs 5440 and 5441 (2011, as amended in 2012). Anticipated lot landscaping for the two TMs is shown on Figures 11a and 11b, Proposed Landscaping.

Lot 5441 would also include a number of retaining walls in order to minimize additional grading into the parcel slopes and native vegetation. A 22- to 28-foot- high retaining wall approximately 380 feet in length would be constructed wrapping around the northern end of the parcel. A 4- to 16-foot-high retaining wall (immediately adjacent to the residential pads) would be constructed on the west side of the lot to support those pads. This wall would be approximately 780 feet



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Rancho Cielo Approved Specific Plan Lots

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

long, or the whole length of the western pad limit. One smaller wall would be located perpendicular to this retaining wall at the southern extent of the Project near the pad for Lot 1. Landscaping would be located between this retaining wall and an additional (downslope) wall to the north and west that would be no taller than 8 feet and approximately 230 feet long. A small 10-foot high wall (90 feet long) would also extend laterally from Via Ambiente to the north on the west side of the lot. On the southeastern edge of pad creation (primarily along Lots 15 and 16), two 8-foot high abutting walls would be built, one at 160 feet and one at 140 feet in length. On the northeast side (at the toe of slope for Lots 11, 12 and 13) a 110-foot long wall would reach a maximum 11 feet in height. Associated with this retaining wall and close to Via Ambiente, a storm water basin would have walls six to eight feet in height.

In sum, the revisions to planned uses on these two parcels would result in the maximum number of detached, single-family homes (42) on the two parcels as was originally approved for the northern parcel alone. On the northern parcel, structure height would be reduced by 25 feet. On the southern parcel, approved commercial and residential uses (for Dwellings as Secondary Uses to commercial uses [Zoning Ordinance Section 2980]) would be developed as residential only. Lot design has clarified the retaining walls used to minimize incursions into parcel slopes and native habitat, as described above. Both parcels would be landscaped consistent with approved landscaping for the existing approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan.

The Project contains a “D” Special Area Designator, requiring design review during review of the parcel Tentative Maps and Site Plan.

2.2 Regulatory Framework

The Rancho Cielo site is within a geographic area addressed by the San Diego County General Plan (2011) and San Dieguito Community Plan (2012), as well as the Zoning Ordinance. Overall design elements of the existing Specific Plan were previously evaluated and approved. The current SPA addresses approximately 20 acres, within the larger 2,846-acre Project (*less than one percent of the previously approved Project acreage*). The regulatory framework relevant to the proposed SPA includes CEQA review (the entirety of this report, with specific visual thresholds addressed in Sections 2 through 5), as well as consistency with the adopted General Plan and San Dieguito Community Plan, San Diego County Zoning Ordinance and Resource Protection Ordinance relative to steep slopes, as addressed below. The SPA is consistent with the approved Specific Plan as amended, Semi Rural 2, Open Space – Conservation, and Public/Semi-Public Facility designations of the General Plan because it proposes residential and open space uses in compliance with the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, which permits an overall density of 0.27 dwelling unit per acre and identified development of these parcels with similar (although more intense) uses. This reduction in intensity of the proposed development provides a primary basis for the analysis in the remaining sections of this VIA.

The SPA is consistent with the San Dieguito Community Plan because it proposes residential and open space uses that conform to the RC Specific Plan use classifications and maximum unit count as outlined in that Community Plan. Visual design policies are additionally addressed in Section 2.3, below.

The proposed SPA is consistent with encroachment into steep slopes, as described herein. Pursuant to the County Title 8, Zoning and Land Use Regulations, Chapter 6 Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO), natural slopes in the County that exceed 25 percent slope and have a gradient of more than 50 feet are protected from excessive encroachment. Steep slopes are shown on Figures 15, TM 5441 Steep Slopes Analysis, and 16, TM 5440 Steep Slopes Analysis in the Section 5.3.1, Construction Period Effects discussion of Grading, below. Specifically, TM 5440 has a gross acreage of approximately 5.6 acres, with approximately 2.2 acres (or 38.6 percent of the lot) in steep slopes. The allowable percent encroachment is 10 percent (or approximately 0.6 acre). The proposed encroachment is approximately 0.2 acre, or 3.6 percent. TM 5441 has a gross acreage of approximately 14.4 acres, with approximately 6.6 acres (or 46.1 percent of the lot) in steep slopes. The allowable percent encroachment is 10 percent (or approximately 1.5 acre). The proposed encroachment is approximately 1.4 acre, or 9.8 percent. Steep slope encroachment for both parcels is within allowable limits defined in RPO Section 86.604(e)(2) as development would encroach into less than 10 percent of the steep slopes on each parcel.

2.3 Design Policies and Guidance

The San Dieguito Community Plan has a number of design policies relative to development in within the community that could have visual effects. The Community Plan asks that during review of proposed development the following criteria are considered:

- Site topography and protection of steep slopes
- View orientation and view protection of adjacent properties
- Natural site amenities such as trees, bluff, rocks and natural drainage channels
- Access to the proposed residence
- Protection of ridgelines
- Preservation of dark skies
- Encourage high standards of design, materials and workmanship in all construction
- The design of a building must be reasonably appropriate to its site, and harmonize with its surroundings

Initial review of conformity with applicable design policies was completed for Rancho Cielo development overall as part of previous approvals. Those approvals anticipated development of the two parcels with 42 residential units of up to 60 feet in height on small lots north of Via Ambiente and commercial/residential uses up to 35 feet in height south of Via Ambiente. Specific plans demonstrating compliance with approved elements would have been required prior to implementation, but the types and extent of uses were approved.

Therefore, this analysis evaluates the current plans for these parcels as addressed in TMs 5440 and 5441, within the context of the historical approvals and Specific Plan Amendments. The prior approvals provide the existing condition, as demonstrated in the Community Plan. This document: (1) addresses the level to which the currently proposed uses on those two specific parcels would visually vary from previously approved uses (including ridgeline, or hilltop, development), on those parcels; and (2) analyzes the level to which any change might be more visually imp active under CEQA.

3.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

This section addresses the existing setting and visual conditions in the area. It includes a discussion of the Proposed Project viewshed. The existing visual and landform setting is based on topographic mapping, aerial photographs, reference document reviews, analysis of photographs, and documented on- and off-site land uses, as well as site reconnaissance.

3.1 Project Setting

The Rancho Cielo SPA site is located in the unincorporated portion of the County of San Diego in the community of Rancho Santa Fe, approximately 2.5 miles easterly of the City of Encinitas (Figure 1). The area within the Specific Plan that is subject to change is sited approximately 2 miles northeast of the intersection of Calle Ambiente and Del Dios Highway and consists of two parcels north and south of Via Ambiente near that road's junction with El Brazo. The parcels are at elevations of approximately 1,100 to 2,000 feet in elevation. Large amounts of open space are located on area hillsides, with ridgelines and hill tops in the area being dedicated to large-scale rural residential/estate uses.

Olivenhain dam is visible approximately one mile to the northeast, within the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve. The southern boundary of the Reserve (down in the bottom of a canyon and as the crow flies), is located approximately 0.5 mile to the northeast (Figure 3). Rounded hills abut Del Dios Highway and extend to the west and north. The San Dieguito River and a narrow valley are located to the south and west, with lower hills (in the range of 450 to 550 feet AMSL) to the south. Lake Hodges is located approximately 1.75 miles to the east.

3.2 Project Viewshed

A viewshed is an analytical tool used to aid in the identification of views that could be affected by a potential project. The viewshed is defined as the surrounding geographic area from which the on-site elements of a project are likely to be seen, and mostly is delineated based on topography. The viewshed boundary for the Proposed Project was determined through the computer analysis of local topography, and was field verified. The viewshed boundary represents the geographic limits for this visual assessment.

Figure 3 illustrates viewshed limits on an aerial photographic base. The viewshed assumes a 3-mile distance from the site in any direction, and incorporates over 28 square miles. The areas highlighted in green shading on the map indicate areas that—based on topography and elevation relative to the site—have the potential to see the SPA parcels.

As indicated, this figure is based on topography only, without consideration for structures or vegetation which often restrict views in local areas. Other controlling features include distance (from some locations within the viewshed the SPA site would be seen as one small aspect of a much larger view) and atmospheric conditions (haze/humidity can often diminish details of views).

The delineated viewshed is conservative (i.e., shows the greatest possible visibility) as a 35-foot elevation to reflect potential building height was entered on top of the highest elevation of finished grading proposed; and neither intervening vegetation or structures, nor distance, were assumed. As noted above, it also extends three miles out, to encompass a larger pool of potential viewers, although climatic conditions in San Diego County can often result in much lower visibility of detail at distances over one mile.

As shown on Figure 3, the potential viewshed generally is confined to higher elevations, as intervening topography would block views from areas with intervening topography. Of the 28.26 square miles encompassed within the viewshed, views would be available from an anticipated maximum of only 3.48 square miles, or approximately 12 percent of the surrounding area within the viewshed limits. Approximately 88 percent of the locations within three miles of the Proposed Project would not have views to the two parcels, based on topography alone. A lower percentage would experience actual views to the SPA parcels based on intervening structures and existing vegetation.

The viewshed analysis also reveals other scattered areas beyond three miles from which the SPA parcels potentially could be seen. From these distances, the location uniformly would be seen as one small aspect of a much larger view, and atmospheric conditions generally would be expected to diminish details.

3.3 Landscape Unit

The site is situated within a single landscape unit.³ This unit is defined by the Rancho Cielo hilltop development pattern currently being implemented, throughout a large majority of the Specific Plan Area. It consists of winding roads and flat pads on an undulating ridgeline that generally follows the topography of the underlying hills. Development to date consists of large low-density estate residential uses. Open space between homes and on hillsides consists of native low-lying scrub habitats. Within developed lots, landscaping can be lush, and consist of irrigated trees as well as shrubs and groundcovers.

³ Visible topographic forms, vegetation type and coverage, and type(s) of existing land uses can combine to visually create an outdoor “room” (the landscape unit) that exhibits a distinct visual character.

4.0 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

4.1 Existing Visual Resources

4.1.1 Visual Character

Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that are neither good nor bad in themselves. A change in visual character cannot be described as having good or bad attributes until it is compared with the viewer response to that change. If there is public preference for the established visual character of a regional landscape and a resistance to or a preference for a project that would change or contrast with that character, then changes in the visual character can be evaluated.

The visual character of the Rancho Cielo locale encompasses visually diverse forms, including numerous hills, expansive open areas (generally on slopes that can be extremely steep), and notable hilltop development, with geometric and rectilinear structures skylined from off-site views. This juxtaposition of the natural and the engineered (man-made) environment is notable. Roadways generally wind along the valleys between hillsides, although often steep roads provide access to the hilltop structures. Views in this area provide dramatically different visual experiences. Along the public roadways (generally located at lower elevations) and from areas in the valley bottoms, views are fairly restricted. This is because roads are generally winding in nature, and often edged by vegetation, resulting in views being fairly focused and localized. From private roadways, public trails and private residential lots at higher elevations, views are panoramic in nature—with a viewshed often extending miles. On clear days, the ocean can be clearly seen from the higher hilltops in this area, as are Olivenhain reservoir, extensive open space, and surrounding (primarily residential) development.

The overall Rancho Cielo development is building out, with numerous graded pads and some homes currently located in the vicinity of the Proposed SPA. Slightly more than one-half of the approved Project has been graded, and homes have been built on approximately 40 percent of the 639 Country Estate lots.

As shown on Figures 12a through 12d, Existing Hilltop Development, residential uses in this portion of the County have been allowed on hilltops. The panorama photograph provided in Figure 12a depicts the amount of topographic variation in this area, as well as illustrating that existing hilltop homes can fade from view with only a mile distance between the lots and viewer dependent on time of day and orientation. These structures vary in their particular level of visibility based on the orientation of the viewer to the homes (i.e., on an adjacent hilltop or below the viewed homes), the time of day and sun orientation, amount of haze in the atmosphere, etc. The scale of the hillsides and surrounding open space minimize the visual impact of these structures—they are not the primary view elements in any larger view. Figure 12b illustrates contiguous pad development along hilltops and varying levels of visibility based on time of day and viewer orientation; and Figure 12c depicts individual homes, illustrating the common nature of hilltop development in the area, which contributes to the overall visual character of this portion of the County. Figure 12d illustrates hilltop and ridgeline homes associated with the area in general (Mt. Israel and Harmony Grove areas).

In general, area grading reflects the natural topography; in that it steps up and down the original gradient, following increases and decreases in elevation. The ultimate result, however, is that the ridgelines (which draw the eye from lower elevations) are developed with large-scale structures that are skylined to viewers from below, or at, similar elevations.

Because lots are placed on these varying topographic features, substantial retaining walls—to support the lots or the roads accessing them—also comprise part of the existing setting. There are over 40 retaining walls within the Rancho Cielo development that are visible from the roads. These walls range in length from just over 100 feet to approximately 300 feet long. The heights of these walls range from a minimum of 8 to 10 feet to a maximum height of over 70 feet. Some of these walls are visible in Figures 13a and 13b, as well as Figures 24 and 26 (below). They also, based on location (part of a public roadway support or individual home), vary in color and material (concrete, block or stone) as well as design (solid or plantable). The scale of the retaining feature is directly related to the scale of the slope where it is located. As a result, even large-size retaining features in this area can be visually dwarfed by the adjacent (above, below, and/or to the side) un-retained slopes. Although the winding nature of area streets and intervening topography may result in few of these features being visually accessible in any one view, as shown in Figure 13a, a variety of retaining features may be visible at any one time. In Figure 13a, three retaining walls of varying material (crib block wall, mechanically stabilized earth wall) and color are visible.

In addition to home location and examples/presence of retaining wall features, Figures 13a and 13b also show that depending on the viewer's location (i.e., given any level of distance from the structures), homes on individual lots can visually combine to appear as if they are immediately adjacent to one another. This is referred to in this report as “perceived massing.”

4.1.2 Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness and unity present in the viewshed. This approach to evaluating visual quality can help identify specific methods for mitigating specific adverse impacts that may occur as a result of a project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality can be defined as follows:

- **Unity** is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. It frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the landscape
- **Intactness** is the visual integrity of the natural and man-made landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. It can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings
- **Vividness** is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns

The visual unity of the landscape unit is high. The setting locates estate residential on stepped lots following ridgetop topography, with large expanses of retained open space on hillsides. These homes have consistent architectural unity as well. Existing structures are generally one to two stories in height, and incorporate setbacks within the structures. Mediterranean influences



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Expansive Nature of Views from Ray Brooks Overlook from Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve

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Existing Rancho Cielo Ridgeline Development

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Existing Rancho Cielo Ridgeline Development

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Ridgeline development on Mt. Israel



Ridgeline development in the Harmony Grove Area



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Existing Vicinity Ridgeline Development

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Area Retaining Walls and Perceived Structure Massing

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



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Area Retaining Walls and Perceived Structure Massing

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

are clear, based on tile roofs and materials and finishes, while still varying in specific color. The residential elements show visible compositional harmony, even among the variety of features.

The intactness of the area currently is moderately low. As noted above, although approximately 50 percent of the Specific Plan Area has been graded, only 40 percent is currently built out. There are voids in the development pattern that will disappear as the overall development matures and is completed. At that point, intactness would be expected to be similarly high for the same reasons noted above under “unity.”

The site setting is vivid because of its access to expansive views. Rancho Cielo, however, is not particularly vivid as it is consistent with other hilltop development in this portion of the County.

4.2 Viewer Response

Viewer response, or awareness, is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by a project’s implementation.

4.2.1 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewers’ concern for scenic quality and the viewers’ response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. For the Proposed Project, viewer sensitivity has been identified based on the analysts’ experience in similar settings, input provided by the San Dieguito Planning Group and at County hearings on the Project, as well as County planning documents (i.e., General Plan and San Dieguito Community Plan).

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of the view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer.

Viewer Awareness: A viewer’s response is also affected by the degree to which he/she is receptive to the visual details, character, and quality of the surround landscape. A viewer’s ability to perceive the landscape is affected by his/her activity. A viewer on vacation in San Diego County would probably take pleasure in looking at the landscape, and an individual may be strongly attached to the view from his home, but a local County resident commuting to work may not “register” those same visual resources on a daily basis.

4.2.2 Viewer Groups

The following viewer groups discussion addresses both public and private views. With regard to private view, the majority of these are from residences and from private, gated communities with streets that are not accessible to the general public but have views to the SPA.

Motorists

The SPA parcels are located off the beaten track. The primary roadway in the vicinity is Del Dios Highway, located approximately two miles from the subject site. Motorists on this roadway would constitute the largest viewer group in the area, but although other sections of Rancho Cielo are visible from Del Dios, the two Project parcels addressed in the SPA are not. Other roadways in the area with some clear views to the Project include Mt. Israel Road (which accesses a total of approximately 40 homes) and Elfin Forest Road. Other smaller and publically accessible roads are located at greater distances within the viewshed. No County Scenic Corridor roadway is located within the viewshed.

Motorists on smaller, residential roads in the area are presumed to generally have moderately high sensitivity. A high percentage of the viewers along these roads are presumed to be residents. Residents' sensitivity (discussed below) generally would be high; however, the winding nature of the roads in the residential areas of the viewshed would require that motorists in these areas be more sensitive to the immediate roadway rather than wider views. This may not be the case with passengers, who would be able to pay more attention to the surrounding scenery.

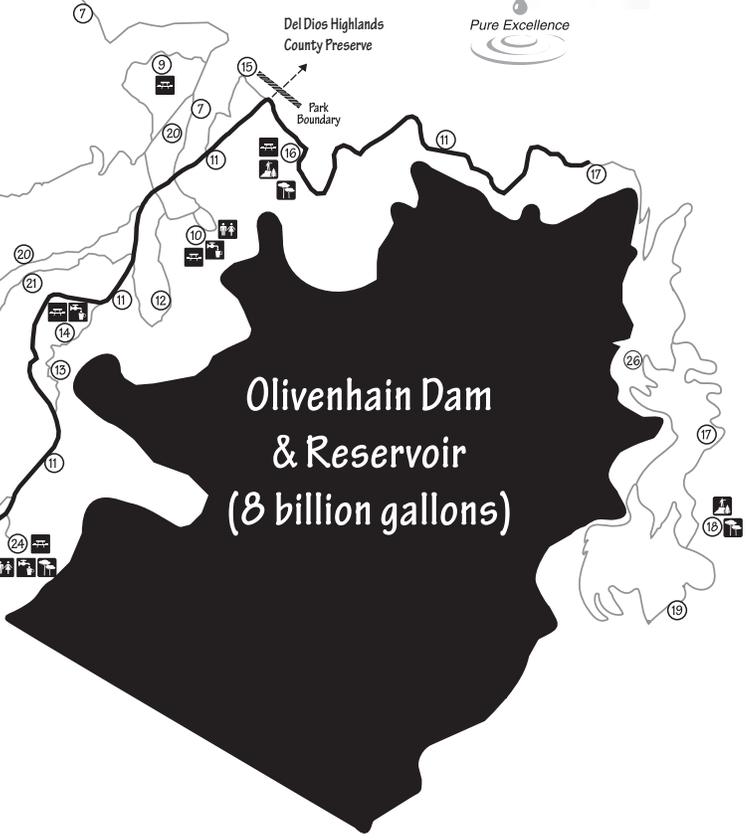
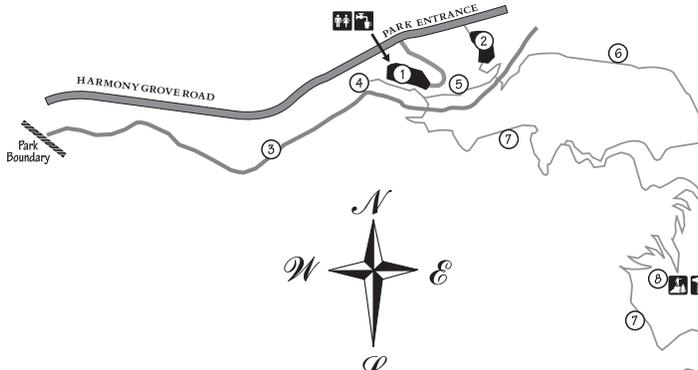
Recreationalists

The Del Dios Community Park (at the north end of Lake Hodges) is in the vicinity, but has no views to the site. The Del Dios Highlands County Preserve (accessed from Del Dios Highway and Date Lane) includes a trail that accesses Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve. Views to the Project are not available until the viewer is in the Reserve.

The Reserve offers approximately 11 miles of hiking, mountain biking, equestrian trails, as well as picnic areas and scenic mountain viewing points (Figure 14, Reserve Trail Map). Based on car counts made by Reserve staff, an average of 2,800 to 3,500 cars accesses the Reserve per month. Reserve staff assume 2.5 individuals per car, so that an estimated 60,000 visitors a year come to the Reserve. Trail use can therefore be heavy, with the most heavily used trail being the "Way Up Trail," which is used to access others in the system. The farther away from the Reserve entrance a trail is located, the fewer hikers use the trail. In other words, the majority of Reserve visitors focus their visit on areas closer to the visitor center, with fewer visitors visiting locales miles in from the entrance and away from the trail head (Anderson 2012: pers. comm.).

A number of these trails are on the northeastern slopes of the Reserve, with views oriented toward the Harmony Grove community. The Equine Incline Loop, Manzanita, and Cielo trails, however, are located on the southwesterly side of the Reserve, and would have intermittent to open views toward the Proposed Project. The Ray Brooks Overlook (Figure 14) is also located in this area, with direct views to the site.

Trail users in the Reserve can see the two Project parcels on the ridgeline. The existing view encompasses diverse elements—including buildings and developed areas, as well as natural open space. A transmission line with tower footings trends along the Ridgeline Maintenance Road, which provides primary access to the Ray Brooks Overlook. Although there is some effect based



Legend

- Restrooms
- Drinking Water
- Picnic Area
- Shade
- Scenic Overlook
- Maintenance Road

Trail Map

- | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| 1. Staging Area/Main Parking/ Elfin Forest Interpretive Center (Elevation 492 ft.) | 5. Creek Viewing Area | 11. Ridgeline Maintenance Road (1.39 miles) | 17. Lake Hodges Overlook Trail (.93 mile) | 22. Elfin Forest Overlook (Elevation 1,346 ft.) |
| 2. Overflow Parking Lot | 6. Botanical Trail (.64 mile) | 12. Tykes Hike Trail (.23 mile) | 18. Lake Hodges Overlook (Elevation 1,200 ft.) | 23. Manzanita Trail (.30 mile) |
| 3. Escondido Creek (Flows year round from Lake Wohlford to Pacific Ocean) | 7. Way Up Trail (1.41 miles) | 13. Mariposa Trail (.18 mile) | 19. Lake Hodges Overlook Loop Trail (.81 mile) | 24. Ray Brooks Overlook (Elevation 1,185 ft.) |
| 4. Creek Trail (.22 mile) | 8. Harmony Grove Overlook (Elevation 1,010 ft.) | 14. Mariposa Picnic Area (Elevation 1,155 ft.) | 20. Equine Incline Loop Trail (2.60 miles) | 25. Cielo Trail (.88 mile) |
| | 9. Me-xal Trail (.21 mile) | 15. Quail Trail (.16 mile) | 21. Chaparral Trail (.28 mile) | 26. Witch Trail (.37 mile) |
| | 10. Ridgetop Picnic Area (Elevation 1,140 ft.) | 16. Escondido Overlook (Elevation 1,200 ft.) | | |

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Reserve Trail Map

on distance, the hills on which the SPA area is located provide a major element for the viewer as they can be the defining feature (both highest, and most distant) forming a horizon in the view.

The Coast to Crest Trail in this vicinity is aligned along the San Dieguito River. As shown on the VIA viewshed map (Figure 3), the Proposed Project is not visible from this location with the exception of a small area very near the limits of the viewshed to the southwest.

Two private golf courses exist within three miles of the Project site, and open views may be available from the Crosby National Golf Club.

Individuals using the cited trail system would be expected to be highly sensitive to changes in the immediate viewscape. Viewers using these trails would be moving at pedestrian rates of travel, or even stationary at overlooks. As a result, they are expected to be sensitive to Proposed Project modifications to the existing setting, as well as, potentially, any change from a more to less “natural” experience. Viewers from the Crosby National Golf Club are anticipated to have a low level of sensitivity. This is due to both the distance from the Project and their focus on the game.

Residents

A number of homes are located within the Project viewshed. Large, estate-style single-family residences and smaller rural residential uses are located in the Project vicinity. Smaller lot homes south of Del Dios Highway (at two to three miles distant) also potentially would have views of the Project parcels. Along Elfin Forest Road to the northwest, homes are at elevations from which views could be accessible, but vegetation is also mature in many areas, and may restrict views.

Residential viewers are expected to be highly sensitive to changes in the immediate viewscape. For these viewers, the Rancho Cielo area can provide an often-seen and intimately known view that contributes to the sense of home or the broader community.

4.2.3 Existing Viewer Exposure

Motorists' Exposure

Primary exposure from public roads would occur on Mt. Israel (the closest road with a direct view) and Elfin Forest Road (further away, but also with open views toward Rancho Cielo). Elfin Forest Road is posted at 45 miles per hour in sections. In other areas, speeds would be expected to be slower as the road is narrow and winding. Similar conditions (slow, narrow and winding) pertain for Mt. Israel Road. This could result in longer exposure to any one view than would occur at higher speed roads. Along both of these roads, screening vegetation obscures views to the SPA parcels in many areas. Along other roads, views are additionally attenuated by distance, the curving nature of the roadways and/or vegetation. Where roads are long and straight, higher speeds may also result in lower periods of exposure.

Overall, the brief duration of views and relatively low number of viewers indicates that motorists on roads in the residential areas have moderate exposure.

Recreationalists' Exposure

Despite the opportunity for expansive views of the SPA site and surrounding area, recreationalists in the nearby Reserve lands and hiking on nearby trails are anticipated to have moderate exposure. Open views to the two parcels are available from some trails, and at least one scenic overlook, as noted above. However, the number of individuals who make it to these interior trails, combined with the turning and twisting nature of the trails, results in a much lower number of viewers being expected than actually enter the Reserve on the north side.

Hikers along the Coast to Crest Trail would only have potential for a view from approximately 2.5 miles distant. As the Trail in this area parallels the river, riparian vegetation may also intervene. Exposure would be considered low from this location.

Residents' Exposure

Residents in the viewshed have high exposure, due to their long-term, stationary views. The views currently are of a generally rural area with a hilly backdrop. A substantial amount of local topographic variation (small hills, bumps and gullies located on the larger hill forms) is present throughout the viewshed, and residential landscaping also provides frequent shielding of view elements, both from the home where the landscaping is installed as well as for adjacent structures. In other cases, residential (or related) structures themselves block views. Therefore, not every structure encompassed in the viewshed limits has uninterrupted views from the entire property. Regardless, where views exist, they can be expansive, and many homes are sited specifically to take advantage of these open views. In these instances, open views encompass adjacent developed uses, and ridge features with residential development.

4.2.4 Existing Viewer Awareness

Motorists' Awareness

Although drivers on local roads are expected to note SPA-related changes, their primary focus generally would be on speed of travel, interaction with other drivers on the road, as well as attention to local children, domesticated animals, and the occasional wildlife sighting in this rural area. This, combined with both the relatively short duration of exposure time and the number of competing visual elements in the expansive viewshed, is expected to lessen the importance of specific view elements for this group of viewers. Speed and traffic conditions would comprise an element of distraction from passenger views as well, but it generally would be less than for the driver. In these cases, passengers within the vehicle could be more focused on the passing viewscape. Although lessened in level of effect, any distraction at all, when combined with the relatively short duration for visibility, would result in the visual impact of specific view elements being less important for this group of viewers (e.g., less important relative to viewers such as residents, discussed below).

Recreationalists' Awareness

Hikers in the nearby Reserve may have a high awareness of the surrounding area and the available views, including those that encompass the SPA parcels. Regular visitors would wish to retain the current, expansive views of mostly natural and rural areas, while occasional or first time visitors may not expect the same conditions.

Residents' Awareness

Residents are expected to be extremely aware of changes associated with SPA implementation. Based on past experience, it is assumed that residents will strongly desire retention of existing conditions.

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5.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This discussion focuses on visible project-direct changes, which could occur resulting from SPA implementation and would be based on variance from the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan and the uses permitted within Rancho Cielo's current zoning district.

5.1 Guidelines of Significance

The following CEQA significance guidelines are from the County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007), and were derived from the CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Environmental Checklist Form.

They guide the evaluation of whether a significant impact to visual resources will occur as a result of project implementation. A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following, absent specific evidence to the contrary. Conversely, if a project does not propose any of the following, it will generally not be considered to have a significant effect on visual resources, absent specific evidence of such an effect.

1. The project would introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.
2. The project would result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.
3. The project would substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from:
 - a public road,
 - a trail within an adopted County or State trail system,
 - a scenic vista or highway, or
 - a recreational area.

5.2 Key Views

Analyzing all of the views from which a proposed project potentially can be seen is not feasible. Several of these potential views are in gated communities not accessible to the general public. Five publically accessible key viewpoints (Key Views 1 through 5, depicted on Figures 7 through 9) have been selected that most clearly display the visual effects of the Project from various locations. The key view points with arrows depicting the direction of the view are shown on Figure 3.

Each of the five Key Views is described below. The Key View descriptions include viewer location, orientation and exposure,⁴ existing visual character and quality, SPA features visible from this location, change to visual character and quality, anticipated viewer response, and resulting visual impact.

5.2.1 Key View 1 – Mt. Israel Road

Key View 1 (Figure 7) is located on Mt. Israel Road approximately 0.5 mile directly east of the Proposed Project. The view orientation is westerly, looking up at TM 5441 on the ridgeline. The TM 5440 lot ground level is not visible from this location as that parcel is behind TM 5441 and blocked by the existing topography. Less rural settings are also present along this road (e.g., farther west, there is development and a rip-rap swale leading down the slope from Rancho Cielo to Mt. Israel Road, with Via Ambiente also visible from the location). Key View 1 was chosen to depict the rural setting also available along this road.

The existing visual character seen from this location is rural, with existing vegetation and a steep rocky embankment along the road framing the view to the SPA lots. Mt. Israel Road accesses approximately 40 homes and private drives in the valley and hillsides east of Rancho Cielo. There is no access to public trails or recreation facilities. The existing visual quality is fairly high, with several mature trees along the road and valley floor and lower scrub and/or chaparral vegetation and rock outcrops on the hillsides.

The eastern elevation and manufactured slopes of TM 5441 on the ridgeline would be visible from this location. Although the amount of detail discernible is somewhat dependent on the time of day and sun angle, at distances of less than one mile architectural features such as windows, railings, rooflines, building materials, and Project landscaping generally are easily seen. Visible elements of Project design would be most prominent in the morning, with the late afternoon view to the west becoming more of a silhouetted ridgeline view as the sun sets.

With implementation of the SPA, the visual character of this focused portion of the ridgeline would be the most prominent change to this view. Project landscaping would soften the view somewhat, but the view from the valley floor up to the ridge cannot be completely screened.

The viewer response is anticipated to be adverse. At this Key View location, the great majority of people on Mt. Israel Road are homeowners arriving to or leaving their neighborhood. Viewer sensitivity to change is expected to be high. However, the number of viewers is low. As noted above and provided in the Community Plan, only approximately 40 homes are located in the Mt. Israel Road residential enclave, and much of the Road is highly vegetated, obscuring off-road views.

⁴ Viewer exposure is a key element in assessment of viewer response and ultimate visual impact. As explained in Section 1.5, Viewer Response, in the County Guidelines for Determining Significance: “Viewer exposure varies based on the physical location of the viewer, and the distance and position of the viewer in relation to the resource; the number of viewers of the resource; and the duration and frequency of viewer’s contact with the resource.”

The resulting visual impact is expected to be important to these local viewers, but less than significant under CEQA, due to the limited number of viewers. Reduction in visual effect from the approved Project that would occur with implementation of the SPA due to decreases in intensity of allowable development is addressed in Section 5.5 of this chapter, with the 42-unit Project depicted in Figure 17 of that section, below.

5.2.2 Key View 2 – Camino Del Sur

Key View 2 (Figure 7) was taken from Camino Del Sur (northern sidewalk) at the intersection of Casey Glen approximately 2.6 miles south of the Proposed Project and lower in elevation. The view orientation is due north, looking toward a portion of TM 5440 on the ridgeline across the San Dieguito River Valley. The TM 5441 location is not visible from this site as it is blocked by existing topography.

The existing visual character at this view location is suburban, with recent streetscape improvements and landscaping. Camino Del Sur is a four lane major roadway at this location with a posted speed limit of 45 mph. The foreground of this view consists of open space and an unpaved section of Artesian Road (see Key View 3 in Figure 8). The existing visual quality is relatively high with new and planned development replacing open space and formerly rural lands.

A small portion of proposed development on TM 5440, primarily the rooftops and parts of second floors of units on the southwest side, would be visible. At this distance individual Project features such as windows, railings, and building materials would not be discernible. The majority of the proposed ridgeline development is blocked by the existing topography.

The SPA-related change to existing visual character, as seen from this Key View, with the proposed development would be negligible. The resulting visual impact is less than significant.

5.2.3 Key View 3 – Artesian Road

Key View 3 (Figure 8) was taken from the western portion of Artesian Road approximately 3.0 miles southwest of the Proposed Project and lower in elevation. The view orientation is northeast, looking toward a portion of TM 5440 on the hilltop across the San Dieguito River Valley. The TM 5441 location is not visible from this site as it is blocked by the existing topography.

The existing visual character at this view location is rural/estate.

A small portion of proposed development on parcel TM 5440, primarily the rooftops and parts of second floors of units on the southwest side would be visible. At this distance, individual Project features such as windows, railings and building materials would not be discernible. The majority of the proposed development is blocked by the existing topography.

The SPA-related change to existing visual character as seen from this key view with the proposed development would be negligible. The resulting visual impact is less than significant.

5.2.4 Key View 4 – Elfin Forest Road

Key View 4 (Figure 8) is located on the eastern portion of Elfin Forest Road approximately 1.5 miles northwest of the Proposed Project. The view orientation is southeast, looking toward and up at portions of both TMs 5440 and TM 5441 on the ridgeline, although the two parcels are indistinguishable at this distance.

The existing visual character at this view location is rural.

The visual character of the ridgeline would be the most prominent change to this view with implementation of SPA, as the hilltops currently read as relatively flat distant features and implementation of structures would be visible against the skyline. Color variation from the current scrub-covered hills also would be apparent; as structures would be anticipated to introduce both lighter and darker colors and irrigated landscaping would also result in darker vegetation that would be visible from this vantage point. However, as shown on Figure 8, the SPA is at a distance, and only comprises approximately 13 percent of the horizontal view seen in this picture. This is a larger percentage of the view than would be perceived by southerly bound travelers along this Road, and for whom the viewshed would stretch both left and right from that shown in the photograph. The SPA would be noticeable, but not substantial, from this view point. It also would meld with similar changes currently being built out as part of the approved Project along abutting hilltop areas.

The resulting visual impact is expected to be discernible, but would not vary from visual impacts approved under the overall Rancho Cielo Project from this vantage point. Less than significant visual impacts are identified for SPA implementation. The low level of Project visibility is further addressed in Section 5.5 of this chapter, with the 42-unit Project depicted in Figure 19 of that section, below.

5.2.5 Key View 5 – Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve

Key View 5 (Key Views 5a and 5b in Figure 9) was taken from the Ray Brooks Overlook (elevation 1,185 ft) on the Manzanita Trail just off the Ridgeline Maintenance Road within the Reserve. The site is approximately 1.0 mile north of the two Project parcels and proposed SPA. The view orientation is southerly, looking across the valley to both TM 5440 and 5441, which would be located on the ridgeline, at a similar elevation as the photograph. The viewpoint is somewhat difficult to depict, as views toward the SPAs are generally oriented toward the sun during hours when visitors are most likely to be present.⁵ Although multiple trips to the study were made during the preparation of this VIA (and the 2.8-mile hike in to the Ray Brooks Overlook was made twice, two months apart, on days considered most likely for clarity [i.e., days without rain or predicted fog]) the photographs taken on both days were virtually identical in terms of glare, although the amount of haze was strongly diminished in the photograph

⁵ A photo of the site from the Ray Brooks Overlook without glare may not be possible during the timeframe of this report. The view is to the southwest, and in the northern hemisphere at this time of year, after about 9:00 a.m. the photographer is looking into the sun. If the photographer reaches the Overlook before 9:00 a.m., fog is often present.

chosen. Nonetheless, the expansiveness of the view is demonstrated, as well as direct line of sight to the Project. The lack of total clarity does not result in the reader being unable to perceive the Project location or scale relative to surrounding topography and development.

The existing visual character at this view location is generally rural. Some intervening development is visible, and if the viewer looks southerly, the Olivenhain dam is immediately adjacent. Transmission lines and poles, and the primary maintenance road in this part of the Reserve, are also visible. For viewers looking directly toward Rancho Cielo, existing homes toward the valley and along the ridgelines are visible, with the majority of view elements on the north-facing slopes consisting of slopes and vegetation. It should be noted that the entire Rancho Cielo Specific Plan protects on-site slopes as part of the 1984 Supplemental EIR approval, as part of the first Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Amendment, including steep slopes on these specific lots.

This view point is toward the far southern extent of the Reserve, and requires substantial hiking from the entry point at the north end. The number of viewers would be less than the total number of viewers to the Reserve interpretive center, at the north end.

The visual character of the ridgeline and the implementation of retaining walls to support the clustered development (rather than impact additional native vegetation) would be the most prominent changes to this view with SPA implementation. These modifications are discussed in detail in Section 5.5 of this report, with visual effects of the 42-unit development depicted in Figures 18 of that section, below.

5.2.6 Key View Summary

To some extent, the resulting visual impact is expected to be attenuated by the SPA's distance from the Key Views discussed. Because the 42-unit development would not constitute development substantially different from that in the surrounding area, it would not be expected to particularly draw the eye for the casual viewer. In other words—for a viewer gazing at the slopes and hilltops in this vicinity from public roadways or overlooks in the area—following landscaping maturity it would not be expected to be visually differentiated from surrounding development patterns in this location. The modifications would constitute important and adverse changes from the existing condition, but are considered less than significant under CEQA for the reasons enumerated above, including overall visual consistency with the approved and developing Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. Reduction in effect from the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan that would occur with implementation of the 42-unit SPA is addressed in Section 5.5 of this chapter, and supported by key view simulations completed in accordance with County guidelines in that section, below.

5.3 Assessment of Visual Character and Quality/Analysis of Project Effects During SPA Construction

The reader is referred to Sections 5.2, above, and 5.5, below, for important information related to visual character and quality relative to effects associated with SPA implementation. This section specifically addresses the proposed changes that SPA implementation may cause to the visual

character and quality within the Project viewshed, during Project phasing (i.e., SPA construction through SPA maturity), and the potential response of viewers to those changes.

5.3.1 Construction Period Effects

Construction-period visual effects are described in four phases:

- Existing Conditions
- During Grading and Cut/Fill Operations
- End of Construction
- At Maturity

Existing Conditions

The existing visual conditions have been partially modified as part of the construction of roads and mass grading over the last 20 years. Each of the two parcels contains cut slopes and concrete brow ditches left over from the initial roadway construction largely covered by sparse low-growing scrub vegetation. The hilltop pads, although previously cleared and grubbed, now appear fairly natural and visually cohesive with nearby undisturbed sections of ridgelines.

During Grading and Cut/Fill Operations

During grading and cut/fill operations, both parcels would have approximately 58 percent of the existing vegetation cleared. Cut and fill operations would create flatter stepped pads on site surrounded by 1.5:1 manufactured slopes, as approved by the Project geotechnical engineer and landscape architect, consistent with the County grading ordinance.

Natural slopes in the County that exceed 25 percent slope and have a gradient of more than 50 feet are protected from excessive encroachment. Steep slopes are shown on Figures 15, TM 5441 Steep Slopes Analysis, and 16, TM 5440 Steep Slopes Analysis. As shown on those figures, substantial areas of steep slope abut and slightly encroach into the proposed pads. Pad boundaries have been designed to restrict encroachment to allowable limits, as detailed on these figures. Steep slope encroachment for both parcels is within allowable limits defined in RPO Section 86.604(e)(2) as development would encroach into less than 10 percent of the steep slopes on each parcel.

Parcel TM 5440 would not require any retaining walls. Parcel TM 5441 would have a number of large retaining walls. As noted elsewhere, the implementation of the clustered development on TM 5441 is a Project design feature required as mitigation, to minimize steep slope and vegetation impacts that would otherwise occur more broadly through the Rancho Cielo development. The walls specific to Lot 5441 also would minimize grading extent—and the associated impact to native vegetation—that would otherwise occur to support the Project pads. These walls would vary in visibility. This reflects view restriction resulting from turns in public roads and abutting vegetation. More direct (closer) and longer duration views from private roads and residences would be available. Similar to other walls completed for residential pads and roads in Rancho Cielo, walls greater than six feet in height would be modular segmental concrete



RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS HAVING A SLOPE WITH A NATURAL GRADIENT OF 25% OR GREATER AND A MINIMUM RISE OF 50 FEET.

Source: Fuscoe Engineering 2012

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TM 5441 Steep Slopes Analysis

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



RPO STEEP SLOPE LANDS HAVING A SLOPE WITH A NATURAL GRADIENT OF 25% OR GREATER AND A MINIMUM RISE OF 50 FEET.

Source: Fuscoe Engineering 2012

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TM 5440 Steep Slopes Analysis

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

systems (or precast segmented walls), and can be selectively colored and textured to harmonize with surroundings.

As described in Section 2.1 of this VIA, an up to 28-foot- high retaining wall approximately 380 feet in length would be constructed wrapping around the northern end of the parcel. A 4- to 16-foot-high retaining wall would be constructed on the west side of the lot to support residential pads. This wall would be approximately 780 feet long, or the whole length of the western pad limit. Landscaping would be located between this retaining wall and an additional (downslope) wall to the north and west that would be no taller than 8 feet and approximately 230 feet long. A small 10-foot high wall (90 feet long) would also extend laterally from Via Ambiente to the north on the west side of the parcel. On the southeastern edge of pad creation near Via Ambiente, two 6- to 8-foot high abutting retaining walls would be constructed one at 160 feet and one at 140 feet in length. On the northeast side (at the toe of slope for Lots 11, 12 and 13) a 110-foot long wall would reach a maximum 11 feet in height.

Although consistent with other walls required for pads in Rancho Cielo, these walls at first appear to be unique in their number, extent and height within a single lot. That is a function of designing multiple homes on a single lot, however, and would not be their visual effect. Although on a “single lot,” the development of TM 5441 with 31 residential units would make this read visually as a number of lots, far more consistent with other lots in the development. From points south and east, the walls to the north and west would not be visible. From the north and west, walls to the south and east would not be visible. From the north, the longest and highest wall would be visually attenuated to some extent even before landscaping due to the wall not being in a straight line. As it wraps around the base of the slope, it would extend away from the viewer on both its west and east extents and would no longer be perpendicular to a line of sight. This is also true for the west and east walls. They largely trend north-south in orientation, and as a result would not provide the same visual mass as a wall located perpendicular to the viewer. Walls at the south end of the parcel would be obscured for viewers to the north. Another point relative to the largest northern wall is that it would not be located along the ridgeline. It would be down slope, with skylined homes above. As a result, the visual effect of the wall would be minimized as the eye would naturally be drawn up to the skyline.

All of these walls would be most visible during the cut and fill phase of the Project. Ultimately, landform, structures and landscaping would combine to minimize visibility to multiple walls from any one vantage point, as described below.

During grading and cut/fill operations, both parcels would have approximately 60 percent of the site exposed as raw, unvegetated soil. The bare soil would visually contrast with adjacent vegetated areas and during this 8- to 12-month period the site would be expected to stand out from its immediate surroundings. As soon as the manufactured slopes are complete, hydroseeding operations could commence which would minimize the temporary visual impact. Approximately 40 percent of both parcels consist of steep slopes that would not be disturbed.

End of Construction

At the end of the construction period all the homes would be constructed, including all final color and finishes. All SPA-related landscaping and erosion control measures would be installed and a three to six-month plant establishment period would begin for trees and shrubs. Architectural features such as wall color and finishes, roof materials, etc., would constitute the dominant visual elements associated with the SPA parcels during this period. The manufactured slopes would have had approximately a year to establish cover, but sections of bare soil would likely remain.

At Maturity

Approximately five years following the end of construction, landscaping would mature to the point where all the shrub/vine planting would be at its full mature size and all groundcover would achieve 100 percent of planned coverage. Trees mature more slowly and vary amongst species. On average, it is anticipated that the trees in the landscape would be 30 to 50 percent taller and fuller than at initial planting. Project landscaping and construction of homes would obscure some walls, and also provide visual “competition” for the viewer’s attention. Overall, the landscape elements would by then effectively visually soften the architectural features and create a much more cohesive aesthetic. This would continue into the future as the trees reach full maturity.

These construction-period effects are consistent with those occurring for other developing areas within the overall Rancho Cielo development. No new significant impact is identified.

5.4 Viewer Response

As noted in Section 4.2, viewer response, or awareness, is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. Viewer exposure is the degree (number of viewers, length of time and/or frequency) to which viewers are exposed to a view or visual resource. Viewer sensitivity and expectations are based on the preferences, standards, ideas, opinions, and bias of different viewers. For example, recreational and residential viewers’ sensitivity and expectations or their visual surroundings are traditionally higher than viewers in industrial or commercial settings. The general sensitivity and exposure of viewers was defined in Section 4.2 of this VIA. In this section, an assessment is provided of viewer response for the same four phases addressed in Section 5.3.

Existing Conditions

The existing condition is generally anticipated to be the preferred condition for viewers in this area. The existing condition, however, reflects ongoing construction of the overall Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. That means that areas of cut and new construction are currently visible that have not been fully remediated (e.g., the existing road cut visible from Mt. Israel Road), or reached maturity in terms of landscaping. Because of their detailed knowledge of the Project area, adjacent local viewer response to the existing condition is expected to range from neutral to adverse depending on their view orientation. Other viewers passing through the area on Del

Dios Highway or more distant points would be expected to be less sensitive to SPA-related changes due to less routine visibility to the site (either because of distance or intervening topography). Their response is expected to generally be neutral to the existing condition.

During Grading and Cut and Fill Operations

For those with views to the site, the grading period is expected to be the most visually obtrusive. The cut and fill areas would be generally “raw,” without shielding vegetation and can be perceived as scars across the landscape. Additional disturbance could be perceived as less visually severe due to the existing disturbed condition, or could be perceived as exacerbating the existing visual effect over the original impact. Retaining walls built to minimize impacts to vegetated slopes would be most visible during this phase. As appropriate, some coloring intended to blend with abutting soil colors seen in areas of native habitat, but they would not yet be shielded by landscaping. Viewer sensitivity is expected to be highest at this time and response is generally expected to be adverse.

More distant viewers are not expected to respond as adversely as the local and “close-in” viewers. For the more distant viewers, the disturbed area would comprise a very small part of the overall view, and it could also be fleeting depending on the nature of the road (straight or with many turns). Response of the more distant viewer is expected to be neutral due to the distance from disturbance.

End of Construction

This is second only to the grading phase in terms of level of visual change. At this point, some of the graded areas would already be recovering from a visually “raw” state as a result of hydroseeding for erosion control; and, in some instances, expansion of native vegetation into previously graded areas due to “volunteer” behavior on the part of nearby plants. The retaining walls noted above still would not be shielded by landscaping. Homes also would be new elements in the viewscape to existing viewers, and would not be shielded by SPA landscaping. Viewer response is expected to be adverse.

Response of the more distant viewer is expected to be neutral due to the distance from new building, and the inability to distinguish structural elements.

At Maturity

This phase reflects a post-construction time period. Landscaping would be installed and would have reached full maturity, which would provide substantially more cover than depicted in the simulations in Section 5.5.1 of this VIA (per County guidelines, the SPA vegetation has been depicted five years after installation). All ground cover would be in place, no “raw” soil associated with construction would be visible. Walls and structures with planting in place would be obscured or softened.

Viewer response at this point is expected to become more varied. It is expected that some viewers would be deeply connected to past land use patterns and would find any change to those

patterns to be visually adverse. Some viewers would accommodate the changed condition and find it less impactful than originally anticipated. Other viewers would be new to the area, and the SPA lots would simply be part of the existing condition. For those viewers, their response would be expected to be generally neutral, and may be positive. Response of the more distant viewer is expected to be neutral due to an inability to distinguish Project detail.

5.5 Determination of Significance

The discussions below address long-term potential impacts, to off-site viewers. Three simulations are provided for illustrative purposes, and are referred to in the following determination discussions. These simulations depict with-SPA views from viewpoints close to and/or frequently seen off-site vantage points. These include locations from Mt. Israel Road, Elfin Forest Road, and the Ray Brooks Overlook area in the Reserve.

As noted above, the CEQA simulations are based on photographs taken with a 50 millimeter lens and without “zoom” as it most closely represents the 60 degree “cone of vision” seen by the human eye. Structures match architectural standards required by the Project Design Guidelines and consistent with building elements already existing as part of the Rancho Cielo development. Landscaping in these simulations reflects the primarily coast live oak and African sumac/sycamores tree palette (the latter of which have similar aspects at this distance). The assumptions represented in the simulations are that the trees would be installed as 50 percent 24-inch box size and 50 percent five-gallon size. Trees are depicted five years after growth. Shrubs and groundcovers (in color, texture and size) are also representative of the species listed on the planting plan.

All owners of properties within Rancho Cielo have purchased their properties assuming full build-out of the development, and disclosure of potential modifications to Project design specifics has been made.

5.5.1 Guideline 1: Contrast with Existing Visual Character and/or Quality by Conflicting With Important Visual Elements or the Quality of the Area, or by Being Inconsistent With Applicable Design Guidelines

Two sets of design guidelines are relevant to SPA evaluation. One set comes from the 2012 San Dieguito Community Plan, and one set consists of the criteria guiding the build-out of the Rancho Cielo Development. The San Dieguito Community Plan identifies several criteria to be considered during planning. Particularly relevant to the SPA are consideration of site topography and protection of steep slopes, view orientation and view protection of adjacent properties, protection of ridgelines, preservation of dark skies, and design of buildings reasonably appropriate to the site in order to harmonize with its surroundings.

The parcel locations are currently open in aspect. Vegetation generally consists of scrub habitats and open soil; no trees are present. As a hilltop location, no natural drainage channels are present. Small rock outcrops are occasionally present in the vicinity, but none were noted on the two Project parcels, and (if present) would be likely to be visible from off-site vantage points due to parcel elevation, which is generally higher than surrounding areas.

SPA structures would be built on ridgeline/knoll top topography. Steep slopes are on the site and would be affected by SPA implementation (see discussion under Section 5.3, above). Although consistent with other walls required for pads in Rancho Cielo, TM 5441 walls would be unique in their number, extent and height within a single lot. As noted elsewhere, implementation of the clustered development on TM 5441 is a Rancho Cielo design element required as mitigation to minimize steep slope and vegetation impacts. Grading would be the minimum required for parcel implementation. Slopes not affected during pad creation would not be affected by SPA implementation. Undeveloped areas would be left in existing native habitat.

With regard to view protection and the related issue of protection of ridgelines, the parcels are located on ridgelines that are representative of this part of the County, and which form ridgeline views for off-site viewers. The implementation of the 31-unit residential development (TM 5441) would be notable on a portion of a ridgeline that, from points north in particular, currently appears undisturbed. Likely viewers would include private residential viewers, travelers along Mt. Israel, and users of southerly trails in the Reserve. One overlook (Ray Brooks), in particular, has views directly to the site (see discussion above for Key View 5). These views are illustrated in Figures 17, Key View/Photosimulation – Mt. Israel Road, and 18a and 18b, Key View/Photosimulation – Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve/Ray Brooks Overlook.

The view to this specific part of the Rancho Cielo ridgeline would change for these viewers. The ridgeline is a substantial topographic feature, and is both close enough to be visible and far enough away to provide the horizon line. Structures built on the TM 5441 pad would be skylined and would change the current more natural aspect of the ridgeline.

The potential significance of this effect, however, must be weighed in conjunction with the setting in this part of the County. Hilltop development in this particular part of the County is both common and a hallmark of the estate residential uses in the area. As described earlier in this report and depicted on Figures 12, such development is wholly consistent with the existing character of lot development in this area. Beyond Rancho Cielo, Mt. Israel has a home sited on its apex. At a little greater distance, the Harmony Grove area supports hilltop homes west of Country Club Drive. As depicted on Figure 12d, homes in that area follow the natural topography of the hills, as they rise in elevation. It is also wholly consistent with the rest of the Rancho Cielo development build-out surrounding these parcels, as shown on Figures 12b and 12c.

Both the General Plan and San Dieguito Community Plan assume full Rancho Cielo implementation. Based on proposed elimination of a number of residential structures, the current TM 5441 31-unit SPA proposes visually similar, but less dense, uses than have already been approved. Project landscaping, assumed as part of SPA design, would be included to soften structural lines. As a result, ridgeline effects that would result from SPA implementation would not result in a significant visual impact, under Guideline 1 related to contrast with valued visual elements or quality or inconsistency with applicable design guidelines.

The San Dieguito Community Plan requests that design of a building be reasonably appropriate to its site, and in harmony with its surroundings. The SPA proposes 31 detached single-family residential units. These homes would match the theme and style of the rest of the Rancho Cielo development, which is currently visible to off-site viewers. As noted in Section 2.0 of this VIA,

the color, architecture, building materials, etc., all would be consistent with the structures already existing and under construction within the development, as would the height of the structures (up to 35 feet, or two stories).

Outlines of individual structures (and architectural detailing and variation between the structures) would be visible to closer viewers, such as along Mt. Israel Road, as shown in Figure 17. As noted, spaces between the homes would be visible, and the proximity of the structures to each other could be apparent based on similarity in structure size. This would be somewhat offset by the SPA requirement to incorporate single-story residences into this plan. These viewers would see the rooftops and some structures associated with TM 5440, beyond the TM 5441 structures from some vantage points. These visible elements would be consistent with adjacent existing (and future planned) structures in this area as noted in the discussion in Section 4.1.1 and depicted in Figures 12, 13, 24 and 26.

Retaining walls closer to the homes also have been incorporated into the model, but they are less visible from this Mt. Israel vantage point due to distance and the SPA landscape plan (see Figure 17). In that simulation, the retaining wall associated with the storm water basin is depicted adjacent to Via Ambiente on the lower right hand side of the development. The Rancho Cielo-design earth-tone coloration of the wall and distance from this public roadway viewpoint minimize its visibility. Slope revegetation of the cut slope in direct view of the traveler on Mt. Israel Road has occurred in the simulation, and the visual scarring associated with grading is substantially diminished. As shown, the natural tones of the native vegetation located below SPA development would continue upslope, and expand the visual perception of natural slopes. From the Reserve location shown in Figures 18a and 18b, the Project would be too distant to discern much detail. Even on Figure 18b, where a retaining wall is visible due to the zoomed in nature of the simulation, the scale relative to the surrounding slope, and size of the homes above, minimize the visual effect.

Although Figure 17 depicts the reduction in massing that would occur under the currently approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, the residential structures would be closer to each other than the large-lot estate homes located adjacent to these SPA lots along the ridgeline, and would have less open space between them. Figures 13a and 13b, above, depict existing large lot estate homes in the area. As shown, a viewer's distance from specific parcels can result in a number of structures being seen at the same time without perceiving intervening space. This results in the structure mass "combining" as the lots seem to merge together. This is an existing visual condition in the area. Similarly, the large retaining walls would be obscured by landscaping, would be colored to "visually fade" into the surrounding soil color, and are not atypical features in this area given the abruptness of the topography and existing/planned home locations.

Overall, identified architectural features, such as gabled roofs, split level design and varied window treatments, common landscaping elements and similar heights would result in a level of unity that results in "harmony" with the surroundings; consistent with the San Dieguito Community Plan goal stated in Section 2.3 of this VIA.

Although hazy, as shown in Figures 18a and 18b, both lines of residential structures on TM 5441 would be visible as they trend along, and slightly down slope from, the ridgeline. To some



Existing Conditions



Proposed Project

Proposed Configuration

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Key View/Photosimulation - Mt. Israel Road

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Existing Conditions



Proposed Project

Proposed Configuration

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Key View/Photosimulation - Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve/Ray Brooks Overlook

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions



Proposed Configuration

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Key View/Photosimulation - Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve/Ray Brooks Overlook

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

extent, the residences would draw the eye, as they would be located close to a ridgeline that could be directly in front of the viewer. Their visual impact would be somewhat diminished; however, by other visible elements, such as homes down slope and other residences along the ridgeline (visible in Figure 18b with its enhanced [zoomed in] view to the property). It is also clear from the simulation that the lot provides only a portion of a much larger view experienced from this location. From this viewpoint, the full expanse of the panorama provided in Figure 12a is available to the viewer. Equally dominant to the visible (on- and off-Rancho Cielo developed elements) are the undeveloped slopes with native vegetation. Both of these terrestrial elements are additionally visually balanced by the expanse of sky seen from this elevated viewpoint. For viewers sited just a bit further back from the overlook, the reservoir itself also would provide a powerful visual element, due both to the infrequency of large bodies of water in the County, as well as the highly engineered nature of the dam.

As depicted in Figure 19, Key View/Photosimulation – Elfin Forest Road, although potentially centered in the view for travelers along this roadway, the distance to the site renders changes to the view somewhat minimal. The ridgeline development would be seen, but would be substantially visually outweighed by the intervening slopes and immediately adjacent vegetation.

Relative to the currently approved Rancho Cielo Project, the subject SPA-proposed reduction in units, within the parcel would result in uses over 20 percent less dense than those allowed under the approved Rancho Cielo Project for TM 5441. Restriction of structure height to 35 feet rather than the anticipated 60 feet also would result in rooftops being 40 percent less visible than originally anticipated. Any view of development at TM 5440 would result in less impactful views than those originally planned as part of the existing zoning district, as the commercial development allowed by the existing zoning would have been more intense than the residential development proposed at TM 5440. The reduction in development intensity combined with the lower structure height result in a less than significant impact. Based on the above discussion, SPA implementation would not result in a significant visual impact under Guideline 1 related to contrast with existing visual elements or quality of the area. The SPA is also found consistent with applicable design guidelines. Although the San Dieguito Community Plan historically has contained prohibitions against ridgeline development, it also expressly contains the approved Specific Plan, as a specific element and (as discussed throughout this report), is consistent with the development pattern and visual character of this part of the County. As an already approved project, the SPA is not evaluated in a vacuum as a new proposal, but is evaluated relative to the approved Rancho Cielo development. As noted above, the current amendment reduces footprint, number of dwellings, and heights of dwellings proposed for TM 5441. The SPA is identified as consistent.

Visual effects described above also occur, but to a lesser level, for more westerly viewers. These viewers would see more of TM 5440 than 5441. In general, the size of the immediate adjacency of the structures is expected to be less visible as these viewers generally would be at farther distances. The separate structures would visually read as built features, but they may visually meld into one larger structure given landscaping and viewer distance (as illustrated in Figure 13a, which shows existing separated structures on large lots appearing to be immediately adjacent to one another when viewed from a distance). Other Rancho Cielo (and off-site) structures also would be part of the view, detracting from a focus on the two Project parcels.

Regardless, the view would be consistent with, and less impactful than, the one originally approved. Since the development is residential, the units are more consistent with adjacent residential development than the zoned commercial center.

With regard to concern for dark skies, although Rancho Cielo is not located within the Dark Skies boundaries (it is in Zone B), the development of the Specific Plan includes safety lighting, street lights; pedestrian pathway illumination; and parking lot lighting. SPA (and Rancho Cielo development overall) would not adversely affect night views or astronomical observations. The proposed lighting would conform to the lamp type and shielding requirements, as well as the hours of operation detailed in the Light Pollution Code (Section 59.101-59.115).

5.5.2 Guideline 2: Result in the Removal of/or Change to Valued Visual Elements

No designated landmarks (e.g., landmark trees) or visible rock outcrops or historic resources (structures or landscaping) are present on the two parcels. They do not form part of the seen environment, and no impact is identified.

The largest change to valued visual elements would relate to modifications to ridgeline views for off-site viewers as discussed under Guideline 1.

As noted above, the view to this specific part of the Rancho Cielo ridgeline would change for these viewers. The ridgeline is a substantial topographic feature, and is both close enough to be visible and far enough away to provide the horizon line. Structures built on this pad would be skylined and would change the current more natural aspect of the ridgeline. Also as discussed above, ridgeline development is wholly consistent with the entire ongoing Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The review of this type of construction and its visual effects was included within the previous Rancho Cielo approvals. The current SPA proposes visually similar, but less intense, uses than have already been approved, through the existing zoning districts. Landscaping, assumed as part of design and shown in Figure 11, would be included to soften structural lines. As a result, ridgeline effects that would result from SPA implementation are not visually significant, as it relates to Guideline 2.

5.5.3 Guideline 3: Substantially Obstruct, Interrupt, or Detract From a Valued Focal and/or Panoramic Vista

The two parcels are not visible from scenic roadways, and visibility to the site from the Coast to Crest Trail could occur from one limited location that is over 2.5 miles distant. No impact is identified for these resources.

The SPA development would be visible from public roads, and trails within Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve. However, based on this analysis, no *substantial obstruction* or *interruption* of views would occur.

As discussed, many views towards the SPA area are eliminated due to existing road orientation or vegetation that screens views. The presence of surrounding hills however, results in views that remain often being panoramic in nature.



Existing Conditions



Proposed Configuration

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Key View/Photosimulation - Elfin Forest Road

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This means that potential public views are likely to incorporate all or a portion of the two Project parcels, but also means that the two parcels only form one element within a larger and expansive view, incorporating other hills, structures, roads, etc. Although it is expected that some viewers will find that the SPA would detract from a valued focal point or panoramic vista, the scope of the views result in the effect being less than *substantial*, with associated impacts being less than significant under Guideline 3.

5.5.4 Rancho Cielo Interior Views

Although not directly relevant to the CEQA analysis provided in this VIA, the SPA Applicant has also prepared visual simulations of interior Rancho Cielo views in response to requests from area residents and the Board of Supervisors.

These simulations do not follow County CEQA Guidelines for simulation preparation in that they neither focus on public views nor restrict vegetation represented in the simulations to only five years' growth. They have been reviewed for accuracy of modeling; however, and they accurately illustrate the post-development topography and architectural detailing. They depict proposed lot development with landscaping shown at varying levels of maturity, as well as showing substantially greater detail of the development due to the closer location of the represented viewer. Because Rancho Cielo residential streets are not public, these simulations did not provide a basis for the CEQA analysis in this VIA. They are provided here for the readers' information and interest.

Figure 20, Key Map for On-Site Simulations, provides an orientation graphic showing the locations from which the base photographs were taken. Figures 21 through 26, On-Site Key View/Photosimulations 1 through 6, depict views within Rancho Cielo, from west to east.

5.6 Cumulative Effects

Visual cumulative effects address those incremental changes that may contribute to significant adverse changes in a regional setting or character, even if those changes are not identified as significant adverse impacts on a project level. The analysis is a two-step process: first, an assessment is made regarding whether a cumulative impact occurs; and second, an assessment is made regarding the level to which the proposed action would contribute to it. The Project contribution is identified as either cumulatively considerable or less than cumulatively considerable.

In this instance, Project visual effects relate to two SPA elements: (1) location on a ridgeline; and (2) clustering of residential features in an area generally more estate residential in nature. The cumulative study area is the viewshed identified for the Project, as this covers the area from which Project elements are most likely to be visible.

In this instance, as seen in Figure 3 of this VIA, the cumulative study area breaks into two general categories—the large estate or rural lots and open space located in the northern two-thirds of the study viewshed, and the more densely developed residential areas around golf course facilities in the southern third of the viewshed. The Proposed Project would place the

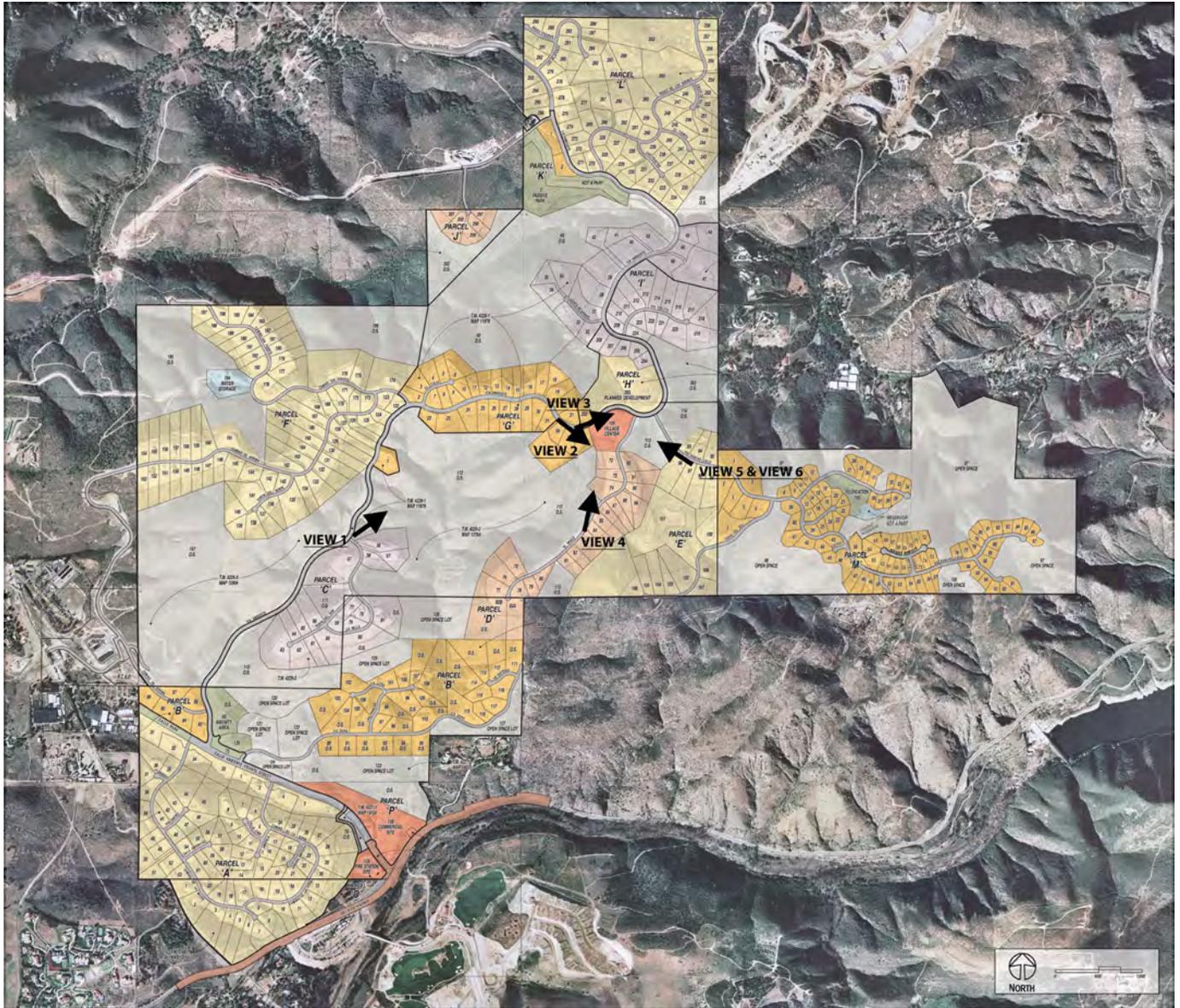
allowed clustered structures in the northernmost portion of the viewshed, where they are relatively atypical. Most of the development in this portion of the viewshed is large lot in nature—in fact, the two parcels in question are part of an otherwise large-lot development. As such, there is not a cumulative trend toward such clustered development in this part of the viewshed, and the proposed SPA does not contribute to an existing cumulative effect.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the visibility to TMs 5441 and 5440 is not extensive, as it would only occur for approximately 12 percent of mapped viewshed. Views may be obtained to the Project from Elfin Forest residences, but as previously described, these would be at distance, and visual impact of the SPA from Elfin Forest Road to existing views would be minimal relative to the percentage of the view seen, as depicted on Figure 19. In addition, the Cielo del Norte development would be located adjacent to the northwest boundary of Rancho Cielo. This development of single-family homes is sited between Rancho Cielo and Elfin Forest, on the portion of Figure 3 that largely shows no visibility to TMs 5441 and 5440. Where the Project would be visible from Elfin Forest Road and Harmony Grove Road (please refer to Figure 19) the Cielo del Norte development would be located between the viewer and Rancho Cielo. As a result, the visual effect of the more distant residences proposed as part of Project implementation would be substantially diminished. The Cielo del Norte estate homes appear consistent with other development in the area. The combination of the two projects is not expected to visually change the perception of large lot individual homes and open space mix in this portion of the County from these roadways.

Even without consideration of intervening structures and vegetation, viewers in the vicinity of the Bridges at Santa Fe would have virtually no visibility to the parcels (located in the vicinity of photo locations A, B, C and D on Figure 3). Although residences in the Crosby National Golf Club may have views to the Project, they (as well as public views from roads to the south such as Artesian Road, etc.) would be at distance, with the proposed development losing individual structure differentiation. Although the lot size would be more consistent with residences at the Bridges and Crosby, the visual effect on the cumulative condition would be attenuated by distance.

From closer viewing locations (including the Reserve), the visual effect would be most notable, as described under Project direct effects in Sections 5.1 through 5.5. As noted above, because most of the developable area is already built out or planned to be built out with large lots, there is not a trend toward smaller lot development. As such, there is no cumulative issue for this topic to which the proposed SPA could contribute.

With regard to ridgeline development, SPA implementation would continue this trend that occurs in the more exclusive portions of the County. The Proposed Project would also implement the past approvals in the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. While representative of this area and seen as highly desirable by some, others find ridgeline development and structural skylining to be visually intrusive. The proposed SPA, however, addresses less than one percent of the overall Rancho Cielo Project, and a substantially smaller percentage of the overall viewshed. As shown on Figure 3 and described above, views to the proposed development generally would be fleeting and/or at distance, as well as observed by relatively low numbers of viewers overall.



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Key Map for On-Site Simulations
 RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions

EXISTING HOME LOT 68



PROPOSED PROJECT



Proposed Configuration

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 1

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions

PROPOSED PROJECT



EXISTING HOME LOT 21

Proposed Configuration

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 2

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions

PROPOSED PROJECT

PROPOSED PROJECT



VIA AMBIENTE

Proposed Configuration

EXISTING PAD FUTURE
HOMESITE LOT 202

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 3

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions

EXISTING HOME
LOT 71

PROPOSED PROJECT

EXISTING HOME
LOT 85 & 86



Proposed Configuration

EXISTING PAD FUTURE
HOMESITE LOT 74

EL BRAZO

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 4

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions

EXISTING HOMES
LOTS 30, 69, & 71

PROPOSED PROJECT



Proposed Configuration

VIA RANCHO CIELO

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 5

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Existing Conditions



PROPOSED PROJECT

Proposed Configuration

VIA RANCHO CIELO

EXISTING SLOPE LOT
94

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On-Site Key View/Photosimulation 6

RANCHO CIELO ESTATES VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Cumulative effects resulting from these very focused (and minimizing) changes would not vary based on SPA implementation. The contribution to this effect resulting from SPA implementation would constitute a less than considerable contribution to any adverse cumulative condition that may exist.

5.7 Summary of Project Impacts and Significance and Conclusions

Consistent with guidance in the 2007 County of San Diego Visual Guidelines and Significance Thresholds, public views form the primary focus of this analysis. Although visibility of the SPA area to viewers from both private and public viewpoints are discussed throughout the report, since, the SPA would result in less intense and dense development it is visually less intrusive and the impact assessment focus on public viewers.

The two Project parcels and their uses were identified during approval of the first amendment to the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan, in the 1984 Supplemental EIR. The visual impacts identified in 1984 and during the subsequent Specific Plan Amendments were the same or similar to those discussed in this analysis for the proposed TMs 5440 and 5441. The stated visual impact mitigation measures proposed for the Specific Plan would not change based on the current Project design. The current TMs would not create more severe visual impacts than were originally anticipated. In fact, it is expected that the subject TMs would result in slightly less impact, due to the lower intensity of development and reduced building heights currently proposed. Ridgeline development and visibility of the subject clustered development were assumed as part of the originally approved Specific Plan design and implementation of the current SPA TMs would not create a more severe impact than the original design of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan.

With regard to visible SPA-related changes, implementation of the proposed SPA at TM 5440 would retain building heights at 35 feet, eliminate an approved helipad and commercial uses, and implement residential uses only (consisting of 10 to 11 units, depending on development scenario) and result in building massing that is more consistent with residential development than the zoned commercial uses. Implementation of the proposed SPA at TM 5441 would reduce the number of planned units for this lot from 42 to 31 and substantially reduce structure height from a maximum allowed 60 feet to 35. Steep slope encroachment for both parcels complies with the RPO. The SPA implementation would result in grading patterns, retaining walls, architectural features and landscaping consistent with the existing development, on the other portions of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan.

Review of site changes from five representative viewpoints within a three-mile radius indicates that the SPA elements would range from notable to barely visible. This is supported by the three photosimulations prepared for the SPA and presented in Section 5.5.1. The Project would be incrementally less visible from off-site locales than if the currently allowed Project were to be built. Consideration of each of the above points related to minimization of potential Project effects previously approved, results in findings of less than significant impacts under CEQA relative to the SPA.

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6.0 ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

6.1 39-Unit Development Scenario

One development scenario has been reviewed for the SPA, which would reduce the units developed on the two Project parcels by a total of three. This would reduce the number of homes on TM 5441 by 2, so that only 29 residences would be built. On TM 5440, only 10 residential units would be constructed. This would allow a slightly less dense organization of the units on the lots, but would result in only an incremental change in massing. Structure height would be the same. Given the distance from which most viewers see the site (at least 0.5 mile distant), this decrease may not be noticeable.

Although grading on Lot 5440 would remain the same, one potentially important change between the plans would occur on Lot 5441. With deletion of two residential structures, grading would be simplified, and retaining walls at the north end of the lot that are proposed for a 31-residential unit development scenario on this lot would be substantially minimized. Under this alternative, the northern wall would be only approximately 80 feet long and would vary from 1 to 10 feet in height, as opposed to 380 feet in length and 22- to 28- feet in height.

Similar to the 42-unit design scenario analyzed above, this alternative also would result in less than significant impacts under CEQA.

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7.0 VISUAL MITIGATION AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Several design features such as landscaping, building setbacks, and architectural details would help to reduce the contrast between the Proposed Project and the surrounding area. These elements largely are part of the approved Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. For the current SPA proposal, the reduction in residential units on TM 5441 (the 31- or 29-unit development scenarios), combined with reduction in structure height to a maximum of 35 feet and elimination of approximately 30 percent of two-story dwellings, would result in further diminution of visual effects over those anticipated as part of the currently approved Specific Plan.

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8.0 REFERENCES

County of San Diego

- 2011 General Plan
San Dieguito Community Plan

- 2007 County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources. July 30.

- 1986 San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances. Light Pollution Code. Section 59.101 et seq. Chapter 9.

- 1984 Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Project

Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve

- 2012 Anderson, Jeff, to Lisa Capper of HELIX, pers. comm. regarding user numbers at the Reserve and primary use of more northern areas.

Rancho Cielo Estates, Ltd.

- 2001 Cielo Rancho Santa Fe Site Improvements Design Guidelines Supplement. November 2001.

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9.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

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