Visual Analysis for Proposed SS-639-01 Veterans of Foreign Wars Cingular Wireless Telecommunications Facility

ZAP 05-010
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Introduction

This study has been prepared to provide supplemental information to the County of San Diego regarding the visual impacts associated with telecommunication equipment proposed for 844 Tavern Road, Alpine, California (APN 403-380-80-00). This study has been prepared to assess the visual impacts to the surrounding roadways, including Scenic Routes, and communities that will result from the construction of this project. A discussion of applicable County policies and mitigation measures are also included within the context of this study.

Proposed Project:

Description

The project proposed by this Major Use Permit is to co-locate an unmanned wireless telecommunications facility on a commercial parcel located in the community of Alpine in the unincorporated area of San Diego County. The site currently contains telecommunications equipment from 4 carriers that range in size from a 28-foot high flagpole with antennas (T Mobile) to a Nextel Monopole that is 78-feet high (see Site Plan, Figure 4). This project consists of the installation and operation of antennas and associated equipment cabinets for the Cingular Wireless telecommunications network. A total of (12) twelve antennas are to be mounted on a proposed 50-foot high Broadleaf Monotree (monotree). Associated equipment cabinets will be located at ground level within a fenced 12'x18' masonry enclosure painted to match existing enclosures presently on-site. Evergreen shrubs will screen the otherwise visible portions of the enclosure structure.

Proposed utility connections will be located underground.

Location

The project is located approximately 500-feet north of the centerline of Interstate 8 which is identified as a Second Priority Scenic Route in the Alpine Community Plan, .5 miles northwest of the I-8/Tavern Road interchange, and approximately .6 miles northwest of the Alpine Blvd./Tavern Road intersection (Figures 1 & 2). Industrial land uses lie to the north, west, south, and east.

The property is zoned, C37, Service Commercial, which allows for the construction of telecommunications facilities upon approval of a Major Use Permit.

Project Visual Setting

The project is located approximately 1,700-feet above mean sea level (AMSL) on a south facing slope of a localized knoll that is part of the foothills of the Cuyamaca Mountains. This site is approximately 370-feet above the Alpine Creek corridor which lies south of the Interstate 8 (I-8). The immediate visual setting is one of rural, and industrial land uses, open space, and vacant land surrounded by hills, valleys, and drainages. The area, as described in the Alpine Community Plan, "is rugged and diverse, ranging from densely vegetated lower drainageways of l500' elevation, to semi-arid hilly terrain, to the peaks of Viejas and El Cajon Mountains with elevations of over 4100'."

On-site visual elements include a residential looking structure, mature trees (Eucalyptus and other broad-headed evergreen species), boulder outcroppings, existing telecommunications towers and associated equipment, chaparral and coastal sage scrub, and mature verdant landscaping associated with the developed portions of the site (Viewpoint 8, Figure 13).

To the south lies Interstate 8, the Alpine Creek corridor, and rural residential land uses and open space (Figure 9). To the west lie industrial land uses beyond which I-8 is visible winding through

steep topography (Figure 8). To the east I-8 is visible working its way past Alpine Town Center and Viejas Mountain (Figure 8). To the north lie industrial facilities and a gravel pit (Figure 9).

These viewsheds contain many of the natural scenic elements characteristic of the Alpine area, including steep hills, densely vegetated riparian corridors, and sparsely vegetated, boulder strewn, taller peaks and ridgelines. These elements combine with a distributed pattern of diverse land uses and direct views to encompass a fairly wide orientation.

Key issues

- Visibility of the facility from surrounding sensitive areas and key views,
- Degree of visual contrast between the proposed equipment and the surrounding area, and
- Visibility of the facility from the I-8 corridor, a proposed second priority scenic corridor.

Visibility and Impact Analysis

Key views are representative views in which the project could be viewed as a prominent feature based on; the type of view, public or private (public being considered more sensitive), breadth of view (views taking in a number of elements rely more on the project as a whole than those focusing on a specific feature), view distance, view duration, the number of viewers exposed (greater the number, the more sensitive the view), and whether the project adversely impacts scenic vistas and/or designated scenic highways. To assess the visibility of the proposed project a site visit was conducted to identify the significant project related viewsheds and to identify key views from which the project would be most visible from the surrounding community. The Generalized Viewshed exhibit that follows as Figure 2, delineates general areas within which the project is visible (project viewshed) whereby there is no intervening topography between the eye of an observer and the proposed project as determined from an analysis of USGS topographic information. Intervening structures and vegetation observed from analysis of aerial photographs and site visits are taken into consideration when determining a project's specific viewshed. The key views that follow are the result of this analysis and are depicted in Figure 3, Viewpoint Locations.

Significance Criteria

The CEQA Guidelines define a significant effect on the environment to mean a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project, including objects of historic or aesthetic significance (14 CCR 15382).

Under the CEQA Guidelines, significant visual impacts may result from:

• A substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista

• Substantial damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway

• Substantial degrading of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings

• A new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

The analysis of a proposed project's impacts is based on evaluation of the changes to the existing visual resources that would result from the project's construction and operation. A project's visual contrast is used as a tool in determining the extent to which a project will affect these resources. Visual contrast refers to the degree in which a project differs in form/line, color and texture, from corresponding elements in the surrounding visual setting. It is used as a tool to quantify degrees of impact. A severe degree of contrast would occur when any two or more of these visual elements differ substantially, or when at least one element differs significantly. A moderate degree of contrast

would occur when there are substantial differences between one of these elements, or moderate differences between two or more of these visual elements. A slight degree of visual contrast would occur if there was a moderate difference between one visual element of the project as compared to the existing visual setting.

Visual impacts are also assessed based on the projects consistency with the following applicable adopted County policies relating to visual resources.

Alpine Community Plan

The Alpine Subregional Plan implements the goals and policies of the Regional Land Use Element and sets forth goals, objectives, and policies intended to guide development within the community. Elements of the Plan that contain applicable criteria pertaining to visual quality include Scenic Highways, and Conservation. Relevant goals and policies from each of these elements are presented below. The Community Plan does not contain policies on telecommunications facilities.

Scenic Highway Goals & Policies

Goal: Promote the early designation of a scenic highway system which will provide attractive and scenic travel routes within the alpine planning area.

Policies and Recommendations

"Support priorities for scenic highway corridors in the Alpine area as follows: Interstate 8, second priority."

"Proposed development within the following scenic corridors should be done with extreme care to preserve these vistas ... from I-8 toward El Capitan Reservoir, east and west views of Viejas Mountain from I-8, and from I-8 south along Sweetwater River."

Conservation

Policies and Recommendations

"Wherever possible, the character of ridgelines shall be preserved. This policy shall not exclude two story structures. However, project design shall minimize visual impacts."

Discussion of Project Conformance to the Alpine Community Plan

The project conforms to the Alpine Community Plan with its choice of a faux tree design which will relate to existing vegetation found on site. This will help preserve the overall rural and agricultural character of the development area. Landscaping, including native species, will provide substantial screening of the equipment enclosure over time. Additionally, significant on-site vegetation, including mature grove trees will be preserved, protecting wildlife habitat and community character.

Section 6980 – Zoning Ordinance: Wireless Telecommunications Facilities

The following design regulations are found to be relevant to the proposed project.

B. All camouflaged facilities shall be designed to visually and operationally blend into the surrounding area in a manner consistent with community character and existing development. The facility shall also be appropriate for the specific site, i.e., it should not "stand out" from its surrounding environment, such as a faux tree standing alone in a field or standing at a greater height (five feet or more) than other trees on the site).

As an unmanned, 50-foot Broadleaf Tree design, the facility has been designed to visually and operationally blend into the surroundings. The faux tree design will be located near existing mature trees in an area where specimen trees punctuate the landscape and therefore will not "stand out" from its surrounding environment.

F. All facilities shall be designed to minimize the visual impact to the greatest extent feasible by means of placement, screening, landscaping with native species, whenever feasible, and camouflage, and to be compatible with existing …. and other site characteristics.

As a Broadleaf Tree design the facility has been designed to blend with the surrounding live vegetation. The project has been sited to take advantage of existing landscaping as a means of providing visual context with other live plant material. Native species are being use to aid in screening of the equipment enclosure.

K. All high visibility facilities shall be sited in such a manner as to cause the least detriment to the viewshed of adjoining properties.

The project has been sited near stands of existing vegetation to minimize adverse impacts to the viewshed of adjoining properties.

R. No facility sited on a ridgeline or hilltop shall be approved unless the facility blends with the surrounding … environment to the maximum extent possible …

As a Broadleaf Tree design near existing live vegetation, similar in height, the proposed facility will blend with the surrounding environment to the maximum extent possible.

Viewsheds and Impact Evaluation

The following discussion addresses changes to the existing visual character resulting from implementation of the proposed project. Visual effects were determined via analysis of viewsheds from public roadways, private residences, and consistency with adopted County policies relating to visual resources. Four primary viewshed are identified within the project area and are discussed below:

Interstate 8 / Alpine Blvd. Viewsheds

To a viewer traveling east on Interstate 8 the project becomes visible from approximately .8-miles away and remains in view over that entire distance, approximately 45 seconds to a viewer traveling in a vehicle at 65 mph. Traveling west on I-8, the project comes into view at or about the West Victoria Road/I-8 interchange, approximately 1.3 miles from the project. The project remains in view for approximately 71 seconds to a viewer traveling in a vehicle at 65 mph.

From locations along the I-8 corridor, the equipment enclosure will be substantially screened from view while the Broadleaf Tree will appear similar in form, line, color and texture with other surrounding trees in view, thereby reducing the visual contrast of the facility with its surroundings. As a result it is anticipated that a slight to moderate degree of visual contrast will occur as a result of this project (see Figures 19 & 20, Simulations 2 & 3) but this change would not represent a significant adverse impact to views from the I-8 viewshed due to the sight distance and the faux structure's design compatibility with the existing visual environment.

Views from the North

Views of the project are available from the industrial zoned parcels adjoining Tavern Road located north of the site (Viewpoints 6-9). From these locations, as evidenced by existing visible equipment and vegetation, the proposed equipment enclosure and lower portions of the Broadleaf Tree will be screened from view by foreground view-blocking vegetation, topography, and structures. The choice of a Broadleaf Tree design will largely render the visible portions of the Broadleaf Tree consistent in form, line, color, and texture with the surrounding evergreen plantings. As a result it is anticipated that a slight degree of visual contrast will occur as a result of this project (see Figure 20, Simulation 3) but this change would not represent a significant adverse impact to views from the east.

Views from the South

Views from the south are available from Alpine Road and from existing development situated on the south facing hillsides located across the Interstate 8 corridor as evidenced by visible equipment seen in Viewpoints 11 through 16. Views from these locations are generally of short duration between view-blocking vegetation, structures, and topography. Along Alpine Boulevard dense riparian vegetation associated with Alpine creek, in conjunction with cut slopes adjoining the roadway, severely limit views toward the project. View of the project are available from locations along Midway Drive (Viewpoints 11-14) however these views are again of short duration due to view-blocking vegetation and structures. From locations where views are available of the project, the proposed monotree will be largely consistent in form, line, color, and texture with the surrounding trees, thereby relating to this surrounding vegetation. The equipment enclosure is substantially screened by landscaping. Installation of the monotree will screen (in part) other telecommunications facilities that exist on the site. As a result it is anticipated that a slight degree of visual contrast will occur as a result of this project but this change would not represent a significant adverse impact to views form the south. In fact from some locations it is anticipated that due to screening provided by the proposed monotree, views toward the existing telecommunications equipment will improve.

Views from the West

Views from the west, other than from within the I-8 viewshed, are generally restricted to the industrial zoned parcels adjoining Tavern Road (Viewpoint 8). Where views are available of the project the proposed monotree will largely be consistent in form, line, color, and texture with the surrounding trees, thereby relating to the existing visual environment. The equipment enclosure will be screened by landscaping. Installation of the monotree will screen (in part) other telecommunications facilities that exist on the site. As a result it is anticipated that a slight degree of visual contrast will occur as a result of this project but this change would not represent a significant adverse impact to views form the north. From some locations it is anticipated that views will improve slightly as a result of screening provided by the proposed monotree of existing equipment.

Views from the East

Views of the upper portions of the telecommunications equipment are available from the east from locations along Tavern Road (Viewpoint 6). From these areas the proposed monotree will be largely consistent in form, line, color, and texture with the surrounding vegetation, thereby relating to other trees found on site. The equipment enclosure will not be visible. As a result it is anticipated that a slight degree of visual contrast will occur as a result of this project but this change would not represent a significant adverse impact to views from the east.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts to visual resources could occur where project facilities or construction activities occupy the same field of view as other built facilities or affected landscapes and further degrade the view. A cumulative impact could also occur if a viewer's perception is that the general visual quality of an area is diminished by the presence of structures or construction effects (such as disturbed vegetation), even if the new structures are not within the same field of view as the existing structures. The significance of the cumulative impact would depend on the degree to which: (1) the viewshed is altered; (2) visual access to scenic resources is impaired; (3) visual quality is diminished; or (4) the project's visual contrast is increased.

There will be short-term (during construction) and long-term visual impacts as a result of this project. The short-term impacts will occur during and immediately after project construction however major disturbance to the site is not anticipated since the project area is generally level and free of significant vegetation that will be removed. There will be short term visual impacts associated with the presence of on-site construction equipment.

Past, Present and Reasonably Anticipated Future Wireless Projects in the Project Area

The State CEQA Guidelines (Section 14355) indicate that a cumulative impact is "the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present and reasonably foreseeable probable future project." Sections 15065 and 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that cumulative impacts of a project be addressed when the project's incremental effects would be cumulatively considerable; i.e., the incremental effects of the proposed project would be "considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects and the effects of probable future projects." This Subchapter provides information regarding past, present and reasonable anticipated future projects that could potentially combine with the proposed project to result in cumulatively considerable impacts.

Of the several wireless telecommunications projects that exist in the general vicinity of the project, all of them are located on site and considered in the analysis of localized cumulative visual impacts.

Due to the stealth design and location of the proposed project among surrounding vegetation of similar size, the analysis has concluded there will be no cumulative impacts with the addition of this project within the project viewshed. The overall visual character of the area, as seen from the impacted viewshed will improve slightly due to screening provided by the monotree of existing equipment. The overall visual character of the area will remain unchanged without it.

Cumulatively considerable projects were determined via analysis of the County's Discretionary Projects Map.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is provided by painting the equipment shelter to match other existing outbuilding found on site, placing it near existing vegetation, and by providing a camouflaged facility.

Conclusion

As a Broadleaf Tree design, to the average viewer, the project will reinforce the existing, rural visual environment within the project's viewsheds. Slight to moderate changes in the visual environment will occur to private and public views however; this change in visual environment will lessen over time as the existing surrounding vegetation grows and matures, providing further screening and visual context for the project. As a Broadleaf Tree design, the proposed project will appear to be consistent with the existing rural visual character of the community. The project will not therefore result in significant adverse visual character impacts and will be consistent with County policies related to visual effects.

In conclusion, as proposed, the telecommunications tower and equipment enclosure will not cause a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect to views from the surrounding area.

The potential visual impacts of this project do not meet the threshold of significance, and are therefore insignificant.

Figure 1 - Regional Location Map

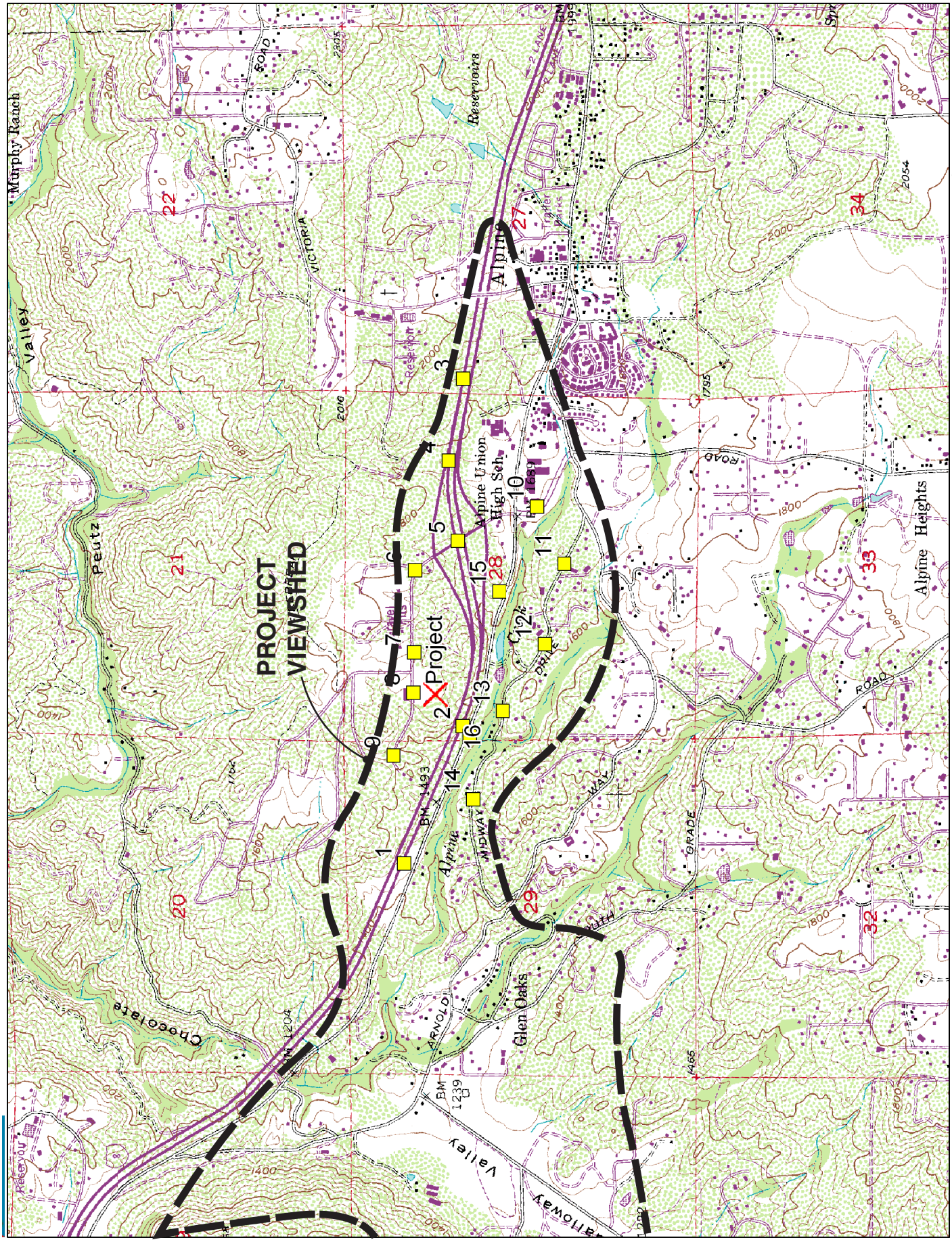

Figure 2 - Generalized Viewshed

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Figure 3 - Viewpoint Locations

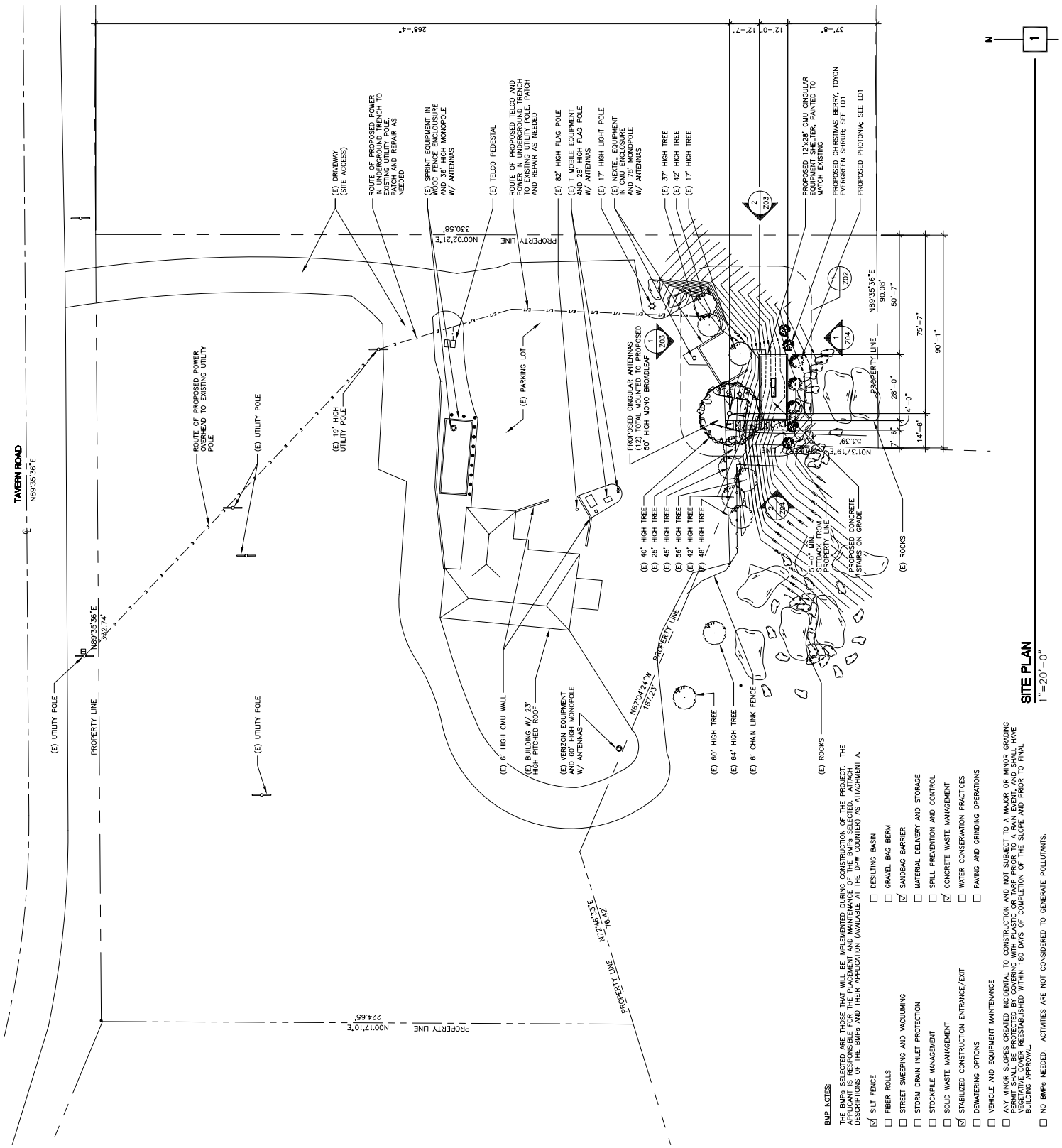

Figure 4- Site Plan

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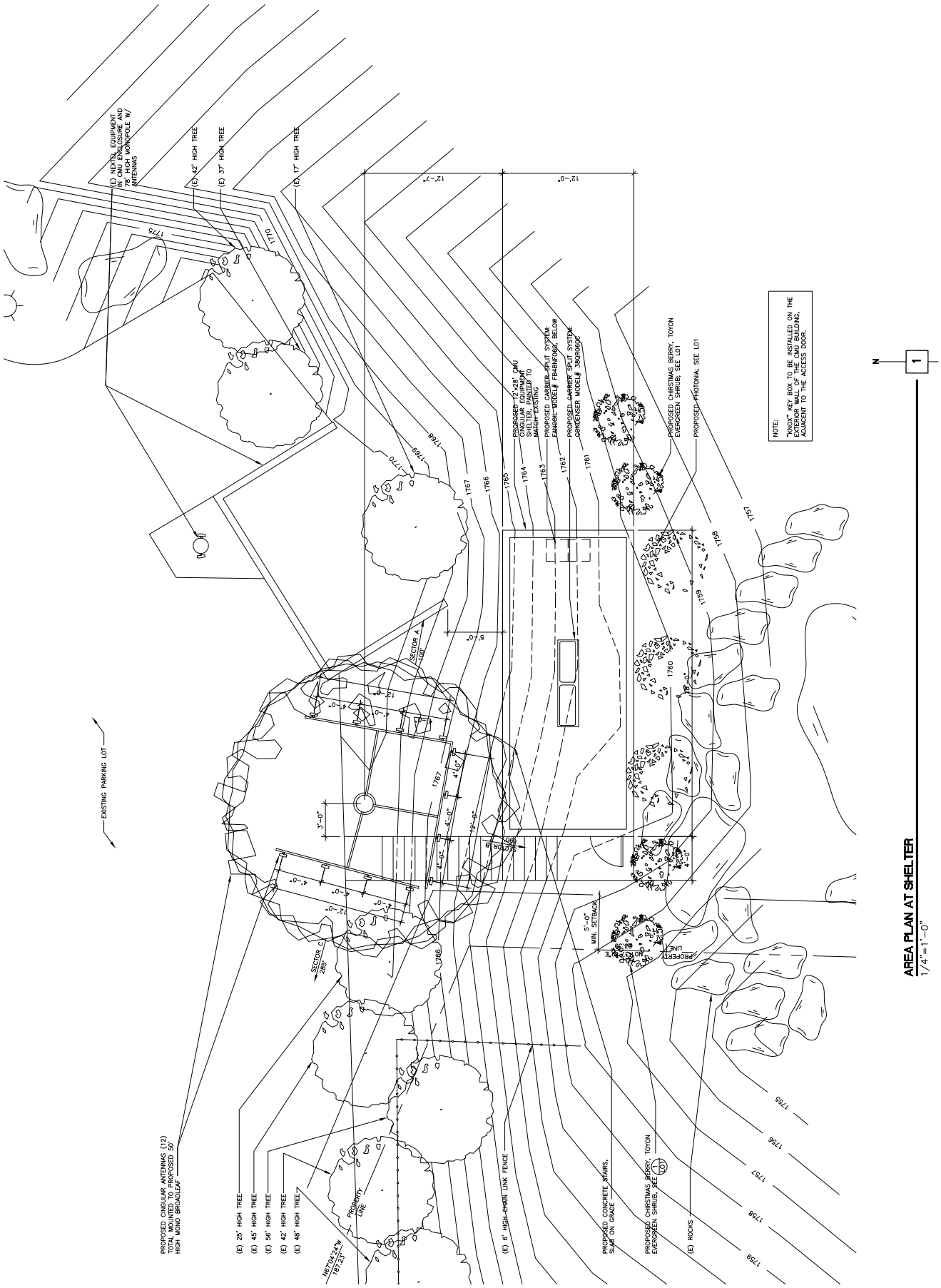
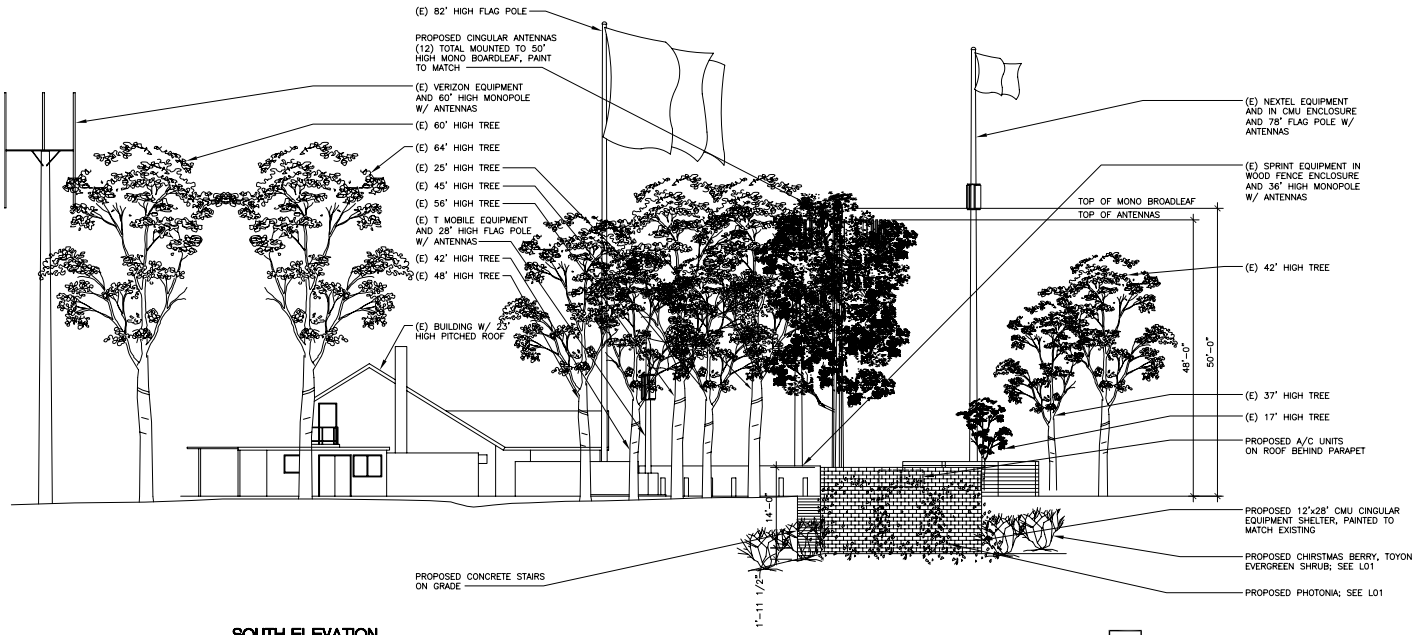
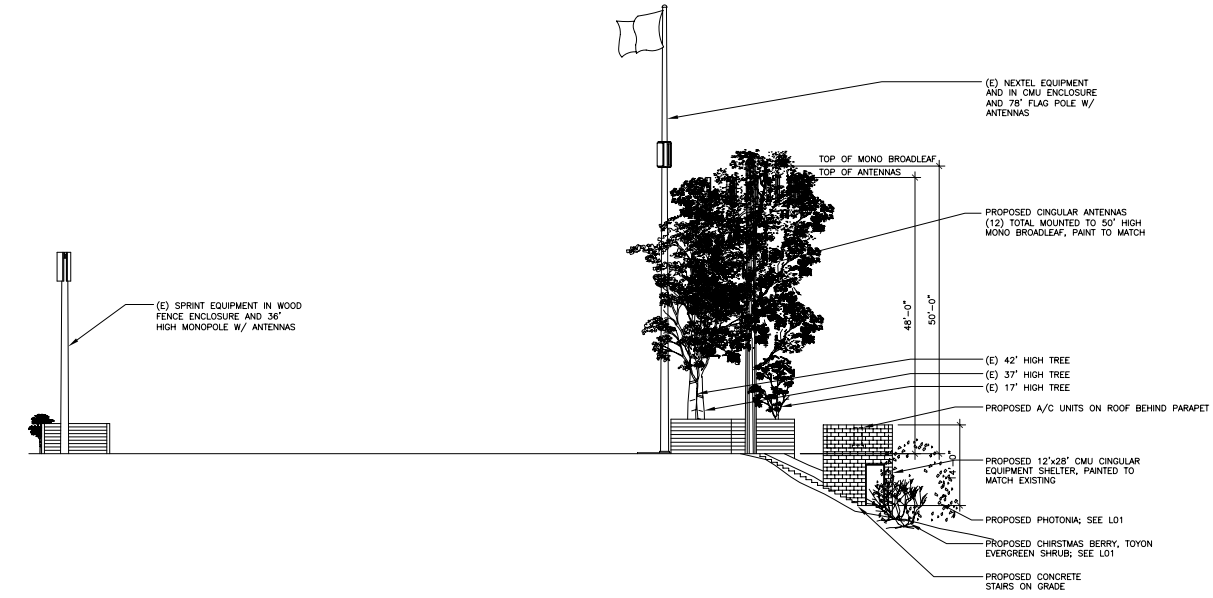


Figure 5- Enlarged Site Plan



SOUTH ELEVATION — 1

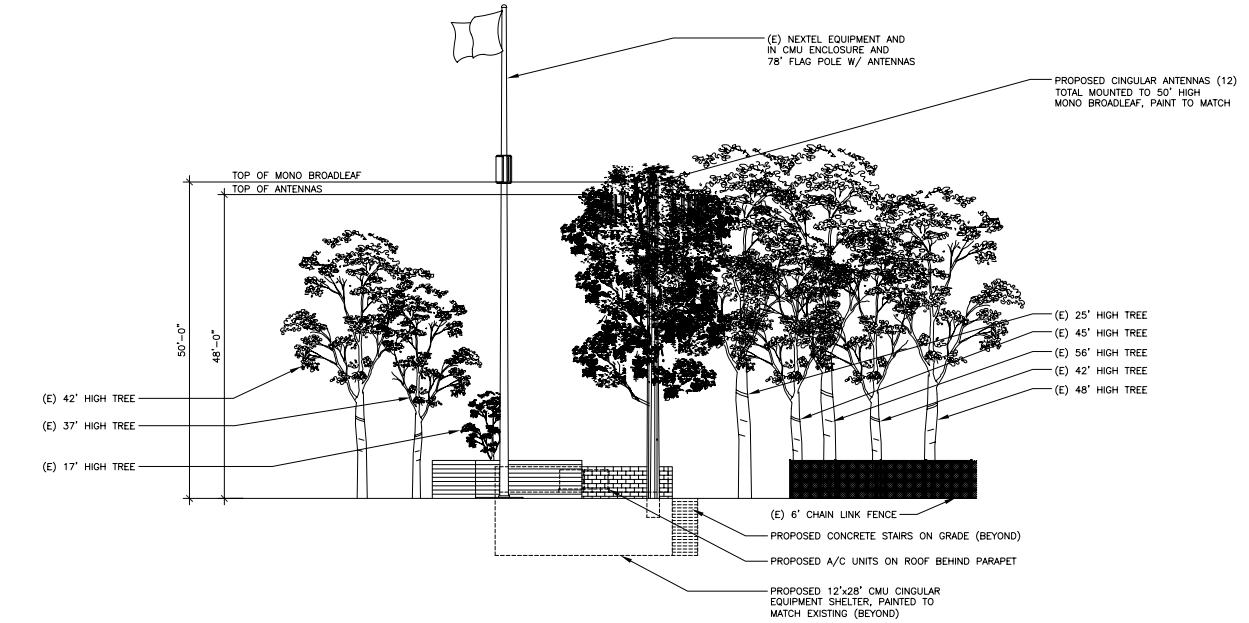
3/32"=1'-0"



WEST ELEVATION — 2

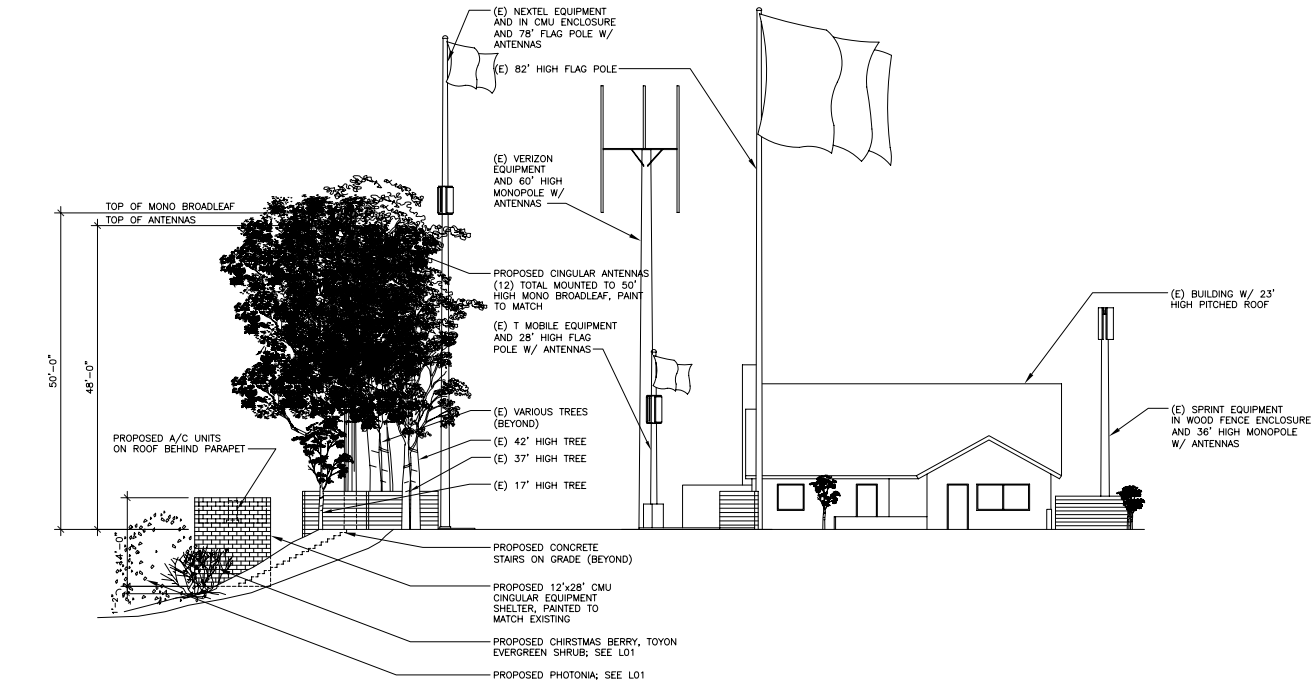
3/32"=1'-0"

Figure 6- Elevation



NORTH ELEVATION 1

3/32"=1'-0"



EAST ELEVATION 2

3/32"=1'-0"

Figure 7 - Elevation

View of partial western viewshed.

View of partial eastern viewshed.

Figure 8 - Viewsheds

View of partial northern viewshed.

View of partial southern viewshed.

Figure 9 - Viewsheds

Viewpoint 1 - View as seen traveling eastbound on I-8, approximately half mile from project.

Viewpoint 2 - View as seen traveling eastbound from I-8, approximately 650 feet from project.

Figure 10 - Viewpoints

Viewpoint 3 - Zoomed view as seen traveling westbound on I-8, approximately .9 miles from project.

Viewpoint 4 - Zoomed view as seen traveling westbound on I-8 approximately .7 miles from project.

Figure 11 - Viewpoints

Viewpoint 5 - Zoomed view as seen traveling westbound on I-8 approximately half mile from project.

Viewpoint 6 - View looking west from a location near the Tavern Road and Victoria Park Terrace intersection, approximately .4 miles from project.

Figure 12 - Viewpoints

Viewpoint 7 - View looking west from Taven Road, approximaely 730 feet from project.

Viewpoint 8 - View looking south toward site from Tavern Road, approximately 350 feet from proposed improvements.

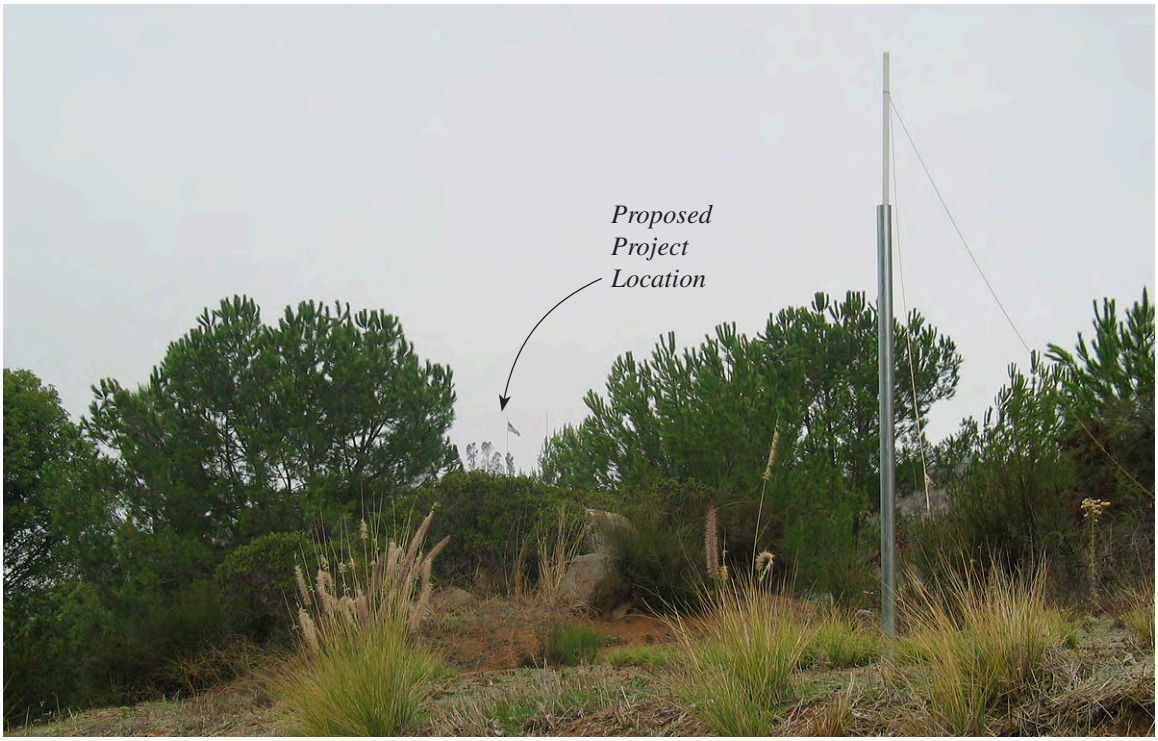
Figure 13 - Viewpoints

Viewpoint 9 - View looking southeast from Taven Road, approximately .2 miles from project.

Viewpoint 10 - View looking northwest from Tavern Road, approximately .6 miles from project.

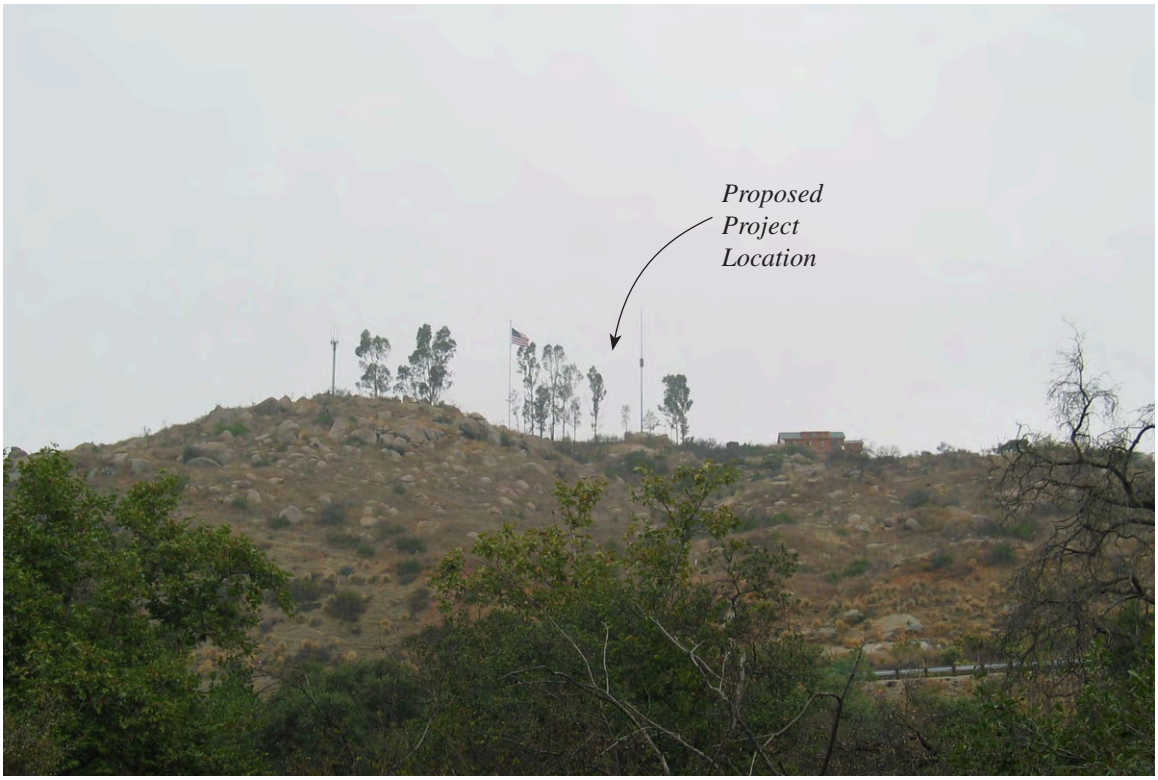
Figure 14 - Viewpoints

Viewpoint 11 - View looking northwest from Midway Drive, approximately half mile from project.



Viewpoint 12 - View looking northwest from Midway Drive, approximately .4 miles from project.

Figure 15 - Viewpoints



Viewpoint 13 - View looking north from Midway Drive, approximately .2 miles from project.

Viewpoint 14 - View looking northest from Midway Drive approximately .3 miles from project.

Figure 16 - Viewpoint

Viewpoint 15 - View looking northwest from Alpine Blvd., approximately .35 miles from project.

Viewpoint 16 - View looking northeast from Alpine Blvd., approximately 830 feet from project.

Figure 17 - Viewpoints

Figure 18 - Simulation 1

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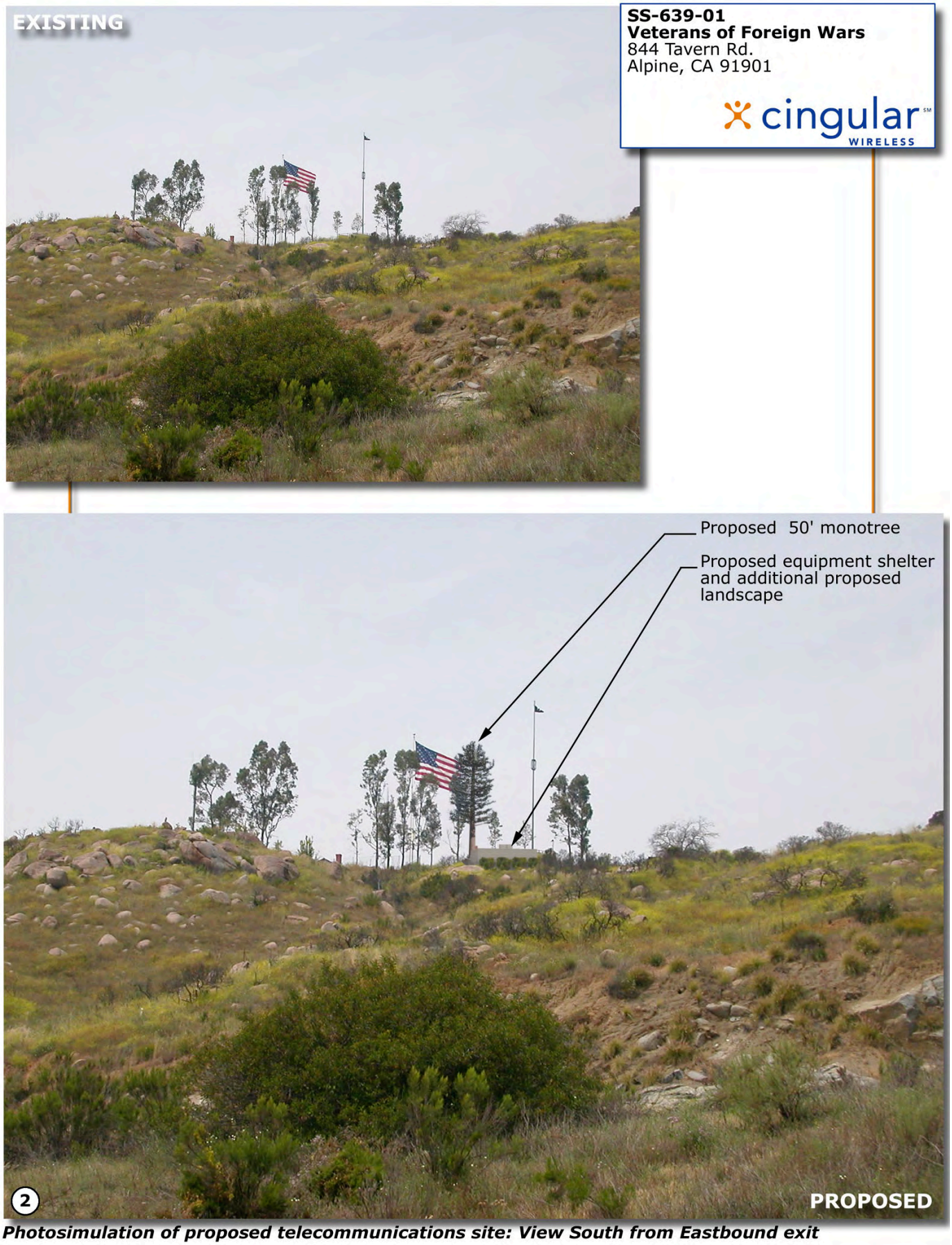

Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site: View South from Eastbound exit

Figure 19 - Simulation 2

Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site: View East from gas station

Figure 20 - Simulation 3

Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site: View North elevation

Figure 21 - Simulation 4

Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site: View from Tavern Rd. West of site

Figure 22 - Simulation 5