

3.1 AESTHETICS

Aesthetic or visual resources are the natural and human-built features of the landscape that contribute to the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the aesthetic environment. This section describes the aesthetic and visual qualities of the SOIA Area and provides a qualitative evaluation of the project's potential impacts on the area's visual character, scenic vistas, and scenic resources, as well as potential impacts from light and glare.

3.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT SITE

Exhibit 3.1-1 shows the location of representative photos taken at the SOIA Area. As shown in Exhibit 3.1-2 through Exhibit 3.1-8, the SOIA Area is currently graded flat, and used for extensive dry farmed and irrigated croplands, as well as vineyard operations and the McConnell Estates winery and tasting room, which hosts weddings, concerts, and other events. A few rural residences are also present on the SOIA Area. There are several irrigation canals that run through the site, several electrical transmission lines cross the area, and local power lines are present on the site. The primary visual features of the SOIA Area are associated with these uses: several trees, croplands, vineyards, and a few buildings. The SOIA Area has no rock outcroppings and is not located on a state scenic highway.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

The SOIA Area is located at the edge of the existing City of Elk Grove city limits. The SOIA Area is bordered on the north by Kammerer Road, on the east by West Stockton Boulevard and State Route 99 (SR 99), and to the south by Eschinger Road.

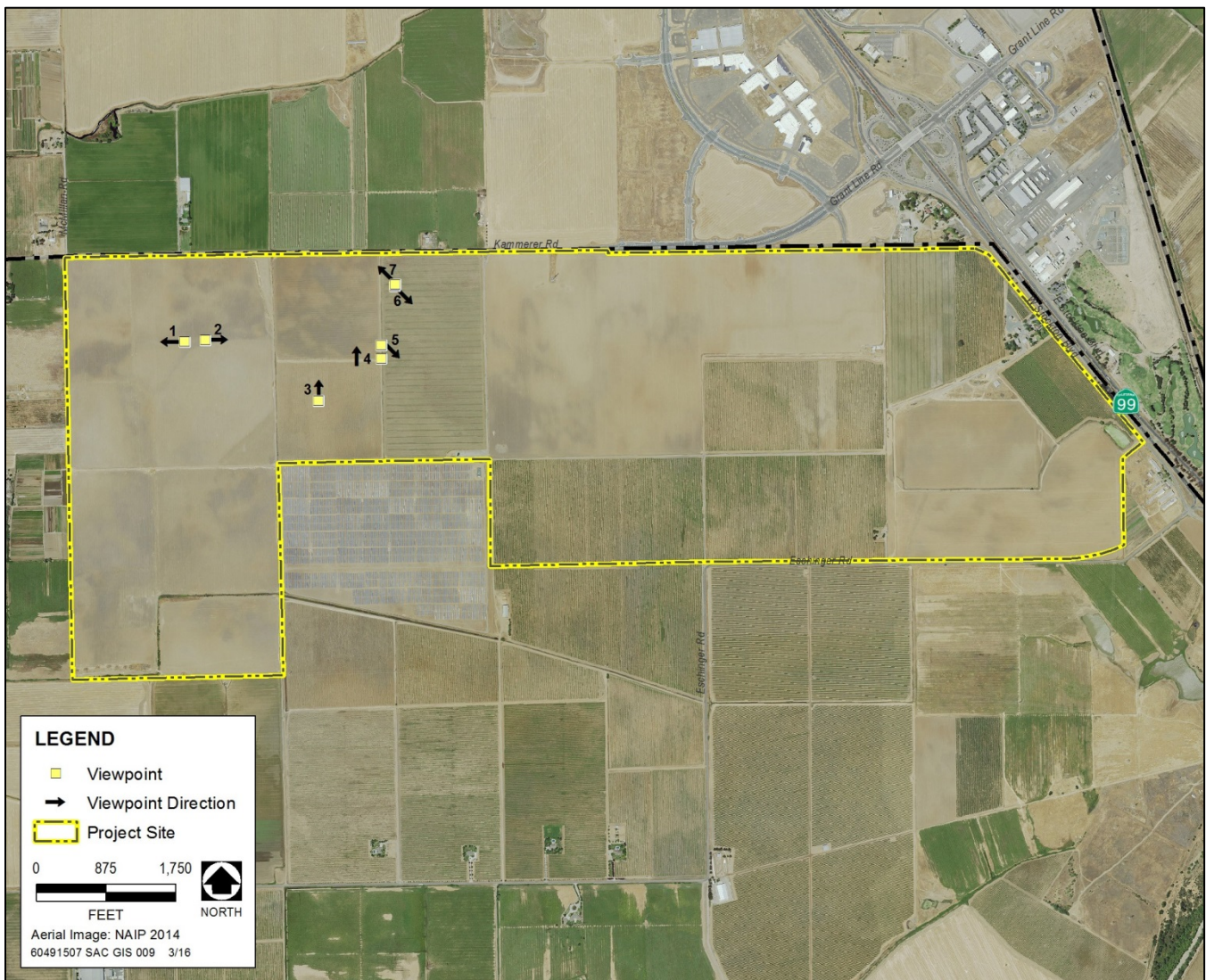
Along the north edge of the SOIA Area, north of Kammerer Road, there are mainly agricultural lands with a few rural residences. The Lent Ranch Marketplace Special Planning Area lies to the northeast, with frontage along SR 99. When the Lent Ranch Marketplace is built out, it will provide approximately 295 acres for regional retail, office, and entertainment uses (City of Elk Grove 2016). In addition, the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs has identified the northwest portion of the intersection of Grant Line Road and SR 99 as the preferred location for the Wilton Rancheria Casino Resort. A draft of the Environmental Impact Statement has been released. The Elk Grove alternative consists of a proposed 611,055 square-foot hospitality and entertainment facility, including a 12-story, 302-room hotel, a 48,150 square-foot convention center, six restaurants and bars, and a 110,260 square-foot gaming floor (City of Elk Grove 2016). The recently approved 1,200-acre mixed-use Southeast Policy Area (SEPA) lies directly to the north in the city of Elk Grove. A small trucking company is also located north of the SOIA Area. The visual character to the north of the SOIA Area is currently agricultural, although it is planned for urban development.

A narrow portion of Elk Grove is adjacent to the east side of the SOIA Area. Within this area, across SR 99, are several commercial, industrial, and public uses, including the Suburban Propane refrigerated propane gas storage facility and heavy rail, the Cosumnes Community Services District (CCSD) Fire Department Headquarters and Fire Training Facility, North West Recyclers, City of Elk Grove Special Waste Collection Center, utility service structures, and the Flatland Brewing Company. Emerald Lakes Golf Course is also across SR 99 within this

portion of Elk Grove. The visual character to the east of the SOIA Area is generally industrialized, with the exception of Emerald Lakes Golf Course.

South of the SOIA Area is Eschinger Road and an area developed with agricultural operations and solar energy generation facilities. The visual character south of the SOIA Area is agricultural, with distant views of undisturbed riparian habitat along Cosumnes River, about 3,000 feet south of the SOIA Area. The Cosumnes River is the only undammed river on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. The riparian habitat along the creek and river provides textures and colors not commonly found in the urban environment. This pastoral landscape is typical of the historic setting of Elk Grove prior to development and other rural communities, such as Sheldon and Wilton, located approximately 5–6 miles to the east (City of Elk Grove 2003a). Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coast Ranges are available on clear days.

To the west of the SOIA Area are agricultural uses with several rural residences. The visual character is agricultural or pastoral.



Source: AECOM 2016

Exhibit 3.1-1

Photo Locations



Exhibit 3.1-2

Photo Location 1, facing west



Exhibit 3.1-3

Photo Location 2, facing east



Exhibit 3.1-4

Photo Location 3, facing north



Exhibit 3.1-5

Photo Location 4, facing north



Exhibit 3.1-6

Photo Location 5, facing southeast



Exhibit 3.1-7

Photo Location 6, facing southeast



Exhibit 3.1-8

Photo Location 7, facing northwest

VIEWS OF THE PROJECT SITE (THE SOIA AREA)

Because the area has little topographical relief and the adjacent areas consist of private farmland and rural residences, public views of the SOIA Area are limited to the areas along West Stockton Boulevard and SR 99 to the east and along Kammerer Road to the north. The SOIA Area is visible to motorists traveling along these roads. Pedestrians and cyclists on Survey Road across SR 99 could also see the SOIA Area. However, there are currently no pedestrian facilities on Kammerer Road or SR 99.

Staff and visitors to the McConnell Estates winery and tasting room have views of vineyards and winery infrastructure with the agricultural lands in the background. In addition, residents living within and adjacent to the SOIA Area have views of the agricultural lands, specifically vineyards and cropland.

LIGHT AND GLARE

The SOIA Area is currently under agricultural production. Therefore, there are few on-site sources of ambient light. Most of the light emanates from local farms, the winery, and rural residences and is associated with vehicle or agricultural equipment use. Similarly, minimal glare exists in the SOIA Area since it is mostly undeveloped.

Light sources outside of the SOIA Area are located primarily along the northern and eastern boundary of the SOIA Area and include street lights and vehicle lights associated with Kammerer Road and SR 99, and adjacent commercial and industrial uses to the northeast. Glare sources outside of the SOIA Area are located primarily from adjacent urban development along the northern and eastern boundary of the SOIA Area.

3.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

FEDERAL AND STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal or State plans, policies, regulations, or laws apply to the potential aesthetic or visual impacts of the project. There are no National or California Wild and Scenic Rivers in the area. The nearest California Scenic Highway (State Route 160) is located approximately 7 miles west of the SOIA Area along the Sacramento River.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

If this SOI Amendment is approved by LAFCo, this would not authorize any change in land use or governance. However, the proposed project would adjust the City of Elk Grove's SOI and allow the City or landowners the opportunity to file an annexation request with LAFCo to annex lands within the SOI Amendment Area at some point in the future. The City of Elk Grove General Plan and Zoning Code guide both present and future development within the City's jurisdiction. Assuming that if future land use change occurs on-site, it will occur within the City of Elk Grove, the policies of the City General Plan and provisions of the Elk Grove Municipal Code, Design Review Ordinance, and Design Guidelines would apply to such development.

Elk Grove General Plan

Elk Grove is currently (July 2016) updating their General Plan. However, a draft is not yet available, so existing (2003) General Plan policies and actions that would apply to future development are described below. Any future development would be required to comply with the most recent General Plan. In addition to those policies and action described below, the City has several policies related to the promotion and protection of agricultural lands, which are provided in Section 3.2, "Agricultural Resources."

Conservation and Air Quality Element

- ▶ **Policy CAQ-8:** Large trees (both native and non-native) are an important aesthetic (and, in some cases, biological) resource. Trees which function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat should be retained to the extent possible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks, drainage channels, and other uses and structures.

If trees cannot be preserved onsite, offsite mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee may be required by the City. Where possible, trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees, which were removed.

Trees that cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City.

Land Use Element

- ▶ **Policy LU-35:** The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development—including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development—is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.

- **LU-35-Action 2:** The Design Guidelines shall include a provision to minimize the use of reflective materials in building design in order to reduce the potential impacts of daytime glare.
- **LU-35-Action 3:** The Citywide Design Guidelines shall include provisions for the design of outdoor light fixtures to be directed/shielded downward and screened to avoid nighttime lighting spillover effects on adjacent land uses and nighttime sky glow conditions.
- ▶ **Policy LU-36:** Signs should be used primarily to facilitate business identification, rather than the advertisement of goods and services. Sign size limits and locations should be designated consistent with this policy.
- ▶ **Policy LU-37:** Require the construction of “City of Elk Grove” signage and landscape treatments at major entrances to the city.
- ▶ **Policy LU-38:** Reduce the unsightly appearance of overhead and aboveground utilities.
 - **LU-38-Action 1:** To the extent possible, new utility facilities should be located underground. Facilities to be placed underground should include electrical transformers (where consistent with the guidelines of the electrical utility), water backflow preventers, and similar items.
 - **LU-38-Action 2:** Require that development on sites with existing overhead utilities be required to place these facilities underground where consistent with the guidelines of the electrical utility.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space Policies: Open Space

- ▶ **Policy PTO-15:** The City views open space lands of all types as important resource which should be preserved in the region, and supports the establishment of multipurpose open space areas to address a variety of needs, including, but not limited to:
 - Maintenance of agricultural uses;
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Recreational open space
 - Aesthetic benefits
 - Flood control

To the extent possible, lands protected in accordance with this policy should be in proximity to Elk Grove, to facilitate use of these areas by Elk Grove residents, assist in mitigation of habitat loss within the city, and provide an open space resource close to the urbanized areas of Elk Grove.

Sustainability Element

- ▶ **Policy S-24:** Emphasize placemaking design principles in new development projects.
 - **S-24-Action 1:** Identify locations for major streetscape improvements such as landscaped medians, enhanced crosswalks, street trees, directional signage, benches, and public art.

- **S-24-Action 2:** Identify key entry points into the city and provide major entry features or monuments at these locations to create a sense of arrival to Elk Grove.
- **S-24-Action 3:** Review the Land Use Plan to develop community focal points by allowing greater densities and a mix of uses at key locations.
- **S-24-Action 4:** New development should prioritize the pedestrian by implementing the following measures:
 - Parking areas and curb cuts should be minimized along commercial street frontages;
 - Encourage a vertical and horizontal mix of land uses;
 - Provide urban plazas and gathering spaces in commercial and multifamily development;
 - Provide pedestrian amenities such as lighting, landscaping, and benches.
- **S-24-Action 5:** Ensure development minimizes disruption of viewsheds within the community (e.g., view to the Sierras).

Elk Grove Municipal Code

Title 19, “Trees,” Chapter 19.12, “Tree Preservation and Protection”

The City of Elk Grove prioritizes the preservation of existing trees and the historic and aesthetic character of the community, as described in the City General Plan. The City’s tree ordinance contains provisions to preserve existing trees through the development review process and a process for tree replacement where preservation is not reasonably possible. The City considers trees with a diameter at breast height (dbh) of 6 inches or greater, or multi-trunked trees with a combined dbh of 6 inches or greater, of the following species as trees of local importance (Section 19.12.040): coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), valley oak (*Q. lobata*), blue oak (*Q. douglasii*), interior live oak (*Q. wislizenii*), oracle oak (*Q. X moreha*), California sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), and California black walnut (*Juglans hindsii*). For future development projects, tree removal would be addressed as part of the project application (Section 19.12.090).

The tree ordinance requires that mitigation for tree loss be provided at a ratio of 1 new inch dbh of tree for each inch dbh lost (1:1 ratio), unless alternative mitigation is approved by the City. An applicant for future development would be required to prepare a tree mitigation plan if any trees would be removed. Mitigation options (Section 19.12.160) could include on-site or off-site replacement, payment of an in-lieu fee, preservation of existing trees, or on-site or off-site relocation.

Elk Grove Zoning Code

The Elk Grove Zoning Code (Elk Grove Municipal Code Title 23) provides development standards that address building mass, setbacks, landscaping, lighting, and signage to achieve an aesthetically-pleasing appearance. Chapter 23.56 addresses lighting specifically. Any future development would be required to comply with the Elk Grove Zoning Code.

The Elk Grove Zoning Code designates SR 99 as a Special Sign Corridor, which regulates the type, size, and location of signs within the view of the traveling public.

Elk Grove Design Review Ordinance and Design Guidelines

The City Design Review Ordinance (Elk Grove Municipal Code Section 23.16.080) and corresponding Elk Grove Design Guidelines established a design review process and guidelines for site planning, architecture, lighting, and landscaping, as well as preservation of significant natural features and compatibility with surrounding property. The City strongly encourages incorporating natural features and using landscaping to reduce the potential impacts of lighting from parking areas on both project areas and adjacent vacant land, and that landscaping be designed to maximize screening and buffering between adjacent uses. Design Review is required for development types listed below.

- ▶ Single-family Residential Subdivision Maps;
- ▶ Master Home Plans for Single-family Residential Subdivisions;
- ▶ Multi-family Residential Development; and
- ▶ Non-residential Development (e.g., commercial, office, industrial, and public/quasi-public development).

Any future development that fell under one of the above categories would undergo Elk Grove Design Review and comply with any Elk Grove conditions of approval.

3.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHODOLOGY

The SOIA does not propose any development, change in land use, or change in land use designations or zoning. However, in order to facilitate environmental analysis for this SOIA, the applicant has developed a conceptual land use scenario. The applicant-proposed array of land uses has been derived from the recently approved 1,200-acre mixed-use Southeast Policy Area (SEPA) land use distribution adjacent to the north, in order to facilitate project analysis. The applicant estimates that the SOIA Area could accommodate development that could provide 18,000 to 20,000 jobs in office, industrial, and commercial settings. Development could include a significant employment component near the Grant Line Road/SR 99 interchange and along the Kammerer Road (future Capital Southeast Connector) corridor. Additionally, for the purposes of analysis, the applicant has identified that the SOIA Area could accommodate the development of a broad array of housing types, with 4,000 to 5,000 dwelling units. For the purposes of analysis, the applicant notes that future proposed development would involve supportive infrastructure, public lands, and retail development that is oriented to future employment areas.

The methods used for this analysis are similar to the methods developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA 2015) to evaluate visual quality. The visual impact analysis is based on:

- ▶ an inventory (including field observations and photography) of the visual features that compose the existing landscape, including an assessment of the character and quality of the visual resources in the context of the character of the visual landscape and the extent to which places or features have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration;
- ▶ the extent to which the project would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment, including impacts on distinctive landscape features, the integrity of the landscape (the degree to which it is free from distracting features), and the consistency or “unity” of the landscape considered as a whole; and

- ▶ the number of viewers, their activities, and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the project-related changes.

However, any assessment of visual quality is subjective and depends on perspective and opinions regarding whether an alteration of the visual character may be adverse or beneficial. This analysis uses a conservative approach and assumes that a substantial change to visual character would be a significant impact.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The thresholds for determining the significance of impacts for this analysis are based on the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, as amended. The proposed project would have a significant impact related to aesthetics if it would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic building within a state scenic highway; or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

- ▶ **Substantial Damage to Scenic Resources within a Designated State Scenic Highway**—The proposed project would not affect scenic resources, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings within a State scenic highway. The closest State-designated scenic highway segment is a portion of State Route 160 along the Sacramento River, approximately 7 miles west of the SOIA Area, and the SOIA Area is not visible from the scenic highway segment. Therefore, no impact would occur, and this issue is not evaluated further in this document.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

- IMPACT 3.1-1** *Degrade the existing visual character of the project site or impact scenic vistas. Future development could degrade the existing visual character of the SOIA Area. Although future development would be required to comply with the City of Elk Grove's Municipal Code and General Plan, the development would entail a significant change from the existing visual character of the site. This impact is considered significant.*

A scenic vista is a public viewpoint that provides expansive views of highly-valued scenery or landscapes. Neither Sacramento County nor the City of Elk Grove has officially-designated scenic vistas in the SOIA Area. However, the Sacramento County General Plan Scenic Highways Element specifies SR 99 as a Scenic Corridor, which designates a scenic corridor 660-foot on either side of the right-of-way in the unincorporated areas of the county. The eastern portion of the SOIA Area is within this 660-foot area. Depending on intervening barriers and vegetation, building heights, and other factors, it is possible that changes within the SOIA Area could be visible to motorists traveling along SR 99.

The Elk Grove Zoning Code designates SR 99 as a Special Sign Corridor, which regulates the type, size, and location of signs within the view of the traveling public. In addition, the Elk Grove General Plan prioritizes the promotion and protection of open space and agricultural lands, for economic, biological, safety, recreation, and aesthetic reasons.

Although there is development proposed north of Kammerer Road, the SOIA Area and the surrounding areas are pastoral, with the exception of the small commercial/industrial area near the Kammerer Road/SR 99 Interchange, the SOIA Area is currently used for extensive dry farmed and irrigated croplands, as well as vineyard operations and the McConnell Estates winery and tasting room, which hosts weddings, concerts, and other events. A few rural residences are also present in the SOIA Area. In addition, views of riparian habitat along Cosumnes River and distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coast Ranges are intermittently available.

Future buildout of the SOIA Area would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment by adding urban elements to a largely agricultural area. Views of open areas would be replaced by views of residential and commercial uses. Distinctive landscape features such as the vineyards, croplands, and scattered rural buildings could be removed and replaced with new buildings, roads, landscaping, and other urban features inconsistent with the surrounding agricultural lands. The areas around the existing winery and rural residences and the edges of the parcels have trees (specifically ornamental exotics and fruit trees), and potential future construction of new access roads, buildings, parking, and utilities may necessitate their removal.

Off-site improvements to roads, sewer lines, drainage facilities, and water lines could also be required if future development were to occur in the SOIA Area. Although it cannot be determined where these improvements would be located or how extensive the disturbance would be, it is possible that these improvements could change the visual character of an area. Installation of water, sewer, and drainage facilities would mostly create temporary visual impacts, rather than long-term impacts, but transportation infrastructure would be visible.

Residents, motorists, and others who have views of the SOIA Area would be affected by these future changes. The visual character of the SOIA Area, as experienced from both public rights-of-way and private properties with existing views of the SOIA Area would be significantly changed. Although the SOIA Area is not officially-designated as a scenic vista, the pastoral quality of the SOIA Area is typical of the area and motorists, pedestrians, and residents may be sensitive to an aesthetic change. In addition, the Elk Grove General Plan prioritizes the promotion and protection of open space and agricultural lands, for economic, biological, safety, recreation, and aesthetic reasons.

Although the proposed SOIA would amend the City's SOI boundaries, property within the SOIA Area would not be within the City's jurisdiction until LAFCo approves future requests for annexation of property. Upon approval of those future requests for annexation, development proposals would be subject to environmental review and applicable City of Elk Grove regulations, as described above. Compliance with the Elk Grove General Plan and Municipal Code would ensure that future development is visually appealing and consistent with the developed areas of the City. Specifically, General Plan policies and action items ensure the protection of certain trees, require that the use of reflective materials would be reduced, and indicate that utilities should be located underground to the extent possible. The Municipal Code also protects certain trees and has additional restrictions related to landscaping, lighting, building siting and design, and other aesthetic characteristics. However, future development of the SOIA Area would be inconsistent with the existing visual character of the SOIA Area. Thus, the impact is considered **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-1: Avoid Tree Removal to the Extent Feasible

At the time of submittal of any application to annex territory within the SOIA Area, the City of Elk Grove shall impose the following conditions on all discretionary projects:

(1) Trees that function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat should be retained to the extent feasible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks, drainage channels, and other uses and structures.

(2) If trees cannot be preserved on-site, the City may require off-site mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee. Trees that cannot be preserved shall be replaced either on- or off-site as required by the City, and trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees that were removed, when feasible.

Significance after Mitigation

Future development and associated off-site improvements would be subject to consistency findings with the Elk Grove General Plan and compliance with the City's Municipal Code that pertain to aesthetics and design. General Plan policies and actions ensure the protection of certain trees, require that the use of reflective materials would be reduced, and indicate that utilities should be located underground, to the extent possible. The Municipal Code also protects certain trees and has additional restrictions related to landscaping, lighting, building siting and design, and other aesthetic characteristics. However, there are no policies, code requirements, or feasible mitigation measures that would avoid a substantial change in the visual character of the SOIA Area and areas necessary for off-site improvements if development is to occur within the SOIA Area in the future. This impact is **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT Create light or glare. *Future development could create a new source of substantial light or glare that could*
3.1-2 *adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. This is considered **significant**.*

The SOIA Area is currently under agricultural production. Therefore, there are few on-site sources of light. Most of the light emanates from local farms, the winery, and rural residences and is associated with vehicle or agricultural equipment use. Light sources in the vicinity of the SOIA Area include rural residences, lighting associated with Kammerer Road and SR 99, and adjacent industrial/commercial land uses.

If development occurs within the SOIA Area in the future, this could introduce street, parking lot, and building lighting. These lights would be visible during nighttime hours and would represent a source of new light to nearby residents. Windows, particularly large areas of glass in commercial structures, could also create substantial glare. Thus, future development could represent a substantial source of light and glare. In addition, off-site improvements may be required for future development, which could contribute to the light and glare.

Upon approval of future development applications and annexations, the parcels within the SOIA Area would be within the City's jurisdiction and would be subject to subsequent CEQA review and applicable City policies and regulations. Future development would be subject to the City's performance standards as described in Elk Grove

Municipal Code Chapter 23.56, the Design Guidelines, and the General Plan. Specifically, future projects would likely be required to limit outdoor lighting, which would be directed downward and shielded to minimize light spillover and skyglow, and to minimize the use of reflective materials in building design, as described in Elk Grove Zoning Code 23.56 and General Plan LU-35 Action 2 and LU-35 Action 3. Compliance with City General Plan policies, zoning regulations, and design guidelines would minimize lighting and glare. However, future development would still create a new source of light and glare and would adversely affect day and nighttime views in the area. As previously described, residents, motorists, and others who have views of the SOIA Area could be affected by these changes. The amount of light and glare on the SOIA Area as experienced from both public rights-of-way and private properties would be significantly changed. This impact is considered **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-2: Reduce Light and Glare

At the time of submittal of any application to annex territory within the SOIA Area, the City of Elk Grove shall impose the following condition on all discretionary projects:

All projects in the SOIA Area shall comply with the City of Elk Grove's Citywide Design Guidelines by minimizing the use of reflective materials in building design to reduce the potential impacts of daytime glare and designing outdoor light fixtures to be directed/shielded downward and screened to avoid nighttime lighting spillover effects on adjacent land uses and nighttime sky glow conditions.

Significance after Mitigation

Future applications for projects within the SOIA Area or off-site improvements within the city would be required to comply with Elk Grove policies and regulations. This mitigation would reduce potential glare and adverse effects related to lighting. However, even with the implementation of this mitigation, development would still require lighting for security and other purposes. This would contribute to skyglow. While mitigation would minimize potential glare, it would not necessarily completely eliminate glare. There is no additional feasible mitigation. Thus, impacts have been conservatively determined to be **significant and unavoidable**.