

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section includes a description of the existing visual setting of the project site and an analysis of the effects the proposed project would have on aesthetics in the project vicinity. Aesthetics in the context of this report refers to the visual and design quality of a physical setting.

A. Regulatory Framework

City policies and guidelines of particular relevance to aesthetics include those in the General Plan and the standards used by the Site Plan and Architectural Review Committee.

1. Petaluma General Plan

Applicable policies and programs included in the Community Design, Character, and Green Building Element of the Petaluma General Plan are listed in Table 4.1-1.

2. Petaluma Glare Ordinance

The City's Zoning Ordinance includes Section 21.040D, Glare. This section of the City's Zoning Ordinance limits direct glare from on-site lighting sources as measured at the property line. No direct glare at the property line is allowed, unless to light parking lots. For parking lots, the lighting must be shielded down towards the ground and shall not exceed three foot candles in illumination at ground level. In the case of indirect glare, i.e. glare caused by diffuse reflection from a surface such as a wall, illumination shall not exceed 0.3-foot candle (maximum) or 0.1-foot candle (average).¹

3. Site Plan and Architectural Review Committee (SPARC)

The City of Petaluma has empowered SPARC to provide final site plan and architectural approval to those projects subject to its review, as defined by the City's Zoning Ordinance Section 24.010. SPARC is comprised of five members, including one Council representative, one Planning Commission representative and three members appointed by the Council.² General Standards for Review used by SPARC in its decision making are described in Table 4.1-2.

¹ A foot-candle is the amount of light that falls on the surface with a 1-foot radius. The foot-candle is equal to one lumen per square foot.

² City of Petaluma, 1982, *Site Plan and Architectural Review Procedures and Guidelines*, page 2.

TABLE 4.1-1 **PETALUMA GENERAL PLAN 2025 POLICIES AND PROGRAMS—AESTHETICS**

Policy/Program Number	Policy
<i>Community Design, Character, and Green Building Element</i>	
Policy 2-P-5	Strengthen the visual and aesthetic character of major arterial corridors.
Policy 2-P-5(A)	Improve key arterial corridors through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Intensification via infilling, orientation of facades toward the street, appropriate building height, and interior parking lot configuration on the parcel; ◆ Sidewalk improvements including trees, lighting fixtures, planters, curbs, shading devices, public and commercial-related seating, and paving materials; ◆ Streetscape improvements including use of planted medians, parking configuration, signage, and paving materials; ◆ Creating strong streetscape elements where deemed appropriate (for example, intensely planted tree corridors could draw attention to the street itself as a green passage).
Policy 2-P-23	Facilitate development patterns that provide an urban edge along East Washington Street, providing visual continuity and cohesiveness, and increased safety.
Policy 2-P-23 (A)	Undertake streetscape improvements to slow traffic speeds, widen sidewalks and promote a pedestrian orientation. Add trees that maximize shade and sense of enclosure. Select street trees appropriate to the scale and character of the area. Include street tree planting for lateral streets accessing the corridor.
Policy 2-P-23 (D)	Ensure that development at the old Kenilworth Jr. High school site and any future redevelopment of the Fairgrounds property maintains a public, pedestrian, and active face along East Washington Street, and provides civic and ceremonial spaces with links to the Library and other uses.

Source: City of Petaluma General Plan 2025, May 2008. Pages 2-3 – 2-4.

B. Existing Conditions

This section discusses the existing visual quality of the project area and its immediate surroundings.

1. Project Site’s Visual Character

The project site is located at the southwest corner of the Highway 101 and East Washington Street interchange, adjacent to the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds. The site is enclosed by Highway 101 to the east and the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds and Kenilworth Drive to the west. The northern boundary is East Washington Street.

The baseline date that provides the basis for the site's existing conditions is October, 2008. The project site was most recently used as a junior high school. The school buildings were located on the northern portion of the site, with a significant amount of open sport fields on the rest of the

TABLE 4.1-2 **SPARC'S GENERAL STANDARDS FOR REVIEW**

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- a. Controls should be exercised to achieve a satisfactory quality of design in the individual building and its site, appropriateness of the building to its intended use and the harmony of the development with its surroundings. Satisfactory design quality and harmony will involve among other things:
 - i. The appropriate use of quality materials and harmony and proportion of the overall design.
 - ii. The architectural style which should be appropriate for the project in question, and compatible with the overall character of the neighborhood.
 - iii. The siting of *the structure on the property* as compared to the siting of other structures in the immediate neighborhood.
 - iv. The size, location, design, color, number, lighting, and materials of all signs and outdoor advertising structures.
 - v. The bulk, height and color of the proposed structure as compared to the bulk, height and color of other structures in the immediate neighborhood.
 - b. Landscaping to approved city standards shall be required on the site and shall be in keeping with the character or design of the site. Existing trees shall be preserved wherever possible, and shall not be removed unless approved by the Committee.
 - c. Ingress, egress, internal traffic circulation, off-street parking facilities and pedestrian ways shall be so designed as to promote safety and convenience, and shall conform to approved city standards.
 - d. It is recognized that good design character may require participation by a recognized professional designer, such as an architect, landscape architect or other practicing urban designer and the reviewing body shall have the authority to require that an applicant hire such a professional, when deemed necessary to achieve good design character.
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Source: City of Petaluma, Site Plan and Architectural Review Procedures and Guidelines, March 1982, page 2.

site. As stated in the project description, the school facilities have already been demolished. A bus maintenance facility associated with the school remains adjacent to the site to the south. A hedge-row of redwood trees abuts the project site's eastern and northern boundaries along Highway 101 and East Washington Street, respectively. Currently, the site does not constitute a scenic resource and does not provide scenic vistas.

Due to existing urban development surrounding the project site and the flat topography of the area, the project site is generally only visible from immediately adjacent streets and properties. Figure 4.1-1 shows views of the project site from different viewpoints, as well as views from the project site. Figure 4.1-1 also provides a map showing the locations from where the photos were taken. The project site is secluded from view from both Highway 101 and the residential neighborhoods to the east of the site as a result of hedgerows of mature redwoods and eucalyptus trees. Although there are some gaps in the eucalyptus hedgerow along the eastern side of Highway 101, it still provides a strong visual barrier for the residential neighborhood to the east, as shown in Figure 4.1-1. The redwoods on the western side of the highway provide less of a barrier for drivers traveling along Highway 101 since there are larger gaps in the stand of trees.

The only clear views of the project site are from the north from the East Washington Street overpass over Highway 101, and from the pedestrian overpass in the middle of the site. Except from the overpasses, views of the site from East Washington Street are somewhat obscured by the existing swim center and Fairgrounds structures, fencing and trees, as shown in picture 1 of Figure 4.1-1.

Similarly, from the west, views of the site are also obscured by the Fairgrounds' facilities and fencing, though the site can be viewed from the west across the large parking lot between the swim center and Fairgrounds, as seen in pictures 2 and 5 of Figure 4.1-1. To the south, the existing light industrial facilities obstruct views of the project site from Lindberg Lane.

2. Form and Appearance of the Surrounding Area

The character of the area surrounding the project site varies, and for purposes of this discussion, the description is separated into four categories:

a. East of the Project Site

To the east, backing onto Highway 101, there is a residential neighborhood consisting of single-family detached homes. Directly adjacent to Highway 101 are the backyards of the homes along Stuart Drive. Currently, the east and west sides of Highway 101 are physically connected by a pedestrian over-crossing, but divided visually by a hedgerow of redwoods along the western side of Highway 101 and eucalyptus trees along the eastern side of Highway 101.

Further southeast, there is the Washington Square Commercial Center, made of single-story buildings, at the intersection of East Washington Street and South McDowell Boulevard. Washington Square is adjacent to McDowell Elementary School, a park, an office complex, and a cluster of multi-family housing comprised of two- and three-story buildings. In the opposite corner, north of East Washington Street, is another commercial center called Petaluma Plaza. This second commercial center, comprised of one-story buildings, is directly adjacent to Highway 101 and bounded by both multi- and single-family housing and Lucchesi Park.

The site's northern boundary, East Washington Street, is designated a gateway for the City of Petaluma. Adjacent to the project site, and heading east towards Downtown Petaluma, East Washington Street is defined by strip commercial activity, with several public uses intermixed. These buildings are typically one- and two-stories in height. As it approaches the Downtown, East Washington Street is bounded by various uses that include manufacturing, office space, fast food restaurants and retail, also one- and two-stories in height.

b. West of the Project Site

The Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds are located to the west of the site. Most of the Fairgrounds area is defined by open land and a few small-scale, one-story structures. The most prominent structure is

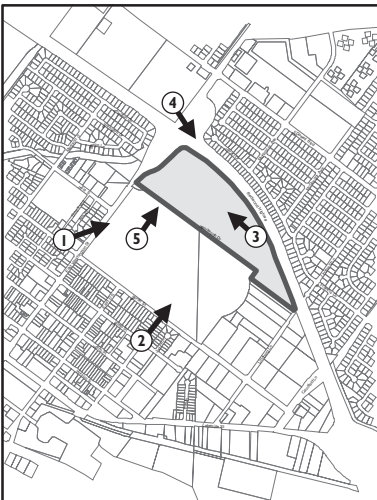


FIGURE 4.1-1
VIEWS OF PROJECT SITE

the Petaluma Speedway, which has bleachers that are about 30 feet tall. The existing swim center and skate park are also located to the west of the site. Beyond the Fairgrounds is a residential neighborhood consisting of mostly single-story buildings, along with commercial uses along Lakeville Street and light industrial uses along Jefferson Street.

c. South of the Project Site

There is a concentration of light industrial uses to the south of the project site, extending from Lindberg Lane to the intersection of Highway 101 and Lakeville Street. Some uses include trucking companies, RV parking, construction companies and shipping companies, such as DHL. A small number of commercial uses are also found further south of the site. Most of these buildings are less than 25 feet in height.

3. Off-Site Scenic Vistas

Given the flat topography of the general area around the project site within an existing urbanized environment, only limited opportunities for scenic vistas are possible. Towards the east, views of the hills are possible, as seen in picture 5 of Figure 4.1-1. To the north, views are limited given the tall hedgerow of trees, as seen in picture 3 of Figure 4.1-1. Towards the west, views of the Petaluma Speedway, open space on the Fairgrounds and distant hills are possible. To the south, views of the hills are possible.

4. Scenic Resources and Highways

There are no officially-designated State scenic highways near the project site at this time.³

5. Lighting and Glare

There is currently some limited outdoor lighting on the project site, mostly concentrated on the southern portion of the project site due to the site's proximity to the school bus storage facility. In the past, there was additional lighting on the northern portion of the project site where the former Kenilworth Junior High buildings stood. The lighting was limited to external walkways for security purposes. There is occasional lighting spillage onto the site from adjacent uses. The Fairground's facilities and parking areas have standard lighting on the exterior of the facilities and external circulation routes for security purposes. There are no significant glare sources on or near the project site.

³ California Department of Transportation, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm, accessed by Leslie Wilson, DC&E, on November 25, 2008.

C. Standards of Significance

The implementation of the proposed project would have a significant impact on visual and aesthetic quality if it would:

1. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
2. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
3. Substantially degrade the view from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings.
4. Expose people on- or off-site to substantial light or glare.

D. Impact Discussion

This section discusses the impacts of the proposed project on the visual and aesthetic qualities of the surrounding area.

1. Project Impacts

The concept for the proposed project is to construct a mixed-use retail center with office uses. The mixed-use portion of the project would be comprised of four freestanding retail buildings, two of which would contain office spaces above. Within each structure, the façade materials and colors, rooflines and windows would be varied, and the entrances would be articulated, to create visual interest for the façades. Retail building entrances would have metal awnings.

Four additional freestanding retail/restaurant pad buildings would be built on Kenilworth Drive, as shown on Figure 3-3. These buildings would be one-story, painted cement plaster-clad buildings with varied paint colors, accent details and roofing materials. These features, in addition to varied setbacks from the parking lot, would discourage what could otherwise be a uniform, long façade. Landscaping in front of the buildings would also help provide variance to the visual appearance of the façades.

1. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

The proposed project would change the character of the 33-acre site to mixed-use commercial development with surface parking. Kenilworth Junior High School had existed on this site and was demolished after being relocated. Although the proposed development would alter the site's existing physical character, the City has anticipated the eventual development of the site by changing its zoning to mixed-use from residential and light industrial designations.

The proposed project would result in filling in the urban character of the area with development that is generally compatible with surrounding uses. The conversion of the site into a mixed-use commercial area would be consistent with nearby commercial centers, including Washington Square and Petaluma Plaza.

The proposed project would be subject to design review to assure that the final development complies with the City's Zoning Ordinance and Design Guidelines. The design review of the Project would be carried out by SPARC. The Committee's procedures and guidelines would assure minimal degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Given that the site is surrounded by existing urban uses and has historically been used for urban and institutional uses, and that development would be subject to SPARC design review, the project would not significantly degrade the visual appearance of the site or surrounding area. A *less-than-significant* impact would occur.

2. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

a. Views to the Project Site

As stated in Section B of this chapter, Existing Conditions, the project site is only visible from immediately adjacent streets and properties and from the East Washington Street overpass over Highway 101. Because of relatively limited visibility to the site and because the site does not contain valuable scenic elements, development of the site would not result in the degradation of a scenic vista from locations off-site. A *less-than-significant* impact would occur.

b. Views from the Project Site

The proposed development would not exceed 50 feet in height, which is the approximate height of the existing rows of trees on either side of Highway 101. As a result, the project would not create a higher visual barrier than already exists along Highway 101 and would not eliminate opportunities for views of the distant hills. Thus there would be *no impact* to views from Highway 101 to the distant hills.

As discussed before, there are no scenic views across the project site to the north and as a result there would be *no impact* to views in that direction from the project.

Although there are views of the hills from the site in directions other than north, and these might be considered scenic vistas, the proposed project would not have a significant impact on these views because after development they would still be maintained at various points throughout the site. As the parking spaces are to be located on the northwest portion of the site, views to the west would be maintained.

Views to the southern hills would be obstructed by the two- and three-story buildings, but only to a limited extent. Similarly, views of the east hills would be slightly obstructed, although less so on the southern portion of the site. However, as mentioned above, these views are already restricted due to the existing built urban environment and trees. For these reasons, impacts to scenic vistas would be *less than significant*.

3. Substantially degrade the view from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings.

As stated in Section B of this chapter, Existing Conditions, there are no scenic highways in the vicinity of the project site. As such, the Project would have *no impact* on scenic resources visible from a State scenic highway.

4. Expose people on- or off-site to substantial light or glare.

The Project would result in development that creates new sources of light and glare, associated with lighting and walkways for the parking lots and pedestrian areas. .

The proposed project may have potentially higher levels of lighting at the property line than those specified by performance standards written into the City's Zoning Ordinance under Section 21.040D, Glare. . The City's existing ordinance does not allow direct glare, other than parking lot illumination, at the property line. As a result, the project may increase lighting and glare levels beyond those permitted in the City's Zoning Ordinance. This is considered a *significant* impact.

2. Cumulative Impacts

A list-based approach has been used for this cumulative analysis. The analysis considers the development projects listed in Appendix E (Cumulative Projects) and whether this project would have significant cumulative impacts on Petaluma's visual environment in combination with the cumulative projects.

The development of the project site, when combined with other foreseeable projects in the city, would not contribute to an overall shift in the visual character of the existing surrounding area. The Petaluma General Plan would allow for some cumulative visual change in the community by allowing for growth and new development. However, the General Plan includes policies to ensure that new development is well designed and attractive. In addition, SPARC reviews development proposals for their visual quality and compatibility with nearby development. These factors would ensure that cumulative development, including the proposed project, does not have a significant cumulative impact. A *less-than-significant* cumulative impact would occur.

E. Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact AES-1: The lighting levels proposed for the project may exceed the City's allowable lighting levels at the property line. As a result, the project could increase lighting levels at adjacent properties in excess of what would otherwise be allowed per Section 21.040D of the City's Zoning Ordinance.

Mitigation Measure AES-1: The project should comply with the lighting requirements of Section 21.040D of the Petaluma Zoning Ordinance, specifically by not allowing direct glare from non-parking lot lighting at the property line.

Significance After Mitigation: *Less than significant.*