

Alvarado Specific Plan

Visual Impact Analysis

December 2019 | LAM-08

Prepared for:

City of La Mesa
Community Development Department
8130 Allison Avenue
La Mesa, CA 91942

Prepared by:

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
7578 El Cajon Boulevard
La Mesa, CA 91942

This page intentionally left blank

Alvarado Specific Plan

Visual Impact Analysis

Prepared for:

City of La Mesa
Community Development Department
8130 Allison Avenue
La Mesa, CA 91942

Prepared by:

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
7578 El Cajon Boulevard
La Mesa, CA 91942

December 2019 | LAM-08

This page intentionally left blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	1
2.1 Project Location	1
2.2 Project Description	1
2.2.1 Residential Development.....	2
2.2.2 Commercial Uses	2
2.2.3 Building Design	2
2.2.4 Alvarado Creek Improvements	3
2.2.5 Public Improvements.....	3
2.2.6 Recreation Areas/Public Space	3
2.2.7 Landscaping	3
2.2.8 Signage.....	4
2.2.9 Lighting.....	4
2.2.10 Grading and Landform Alteration.....	4
2.2.11 Construction Phasing	5
2.3 Land Use Designations and Zoning	5
3.0 REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT.....	5
3.1 California Scenic Highway Program	5
3.2 La Mesa 2012 General Plan	6
3.3 La Mesa Zoning Ordinance	7
3.4 La Mesa Sign Ordinance.....	7
3.5 The Urban Design Program.....	8
4.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT.....	8
4.1 Landform.....	8
4.2 Site Characteristics and Surrounding Uses	8
4.2.1 Site Characteristics.....	8
4.2.2 Surrounding Land Uses	9
4.3 Visual Resources	11
4.3.1 Scenic Vistas.....	11
4.3.2 Scenic Resources.....	11
4.3.3 Visual Character and Quality	12
5.0 VIEWER RESPONSE.....	15
5.1 Viewer Groups	16
5.2 Viewer Exposure	16
5.2.1 Motorists' Exposure.....	16
5.2.2 Bicyclists' and Pedestrians' Exposure	17
5.2.3 Transit Patrons' Exposure	18
5.3 Viewer Sensitivity.....	18

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
6.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT.....	19
6.1 CEQA Significance Thresholds.....	19
6.1.1 Scenic Vistas.....	19
6.1.2 Scenic Resources.....	20
6.1.3 Visual Character and Quality	21
6.1.4 Light and Glare.....	27
7.0 CONCLUSIONS.....	27
8.0 REFERENCES.....	29

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Follows Page</u>
1	Regional Location.....	2
2	Site Vicinity.....	2
3	Site Location.....	2
4	Site Plan Concept	2
5	Cross-Section A	2
6	Cross-Section B	2
7	Cross-Section C	2
8	Cross-Section D	4
9	Preliminary Grading Plan	4
10	Site Photos – San Diego RV Resort.....	8
11	Site Photos – Alvarado Road Frontage	10
12	Site Photos – Existing Buildings	10
13	Site Photos – Alvarado Creek.....	10
14	Site Photos – Billboards	10
15	Views from Public Vantage Points – Alvarado Road.....	16
16	Views from Public Vantage Points – Parkway Drive	16
17	Plan Perspective – Interstate 8	22
18	Plan Perspective – Alvarado Road	22
19	Plan Perspective – South of Project Site	24

LIST OF TABLES

<u>No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	Scenic Quality Policy Consistency Analysis	25

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The following Visual Impact Analysis (VIA) was prepared for the proposed Alvarado Specific Plan (project; Specific Plan). The purpose of this VIA is to (1) assess potential visual impacts resulting from the proposed project; (2) determine the significance of potential impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and (3) if required, recommend measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate significant visual impacts associated with implementation of the project on the surrounding visual environment.

Visual impacts are identified through describing the existing visual setting, assessing the amount of change that would occur as a result of the proposed project, and interpreting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. The analysis and methodology are largely based on the concepts and visual assessment guidelines contained in the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*, as well conformance with applicable City policy guidelines, plans, and regulations that govern visual resources. Significance thresholds are based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The project is located on an approximately 12-acre site along the south side of Alvarado Road generally between 70th Street on the west and Guava Avenue on the east in the city of La Mesa (City). The project site is bound by the 70th Street Trolley Station to the west, the Green Line trolley corridor to the south, a car dealership to the east, and Alvarado Road and Interstate 8 (I-8) to the north. The site is developed and currently contains a recreational vehicle (RV) resort facility with paved access roadways, RV spaces, a clubhouse, a swimming pool, other ancillary buildings, and three billboards. Alvarado Creek traverses the property as it flows under Alvarado Road in the eastern portion of the site and continues southwesterly and westerly along the southern boundary of the western portion of the site. Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the regional location, site vicinity, and site location of the proposed project.

2.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project entails a master development plan (Specific Plan) for a phased transit-oriented development and associated public improvements. The project would include four development parcels that would be constructed in two phases. Phase 1 includes the parcels (Parcels 1-3) west of the intersection of Alvarado Creek and Alvarado Road. Phase 2 includes the parcel (Parcel 4) east of the intersection of the Creek and Alvarado Road. Each parcel would be developed with a multi-family residential building with ground-floor commercial uses.

Phase 1 would feature two multi-family residential buildings built on a podium deck over multi-level parking in the central portion of the site and a smaller-scale building in the western-most parcel. Phase 2 would include one building in the eastern portion of the site similar in size and scale to the two larger buildings constructed in Phase 1. The buildings would include up to five stories of residential units and one to three levels of parking. Each building would include a mix of housing types and sizes. In total, an estimated 850 to 950 residential units would be constructed at buildout. In addition to the residential uses, the project would include ground floor, resident-serving commercial uses. Figure 4 depicts a conceptual site plan of the proposed project at buildout.

2.2.1 Residential Development

The primary land use of the Alvarado Specific Plan consists of multi-family residential development. The project would develop four multi-family residential buildings, conceptually shown in Figure 4. As described above, the project would construct three residential structures (Buildings 2, 3, and 4) with similar construction type and size consisting of multi-level parking structures with residential units above the parking. A smaller-scale building (Building 1) with a similar construction type is proposed on the smaller and narrower western-most parcel (Parcel 1). The proposed buildings would be wood-frame construction and the parking garages would be concrete.

Building 1 would include five levels of residential atop a one-level parking garage with an attached café. Building 1 would include a total of 60 apartments comprised of a mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units. A patio area would be located above the café and sky decks would be provided at the western and eastern ends of the top floor. Figure 5 illustrates a cross-section of Building 1.

Buildings 2, 3, and 4 would include five levels of residential atop a three-level parking garage with an attached leasing office for each building. Each building would include a mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units. Liner units (i.e., units with direct access to the interior creek side area via a front stoop concept) would be provided on the outside edge of the buildings that front Alvarado Creek. These three buildings would be similar in scale and appearance. Buildings 3 and 4 would each include 305 apartment units. Building 2 would include either 280 apartments or 180 student housing units (in association with San Diego State University). Figures 6 and 7 illustrate cross-sections of Buildings 2, 3, and 4.

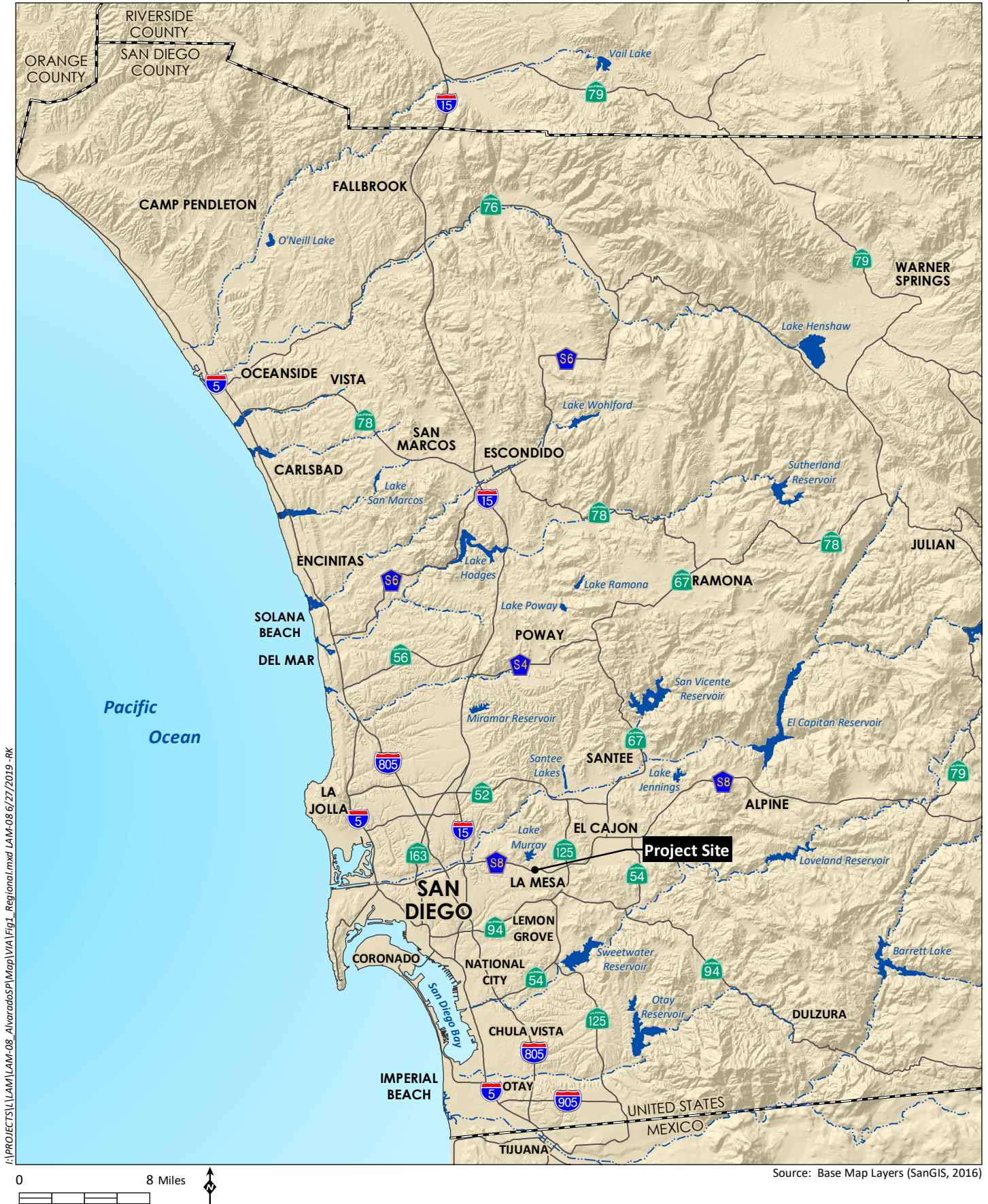
2.2.2 Commercial Uses

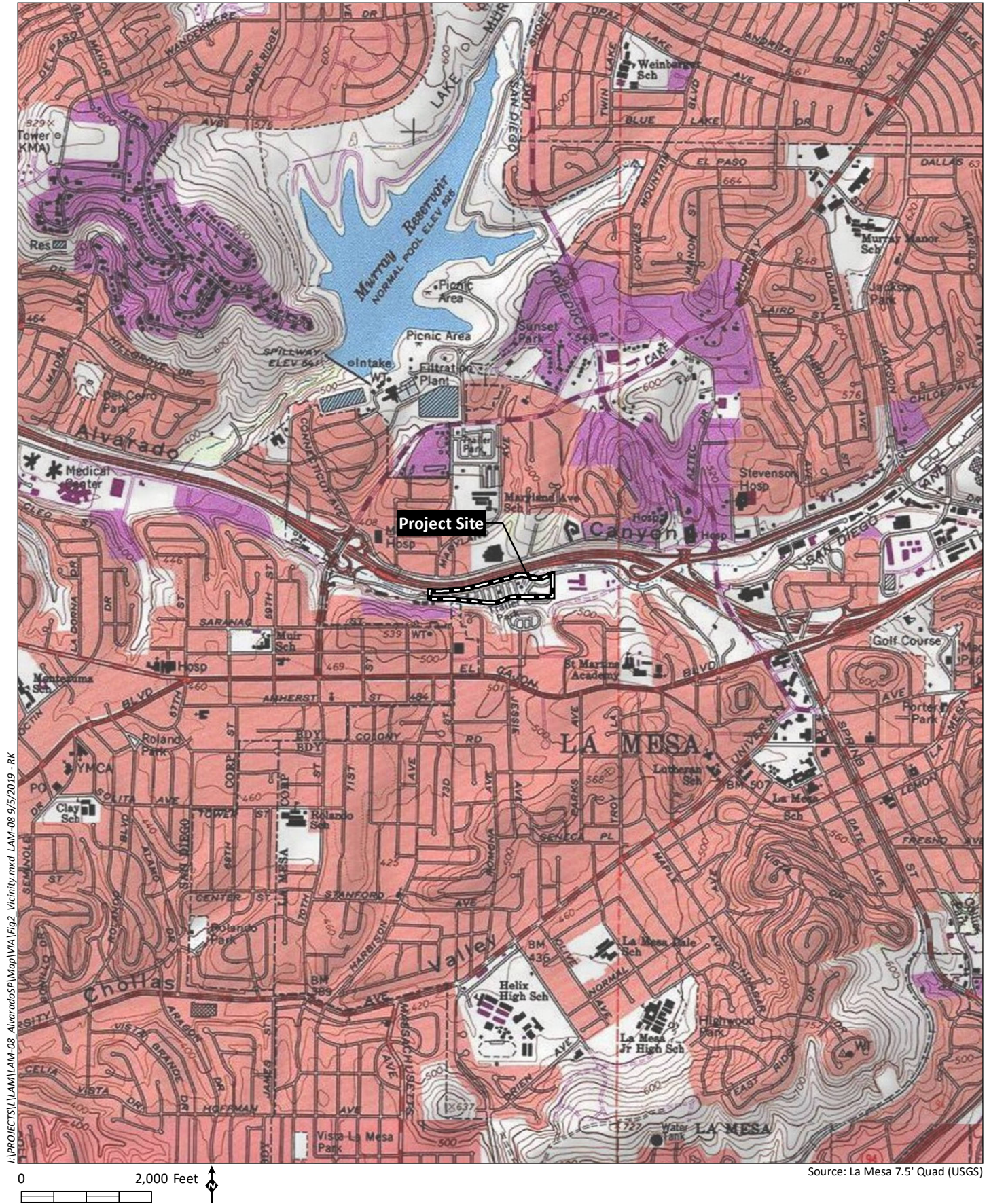
Each proposed building would include space for pedestrian-oriented commercial uses, such as cafés or other small retail establishments. Such uses would be provided to serve residents of the project. Within Building 1, a café is proposed in the northeastern portion of the building at the street level. Commercial spaces within Buildings 2, 3, and 4 could be provided at the ground level or podium level.

2.2.3 Building Design

The land use and development standards in the proposed Specific Plan outline a “form-based” regulatory concept for the proposed buildings on each of the development parcels. The residential structures would include a range of dwelling unit types and sizes distributed within an allowable building envelope prescribed by the development standards set forth in the Specific Plan. The form-based development standards include a maximum building height of 85 feet (to the top of roof sheathing) with an additional 12 feet for roof appurtenances. Additionally, a minimum 15-foot setback from the back of the curb along Alvarado Road would be required, with allowances for a maximum 5-foot encroachment along portions of the northern elevations of proposed buildings fronting Alvarado Road.

While no specific architectural styles or treatments for the proposed buildings are prescribed at the Specific Plan level, conceptual building design elements contained in the Specific Plan including building forms, architecture, colors, materials, finishes, and treatments are used for this visual analysis. The architecture and building design depicted in the Specific Plan is preliminary and subject to design review as part of the development review process.





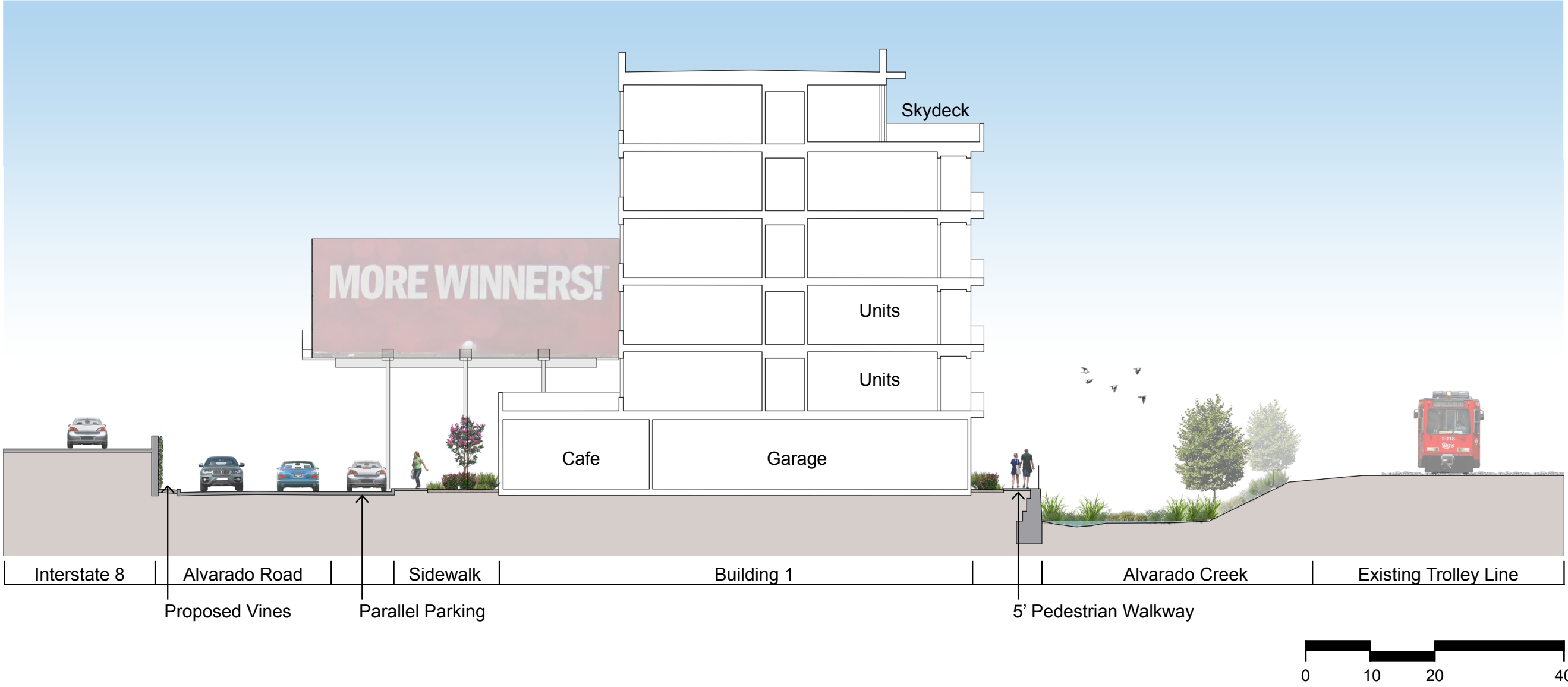
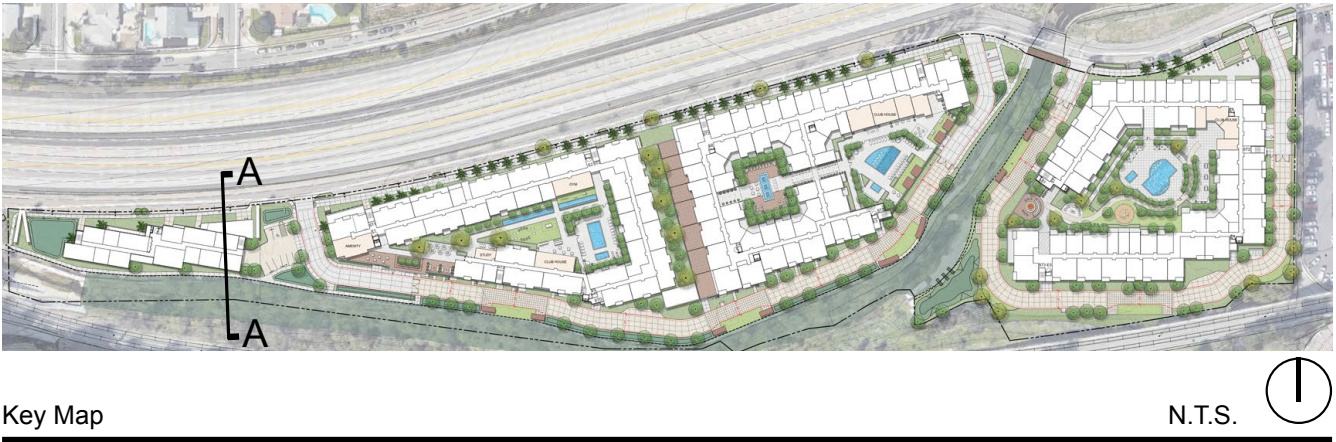


LEGEND

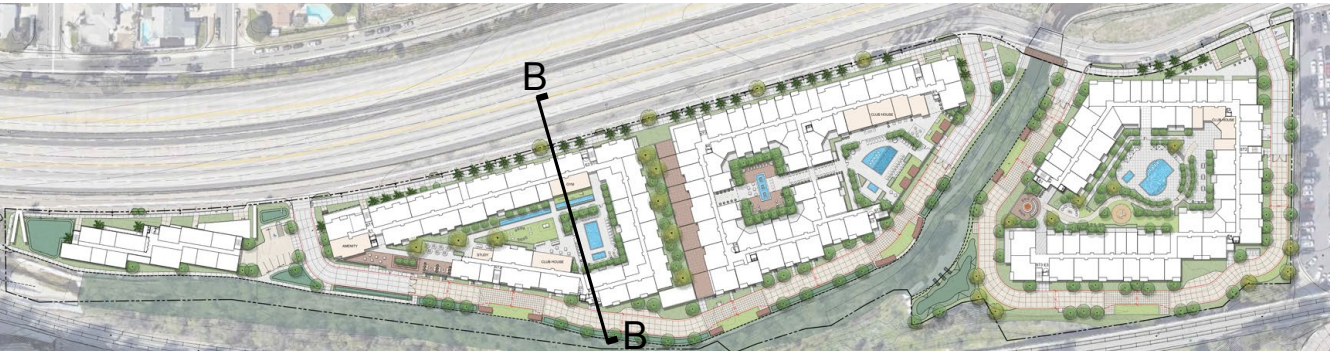
- | | | | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 Outdoor courtyard at podium level | 6 Proposed entry monument | 11 Accent street trees | 16 Loading zone | 21 Public connection to 70th street trolley | 26 Pick up & drop off zone |
| 2 Pedestrian promenade / Emergency vehicular access (EVA) | 7 Pedestrian sidewalk | 12 Existing power pole to remain | 17 Future resident parking | 22 Private connection to 70th street trolley | |
| 3 Gabion retaining wall or similar at creek edge | 8 Parallel parking | 13 Prefabricated pedestrian bridge | 18 Vehicular gate | 23 Building 4 commercial component | |
| 4 Decorative paving | 9 Palm trees in 5x8 tree grates | 14 Bio-filtration basin | 19 Existing creek | 24 Building 2 private residential patios | |
| 5 Social node with shade element and synthetic turf area | 10 Proposed vines at existing retaining wall | 15 Rain event bio-filtration basin | 20 Existing billboards to remain | 25 Building 1 landscape corridor between buildings | |



Source: City of La Mesa 2019

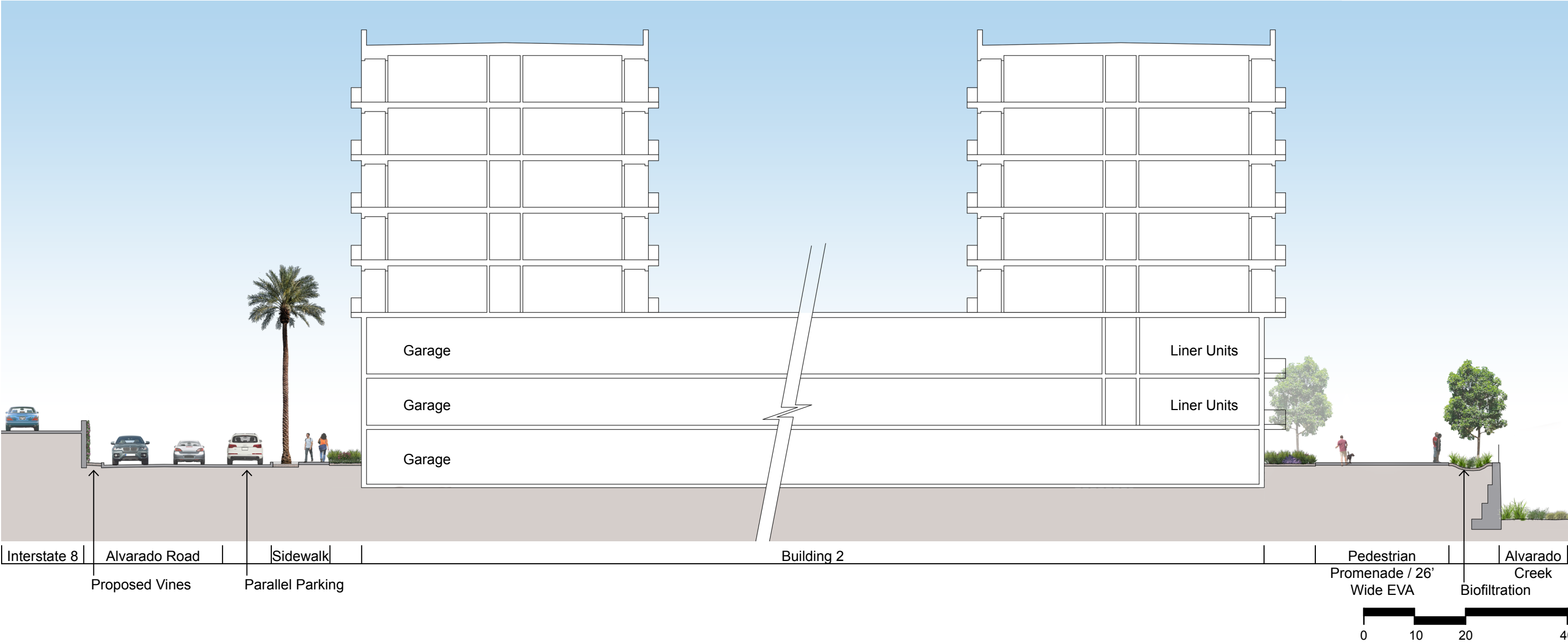


Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018



Key Map

N.T.S.

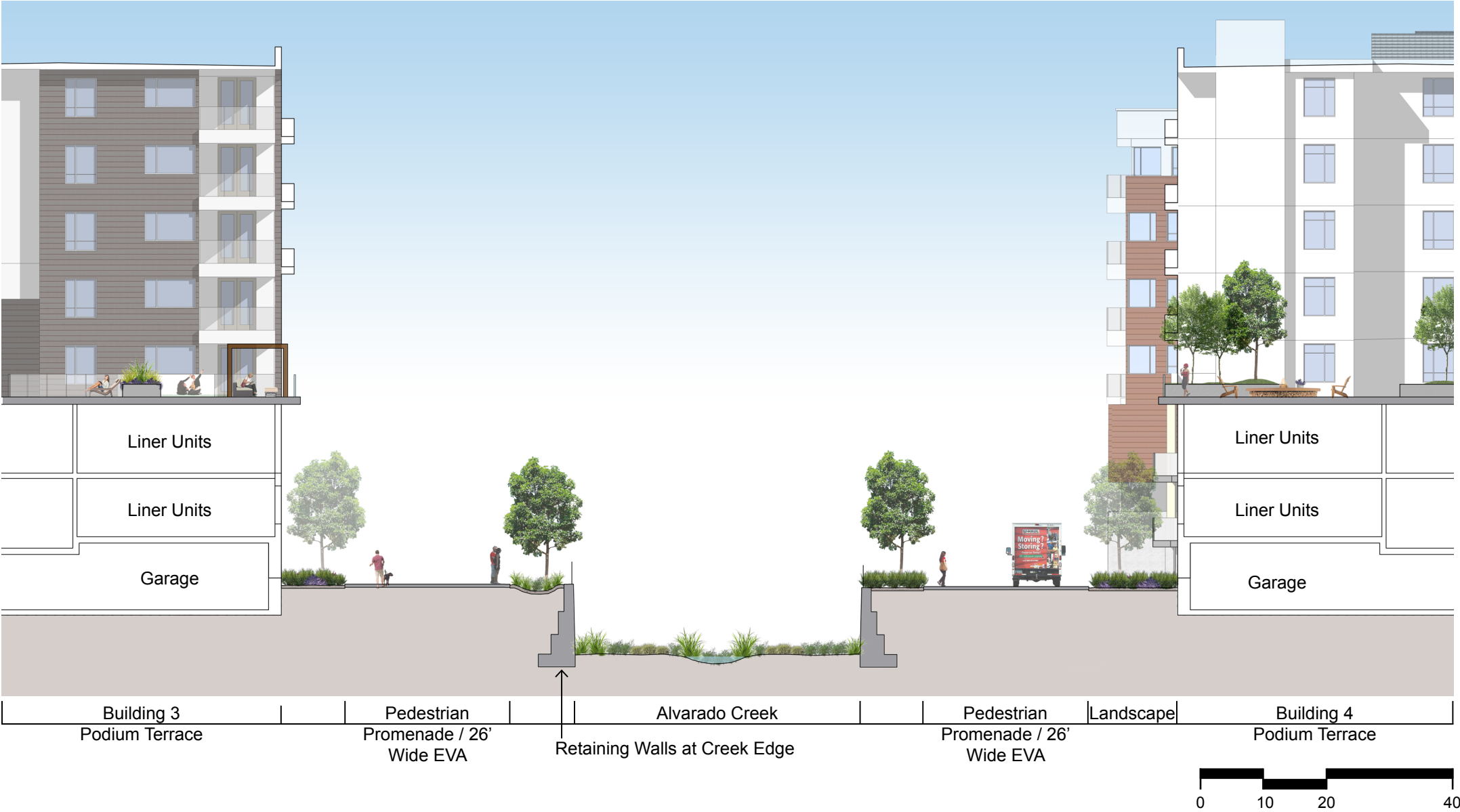


Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018



Key Map

N.T.S. 



Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018

2.2.4 Alvarado Creek Improvements

Improvements are proposed to the Alvarado Creek channel that traverses the site to control flood and storm water flows within the channel, as well as to enhance the creek as an open space amenity and natural feature. Most sections of the existing trapezoidal concrete-lined banks along the channel would be removed and replaced with retaining walls to increase the width of the channel bottom. The creek would also be enhanced (i.e., removal of non-native plants and debris) and restored with riparian vegetation. The enhanced creek would function as a major open space feature of the project. Refer to Figure 7 for a cross-section of the enhanced channel.

2.2.5 Public Improvements

As part of the project, several public improvements would be implemented. Frontage road improvements to Alvarado Road would be provided, including new sidewalk, curb and gutter, street lights, a pedestrian bridge over the Alvarado Creek channel, and a pedestrian connection to the adjacent 70th Street Trolley Station. The project would dedicate 4.5 feet of road right-of-way and a 10-foot-wide public access easement along the Alvarado Road frontage to provide for a shoulder, parking lane, curb and gutter, and sidewalk, as well as street-side landscaping. Refer to Figure 6 for a cross-section of the proposed Alvarado Road improvements. Additionally, a 15-foot-wide pre-fabricated pedestrian bridge would be constructed over Alvarado Creek where it crosses under Alvarado Road. The pedestrian bridge would connect to the proposed sidewalk on both sides of the creek and provide a pedestrian linkage between the eastern and western portions of the site that are bisected by the creek. Figure 8 illustrates the proposed pedestrian bridge in relation to Buildings 3 and 4. At the western end of the project site, a public connection to the adjacent 70th Street Trolley Station would be provided as part of the new sidewalk along Alvarado Road.

The existing communications and 12-kilovolt power lines that extend across the site would be relocated underground. These lines currently cross over I-8, the central portion of the site, and up to Keeney Street in a generally north-south alignment. The portion of the overhead utility lines that cross the site would be relocated underground in the western end of the site.

Sewer system improvements are also proposed, including relocating an existing sewer trunk line within Alvarado Creek out of the channel and under the proposed internal access road, removing several abandoned sewer lines in the creek, and raising and capping an existing manhole.

2.2.6 Recreation Areas/Public Space

The buildings would include interior project amenity facilities and active outdoor spaces on the podium deck levels. Building amenities are anticipated to include clubhouses, pools, and gymnasiums, as well as patios and balconies. Outdoor recreation areas would include a pedestrian promenade, courtyards, public gathering spaces, seating areas, and observation areas (e.g., seating and/or interpretive signage at Alvarado Creek overlook areas). The pedestrian promenade would be located along the interior of the project site and much of it would be adjacent to the enhanced Alvarado Creek.

2.2.7 Landscaping

A comprehensive landscaping plan would be implemented as the site is developed (refer to Figure 4). Street trees would be planted along the Alvarado Road frontage and trees and other greenery would be

planted along the internal roadways, pathways, outdoor spaces, and biofiltration basins. The Alvarado Road project frontage and project access points would feature king palm trees accented by other street trees and plantings. It is anticipated that up to 36 palm trees would be planted along the Alvarado Road frontage with a trunk height of 12 to 14 feet. At maturity, they would be expected to reach over 50 feet in height. The existing retaining wall along the north side of Alvarado Road would be planted with vines.

Portions of the Alvarado Creek channel within the project site would also be restored by removing non-native species and planting native riparian vegetation.

Biofiltration basins are proposed throughout the site to filter and convey on-site runoff flows. These basins would be planted with grasses and plants, with trees, shrubs, and groundcovers around the basin edges.

2.2.8 Signage

The three existing billboards on the project site would remain in their current location upon development of the proposed project. The project would also include entry monument signage at the site access points. The specifics of these signs are not known at the Specific Plan level, but a Comprehensive Sign Program would be implemented to define the sign design standards for the overall project at the time a Site Development Plan is approved for Phase 1 in conformance with the provisions of City of La Mesa Municipal Code (LMMC) Section 15.10.040(c), Special Sign Regulations. For the purposes of this visual analysis, project monument signs are evaluated per the sign regulations for freestanding monument signs in accordance with LMMC Section 15.10.040(d)(2), which allow a maximum height of 8 feet and a maximum sign area of 50 square feet per sign face.

2.2.9 Lighting

The project would include lighting elements to provide safety and to accent project focal points. Street lights would be installed along the Alvarado Road frontage as part of the proposed public improvements. Lighting within the site would be provided along the internal access roads, pedestrian promenade, and pathways; within recreation areas and public outdoor spaces; on buildings, and at the project entry monument signs. Proposed lights would be as low level as possible, timed as appropriate, directed downward, and shielded to minimize spillover onto adjacent properties. Accent lighting would be directed away from Alvarado Creek.

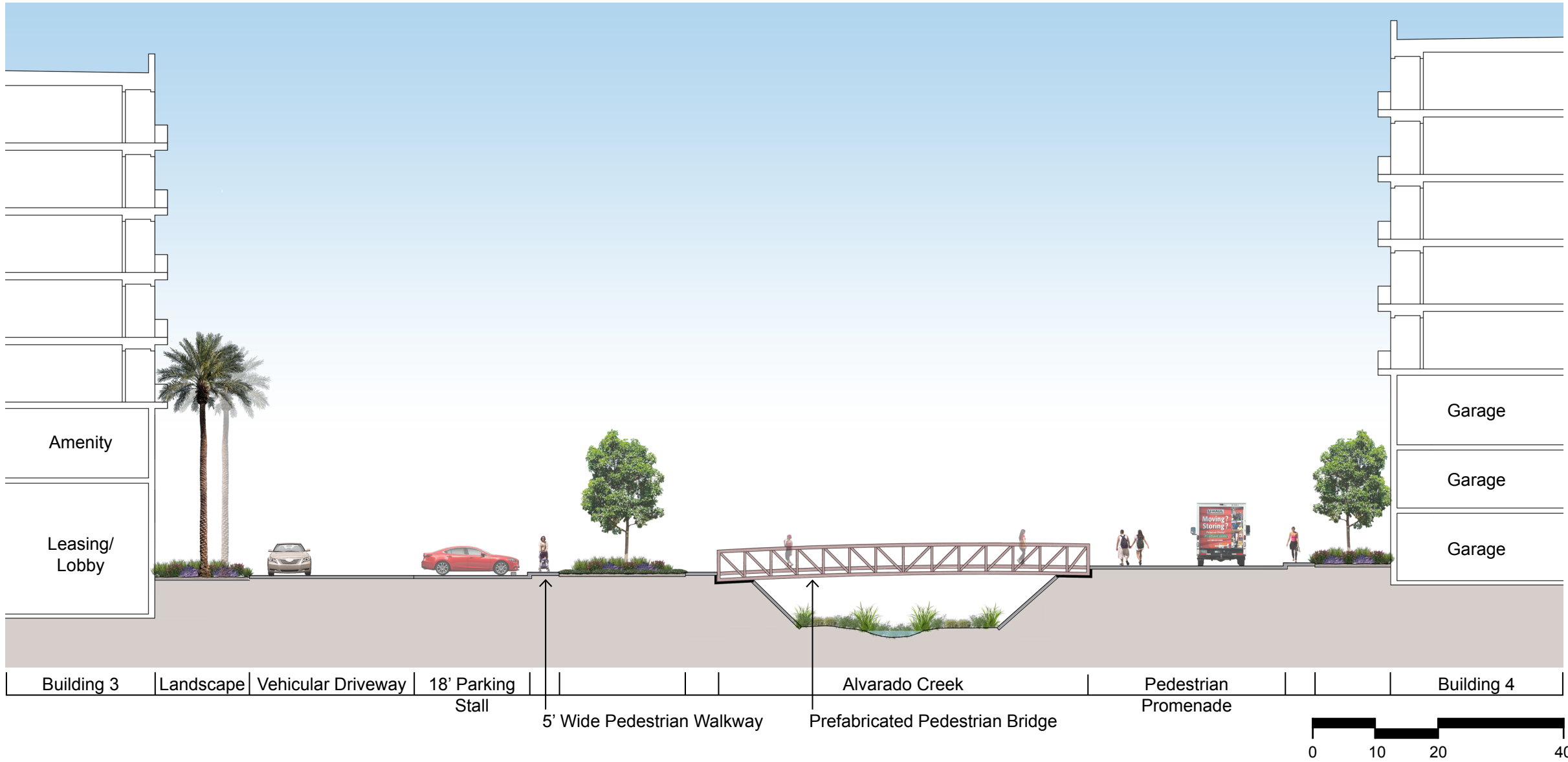
2.2.10 Grading and Landform Alteration

Project construction would require grading of approximately 90 percent of the project site. Project grading would require approximately 46,000 cubic yards (cy) of cut and 16,100 cy of fill, resulting in the export of 29,900 cy of earth material. The average fill depth would be approximately two feet with a maximum depth of approximately eight feet. The average cut depth would be approximately 3 feet and a maximum of 11 feet (within the channel). The site is relatively flat and does not contain any steep slopes. Existing landforms and topographic conditions would essentially remain the same upon project development. The preliminary grading plan is shown on Figure 9.

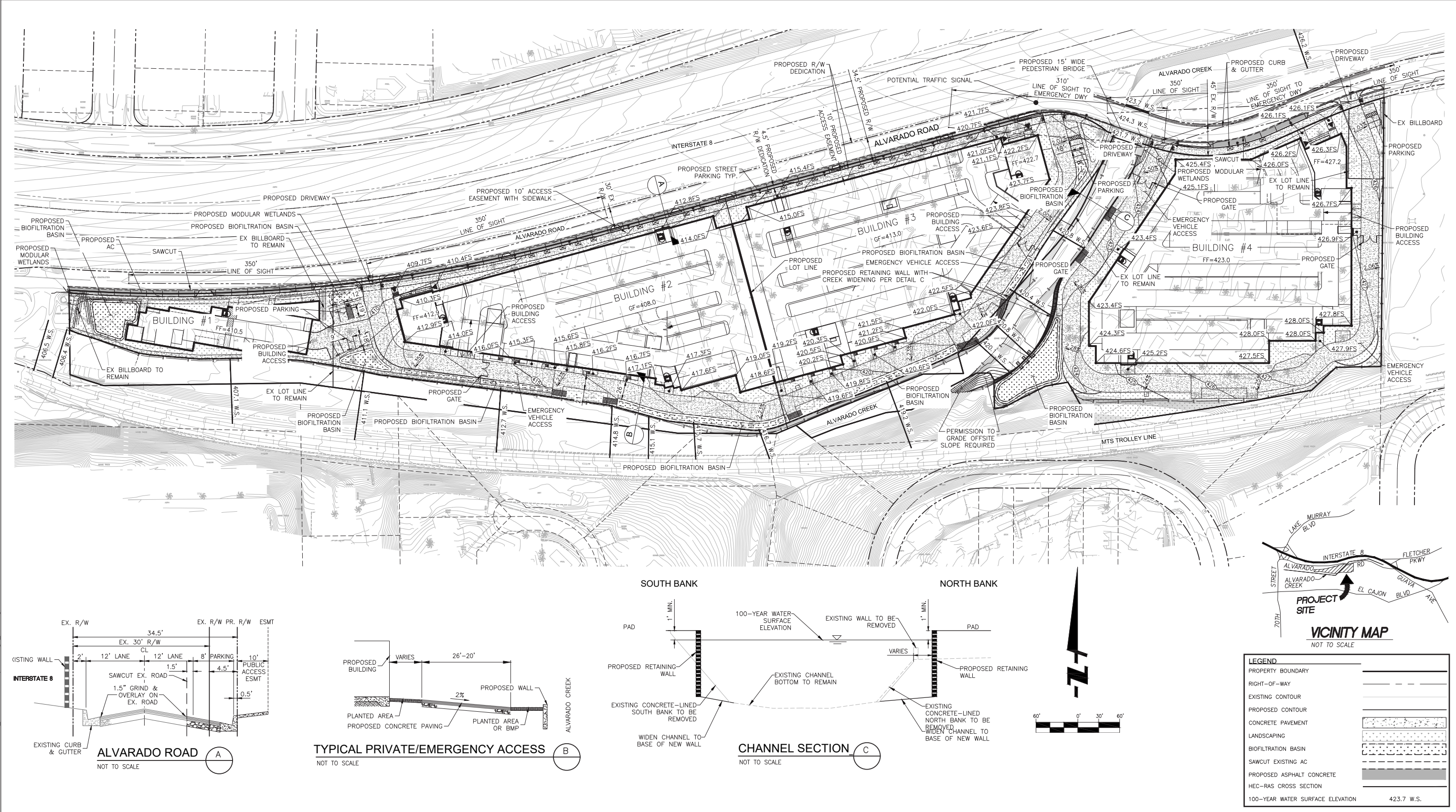


Key Map

N.T.S.



Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018



Source: Fuscoe 2018

2.2.11 Construction Phasing

As previously discussed, the project would be developed in two phases. Phase 1 includes development of Parcels 1-3. Construction would begin with demolition/clearing of this portion of the site followed by grading activities and building pad preparation. Following utilities installation/relocation and construction of the public improvements, Buildings 1, 2, and/or 3 would be constructed in any order or combination. The portion of the existing RV resort on Parcel 4 could remain operational until Phase 2 is developed.

Phase 2 includes development of Parcel 4. The construction sequence of Phase 2 would be similar to Phase 1.

2.3 LAND USE DESIGNATIONS AND ZONING

The project site has a current General Plan land use designation of Regional Serving Commercial. The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the General Plan describes this designation as follows:

This land use designation is assigned to those areas of the City which are suitable for more intense urban activities, such as high-volume retail sales, and other sales and services which are expected to draw local and regional customers. Areas designated Regional Commercial are served by convenient freeway access and public transportation. Grossmont Center, Fletcher Parkway and Alvarado Road are examples of areas where the designation is applied. Examples of uses intended in the Regional Commercial designation include retail shopping centers, large office complexes and uses providing services to the traveling public such as restaurants, service stations, hotels, and motels. Entertainment uses such as movie theaters and nightclubs may be conditionally permitted. Within larger areas of the City, which have been designated Regional Serving Commercial; there may be areas which are suitable for mixed-use or high-density residential developments. The appropriate mix of uses permitted within these areas will be determined on a case-by-case review or by the amendment or adoption of a specific plan which will also establish the appropriate residential density.

The existing zone classification for the project site is zoned C-M-F-D (Commercial Manufacturing-Flood Overlay-Design Overlay). The project proposes to create an Alvarado Specific Plan Overlay Zone that would establish development regulations for the site.

Land use designations of surrounding properties include Mixed Density Residential (7 to 23 dwelling units per acre [du/ac]) and Open Space to the south; Transportation – Freeway, Multiple Unit Residential (18 to 23 du/ac), and Urban Residential (7 to 10 du/ac) to the north; Transportation – Trolley Station and Regional Commercial to the west; and Regional Commercial to the east.

3.0 REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

3.1 CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

The California Scenic Highway Program was created by legislature in 1963 (Streets and Highway Code Section 260 et seq.) and managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Its purpose is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A state scenic highway is any designated freeway, highway, road, or other

public right-of-way that traverses an area of exceptional scenic quality. A scenic designation is determined by the local jurisdiction after consideration and evaluation of how much of the natural landscape a passing motorist sees and the extent to which visual intrusions (e.g., buildings, unsightly land uses, noise barriers) impact the “scenic corridor.” There is one officially designated scenic highway in the city limits of La Mesa—a two-mile portion of State Route (SR) 125 as it transitions from SR 94 to I-8, which at its nearest point is approximately two miles east of the project site. Scenic resources within this corridor include hillsides and sloping terrain with prominent landforms of Mount Helix, Mount Miguel, and Dictionary Hill.

I-8 from Sunset Cliffs Boulevard near the Pacific Ocean to SR 98 in Imperial County is listed as an eligible scenic highway (Caltrans 2017a). An eligible status is not an official designation and does not provide the protections under the California Scenic Highway Program. There are no identified attributes associated with I-8 that make it an eligible scenic highway.

3.2 LA MESA 2012 GENERAL PLAN

The City of La Mesa 2012 General Plan (General Plan) sets forth goals and policies that comprise a comprehensive, unified program for physical development within the City. The goals, objectives, and policies contained in the General Plan are intended to guide the City’s officials and staff in decisions concerning the use of land, as well as a wide range of issues relevant to growth and development within the City and generally are explained in detail in the varying General Plan Elements.

The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the General Plan contains five major concepts that are particularly important to all development that occurs within the City:

- The City’s neighborhoods and facilities should be preserved and improved.
- New development and redevelopment should exhibit high quality design and fit the characteristics of the City’s neighborhood and districts.
- Land use decisions should support sustainability by conserving valuable resources and planning for future generations.
- Promote local job creation and retention by encouraging new business opportunities.
- Land use and urban design are integrated...to ensure that the physical forms, patterns, and aesthetics of future development advance La Mesa’s goals for high quality life and a more sustainable future.

In particular, the following goals, objectives, and policies relate to visual resources as they pertain to development:

- **Goal UD-1:** A built environment that contributes to the qualities distinguishing La Mesa’s unique community identity.
- **Objective UD-1.1:** To protect La Mesa’s existing built environment and cultural heritage.

- **Policy UD-1.1.1:** The visual quality and continuity of the community will be enhanced through consistent circulation patterns, definition of community edges and boundaries, distinct gateways and nodes, and removal of visually disruptive elements.
- **Goal UD-2:** Well-designed development based upon proven urban design principles.
- **Objective UD-2.1:** Preserve and enhance the aesthetic, environmental, economic, and social character of La Mesa through careful design review decisions.
- **Policy UD-2.1.1:** Give careful attention to Urban Design Standards related to building scale, architectural materials, landscaping, and other elements to emphasize attractive building and site design in new developments and redevelopments.
- **Policy UD-2.1-2:** The review of projects should place a priority on the compatibility of adjacent land uses. Special attention should be given to buffering and transitional methods, when reviewing projects of differing densities or land uses.
- **Goal UD-3:** A built environment that respects La Mesa's natural environment and climate.
- **Objective UD-3.1:** Development that is architecturally and environmentally sensitive and is compatible with neighboring design and scale.
- **Policy UD-3.1.5:** Increase the amount of foliage, especially street trees, for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitats, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.

3.3 LA MESA ZONING ORDINANCE

The La Mesa Zoning Ordinance (Title 24 of the LMMC) serves as the primary implementation of the General Plan. The Zoning Ordinance is a regulatory document that establishes specific standards for the use and development of all properties in the City. The Zoning Ordinance regulates development intensity using a variety of methods, such as specific regulations regarding the use of land; minimum lot sizes; limitations on location, height, bulk, and scale of buildings; and other regulations such as lighting.

In addition to the development regulations established by the base zones, several overlay zones have been applied to particular areas of the City where supplemental permitted use and development standards are merited. Overlay zones applicable to visual resources include the Urban Design Overlay Zone and the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone. The Urban Design Overlay Zone is used to supplement the required land use regulations reviewed under the standard provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. The Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone established regulations for the recognized scenic areas in the City, the character of which could be adversely affected by development and the use of land without special regulations. The project site is located within an area designated with the Urban Design Overlay Zone, but not within the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone.

3.4 LA MESA SIGN ORDINANCE

The La Mesa Sign Ordinance (Title 15 of the LMMC) provides regulations for signage intended to balance the means for conveying information with the needs to protect the visual environment. Specific regulations are generally guided by land uses. The project site currently contains three

“non-conforming” freeway-oriented billboards. In accordance with the Sign Ordinance, all existing advertising structures (i.e., billboards) can retain their existing non-conforming status until such time that they are removed.

3.5 THE URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM

The Urban Design Program uses principles of design during a review process that is intended to ensure that new development fits into the fabric of the community. The program includes guidelines for evaluating public and private projects based on the community image concept and hierarchy of land use ranging from regional to site-specific plans. The stated goal of the Urban Design Program is to “Preserve and enhance the community character and sense of place by delivering projects and programs that build upon positive design features.” Projects subject to design review include new or substantially renovated commercial properties, multi-unit residential developments, projects within the City’s mixed-use corridors, and sites within the Downtown Village Specific Plan area. The proposed Specific Plan would include site-specific design recommendations and criteria for development within the project site that would supersede those required by the Urban Design Program.

4.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

4.1 LANDFORM

The City’s jurisdiction encompasses 9.2 square miles and is located approximately 14 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. The City is in a transition zone between the coast and foothills in an area of San Diego County that is dominated by a series of geological features known as marine terraces. Canyons such as those containing Alvarado Creek cut through these terraces. The terraced topography results in substantial topographical variation and provides panoramic views of much of the City from a variety of locations. Topographical features, such as Mount Nebo and foothills of Mount Helix further define the geography and landforms of the City.

The project site is relatively level with a slight topographical variation as it slopes downward from east to west to the degree of approximately 10 feet. Existing on-site elevations range from approximately 400 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) to 410 AMSL. Land to the north includes Alvarado Road and I-8 corridors, which are generally at grade with the project site. Across I-8, the terrain gradually ascends within the existing developed neighborhoods to an elevation of approximately 500 feet AMSL. To the south of the project site, the land rises approximately 10 to 30 feet to a bench where the trolley corridor occurs. Beyond this bench, steep hillsides supported by retaining walls rise an additional 10 to 50 feet to a mesa at the edge of residential neighborhoods.

4.2 SITE CHARACTERISTICS AND SURROUNDING USES

4.2.1 Site Characteristics

The project site comprises four separate parcels that encompass approximately 12 acres. All four parcels are developed and currently occupied by the San Diego RV Resort. The RV Resort contains 174 full-hookup RV spaces and serves a combination of short-term and extended stay visitors. One of notable visual features of the project site includes a stand of approximately 155 Mexican Fan Palm trees that are scattered throughout the project site (see Figure 10). These trees are informally grouped, and most have



\\HEGIS\VM\GIS\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\VA\Fig10_SitePhotos_RVResort.indd LAM-08 06/27/19_RK

reached a relatively uniform height of approximately 80 feet. Due to the number of trees and associated heights, this stand of palm trees is highly visible and somewhat prominent from surrounding areas.

Apart from the alignment of Alvarado Creek, which has retained some natural vegetation along the channelized banks, the project site is developed with a combination of paved surfaces and ornamental landscaping (see Figure 10). Numerous RVs are parked within the paved areas and are grouped together along internal roadways. A combination of wrought iron and a wooden plank fence separate the site's boundary from Alvarado Road. Low shrubs and street landscaping provide further separation between the site and the roadway (see Figure 11).

On-site structures include two laundry/bathroom buildings and an office/apartment complex comprised of three buildings (see Figure 12). All five existing buildings were constructed between 1953 and 1964. The office/apartment complex consists of a two-story, rectangular-shaped office building; a two-story apartment building; and a small, single-story meeting building between the two multi-story buildings. The office and apartment buildings exhibit a Contemporary architectural style with stucco exterior façades and low-pitch gable roofs with wide boxed eaves. The office building has numerous large, metal-framed windows, and the second story cants out on the two long sides. The apartment building has an exercise room at one end with a curved façade and large picture windows, as well as pilasters and bay windows. A small swimming pool is present immediately east of the office building and is surrounded by a concrete patio. The two laundry/bathroom buildings are rectangular, single-story buildings with stucco façades and low front gable roofs. Both buildings have a small laundry room at one end with restrooms and storage in the remaining space.

Alvarado Creek is another notable visual feature of the project site. Alvarado Creek enters the site at the intersection of Alvarado Road on the east and continues through the site, bisecting the property until it enters an underground storm drainage facility in the western portion of the property. Alvarado Creek is channelized as it enters into the project site from the northeast and flows through a box culvert underneath a bridge over Alvarado Road (see Figure 13). As shown, Alvarado Creek consists of a trapezoidal channel with concrete-lined banks and a natural channel bottom aside from the concrete aprons near the Alvarado Road overcrossing and at the western end of the site (adjacent to the 70th Street Trolley Station). Much of the channel supports vegetation including native and non-native species at varying vegetative cover, and water regularly flows through this section of Alvarado Creek.

Three large billboard signs are located within the project site along the Alvarado Road frontage. One is located at the eastern boundary of the site and is a single-sided sign oriented for viewers traveling along eastbound I-8. The other two signs occur in the western portion of site and are double sided and visible to both eastbound and westbound viewers (see Figure 14).

Overhead utility lines also cross over portions of the site that connect to 15 utility poles located throughout the site (see Figure 10).

4.2.2 Surrounding Land Uses

Surrounding land uses include Alvarado Road and I-8 to the north, the double-track Green Line trolley line to the south, a car dealership and motel to the east, and the 70th Street Trolley Station to the west of the site. A more detailed description of the visual environment of the surrounding land uses is provided below.

4.2.2.1 North of the Project Site

The northern boundary of the project site area is defined by Alvarado Road and beyond that I-8. Alvarado Road is a two-lane local collector with minimal improvements; no sidewalks or bicycle facilities are provided along the site frontage. Alvarado Road also serves as a frontage road to I-8 and as such it parallels the freeway in this area, divided by a concrete masonry wall along the western portion of the project frontage. The wall itself has been subject to graffiti and graffiti removal as is evidenced by the various swaths and patchwork of paint, that are visually incoherent and further accentuate the deteriorated condition of this roadway right-of-way. Further east along the project frontage, I-8 is divided by a chain link fence and the alignment of Alvarado Creek.

I-8 is a major east-west freeway and in the area of the project, I-8 has four general purpose lanes in each direction. Heavily traveled I-8 has an annual average daily traffic count of approximately 20,800 (Caltrans 2017b).

North of I-8 along Parkway Drive, there are residential neighborhoods comprised of single-family homes and multi-story apartment complexes that front Parkway Drive.

4.2.2.2 South of the Project Site

The Green Line trolley tracks and Alvarado Creek generally form the southern project site boundary. Immediately adjacent land uses south of the project site include the Green Line trolley tracks and portions of Alvarado Creek. Beyond that and located up on a mesa are a combination of single and multi-family residences.

Within the western portion of the project site that abuts Alvarado Creek, the southern site boundary is formed by a four-foot tall cement wall. Beyond the wall, Alvarado Creek and vegetated open space separate the trolley tracks from the site. As the tracks extend eastward along and near the southern site boundary, they begin to rise in elevation on a bench and end up approximately 30 feet above the site in the eastern portion of the project site. The trolley corridor contains rail infrastructure, including double track rail, ballast, catenary poles and wires, signals, and fencing. Additionally, retaining walls occur on portions of the north-facing slopes on both sides of the trolley corridor.

Further south of the tracks and on a mesa that rises approximately 50 feet above the project site are a mixture of single-family and multi-family residences. The character of this neighborhood is eclectic, as there are a variety of residential building types at varying ages with different architectural styles. Adjacent to the western end of the site are two large, two-story apartment complexes along Saranac Street (Fleetwood Apartment Homes and La Cuesta Apartments). Single-family homes along Keeney Street comprised of a mixture of older and newer homes occur east of the apartment complexes. The Colony Mobile Plaza mobile home park and another large apartment complex (Comanche Hills) are located along the mesa east of the mobile home park and adjacent to the eastern portion of the project site. There is little connectivity between these residential uses, such as sidewalks or streetscaping that would define the area as a collective unit or cohesive neighborhood. This area is served by a grid of local streets that connect to El Cajon Boulevard but have no direct street connection to each other or the project site below the mesa upon which they occur.



I:\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\Map\Fig11_SitePhotos_AlvaradoRd.indd LAM-08 06/27/19 -RK



Office Building



Apartment Building



Meeting Building



Laundry/Bathroom Building

Source: Recon 2018

I:\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\Map\Fig12_SitePhotos_Buildings.indd LAM-08 06/27/19 -RK

I:\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\Map\Fig13_SitePhotos_AlvaradoCreek.indd LAM-08 06/27/19 -RK





I:\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\Map\Fig14_SitePhotos_Billboards.indd LAM-08 06/27/19 -RK

4.2.2.3 East of the Project Site

Directly east of the project site is Bob Stall Chevrolet, which occupies 3.67-acres of automobile sales and service land uses along Alvarado Road. The site supports an automotive sales building, automobile repair buildings, and a paved sales lot. As a commercial business, the site has nighttime lighting on both the structures themselves and on light standards spaced throughout the lot. Traveling further east on Alvarado Road is a motel (Motel 6) and the commercial fleet sales and service departments of the auto dealership.

4.2.2.4 West of the Project Site

Immediately west of the project site is the 70th Street Trolley Station. This station consists of covered bench seating areas, a park-and-ride lot, and a bus pull in and loading/unloading area. There is security lighting provided throughout the trolley station on light standards and affixed to the awning structures. While there is some ornamental landscaping, it is mostly clustered in the parking area. West of the trolley station is an automobile repair business in a single-story warehouse-type building and a two-story, multi-tenant office building.

4.3 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.3.1 Scenic Vistas

The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the City's General Plan identifies specific panoramic views and vistas that contribute to the City's community image. Panoramic views are described in the General Plan (Table LD-5) as providing "an overall image of a large portion of the city or outlying region. The location may be within or adjacent to the city and from an easily access point such as a hill top, pass, or atop a landmark." There are two designated panoramic views in the General Plan, including one from Mount Helix and one near the Fletcher Parkway/Amaya Drive intersection.

Vistas are described in the General Plan as "similar to panoramic views but with a much narrower angle. These views are characterized by long vertically defined spaces that open to allow sight of a few select elements. Common examples occur along streets, corridors, or groves that open to views of the ocean, a major building, or a square." The General Plan designates four vistas, including a view of Lake Murray from Baltimore Drive, a view from Fletcher Parkway near Baltimore Drive, and two views along La Mesa Boulevard in the downtown village.

None of these designated panoramic views or scenic vistas are located within the project vicinity. Furthermore, the project site does not contain any features that would be part of a scenic vista, nor does it provide any expansive views of notable regional landforms. There are very limited views of Cowles Mountain from the project site and the surrounding areas; however, existing urban development and natural topography largely obstruct views of Cowles Mountain.

4.3.2 Scenic Resources

There is no comprehensive list of specific features that automatically qualify as scenic resources. However, Caltrans provides some direction citing a partial list of visual qualities and conditions that if present indicate the presence of a scenic resource. This list includes a landmark tree or group of distinctive trees accented in a setting as a focus of attention. Conversely, trees that are commonplace

and repetitious, occurring frequently along a roadway, lack the typical characteristics of a scenic resource (Caltrans 2019).

The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the City’s General Plan identifies visual resources within and adjacent to the City. In addition to the panoramic views and vistas discussed above, multiple landmarks/nodes; districts and groupings; and gateways, paths, and edges are designated throughout the City. Within the project site, the Mexican fan palm trees are identified in the General Plan as a landmark and a grouping. The General Plan Update defines a landmark as “usually either physical objects such as signs, isolated towers, unique buildings; or natural features such as a hill or a lake. They may be seen within the city or at such a distance that they symbolize a constant direction.” A grouping is defined as “small-to-medium sections of the city that are similar in relation to districts. They are a collection of similar units that bridge gaps left between districts and nodes. A grouping may be buildings of similar character, use, or history, or be non-structural such as a park or open space.”

The palm trees are visible from I-8 approaching the project area from the west, providing a visual landmark indicating the entrance into the La Mesa area. Additionally, given their location near a freeway ramp, they may also provide navigational aid for drivers along I-8 entering the area. They are also visible from other nearby locations to the north and south but are most prominent from the freeway corridor and adjacent frontage roads (Alvarado Road and Parkway Drive). Their concentration, height, and resulting visual prominence create a visual focal point for the area. Palm trees, however, are commonplace in the southern California landscape and are frequently planted along roadways and within developed properties, including within the project area and other portions of the City. No other designated scenic resources occur on site or in the immediate project area.

The City has identified other visually sensitive areas through the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone and Hillside Overlay Zone. Most of the land within these overlay zones are located within the southern portion of the City. The project site is not within either of these overlay zones. There are also five additional “visually sensitive areas” where new development is required to be compatible with the physical characteristics of each of these sites and the surrounding environment. Although two of these additional visually sensitive areas are near the site (one to the east on an undeveloped hillside and one to the west on undeveloped land), none occur on or adjacent to the project site.

Additionally, there is one designated scenic highway in the City limits of La Mesa—a two-mile portion of SR 125 as it transitions from SR 94 to I-8. This scenic highway corridor passes through residential and commercial development and provides generally open views of the foothills and peak of Mount Helix, as well as more distant views of Mount Miguel and Dictionary Hill. The project site is approximately two miles northwest of this scenic highway corridor.

4.3.3 Visual Character and Quality

4.3.3.1 Visual Character

Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that do not include subjective positive or negative value judgments. Visual character, as evaluated below is composed of pattern elements and pattern character.

Pattern Elements

Pattern elements are the artistic attributes inherent in the elements that compose a landscape and include the primary visual attributes of objects such as form, line, color, and texture. The form of an object is its visual mass, bulk, or shape. Line is introduced by the edges of objects or parts of objects. The color of an object is both its visual or reflective brightness and its hue. Texture is apparent surface coarseness. Awareness of pattern elements varies with distance.

The visual character of the project area encompasses diverse forms predominantly comprised of built environment features intermixed with some natural features. The area is almost entirely developed with a mixture of residential, commercial, and transportation uses. Given the variety of uses, building forms differ considerably with respect to shape and mass. The structures provide geometric forms with linear elements and a mix of colors on the building facades and roofs. Textures are generally smooth to semi-coarse depending on the exterior surface treatment on buildings. Roadways and parking areas provide additional developed features that exhibit similar pattern elements but are more homogenous in color and texture. The trolley tracks provide a strong linear element, as do the alignments of I-8 and roadways. The natural features are positioned in between, and are surrounded by, urban development and consist of ornamental and native vegetation, hillsides, undeveloped land, and Alvarado Creek. These elements provide contrasting shapes, colors, and textures compared to the structures. The vegetation provides various shades of greens, yellows, and browns with soft textures. Within the project area, Alvarado Creek is channelized, which creates defined linear edges of the creek banks.

The project site itself lacks features with much apparent mass or bulk. There are five buildings on the site that are similar in form and color. The buildings are one to two stories with geometric forms and are painted tan. Most of the site consists of paved surfaces and parking stalls for RVs. This expanse of parking area provides a monotypic element in terms of color and texture. Landscaped and hardscaped areas divide the RV parking stalls for the RVs, which creates a sprawling but low-level form. The arrangement of parked RVs along an internal grid roadway network also provides some consistency in pattern elements. Extending vertically from the site and offering contrasting forms, shapes, colors, and textures are the palm trees, narrow and parallel to the low-lying structures and RVs. The palm trees are greater in height than any other of the site features and along with 15 utility poles, provide vertical linear elements. Overhead utility lines that cross the site create elevated horizontal line elements. The texture of the developed site features is typical of urban built environments, and include a combination of generally smooth hardscaped features, asphalt, and building and recreational vehicle facades and surfaces. On-site landscaping and vegetation cover, some of it rather dense, within Alvarado Creek provide verdant features with softer textures than the developed features.

Pattern Character

Pattern character describes the dominance, scale, diversity, or continuity between the pattern elements. Dominance occurs when a specific feature is prominently positioned, contrasted, or extended to a point where the specific feature strongly influences the pattern character of a scene. Scale is the size relationship among landscape components in the visual environment. Diversity is the frequency, variety, and positioning of pattern elements. Continuity is the uninterrupted flow or transition among pattern elements.

Within the project area, large-scale visually dominant elements include the I-8 freeway and associated roadway infrastructure (i.e., overcrossings and ramps), as well as the on-site billboards and stand of

palm trees. Other man-made features, such as buildings and local roads are generally consistent with one another in terms of scale and prominence. Given the mixture of uses and presence of some natural features, the project area exhibits a moderately high degree of diversity. Although the area includes various uses, residential development is the prevalent use and the development patterns of residential neighborhoods provide some degree of continuity. Similarly, transportation corridors that traverse the area, most notably I-8 and the Green Line trolley corridor, also provide some continuity due to the alignment and expanse of these facilities as they extend through the project area.

The majority of the site is exemplified by the rows of RVs divided by asphalt hardscape and some softer ornamental vegetation, which does not lead to the dominance of a specific feature. However, the Mexican fan palm trees, as discussed in this report, are visually prominent. While at ground level at the site they are not as recognizable as having dominance because of the relatively narrow profile of the trunks, at further distances from the site, they do become a dominant feature given their concentration and generally uniform height of approximately 80 feet. They are pronounced in relation to other landscaped components in the visual environment. The three billboards within the site are large-scale elements compared to other on-site features and given their size and positioning right along the site frontage, exhibit dominance. The combination of the palm trees and billboards contribute to a moderate level of dominance. Diversity of the site is moderately low given the single use of the site and similar visual elements across the site. Trees, including the palms, occur throughout the project site, and although they are not arranged in a distinctive or formal pattern, their assemblage provides some continuity across the site. This is especially evident at further distances. The arrangement of RVs along grid pattern internal roadways also creates continuity among on-site pattern elements. The trees and RVs contribute to a moderate degree of continuity.

Existing Visual Character Summary

Overall, the character of the project site and surrounding area is urban in nature due to the integration of the man-made environment comprised of a mixture of residential, commercial, and transportation uses with limited natural features. The site has a moderate level of dominance, low diversity, and a moderate degree of continuity.

4.3.3.2 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:

- **Vividness** is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns.
- **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.
- **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.

In relation to vividness, the project site contains memorable visual elements, including a designated visual landmark, the palm trees and three large billboards. The concentration of the 155 trees at a generally uniform height of approximately 80 feet creates a distinctive focal point from surrounding areas. In addition, while not a landmark as defined by the City's General Plan and urban in nature, the three large billboards that are placed among the site's interface with Alvarado Road are a distinctive feature of the site adding to the site's memorability. Additionally, Alvarado Creek, and especially the dense vegetation within the creek, creates a vivid natural feature that contrasts with the surrounding developed elements. At the same time, the location of the project site within an almost entirely developed urban area and surrounded by development detracts from the vividness these on-site memorable features provide. This results in a moderate vividness rating for the project site and surrounding area.

The project site is part of the broader landscape that is dominated by I-8 and residential neighborhoods to the north, the trolley tracks as they elevate from at grade to approximately 30 feet higher than the site and the mesa with a mixture of incongruent residential land uses to the south, the trolley station to the west, and the auto dealership and motel to the east. The project area contains a mixture of land uses and exhibits a development pattern characteristic of an urbanized community, which provides some degree of intactness. There are very few natural elements that encroach into the built environment of the area, but there is some open space, undeveloped land, hillsides, and Alvarado Creek that to some extent disrupt the intactness of the built environment. The intactness of the area is therefore considered moderately low.

The visual unity of the project area is moderately low. Although the built portion of the area is comprised mostly of residential development, neighborhoods and homes within them are diverse in terms of architectural style, size, color, configuration, and age. Some pockets of relatively homogenous neighborhoods are evident, but the overall visual mosaic contributes to moderately low unity. Commercial and transportation facilities within the project area also reduce unity within the area. While there are some natural features present, they are generally isolated and are surrounded by built components; there is no connectivity to larger expanses of similar natural features.

The overall existing visual quality of the project site and surrounding is moderately low given the moderate degree of vividness and moderately low rating of intactness and unity.

5.0 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.

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.

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. 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 surrounding landscape. A viewer's ability to perceive the

landscape is affected by his/her activity. A viewer on vacation 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 resident commuting to work may not “register” those same visual resources on a daily basis.

5.1 VIEWER GROUPS

Prior to discussing the viewer exposure and sensitivity, it is important to define who the viewer groups are that would be potentially impacted by land use changes at the project site. For this project, the viewer groups consist of those people that frequent the neighboring land uses; residents; travelers along I-8, Alvarado Road, the other local serving roads (Parkway Drive to the north, Saranac Street, Keeney Street, Williams Street, and Comanche Drive to the south); and people utilizing the trolley and the 70th Street Trolley Station. These viewer groups include motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. Therefore, the assessment of viewer response focuses on these three viewer groups with views of project elements from public vantage points.

5.2 VIEWER EXPOSURE

Viewer exposure is a measure of the viewer's ability to see a particular object. Viewer exposure has three attributes: location, quantity, and duration. Location relates to the position of the viewer in relationship to the object being viewed. The closer the viewer is to the object, the more exposure. Quantity refers to how many people see the object. The more people who can see an object or the greater frequency an object is seen, the more exposure the object has to viewers. Duration refers to how long a viewer is able to keep an object in view. The longer an object can be kept in view, the more exposure. High viewer exposure helps predict that viewers will have a response to a visual change.

5.2.1 Motorists' Exposure

Motorists along I-8 have direct open views into the project site from both the eastbound and westbound direction. The freeway generally is at the same elevation as the site and there are limited intervening elements between the travel lanes and the project site. Based on the posted speed of 65 miles per hour (mph), views onto the project site could have a duration of about half a minute for eastbound (approximately 36 seconds) and westbound (approximately 33 seconds) travelers within the viewshed of the site along the freeway. Based on the alignment of the freeway (i.e., curves) and presence of existing developed features and landscaping, existing site elements are generally visible from a distance of 0.7 mile in the eastbound direction (near the 70th Street/Lake Murray Boulevard overcrossing) and 0.6 mile in the westbound direction (near the Fletcher Parkway overcrossing). Given the project site's proximity to the I-8, open views into the project site, and the large quantity of viewers along this stretch of the freeway (approximately 20,800 [Caltrans 2017]), motorists' viewer exposure on I-8 is considered high. Travelers on I-8 would comprise the largest viewer group in the project area.

Viewer exposure along other nearby local roads differs per vantage point. The freeway frontage roads on the south and north sides of I-8, Alvarado Road and Parkway Drive, offer open to partially obstructed views near the site. Alvarado Road abuts the site and provides immediate and direct open views into the site (see Figure 15). Parkway Drive is higher in elevation than the site and provides some intermittent bird's eye views into the site although roadside landscaping, walls, and the freeway block open views from some vantage points along this roadway (see Figure 16). The number of motorists on these frontage roads is approximately 1,800 on Alvarado Road (Kimley Horn 2018) and 3,700 on Parkway Drive (SANDAG 2015). With posted speeds of 35 mph, the view duration would be about 21 seconds along



\\HEGIS\VM\GIS\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\VA\Fig15_VantagePoints_AlvaradoRd.indd LAM-08 06/27/19 -RK



Alvarado Road (for both the eastbound and westbound direction based on a site distance of approximately 0.2 mile for each direction) and about 41 seconds along Parkway Drive (both eastbound and westbound directions based on a site distance of approximately 0.4 mile). Motorists' viewer exposure would be moderately high on Alvarado Road because of the direct adjacency of the viewer, and moderate on Parkway Drive.

Viewer exposure along public roadways on the mesa south of the site is limited, and the few views afforded from a public location are mostly obstructed by intervening structures, landscaping, and topography. Public roadways in this area dead end at a residence or private street, including Saranac Street, 73rd Street, Keeney Street, and Williams Street. These streets are not highly traveled as they do not connect to other streets and are utilized almost exclusively by residents or visitors of the homes along the roadways. Comanche Drive is another local street that provides access to primarily residents, but this roadway also connects to Alvarado Road where it intersects with Fletcher Parkway and the I-8 eastbound ramp. Consequently, the number of viewers along Comanche Drive is much higher (approximately 11,600 ADT) than the other local roadways named above (estimated at approximately 1,100 ADT or less [SANDAG 2019]). Furthermore, open views of the project site are generally not provided from these streets due to topography and intervening development. Brief glimpses of the site and/or tops of some of the on-site palm trees may be available in between buildings or above vegetation, but no discernible views encompassing the larger stand that mark the site are available. Motorists' viewer exposure from these public roadways is therefore considered very low.

5.2.2 Bicyclists' and Pedestrians' Exposure

Bicyclists and pedestrians traveling along surrounding local roadways would be moving at slower rates of travel compared automobiles resulting in longer durations of potential views. As discussed above, views into the site from surrounding local roadways are generally limited to the two frontage roads that parallel I-8: Alvarado Road and Parkway Drive. Views into the site are not generally provided from local roadways on the mesa to the south. While view durations could be longer for these viewer groups, the extent of views is essentially the same as motorists. Open proximal views are provided from Alvarado Road; however, there are no sidewalks or bike lanes along Alvarado Road. The absence of sidewalks and bicycle facilities does not necessarily preclude the use of this roadway for these viewer groups, but the number of pedestrians and bicyclists is expected to be relatively minimal. Moreover, people walking or biking along Alvarado Road are generally focused on safely traveling along the roadway and not at the surrounding visual environment. Nonetheless, viewer exposure of bicyclists and pedestrians would be moderate along Alvarado Road given the immediate adjacency of the project site.

Sidewalks are provided on the north side of Parkway Drive but there are no bike lanes on this roadway. Pedestrians traveling on the sidewalks have varying degrees of view exposure into the project site. As shown in Figure 16, there are vantage points along the roadway where views into the site are fairly open across the roadway and I-8 while views from other vantage points are largely obstructed by vegetation and walls along the roadway with only the tops of some palm trees visible. Bicyclists along Parkway Drive would have similar views but slightly shorter durations because they would be traveling faster than pedestrians. Viewer exposure along Parkway Drive would be moderate given the variability in project views.

Overall, pedestrian and bicyclist viewer exposure on surrounding local roadways that provide views into the site would be moderate.

5.2.3 Transit Patrons' Exposure

The Green Line trolley corridor extends just to the south of the project site on the south side of Alvarado Creek. The trolley tracks sit higher than the site and thus, transit riders have open views directly into the project site as trolleys pass by the site. Based on a maximum trolley speed of 55 mph and site distance of approximately 0.75 mile, trolley passengers could have a view duration of the project site of up to approximately 49 seconds. Transit patrons at the adjacent 70th Street Trolley Station have static views of portions of the site, namely the tall palm trees and some of the billboards. Given the adjacency of open views from the trolley corridor and neighboring transit station, transit patrons' viewer exposure would be moderately high.

5.3 VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Viewer sensitivity is defined as both the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' recognition of change in the visual resources that make up the view.

A viewer's concern for scenic quality is dependent upon in part, personal experiences and values and in part the context in which a viewer is observing. For this project, the viewer's concern for scenic quality is dependent upon the viewer group. Specifically, a motorist on I-8 or the local roadways or a traveler along the trolley corridor would likely have a lower concern for scenic quality since their views are fleeting and the primary focus of the viewer is on reaching a particular locale as opposed to the scenic quality of the commute. Bicyclists and pedestrians would be more concerned with scenic quality since they are traveling at slower speeds and are generally more attuned to the visual aspects of their surroundings. Similarly, transit patrons are passengers and have more opportunity as passive observers to notice the visual landscape while at the trolley station or riding in a trolley.

A viewer's recognition has three attributes: activity, awareness, and local values. Activity relates to the preoccupation of viewers and whether they are preoccupied or truly engaged in observing their surroundings. The more they are observing their surroundings, the more sensitivity viewers will have to changes to visual resources. Similar to the concern for scenic quality, a motorist or commuter traveling through the area in route to a destination is generally less engaged with the surroundings. Primary public views of the project site are from surrounding freeways and roadways, the trolley corridor, and the 70th Street Trolley Station. Viewers from these locations are likely focused on reaching their destination, but as discussed above, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit patrons would be expected to be more aware of scenic qualities of their surroundings.

Awareness relates to the focus of view and whether the focus is wide, and the view is general, or whether the focus is narrow, and the view is specific. The more specific the awareness, the more sensitive a viewer is to change. In general, commuters may not be particularly aware of all visual changes along a commute; however, given the scale and density of the project in comparison to the existing site setting, it is anticipated that the awareness would be high for all viewer groups. Visual changes at the other public vantage points would be noticeable through the narrow viewsheds that are offered in between the structural, landscape, and topographical obstructions. Given that viewer groups in these areas would most likely be residents, their awareness would also be expected to be high.

Local values and attitudes also affect viewer sensitivity. If the viewer group values aesthetics, or if a specific visual resource has been protected by local, state, or national designation, it is likely that viewers will be more sensitive to visible changes. Conversely, local values and goals may confer visual

significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. Even when the existing appearance of a project site is uninspiring, a community may still object to projects that fall short of its visual goals. As previously noted, the palm trees on the site are considered a landmark in the City's General Plan. There may be some local value placed upon these trees providing a navigational reference but the trees themselves are not unique to the region and are not indicative of spotlighting a greater scenic resource.

Based on the anticipated concern for scenic quality and recognition of change in the visual resources, viewer groups overall would be expected to have a high sensitivity to change.

6.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 CEQA SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLDS

The following CEQA significance thresholds are based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines as amended. The project would result in a significant visual impact if it would:

- Have a substantial effect on a scenic vista.
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, conflict with an applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.
- Create new source of substantial light and glare, which would adversely affect day and nighttime views in the area.

6.1.1 Scenic Vistas

As discussed in Section 4.3.1, The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the City's General Plan identifies scenic vistas and panoramic views that contribute to the City's community image. None of these designated scenic vistas or panoramic views are located within the project vicinity and the project site is not visible from any of them except for Mount Helix. Mount Helix is identified in the General Plan as one of the panoramic views and a major landmark from which expansive views of a large portion of the City can be observed. The project site is barely visible in the distance from this vista; the on-site palm trees can be seen in very distance, but they are not visually prominent and other existing on-site features are not apparent. At a distance of over three miles, the change from the existing RV resort to a multi-family residential development comprised of four multi-story buildings would not be substantially discernible. At this distance and with the expanse of the view that encompasses multiple and diverse built environment features, the project elements would visually blend in with the surrounding urban development such that they would not adversely affect views from this designated vista.

The project site is also not located within the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone, Hillside Overlay Zone, or other identified visually sensitive areas. Furthermore, the project site does not contain any features that would be part of a scenic vista, nor does it provide any expansive views of notable regional landforms.

There are very limited views of Cowles Mountain from the project site and the surrounding areas; however existing urban development and natural topography largely obstruct views of Cowles Mountain. Intermittent views of Cowles Mountain would continue to be provided from the site. Impacts associated with adverse effects on scenic vistas would be less than significant.

6.1.2 Scenic Resources

As discussed in Section 4.3.2, an approximately two-mile segment of SR 125, between SR 94 and I-8, is an officially designated state scenic highway. Scenic resources within this corridor include views of the prominent foothills and peak of Mount Helix with distant views of Cowles Mountain to the northwest and Mount Miguel and Dictionary Hill to the southeast. The portion of this scenic highway at the highest elevation (approximately 650 feet AMSL) and with greatest potential for visibility of the project site is located near I-8. The project site is approximately two miles west of this portion of SR 125. Existing site features are not visible from this scenic highway due to distance, existing topography, and intervening development and vegetation. With the construction of the proposed buildings that would include five stories above one to three levels of parking with a maximum building height of 85 feet aboveground and considering the average site elevation of approximately 410 feet AMSL, the proposed buildings would not be visible from this designated scenic highway corridor for the same reasons that existing site features are not visible. I-8 is located approximately 30 feet to the north of the project site. While I-8 is listed by Caltrans as an eligible scenic highway, it is not officially designated and as such, is not afforded aesthetic protection under the California Scenic Highway Program. Thus, the project would not substantially damage scenic resources within any designated state scenic highway.

As note in Section 4.3.2 above, the existing stand of palm trees on the project site are identified as a scenic resource, specifically a landmark in the City's General Plan. Project implementation would result in the loss of the 155 Mexican fan palms. The palm trees are highly visible from the adjacent I-8 corridor and area a visual landmark indicating the entrance into the La Mesa area. Their concentration, height, and resulting visual prominence create a visual focal point for the area. While the stand of on-site palm trees exists in a larger grouping than elsewhere in the area, neither the trees themselves nor their configuration within the larger visual context create a unique or distinctive landmark. Palm trees are quite common in the region and also occur within the surrounding project area and elsewhere in the City. Therefore, the project would not substantially damage scenic resources.

Moreover, the project provides the opportunity to create a scenic resource through the enhancement and restoration of Alvarado Creek as it traverses through the project site. Currently, within the project area footprint, Alvarado Creek is a concrete-lined channel, prone to flooding, and is characterized predominantly by non-native vegetation and debris. The project would highlight Alvarado Creek as a visual amenity while achieving flood control and storm water quality improvements. As shown in Figure 4, the project includes a series of viewing nodes along a pedestrian pathway that would follow the creek alignment.

Overall, project implementation would not substantially damage scenic resources or protected views and scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

6.1.3 Visual Character and Quality

6.1.3.1 Landform Alteration

The project site is developed and relatively level with an approximate 10-foot existing grade differential. There are no steep slopes or other notable landforms within the site. Alvarado Creek sits slightly lower than the adjacent development pads as it traverses the site. Project construction would involve grading nearly all of the site to raise the existing grade above the base floodplain elevation, but existing landforms and topographic conditions would essentially remain the same. Upon project development, the site would be relatively level with four building pads and a channelized watercourse. The adjacent slopes to the immediate south would not be affected. Therefore, the project would not result in a substantial change to existing landforms.

6.1.3.2 Development Patterns and Forms

The proposed development would be consistent with the development patterns in the surrounding area. The proposed project would entail the redevelopment of the existing RV resort with a multi-family residential development on a 12-acre site that is surrounded by existing development mostly comprised of residential and commercial uses. Surrounding residential development includes a mixture of single-family homes and multi-family complexes. There are several apartment buildings atop the mesa to the south (along Saranac Avenue, 73rd Street, Mohawk Avenue, and Comanche Drive), as well as along Parkway Drive across the I-8 to the north. These buildings range in size and scale and are generally aligned along the I-8 corridor. Consistent with this visual pattern, the proposed project would add another multi-family development along this corridor.

Building forms associated with the proposed residential buildings would be similar to those of surrounding multi-family developments, consisting of a grouping of similarly designed multi-story, geometrically shaped buildings configured within individual sites. While shape and scale of buildings differ, this overall development pattern is evident. Thus, the project would not introduce a new land use or new type of building form that does not currently exist in the immediate area.

6.1.3.3 Massing and Scale

The proposed project would remove existing on-site elements, including paved RV spaces, five buildings, overhead utility lines and poles, and vegetation (including a large palm tree stand) and construct four multi-story buildings that would cover most of the 12-acre site. The buildings would be up to 85 feet tall with rectilinear building forms and strong line elements. Three of the proposed buildings would be similar in terms of bulk and scale and one building would be smaller in scale but generally at the same height. The buildings would be of the same construction type and would include parking garages on the lower levels with the residential units constructed on a podium deck above the parking levels. Given the size of the proposed buildings and overall lot coverage, the proposed development would be more intensive than surrounding developments in terms of bulk and scale. The development intensity at the site would substantially increase over the existing condition and even upon construction, would be greater than existing development in the project area. The project site, however, has been contemplated for redevelopment with more intensive development. Specifically, the site is identified as a Smart Growth Opportunity Area in SANDAG's Smart Growth Concept Map (SANDAG 2016a). The site is shown as a Community Center, which has minimum residential densities of 20 du/ac served by high-frequency transit services and is described as a potential transit-oriented development adjacent to

the 70th Street Trolley Station (SANDAG 2016b). The site has also been identified by the City for some time as a redevelopment opportunity site. Additionally, the General Plan designation of Regional Serving Commercial allows for high-density residential developments. The Land Use and Urban Design Element of the City's General Plan identifies "redevelopment potential for more intensive mixed-use projects located near the 70th Street Trolley Station in the Alvarado Creek area. Sites in this area are designated for Regional Serving Commercial uses to contribute to the local economy, such as office, hotel, multi-family or mixed-use development."

Because the proposed Specific Plan prescribes a "form-based" concept for the proposed buildings, no specific architectural styles or treatments for the proposed buildings are identified at the Specific Plan level. However, the buildings would incorporate common design elements and treatments utilizing a mixture of wood, metal, and glass materials. Architectural treatments such as articulations, varied roof lines, window and entry treatments, and provision of balconies and sky decks would also be incorporated into the building design to reduce mass effects of the vertical facades on the buildings. The podium decks would also provide relief along the building facades.

Each building would vary in shape depending on the building pad, and separation would be provided between each building so as not to create a uniform appearance or an uninterrupted building façade. Project entries, landscaped areas, and the enhanced Alvarado Creek would provide separation between some of the buildings to reduce massing effects. In addition, proposed landscaping at the site along the perimeter, building facades, and common areas would interrupt and visually soften structure massing effects.

6.1.3.4 Public Views

As discussed in Section 5.2.1, views of the project from public vantage points would primarily be available from I-8, surrounding local roadways, the Green Line trolley corridor, and the 70th Street Trolley Station. The largest number of viewers, as well as viewers having the most direct views onto the project site from public viewpoints, would be traveling along I-8, Alvarado Road, and the trolley corridor. These views would be open and project elements would be in the foreground. Views from local roadways within residential neighborhoods to the south would mostly be obscured due to intervening development, vegetation, and topography. From these areas, multi-family residential uses, an improved Alvarado Road frontage, and an enhanced Alvarado Creek would replace existing views of the RV resort and palm trees. Changes to the existing visual character and quality of the project site and surroundings are discussed below for each of these public vantage points.

Figure 17 depicts a conceptual perspective of the project from eastbound I-8. Following implementation of the project, views from I-8 toward the project site would be dominated by the proposed buildings. Foreground views would encompass the building facades and streetscape along Alvarado Road, as well as the existing billboards that would remain. Glimpses of an existing multi-family residential building can be seen in the middle ground in the right side of the concept. Existing off-site vegetation is also visible in the middle ground in between the proposed on-site buildings. Background views are generally limited to the sky.

Figure 18 depicts a conceptual perspective of the project from Alvarado Road near the eastern project boundary. Views of the site would be dominated by the proposed residential buildings. From this vantage point, the dominance of the buildings would be perceived as more apparent because of the adjacency of these new elements to Alvarado Road and the corresponding view angle from this vantage



HELIX
Environmental Planning

Plan Perspective – Interstate 8

Figure 17

I:\PROJECTS\LAM\LAM-08_AlvaradoSP\Map\Map VIA Fig18_PlanPerspective_AlvaradoRd.indd LAM-08 06/26/19 -RK



Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018

point. As shown, foreground views would encompass the multi-story buildings and to a lesser extent, the improved Alvarado Road frontage. The new sidewalk, street lights, streetscape plantings, and pedestrian bridge (over Alvarado Creek) can be seen along the site frontage. Also visible is one of the project access roads (in the left portion of the concept) that is lined with landscaping. Elements in the middle ground are subdued by the larger project elements in the foreground, but the existing Alvarado Creek channel is visible on the north side of Alvarado Road (right side of the concept).

Figure 19 depicts a conceptual perspective of the project representative of viewpoints south of the project site at the trolley facilities. The perspective is a bird's eye view looking downward at the project site as opposed to a ground-level view characteristic of a viewer along the trolley corridor (either traveling on the trolley or at the 70th Street Trolley Station) and thus encompasses a more expansive view; nonetheless, this perspective is a conservative representation of views from the adjacent trolley facilities. Project elements visible in the foreground include the enhanced Alvarado Creek and verdant riparian corridor, as well as portions of proposed on-site buildings (as seen in the right side of the concept). In the middle ground, the proposed buildings, outdoor courtyard and pool, and the pedestrian promenade along the enhanced creek are visible. Background views of hillsides are barely visible and likely would not be visible from the viewing angles provided at the grade of the trolley and trolley station. As seen, the buildings in the middle ground are the most dominant visual element from this vantage point, creating new strong rectilinear built forms. The buildings however are somewhat muted and softened by the meandering riparian corridor along the enhanced creek and trees and other landscaping along the site perimeter and building facades.

The project would result in a notable change to the existing visual condition from these public viewpoints. The existing trees (palms and other), RVs, and overhead utility lines and poles at the site would be replaced with large multi-story residential buildings, an enhanced Alvarado Creek, and an improved Alvarado Road frontage. While the scale of the buildings would be new dominant features within this viewshed, they would not represent new visual elements as other multi-story buildings are present in the immediate area, including apartment buildings on the mesa to the south and across the freeway to north, as well as the Allied Plaza commercial building located off Alvarado Road to the southeast. Furthermore, project elements would not obstruct any scenic resources from these vantages or modify horizon views of the open sky. Although the existing assembly of mature palm trees would be removed from the site, palm trees would be planted along the Alvarado Road frontage to provide a visual reference to the existing trees. Additional project landscaping along the improved Alvarado Road frontage and within and along the site perimeter would provide increased visual unity. Enhancements to Alvarado Creek, including removal of non-native vegetation, installation of native species, and provision of improved hydrologic flow within the channel, would also contribute to improved visual conditions at the site.

Although very different in character from the existing condition, the project would be visually compatible with surrounding development. Multi-story residential developments occur in the project area; building forms and design elements would be compatible with these existing elements. The new buildings would be consistent in terms of line, color, texture, treatments, styles, and form that would create a cohesive development within the site. Proposed landscaping would also be visually compatible with surrounding development and the enhanced Alvarado Creek, in combination with project landscaping, would provide for increased visual unity throughout the site. The proposed buildings would be memorable elements given their relative scale, massing, and configuration. The enhanced Alvarado Creek corridor would also provide a memorable site element. While the project would remove the Mexican fan palm tree stand that is considered a landmark in the General Plan, proposed landscaping

includes the planting of palm trees along the Alvarado Road frontage that would provide a reference to the existing trees. Consequently, the project would result in increased vividness. The configuration of the proposed buildings with their similar scale/forms and incorporation of common design elements would increase the intactness of the site upon project development. The buildings would be buffered from the enhanced Alvarado Creek by pedestrian promenades and recreation/common areas thereby avoiding encroachment of built and natural elements from one another. The removal of the overhead utility lines would further contribute to increased intactness. Overall, the visual quality from these viewpoints would be increased based on the added visual interest and increased visual unity, vividness, and intactness.

6.1.3.5 Zoning and Scenic Quality Regulations

The project site is located within an urbanized area within the City. While the site is currently zoned C-M-F-D (Commercial Manufacturing-Flood Overlay-Design Overlay), the project proposes to create an Alvarado Specific Plan Overlay Zone that would establish development regulations for the site, including those pertaining to visual quality. Therefore, there are no applicable scenic quality regulations associated with the underlying base zone classification that govern the site. The proposed Specific Plan prescribes a “form-based” development approach and site-specific design recommendations and criteria to be implemented as part of the Site Development Plan review process at the project level to guide site design principals for development in accordance with the Specific Plan.

The project site is within an Urban Design Overlay Zone. As required, all new development within the Urban Design Overlay Zone is subject to the requirements of the Urban Design Program and approval by the Design Review Board. Projects within this overlay zone are evaluated in part for their compliance and their incorporation of unique design criteria that pertain to visually sensitive areas. The proposed Specific Plan however would include site-specific design recommendations and criteria for development within the project site that would supersede those required by the Urban Design Program. Compliance with the Specific Plan design criteria would ensure that the new structures provide an appropriate level of design character and quality to be a good fit within the context of the project area and broader community.

The project would be consistent with applicable goals, objectives, and policies contained in the Land Use and Urban Design Element of the General Plan that relate to visual resources. Project consistency with these applicable goals, objectives, and policies (which are identified in Section 3.2 of this report) are summarized in Table 1 below.



Source: Schmidt Design Group 2018

Table 1
SCENIC QUALITY POLICY CONSISTENCY ANALYSIS

Goal/Objective/Policy	Consistency Analysis
Goal UD – 1: A built environment that contributes to the qualities distinguishing La Mesa’s unique community identity.	The proposed project would not adversely affect views from designated vistas or substantially damage scenic resources or protected views that are identified in the General Plan as contributing to La Mesa’s community image. Refer to Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2.
Objective UD-1.1: To protect La Mesa’s existing built environment and cultural heritage.	As discussed in Section 6.1.3.4, the overall visual quality of the site would be improved upon project implementation. The existing on-site structures are not historical resources and thus, their demolition and removal would not adversely affect resources that contribute to La Mesa’s cultural heritage.
Policy UD-1.1.1: The visual quality and continuity of the community will be enhanced through consistent circulation patterns, definition of community edges and boundaries, distinct gateways and nodes, and removal of visually disruptive elements.	Project implementation would not change existing circulation patterns and would not obfuscate any community edges or boundaries. No identified gateways or nodes are located on or immediately adjacent to the site. As discussed in Section 6.1.3.4, the overall visual quality of the site would be improved upon project implementation due, in part, to the removal of existing non-native invasive vegetation and debris within Alvarado Creek and construction of a cohesive development with consistent design elements.
Goal UD-2: Well-designed development based upon proven urban design principles.	The project entails construction of a multi-family development with an integrated design approach guided by the framework provided in the proposed Specific Plan. The proposed development would be subject to design review in conjunction with the Site Development Plan process, which would include a consistency analysis with the site-specific design criteria contained in the Specific Plan.
Objective UD-2.1: Preserve and enhance the aesthetic, environmental, economic, and social character of La Mesa through careful design review decisions.	The project entails construction of a multi-family development with an integrated design approach guided by the framework provided in the proposed Specific Plan. The proposed development would be subject to design review in conjunction with the Site Development Plan process, which would include a consistency analysis with the site-specific design criteria contained in the Specific Plan.
Policy UD-2.1.1: Give careful attention to Urban Design Standards related to building scale, architectural materials, landscaping, and other elements to emphasize attractive building and site design in new developments and redevelopments.	The project entails construction of a multi-family development with an integrated design approach guided by the framework provided in the proposed Specific Plan. The proposed development would be subject to design review in conjunction with the Site Development Plan process, which would include a consistency analysis with the site-specific design criteria contained in the Specific Plan.

Table 1 (cont.)
SCENIC QUALITY POLICY CONSISTENCY ANALYSIS

Goal/Objective/Policy	Consistency Analysis
Policy UD-2.1-2: The review of projects should place a priority on the compatibility of adjacent land uses. Special attention should be given to buffering and transitional methods, when reviewing projects of differing densities or land uses.	The project would be compatible with surrounding land uses and development patterns, as discussed in Section 6.1.3.2.
Goal UD-3: A built environment that respects La Mesa's natural environment and climate.	The project would redevelop an existing developed site that would feature an enhanced Alvarado Creek. The creek would be restored with native vegetation and improved hydrologic flows.
Objective UD-3.1: Development that is architecturally and environmentally sensitive and is compatible with neighboring design and scale.	The project would be visually compatible with surrounding development patterns and uses, as discussed in Section 6.1.3.2. Although the project would be at a greater scale than surrounding development, the design and configuration of buildings and landscaping would reduce massing effects. See Section 6.1.3.3. Additionally, the project would enhance Alvarado Creek by removing non-native vegetation and debris within the channel and planting native vegetation.
Policy UD-3.1.5: Increase the amount of foliage, especially street trees, for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitats, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.	The project includes a comprehensive landscape plan consisting of street trees, shrubs, and groundcovers along the Alvarado Road frontage, site perimeter, pedestrian promenades, building facades, and other common areas. In addition, native vegetation would be planted within the enhanced Alvarado Creek.

6.1.3.6 Construction Period Impacts

Views of the site during construction would include grading and construction activities, presence of construction vehicles and workers, and storage of building materials. These short-term elements could temporarily reduce the existing visual quality of the site during the construction period due to the introduction of additional visually contrasting features, such as newly graded building pads, construction fencing, construction equipment, and construction materials stockpiling and storage. Open views would be particularly available from I-8 and Alvarado Road, as well as from other local roadways at higher elevations. Although adverse, the construction-period effects would be temporary in nature, and not visible from many viewpoints within the overall viewshed due to the general screening of the site by topography or existing structures and landscaping.

6.1.3.7 Summary of Resulting Visual Impacts

The project would change the mostly open and low-scale developed nature of the site to a higher density development comprised of multi-story residential buildings. The resulting change in visual character and visual quality would be substantial as the proposed project would be much more pronounced than the existing land use. Viewer exposure of project elements would vary by viewer group (motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians, and transit patrons), ranging from moderate to high based on the closeness of the view, openness/expanse of the view, and duration of the view. Each viewer

group would be expected to have a high sensitivity to change. However, this change is not considered to be adverse because (1) the project would not substantially alter existing site topography or landforms; (2) the project would be consistent with existing development patterns in the project area as it would add another multi-family development along the I-8 corridor; (3) the project would not introduce a new land use or new type of building form that does not currently exist in the immediate area; (4) although the project would be at a greater scale than surrounding development, the design and configuration of buildings and landscaping would reduce massing effects; (5) the project site is located in an urbanized area that is identified as suitable for redevelopment with higher development intensities; (6) the visual quality from public viewpoints would be increased based on the added visual interest and increased visual unity, vividness, and intactness; and (7) the project would be consistent with applicable scenic quality goals, objectives, and policies.

For these reasons, the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. Impacts related to visual character and quality would be less than significant.

6.1.4 Light and Glare

The project site is located in a developed urban area with substantial existing nighttime lighting from the existing on-site and surrounding land uses. The project site already includes some lighting features for nighttime safety and to illuminate the billboards. Other sources of nighttime lighting in the immediate area include security lights at the adjacent car dealership and the 70th Street Trolley Station, as well as a few street lights along Alvarado Road. Additionally, vehicles traveling along I-8 contribute to the existing lighting conditions at and around the site. Implementation of the proposed project would result in additional sources of lighting. The internal street network, the Alvarado Road project frontage, the pedestrian promenades at the site perimeter, and proposed buildings would have exterior lighting for safety. Proposed buildings would also be illuminated from interior lights. Although project lighting would produce light levels brighter than currently exists on the site, the net increase in nighttime lighting would not be considered substantial on a citywide or regional scale due to the urbanized nature of the site and surrounding area. Exterior lighting would be subject to the design guidelines contained in the proposed Specific Plan, which may require the use of shields and may limit the location, type, and height of light fixtures to prevent light spillover onto adjacent properties. Furthermore, proposed buildings and other site amenities would not include large expanses of reflective material or surfaces such as glass or metal. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant impact related to new sources of light and glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views on the area.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Implementation of the project would result in a substantial change to the visual environment of the project area. Presently, the San Diego RV Resort occupies the site. The introduction of four new multi-story residential structures and ancillary infrastructure would be a marked difference from the relatively low-lying buildings and RV structures that are dispersed throughout the site. While the visual change would be substantial, it would not be adverse.

The project would result in the loss of a large grouping of Mexican fan palm trees on site; however, while these trees are a landmark identified in the General Plan, they are not unique in type or species and they are not indicative of a greater scenic resource. Furthermore, the project would include installation of King palm trees along the improved Alvarado Road frontage that would provide a visual

reference to the existing trees. The project would not adversely affect views from any designated vistas or panoramic views, nor would it damage scenic resources or protected views and scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

The project would substantially change the existing visual character and quality of the site from a mostly open and low-scale developed site to a higher density development comprised of multi-story residential buildings. However, this change is not considered to be adverse because (1) the project would not substantially alter existing site topography or landforms; (2) the project would be consistent with existing development patterns in the project area as it would add another multi-family development along the I-8 corridor; (3) the project would not introduce a new land use or new type of building form that does not currently exist in the immediate area; (4) although the project would be at a greater scale than surrounding development, the design and configuration of buildings and landscaping would reduce massing effects; (5) the project site is located in an urbanized area that is identified as suitable for redevelopment with higher development intensities; (6) the visual quality from public viewpoints would be increased based on the added visual interest and increased visual unity, vividness, and intactness; and (7) the project would be consistent with applicable scenic quality goals, objectives, and policies.

Project lighting would result in an increase in nighttime lighting in the project area, but the increase would not be considered substantial on a citywide or regional scale due to the urbanized nature of the site and surrounding area. Proposed buildings and other site amenities would not include large expanses of reflective material or surfaces such as glass or metal. Therefore, the project would not result in significant impacts related to light and glare.

Because no significant visual impacts are identified, no visual mitigation is required. Project design considerations in accordance with the proposed Specific Plan would be incorporated into the project.

8.0 REFERENCES

- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2019. Standard Environmental Reference, Guidance for Compliance, Chapter 27, Visual and Aesthetics Review. Available at:
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/environmental-analysis/standard-environmental-reference-ser/volume-1-guidance-for-compliance/ch-27-visual-aesthetics-review>.
- 2017a. List of Eligible and Officially Designated State Scenic Highways. Available at:
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>.
- 2017b. Traffic Census Program, Traffic Volumes Annual Average Daily Traffic (2017). Available at:
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/census>.
- Kimley Horn. 2018. Alvarado Specific Plan Draft Transportation Impact Study. July.
- La Mesa, City of. 2012. 2012 General Plan.
- San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). 2016a. Smart Growth Concept Map: Mid-City and East County Subregion. May. Available at:
https://www.sandag.org/uploads/projectid/projectid_296_13997.pdf.
- 2016b. Smart growth Concept Map Site Descriptions. May 5. Available at:
https://www.sandag.org/uploads/projectid/projectid_296_14002.pdf.
2015. Average Traffic Volumes – La Mesa. Available at:
https://www.sandag.org/resources/demographics_and_other_data/transportation/adtv/lamesa_adtv.pdf.

This page intentionally left blank