

Visual Impact Analysis

County of San Diego
Department of Public Works

Ashwood Street Corridor Improvements



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to assess the visual impacts of the proposed project on the surrounding visual environment, determine the potential significance of the impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and to propose measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse visual impacts associated with the construction of the proposed improvements to Ashwood Street (proposed project).

1.2 KEY ISSUES

This analysis addresses the potential of the proposed project to adversely affect scenic vistas, damage scenic resources, or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. This report includes an assessment of the proposed project in comparison to the existing visual resources of the project setting, and the potential viewer response to the proposed changes.

1.3 PRINCIPAL VIEWPOINTS TO BE COVERED

The visibility of the project site and the proposed project elements is evaluated and discussed below. Key Views within the viewshed are analyzed based on the number of viewers, and their potential sensitivity, as well as the location of the project site within the view. Four key views have been selected as representative views and are analyzed with a full simulation. These key viewpoints include:

- A southeastward view from a Class 1 trail extending between Ashwood Street and SR-67, near El Capitan High School and Cactus Park.
- A northward view from Ashwood Street near the entrance to El Capitan High School.
- A southeastward view from an access road within El Capitan High School.
- A northward view from Wildcat Canyon Road north of Willow Road.

This report also includes a discussion of the project viewshed, views, and landscape character units that represent the visual character of the study area.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed project is located east of San Diego in the unincorporated community of Lakeside. Improvements to Ashwood Street would extend from the intersection of Ashwood Street with Maplevue Street northward to approximately 1,400 feet north of Willow Road, along Wildcat Canyon Road. The proposed project footprint also would include grading and retaining walls east and west of the road, including within El Capitan High School. Refer to Figure 1 for a Vicinity Map.

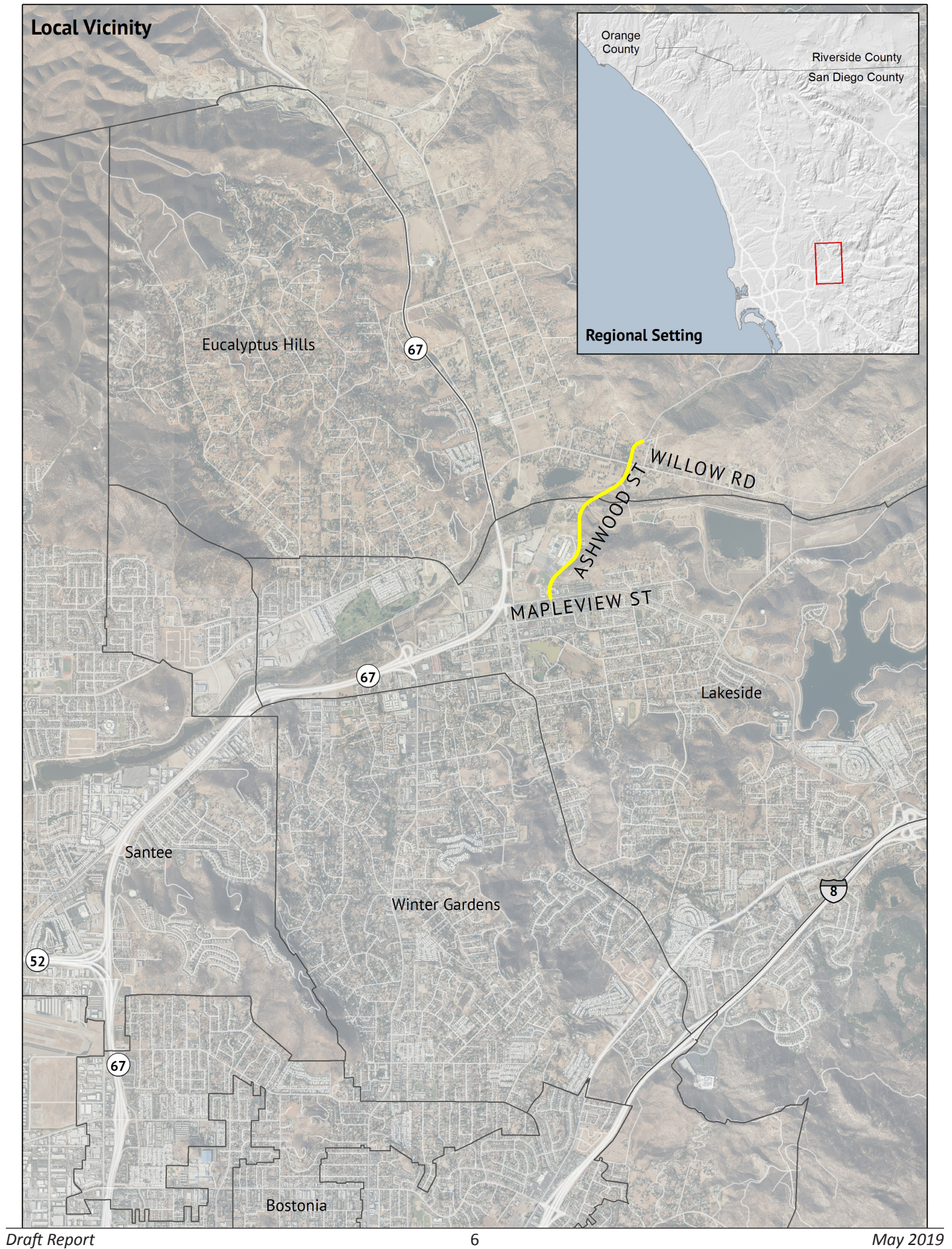
PROPOSED PROJECT FEATURES

The County of San Diego (County) Department of Public Works proposes to improve approximately 1.3-mile of Ashwood Street within the unincorporated community of Lakeside in eastern San Diego County. Specifically, improvements would occur on Ashwood Street between Maplevue Street and approximately 1,400 feet north of the intersection with Willow Road (where Ashwood Street transitions into Wildcat Canyon Road). The goals of the proposed project are to improve traffic movement and sight distance at various locations including El Capitan High School, County-owned Cactus Park, and the intersections of Ashwood Street with Maplevue Street and Willow Road. The proposed project would also enhance pedestrian access with the continuation of sidewalk along the west side of Ashwood Street. The proposed project would not impact the existing bicycle lanes or equestrian crossing associated with the San Diego River Park Regional Trail, which extends generally east to west between Ashwood Street and State Route (SR-) 67, between El Capitan High School and Cactus Park.

Specifically, Maplevue Street will be improved by installing an additional left-turn lane for vehicles traveling eastbound turning north onto Ashwood Street. As motorists travel north, Ashwood Street would be widened to include an additional travel lane only for vehicles entering El Capitan High School. To enhance turning movements into and out of El Capitan High School, a traffic signal system would be installed at the school's entrance; however, the primary northbound travel lane on Ashwood Street would remain unsignalized. A raised median would be installed to separate through-traffic from vehicles entering the school. To accommodate the roadway widening near El Capitan High School, a soil nail retaining wall and a soldier pile wall would be installed along the east and west sides of Ashwood Street, respectively, due to the proximity of steep slopes.

To improve pedestrian access, a sidewalk would be installed on the west side of Ashwood Street between El Capitan School and Cactus Park. A dedicated left-turn lane would also be installed for vehicles entering Cactus Park's western property. At the intersection of Ashwood Street and Willow Road, the existing all-way stop would be signalized with ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps and crosswalk pavement markings, including truncated domes and crosswalk pavement markings, and a dedicated left-turn lane would be added in each direction.

The proposed project includes the relocation of existing storm drain facilities as well as the installation of concrete brow ditches to adequately convey and capture stormwater runoff along Ashwood Street. Stormwater runoff would either be conveyed to proposed biofiltration basins for treatment or directed to curb inlets to reduce the volume of runoff discharged from the site. The proposed project would not alter or modify the existing culvert system that conveys flows from the San Diego River underneath Ashwood Street.



2.1 LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The portion of Ashwood Street that will be affected by the proposed project primarily is bordered by public/semi-public facilities and land owned by public agencies, with a small portion of Semi-rural residential just east of Ashwood Street and north of Maplevue Street as well. General commercial and Village residential lots surround the intersection of Ashwood Street and Maplevue Street. Semi-rural residential lots are located on each side of Wildcat Canyon Road, north of Willow Road.

El Capitan High School and Cactus Park are located on the public/semi-public land west of Ashwood Street. The San Diego River, including associated parks and trails, extends generally east and west just north of Cactus Park and south of Willow Road. The proposed project does not include any improvements that would change trail or park features. Louis Stelzer County Park is located outside the proposed project limits north of the semi-rural residential areas north of Willow Road, with a park entrance and parking lot approximately one mile north of the Ashwood Street and Willow Road intersection.

2.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The proposed project is subject to technical and environmental review pursuant to CEQA, in conformance with applicable regulatory guidelines established by the County of San Diego.

2.2.1 STATE OF CALIFORNIA GUIDELINES

Appendix G of the CEQA guidelines states that a project has the potential for significant impact if it will:

1. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
2. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
3. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings; or
4. Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

2.3 DESIGN POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

2.3.1 APPLICABLE COUNTY PLANS AND POLICIES

Visual and aesthetic assessments need to identify not only impacts to current conditions, but also effects on future aesthetic plans and goals. Adopted policies are also an indication of the sensitivity that a particular community may have toward aesthetic issues. Some of the most relevant policies include the following:

COUNTY GENERAL PLAN; CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT CHAPTER 5, SCENIC CORRIDORS

The County of San Diego General Plan includes a Scenic Corridor subchapter within the Conservation and Open Space Element. This element is intended to protect scenic corridors (and dark skies) and enhance community character. The San Diego County Scenic Highway system includes highways and roadways both eligible and designated as State of California Scenic Highways. Goals within the Conservation and Open Space Element include the protection and connection of Scenic Resources, and careful planning in areas visible from scenic corridors.

Ashwood Street is not a County-designated Scenic Highway; however, according to Table COS-1 of the County General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, there are three roads that are part of the County Scenic Highway System within two miles of the proposed project site, including:

- SR-67 from Santee city limits to SR-78 (excluding portion in city of Poway)
SR-67 extends generally north/south. The intersection of SR-67 with Maplevue Street is approximately 0.3 mile of Ashwood Street. The intersection of SR-67 with Willow Road is approximately 0.9 mile from Ashwood Street.
- El Monte Road from El Capitan Reservoir to Lake Jennings Park Road.
El Monte Road is located in the Lakeside community. El Monte Road is more than one mile east of Ashwood Street.
- Willow Road from SR-67 to the southern end of El Capitan Reservoir.
Ashwood Street intersects with Willow Road, and the proposed project includes some improvements to this intersection.

COUNTY GENERAL PLAN; CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT CHAPTER 5, VISUAL RESOURCES

The County of San Diego General Plan includes a section within the Conservation and Open Space element that addresses visual resources, including a policy to “Protect scenic corridors, geographically extensive scenic viewsheds, and dark skies within the natural environment.”

“Goals and policies in this section emphasize the protection of scenic corridors and dark skies within the natural environment and the recognition and enhancement of community character within the built environment.”

Accordingly, the following table was prepared to show the proposed project in comparison to the applicable goals and policies of the County General Plan for conformance review.

ELEMENT	POLICY	PROJECT CONFORMANCE	CONFORMS?
San Diego County General Plan			
Conservation and Open Space Element COS-11.1 Protection of Scenic Resources	Require the protection of scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, and natural features, including prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, reservoirs, and scenic landscapes.	While portions of the proposed retaining walls would be visible from SR-67 and Willow Road, the proposed project would not change the ridgeline east of Ashwood Street or substantially change the visual environment as seen from these scenic highways. The proposed project would not be visible from El Monte Road.	Yes
Conservation and Open Space Element COS-11.3 Development Siting and Design	<p>Require development within visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and to preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas, through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative site planning • Integration of natural features into the project • Appropriate scale, materials, and design to complement the surrounding natural landscape • Minimal disturbance of topography • Clustering of development so as to preserve a balance of open space vistas, natural features, and community character • Creation of contiguous open space networks 	The proposed project would replace existing slopes with similar slope grades or retaining walls that would be colored and textured to resemble the natural rock existing along Ashwood Street. The retaining walls would be approximately 5 feet higher than the existing slopes, and this difference would not be visually out of scale with the existing visual environment.	Yes

ELEMENT	POLICY	PROJECT CONFORMANCE	CONFORMS?
Conservation and Open Space Element COS-11.6 Billboards	Prohibit new billboards and other forms of large-scale advertising and signage within scenic corridors. Encourage the removal of existing billboards and other forms of large-scale advertising and signage along State and County scenic highway corridors.	Willow Road is a County-designated Scenic Highway. While the proposed project includes improvements to its intersection with Ashwood Street; the proposed project would not introduce or replace billboards or other advertising.	Yes
Conservation and Open Space Element COS-11.7 Underground Utilities	Require new development to place utilities underground and encourage “undergrounding” in existing development to maintain viewsheds, reduce hazards associated with hanging lines and utility poles, and to keep pace with current and future technologies.	The proposed project may or may not underground utilities as part of the proposed improvements. The existing powerline poles are planned to be relocated eastward to accommodate the proposed project.	Yes. Refer to Section 5.5 for further discussion.
Goal COS-12 Preservation of Ridgelines and Hillsides. Ridgelines and steep hillsides that are preserved for their character and scenic value. Conservation and Open Space Element COS-12.1 Hillside and Ridgeline development Density.	Protect undeveloped ridgelines and steep hillsides by maintaining semi-rural or rural designations on these areas.	The proposed project would not change the land use designations of the sloped areas abutting the project area. The project also would not change the ridgeline above Ashwood Street, and would include color and stain treatment for retaining walls that would replace the rocky steep slopes on either side of Ashwood Street.	Yes
GOAL COS-13 Dark Skies. Preserved dark skies that contribute to rural character and are necessary for the local observatories. Conservation and Open Space Element COS-13.1 Restrict Light and Glare	Restricts outdoor light and glare from development projects in Semi-Rural and Rural Lands and designated rural communities to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.	Ancillary street lighting would be installed with the new traffic signals as part of the proposed project. However, , the fixtures would follow applicable design guidelines that would ensure compliance with dark sky goals and policies.	Yes

LAKESIDE COMMUNITY PLAN

The Lakeside Community Plan includes policies specific to the local area's goals and interests regarding land use, circulation, and other issues related to the visual environment within which the proposed project is located. Accordingly, the following table was prepared to show the proposed project in comparison to the applicable goals and policies of the Lakeside Community Plan for conformance review.

ELEMENT	POLICY	PROJECT CONFORMANCE	CONFORMS?
Lakeside Community Plan			
2. Land Use Goal, Policies and Recommendations	2. Preserve the rural atmosphere of the community by blending roads into the natural terrain and minimizing urban improvements, such as curbs, gutters, and sidewalks.	The proposed project includes a sidewalk along the west side of Ashwood Street from Cactus Park to the entrance of El Capitan High School, and curb ramp ADA upgrades at the high school entrance road, Cactus Park entry, and the intersection of Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road and Willow Road. The sidewalk would be located on the institutional land use next to the school. The ADA curb ramps would connect with compacted DG or native soil walking areas along the sides of Willow Road, Ashwood Street, and Wildcat Canyon Road.	Yes
	4. Provide for the preservation of open space areas, such as steep slopes and canyons, floodplains, agricultural lands, and unique scenic views and vistas, which serve to reinforce Lakeside's rural identity by locating residential development away from such areas through the provisions of Land Use Element Policies LU-6.3 and LU-6.4.	The proposed project would replace parts of the existing steep, rocky, cut slopes on each side of Ashwood Street with retaining walls or newly cut slopes. The proposed walls would be colored and stained to be visually similar to the existing slopes, and would not create a substantial change to the visual character of the steep slopes. The project would not include any changes to the San Diego River or floodplains.	Yes
	5. Provide for street tree planting and landscaping, as well as the preservation of indigenous plant life.	The proposed project would include an erosion control seed mix comprised of native species and would replace any coastal sage scrub habitat that may be disturbed. The proposed project would not include street trees, and none currently exist along Ashwood Street.	Yes

ELEMENT	POLICY	PROJECT CONFORMANCE	CONFORMS?
<p>Ashwood Street is identified as a Major Road with a Class II Bicycle Trail on the Mobility Element Map within the Lakeside Community Plan.</p> <p>Circulation Finding:</p>	<p>Pedestrian and bicycle movement should be fully integrated with the major collector street system. Pathways for both modes of transport should be aligned so that they connect major activity centers. For instance, the appropriate steps should be taken to link uses in and around the townsite with recreational uses planned for the San Diego River floodplain. Design of these pathways should emphasize safety and convenience.</p>	<p>The proposed project includes a sidewalk along the west side of Ashwood Street between Cactus Park and the entrance to El Capitan High School. The project would not introduce changes to the existing Class 1 bicycle trail between Ashwood Street and SR-67.</p> <p>Class II bicycle lane markings would be painted along Ashwood Street within as part of the proposed project.</p>	Yes
<p>Circulation Policy and Recommendations</p>	<p>9. Design roads to enhance scenic areas and use existing land contours.</p>	<p>The proposed project overlays an existing road layout and generally conforms to existing landforms. The widening would require retaining walls and grading; these features would be similar in scale, slope, and visual appearance to the existing land forms.</p>	Yes

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AREAS

Resource Conservation Areas are defined as “lands requiring special attention in order to conserve resources in a manner best satisfying public and private objectives.” They are delineated in the County General Plan and detailed in community plans. No Resource Conservation Areas (RCA) are located within the project site. One RCA is located near the project site: #58, El Cajon Mountain – El Capitan Reservoir. As stated in the Lakeside Community Plan, Appendix A:

“This large area contains very steep slopes (the portion in Lakeside about 60 to 70 percent is greater than 50% slope) and isolated rocky peaks and ridges, including some of the largest granitic domes in San Diego County. Vegetation is excellent wildlife habitat with Oak woodlands, Coastal Sage scrub and Mixed and Chamise chaparral. The rocky peaks, especially El Cajon Mountain, serve as a scenic backdrop for El Cajon as well as the Lakeside region.”

The closest portions of RCA #58 to the project site are located 0.5 mile north of the intersection of Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road and Willow Road near Louis Stelzer County Park. The RCA extends further to the east and northeast, and includes Louis Stelzer County Park, approximately 1 to 1.5 miles north of Willow Road, and Lake Jennings, which is approximately 1.75 miles east of the project site.

3.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

This section includes multiple photographs of the proposed project site's existing conditions. Figure 2 depicts the locations and directional viewpoints from which the photographs discussed in this section were taken.

3.1 PROJECT SETTING

Ashwood Street (as it currently exists) is a two-lane roadway with narrow paved shoulders on each side through the length of the proposed project. South of the San Diego River and north of Maplevue Street for between approximately 0.3 mile and 0.5 mile, Ashwood Street is located on a bench, with a nearly vertical rock face extending up to approximately 38 feet above the road on the east side, and steep slopes up to approximately 30 feet tall extending below the road on the west. These rocky slopes support sparse vegetation that during parts of the year is green, and for most of the rest of the year is tan and brown. Weathered angular, jagged rocks and patches of fine grain soils along the rock faces range in color from grays to browns. Typical Views 1 and 2 (Figure 3a) illustrate the slopes east and west of Ashwood Street.

Multiple utility lines supported by wooden poles extend along Ashwood Street. These are located both at the top of the steep slope west of Ashwood Street, and at the foot of the slope east of Ashwood Street. A metal guard backed with wooden block posts extends along the west side of Ashwood for the length of the lower slope.

Ashwood Street at the southern end of the proposed project intersects with Maplevue Street. The intersection is surrounded on three sides by Village Residential apartments, and on the fourth corner by semi-public agricultural barns associated with El Capitan High School, as shown in Typical View 3 (Figure 3a). The high school property extends along approximately half of the west side of the proposed project site. Within the school property, a small road, which provides access to two parking lots, runs parallel to Ashwood Street along the eastern edge of the high school. The small access road then curves inward toward the school facilities and away from Ashwood Street. One of the main school buildings as well several auxiliary buildings, fields, and parking areas are aligned along the eastern edge of the school, near Ashwood Street. The school's elevation is generally lower than the proposed project site, and steep slopes below Ashwood Street face the school, as shown in Typical View 4 (Figure 3a). Between the school's main property and the northern outlying fields, a private residence is located at the same elevation as Ashwood Street. A slat-filled chain link fence, two driveway aprons, and the building's roof are the only visible attributes of this residence. The chain link fence and the roof the house are visible in Typical View 5 (Figure 3a).

The high school's outlying baseball fields, which can be seen in Typical View 6 (Figure 3b), relate visually to the fields within the neighboring Cactus Park, a San Diego County Park property that is located between the San Diego River and El Capitan High School. The school fields are separated from Cactus Park by a levy that is topped with a Class One bicycle trail, as seen in Typical View 7 (Figure 3b). On the west side of Ashwood Street, Cactus Park consists of ball fields and a BMX course, as well as an internal road and parking areas, a cinder-block restroom building, and rock outcroppings near Ashwood Street. This portion of Cactus park is edged with 6-foot-tall chain link fence topped with barbed-wire along Ashwood Street, as seen in Typical View 8 (Figure 3b). Multiple mature pepper trees edge the parking area and surround the restroom building. The BMX area is located north of the park entrance, near Ashwood Street, and consists of a mounded, compacted unpaved winding track. Cactus Park spans Ashwood Street, and includes a model airplane field on the east side of Ashwood Street. However, this park amenity is not visible from Ashwood Street. A grass-covered slope studded with oak and pepper trees blocks views of the model airplane field from Ashwood Street.

On the east side of Ashwood Street, across from the high school, there are approximately four residential lots, but none of the houses in this area are visible from Ashwood Street because they sit at a higher elevation than the road. The northernmost house is located closest to Ashwood Street but is both higher and screened by a dense stand of trees at the eastern road shoulder. Only the residence's driveway is visible from Ashwood Street, and can be seen in Typical View 5 (Figure 3a).

Cactus Park abuts the San Diego River on its north and west edges. Most of Cactus Park and the equestrian area north of the river are within the river's flood plain. The bed river is dry most of the year, and the flood plains are characterized by small trees and low vegetation, relatively flat land, and sandy soils. Although there are existing corrugated steel pipes underneath Ashwood Street to convey water from the San Diego River, no distinct culvert or bridge can be seen from Ashwood Street. The river and its surroundings are fenced on either side of Ashwood Street by a metal-post-and-wire fence. This area can be seen in Typical View 9 (Figure 3b). Equestrian trails and wooden post-and-rail fences are visible farther away from Ashwood Street, within the equestrian facility that is located north of the river and south of Willow Road. This large equestrian ranch is rented for events and used by non-profit equestrian organizations. The property consists mainly of unpaved corrals and trails fenced in various layouts, with mature pepper trees aligned between the various arenas. Some of the property's fences can be seen on the left side of Typical View 10 (Figure 3b). A trail along the eastern and southern edges of the equestrian facility crosses Ashwood Street designated by two white lines and a button-activated blinking signal offset by a few hundred feet on each side. This equestrian/trail crossing is shown in Typical View 11 (Figure 3b).

On the east side of Ashwood Street just south of Willow Road is a County of San Diego maintenance yard. This lot is lined with trees on Ashwood Street's east side, and piles of material are visible from the intersection of Ashwood Street and Willow Road. On the north side of the County maintenance yard adjacent to Willow Road, a residential lot is visible from Ashwood Street as well. Rural residential lots are located along the north edge of Willow Road on either side of Ashwood Street. The houses are scattered and surrounded variously with mature trees, sheds and outbuildings, and occasional equestrian corrals. The lot at the northwest corner of the intersection is surrounded by dense, mature trees and a wooden fence, while the lot at the northeastern corner is more sparsely developed, with scattered trees and outbuildings visible from the roads.

Ashwood Street becomes Wildcat Canyon Road north of Willow Road and begins to curve and rise in elevation north of the residential lots abutting Willow Road. Hills covered with grasses, low shrubs, and sparse rock outcroppings are visible to the north beyond the Ashwood Street/Willow Road intersection. Typical View 12 (Figure 3b) illustrates the view north of Willow Road.



Figure 3a



Typical View 1
Slopes east of Ashwood Street. Taken next to El Capitan High School, looking north



Typical View 2
Slopes west of Ashwood Street, taken from El Capitan High School, looking north



Typical View 3
Ashwood Street south of Maplevue Street intersection, looking northwest



Typical View 4
Southern perimeter road of El Capitan High School, looking north



Typical View 5
Ashwood Street next to El Capitan High School, looking north



Typical View 6
Class 1 trail between Cactus Park and El Capitan High School, looking southeast



Typical View 7
Class 1 trail between Cactus Park and El Capitan High School, looking east



Typical View 8
Ashwood Street at entrance to Cactus Park and Class 1 trail, looking south



Typical View 9
Ashwood Street near Cactus Park and San Diego River, looking north



Typical View 10
Ashwood Street approaching Willow Road, looking north



Typical View 11
Signalized equestrian crossing over Ashwood Street north of San Diego River



Typical View 12
Wildcat Canyon Road, north of Willow Road, looking north

3.2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNITS

Landscape Character Units (LCUs) are portions of the regional landscape, and can be thought of as outdoor rooms that exhibit distinct visual character. This term is coincident with the County's term of landscape unit. It has been slightly modified to recognize that many in the public equate the term landscape unit as vegetation and landscaping in an area instead of all exterior environment elements that make up a viewing scene. The landscape character units often correspond to places or districts that are commonly known among local viewers. The LCUs are similar to zoning and land use designations, but are more closely related to visible land uses, and are comprised of visual elements—such as the underlying topography, vegetative cover, the extent and type of development—which are similar and combine to create a distinctive unit. There are seven distinct LCUs in Lakeside: village residential, institutional, rural residential, parks, undeveloped hillsides, industrial, and San Diego River.

The proposed project site extends along the edge of El Capitan High School, which is part of the institutional LCU, and a portion of the rural residential LCU. At the north end of the high school, Ashwood Street passes a portion of the park and the river LCUs and a small materials yard. Another section of the rural residential LCU spans Wildcat Canyon Road near the north end of the project site, north of the Willow Road. North of this is more open space/park LCU.

The general extent of the LCUs within the proposed project's vicinity area are delineated on Figure 3.

VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

The village residential LCU is located at three corners of the signalized intersection of Ashwood Street and Maplevue Street, at the southern end of the proposed project site. Maplevue Street supports scattered large trees, but this area is generally characterized by the multi-lane road, parking lots, and apartment buildings.

INSTITUTIONAL

The institutional LCU encompasses El Capitan High School and its multiple buildings, outlying structures, fields, parking, etc. west edge of the proposed project site. The Lakeside Rodeo Arena, south and west of the high school, is also located in the institutional LCU, as are the high school's agricultural department buildings and yards.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL / AGRICULTURAL

The rural residential LCU covers the hillsides and river valley areas adjacent to the proposed project site and includes single family houses at a sparser spacing than the village residential areas. The rural residential LCU also includes equestrian facilities, garages, trees and ornamental planting, narrow streets and private driveways. An occasional lot within the LCU supports agricultural enterprises, such as egg production or horse boarding.

PARKS

Several parks are located within the vicinity of the proposed project site, including Cactus Park and a private ranch that hosts equestrian and other events. Cactus Park includes fields and facilities for baseball/softball, a BMX bicycle course, and a model airplane field. A few little league fields in the area are visually similar to the fields within Cactus Park, and therefore are also included in the parks LCU.

SAN DIEGO RIVER

The San Diego River extends generally east-west across Lakeside. The proposed project site crosses the river. The river does not often flow with visible water, and the bed is distinguished by sparse stands of willow and cottonwood trees and sandy soils. A few ponds are located within the river valley and the river LCU, but are not highly visible from the proposed project site.

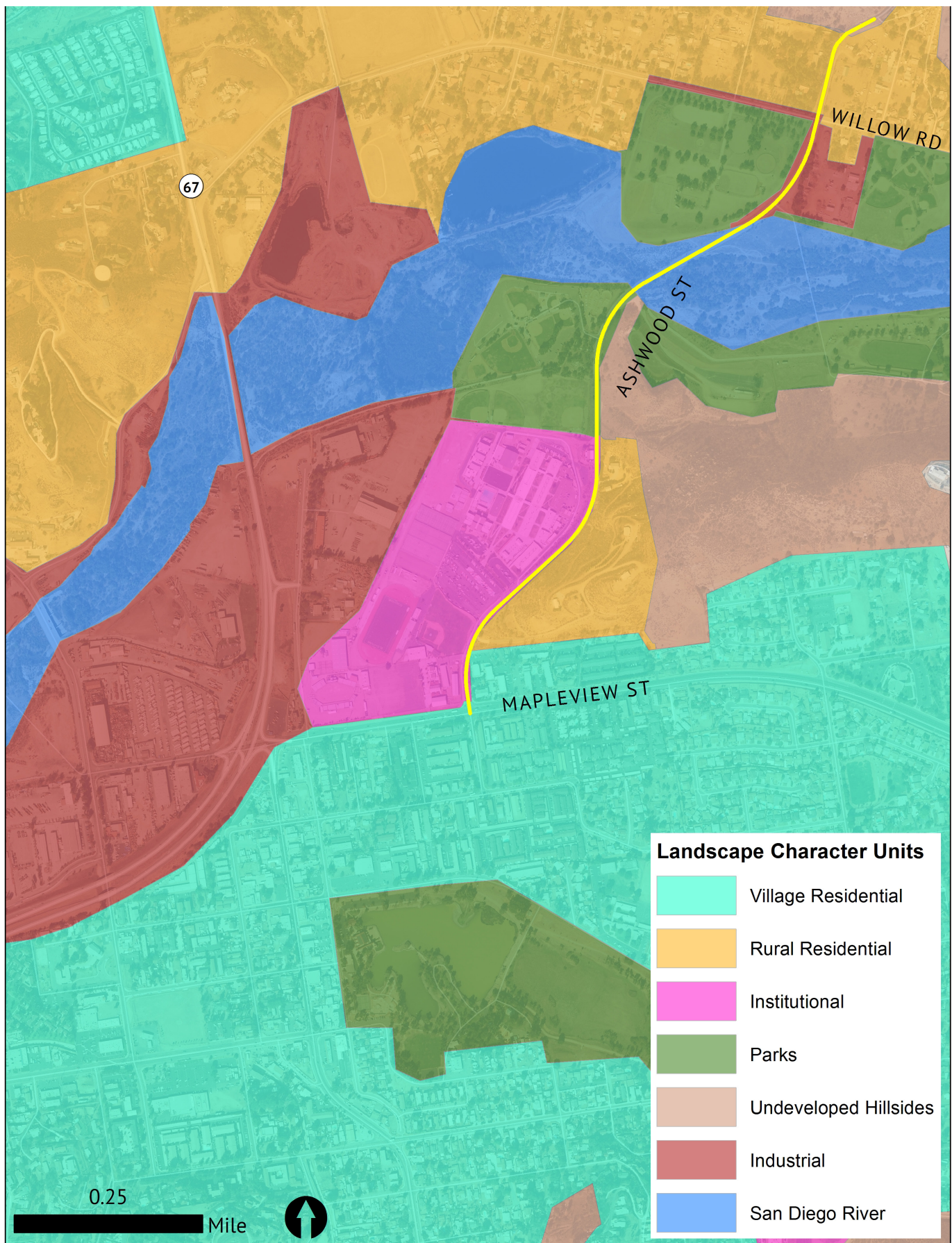
UNDEVELOPED HILLSIDES

Hillsides with no structures, scattered scrubs, and rocky outcroppings extend south of the San Diego River and north of Willow Road. The undeveloped hillside LCU comprises the background of

INDUSTRIAL

A County of San Diego County maintenance yard is located at the southeastern corner of Willow Road and Ashwood Street. A variety of material piles, vehicles, and equipment use the maintenance yard and can be visible as vehicles enter and exit the facility. This lot is a small portion of the Industrial LCU, and is the closest to the proposed project site. Additional industrial lots are located east of the high school and north of the Lakeside Rodeo Arena, along SR-67.

Figure 4



3.3 PROJECT VIEWSHED

In evaluating potential visual impacts for the proposed project, KTUA conducted a viewshed analysis to determine which areas in the vicinity would have a view of the proposed project site. Figure 5a shows the extents of the modeled project viewshed where the proposed soil nail wall would be visible. Figure 5b shows the extent of the modeled project viewshed where the proposed soldier pile wall would be visible.

VIEWSHED LIMITS

A viewshed is defined as the geographical area or areas from which at least some components or elements of the proposed project are visible. The viewshed for the proposed project site was analyzed using aerial photographs, USGS topographic maps, and computer viewshed methodologies.

A model was developed using Digital Elevation Models (DEMs) to identify which locations may have line-of-sight toward the proposed retaining walls, which are potentially the most visible features of the project. The DEM files consist of x, y, and z data (east-west, north-south, and elevational data) representing an area of 10 meters by 10 meters for each data point. Using the proposed heights of each retaining wall, points along each wall alignment were analyzed alongside the topographical data in the surrounding area. The viewshed was limited to a mile radius from the site.

The results of this analysis are considered theoretical since they take into account the position of the viewer, the location of the element being viewed, and the intervening topography. The analysis does not include the effects of buildings, trees, and other structures that can severely limit the visibility of elements. Intervening uses, structures and plant materials, and distance can substantially reduce overall visual impacts. Therefore, the analysis represents the worst-case visibility of the project's proposed elements.

VIEWING CONDITIONS

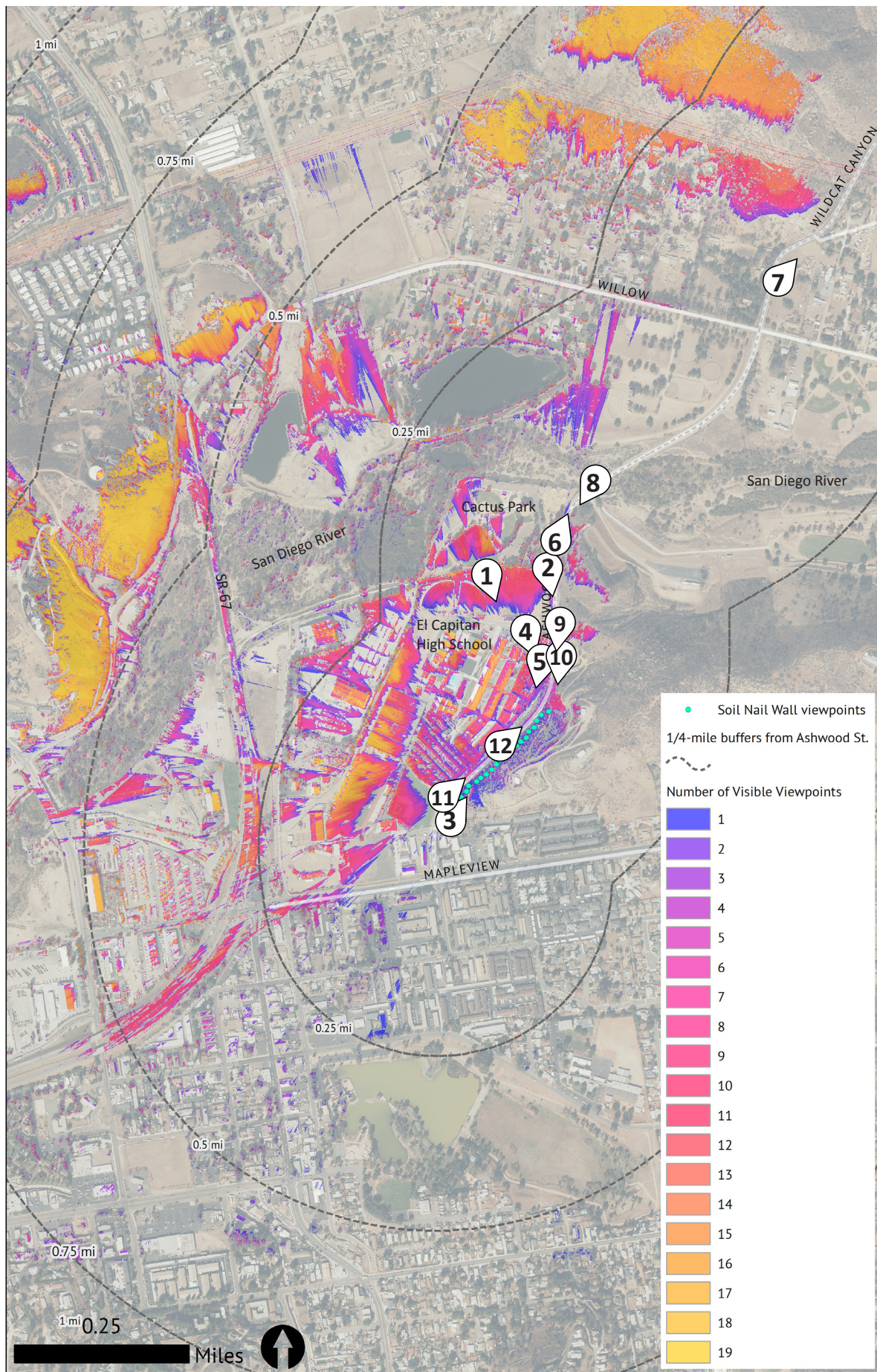
Viewing conditions can be limited by physical conditions including topography, temporary and permanent obstructions, and atmospheric conditions.

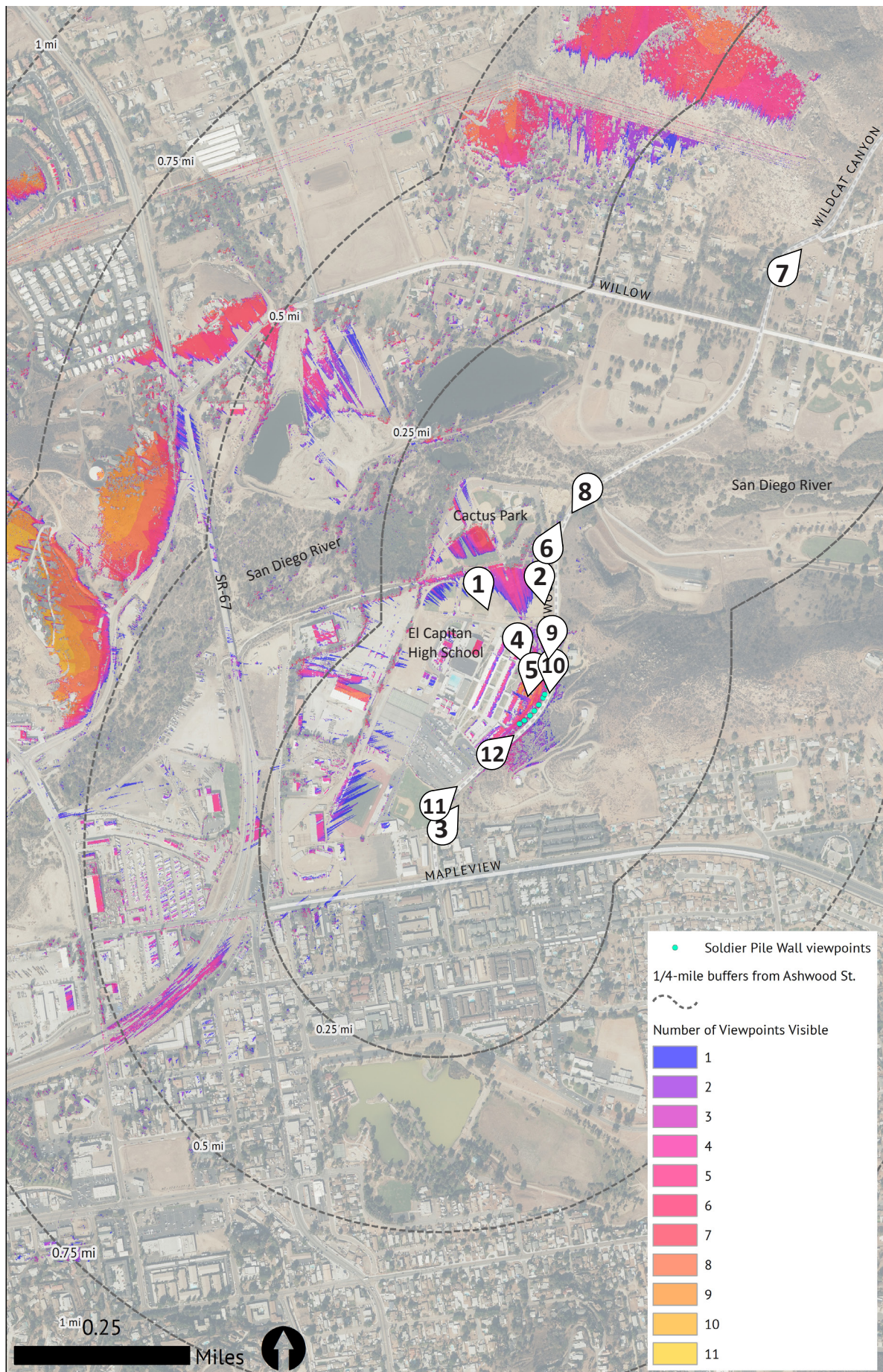
Lighting also can have a significant effect on views. Clouds and fog can also change viewing conditions by increasing or decreasing contrast. Atmospheric conditions in San Diego County are predominantly hazy. A combination of fog, mist, haze, and smog combine to decrease visibility. Often, details of visual features are not discernible when more than a mile away. Based on typical viewing conditions in the proposed project area, objects more than one mile away generally will not be considered visually prominent. Even if these objects are large enough to be visible, the distance decreases scale and contrast that is normally perceived by changes in texture, color, and pattern. The Viewshed maps (Figures 5a and 5b) depict on a reverse visibility: a point in the distance from which the project can be seen is a point that is visible from the project site. Hillsides and mountains can easily be seen from the site because of the overall size and silhouette nature of these views, but since the project site is relatively small and is found within the context of a valley, the proposed project site is not visually distinct in views from these distant locations.

VIEWS OF THE SITE

The modeled viewshed indicates that the proposed retaining walls are potentially visible from points west and north of the proposed project site. The soil nail wall that would be located along the east side slope of Ashwood Street would be the tallest element, and therefore the most visible. This retaining wall would be visible from the fields at Cactus Park and most of the El Capitan High School property where buildings don't block visibility. Provided that vegetation and structures don't obstruct visibility, other areas from where the soil nail wall would be visible include a portion of industrial areas west of the high school and a portion of the rural residential areas north of the San Diego River and north and west of the proposed project site.

The viewshed overlays SR-67, which is a designated County scenic roadway. SR-67 is, at the closest, 0.25 mile from the southern portion of the proposed wall. Many building and trees stand between the highway and the proposed project site. These would block most direct views of the proposed wall and provide only small frames of viewing opportunities to a handful of points along the proposed wall alignment.





The viewshed maps reveal that only a very small area of Willow Road near the interchange with SR-67 would have the opportunity to see either of the proposed walls. This area is approximately 0.5-mile northwest of the proposed walls. The viewsheds do not show that the proposed traffic signal at the intersection of Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road and Willow Road would be visible for a little more than 0.25 mile in either direction along Willow Road, while approaching the intersection.

El Monte Road is east of the project site, and not within the project viewshed.

The soldier pile wall that would be located below and on the west side of Ashwood Street would be visible from fewer areas as the soil nail wall, and all of those points would also see the soil nail wall.

The proposed project features not evaluated by a viewshed map include the widened roadway and associated repaving, striping, guardrails, bioswales, and other low-profile elements. This type of feature would be noticeable in close-up views only. Additionally, while the proposed traffic light at the Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road and Willow Road intersection would be tall, it is a standard roadway feature and beyond providing safety signals for drivers, would not be highly noticeable from the surrounding area.

4.0 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

4.1 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES

The quality of a landscape area is based on its aesthetic character, defined by physical and perceptual quality factors. Physical character factors are the physical element of which the Landscape Character Unit is built. It is the combination of these elements that construct the visual framework of a particular view. Physical character factors include: landform, vegetation, water, color, and diversity, as well as themes, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architectural styles, and building materials that make up the elements both individually and within the Landscape Character Unit as a whole.

Perceptual quality factors are the viewer's perception of landscape quality. These perceptions are based upon a viewer's cognitive assimilation of landscape elements into a memorable landscape image, distinguishable from other landscapes within the region. Perceptual quality factors include: harmony, vividness, adjacent scenery, unity, and scarcity.

4.1.1 VISUAL CHARACTER

VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

Apartment buildings are the most common structure in the Village Residential LCU, and generally are two-story, boxy, colored with one or two neutral colors, and surrounded by parking lots. There are none that are substantially taller or more visually dominant than the others, which ensures a continuity of scale. The streetscapes include sparsely spaced mature trees, and overhead utility wires supported by wooden poles are present over and alongside most streets, except along Maplevue Street, where they have been undergrounded. With a diversity of vehicles, street parking, and relatively wide roads, the LCU is visually busy and diverse.

INSTITUTIONAL

The visual environment of the high school and institutional areas is characterized by long, single-story, tan and white (and sometimes red) buildings with open lawn or concrete areas between them and parking lot and sport fields surrounding them. A few mature trees and planting beds provide vertical elements but are not common within the school complex. There is high continuity and little diversity among the buildings and fields or landscaped areas.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL/AGRICULTURAL

The rural residential and agricultural landscape character unit is comprised of large lots generally supporting single-story ranch-style houses, occasional out-buildings such as garages, sheds, or barns, landscaped edges with mature trees, and fenced equestrian yards of mainly unpaved soil. Where non-equestrian agricultural activities occur, these activities generally are not located near primary roads, and they include single-story buildings spaced more closely together than most houses. These agricultural uses are not visually dominant or out of scale with the surroundings.

PARKS

The parks near the proposed project mainly include sport fields with turf and backstops, or equestrian arenas of native soil surrounded by fences. The parks contain few buildings larger than dug-out shelters or restrooms, and occasional stands of mature trees at the edge of the arenas. There is little diversity within the visual environment of the parks outside of these features.

SAN DIEGO RIVER

The San Diego River valley is not visually distinct beyond having no structures or formally developed areas. Scrub, scattered stands of trees, and sandy soil characterize views of the river from surrounding roads and properties. Retaining ponds are located along the river area but are accessed mostly from private properties and are not generally visible to the public in the project area.

UNDEVELOPED HILLSIDES

The hillsides surrounding the project area and abutting portions of Ashwood Street and Wildcat Canyon Road (when seen from a distance) are visually characterized by dark green sparse shrubs and mostly brown low-grown grasses, along with occasional white-granite rock outcroppings. Where the roadways cut through the hillsides, brown and tan exposed rocks comprise almost-vertical slopes which support sparse bunches of weeds or small shrubs that are green or brightly colored following the rainy season, and brown most of the rest of the year.

INDUSTRIAL

Industrial lots near the proposed project generally are located next to and seen from SR-67 or Maplevue Street west of SR-67. Large low buildings and open, paved or unpaved lots with clustered vehicles, equipment, and materials are common in this LCU. Some of the industrial lots support scattered mature trees, while others are surrounded by fences that block views of the stored materials and vehicles. Where buildings are present, they are long, one- and two-story buildings with mostly blank walls and small windows.

4.1.2 VISUAL QUALITY

Visual quality is comprised of the characteristics discussed above, and can be described in terms of vividness, intactness, and unity. **Vividness** is defined as the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns. **Intactness** is the visual integrity of the natural and built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Intactness can be present in developed 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. Unity frequently attests to the careful design of individual built components in the landscape.

Areas with **high visual quality** may include physical characteristics such as landforms with high vertical relief; a variety of vegetative types with complementary forms, colors, textures, and patterns; the presence of clear or cascading water; compatible colors in the soil, rock, vegetation, or water; and many visually unified elements. A high perceptual quality would include a balanced composition of line, form, color, and texture; striking visual patterns or the presence of distinct focal points; enhancement from the adjacent scenery; the absence of cultural modifications, or, if present, compatibility with the character of the landscape setting; and a unique or visually scarce setting within the region.

Moderate visual quality is based on interesting, but not dominant or exceptional landforms; one or two major types of vegetation; the presence, but not dominance of water; limited but complementary colors in the landscape; and limited but unified visual elements. The perceptual quality factors would include a varied, but unbalanced composition; perceivable, but not striking patterns created by the landscape elements; moderate enhancement from the adjacent scenery; the presence of cultural modifications which do not detract from the landscape setting; and a setting that is distinct but similar to others within the region.

Areas with a **low visual quality** may have the following physical characteristics: few or no interesting landforms; too few or too many vegetation types; the absence of water; monotonous colors; and few undifferentiated elements within the setting. Low perceptual quality may have the following factors: a varied, but chaotic appearance; elements that appear random with no perceivable patterns; adjacent scenery that detracts or has little influence on the scenic quality; cultural modifications that detract from the setting; and an interesting setting that is common within the region.

VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

The Village Residential LCU has moderate visual quality. While the unity of the similarly-sized apartment buildings and streets presents a high intactness to the area, there is no vivid visual element or striking patterns that distinguish the area as different from others in the region.

INSTITUTIONAL

The institutional areas have a moderately high visual quality. Similar to the Village Residential areas, the unity within the LCU is high, and the similarity of the structures provides a high intactness. The high school and Lakeside Rodeo Arena are distinct from the surrounding area and from other similar institutions through the use of signs and colors. These institutions also have high visual continuity so as not to distract from the fundamental function of the space.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL/AGRICULTURAL

The Rural Residential LCU has moderate visual quality. It is made up of a high variety of diverse elements, among which are limited colors and varied elements, but no overriding visual composition. Houses are placed wherever desired on lots, with no standard setback or design requirements, and individual pasture or yard layouts with no compositional harmony throughout. Overall, views of the Landscape Character Unit are moderately vivid. While some individual elements such as equestrian pastures, are repeated within the Landscape Character Unit, providing continuity, there is no perceivable or striking pattern within the area. The mix of uses creates a visual environment that is not highly intact, comprised of elements that are not very memorable combined in indistinct visual patterns. Additionally, the components of the Landscape Character Unit generally are not carefully designed individually or as a group, which results in low visual unity.

PARKS

The parks within the project area have moderately high visual quality. The sport fields and equestrian areas create geometric patterns of green and brown, scattered and repeated in several areas. Each field has only low or moderate vividness that is not highly distinct or memorable as an individual area in and of itself, yet there are no buildings or encroaching elements visible from the parks, ensuring a visual intactness within the LCU. The fields are not carefully designed beyond the requirements of each sport, yet as a whole there is coherence between and within the parks, providing moderately high visual unity.

SAN DIEGO RIVER

The San Diego River valley has moderate visual quality. It is visually distinct in that there are no buildings or fences or other elements within it, yet it is not highly memorable because there are few identifying components. The undisturbed areas vary in width and do not have a consistent border due to land uses directly bordering the river that encroach into the flood plains, such as SR-67 and some of the industrial area. The clusters of trees that remain green for longer than the surrounding vegetation are unique and natural. Within the varied width of the valley, the unity of the river area is high.

UNDEVELOPED HILLSIDES

The undeveloped hillsides abutting and within view of the project site have high visual quality. The varied lines, forms, textures, and slope colors create somewhat memorable and unique compositions resulting in moderately high vivid views within the Landscape Character Unit. These views contribute to the visual identity of the area. The roadways and power lines next to the steep slopes and extending into the hills north of Willow Road encroach into the native vegetation, reducing the intactness of the Landscape Character Unit, which results in moderate intactness. While the distant hillsides are natural and not designed, and the steep slopes next to the roadway are coincidental to roadway construction, there are few visible structures encroaching on the open space, ensuring high visual unity.

INDUSTRIAL

The visual quality of the industrial areas is low. There are no highly distinct or memorable visual patterns within the industrial lots, and no careful design or compositional harmony that ties them together. The variety of vehicles, equipment, materials, and other stored items within the lots may be distinct but is not visually memorable.

4.2 VIEWER RESPONSE

Viewer response can be predicted by a combination of viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure for each group of people who have the potential to see the proposed project.

4.2.1 VIEWER GROUPS

The viewer groups present in the area include drivers and passengers, high school patrons, trail and park users, and residents. An individual might belong to one or several of these viewer groups in the course of a day. However, the sensitivity and exposure of each group varies due to the amount of time a view is available to a viewer (duration of view) and the viewer's awareness at the time the view is available.

4.2.2 VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Drivers and passengers on roadways within the project area have mixed sensitivities depending on their location and purpose. Those who live in the vicinity would have a high sensitivity to changes to the visual environment, while those heading to recreational areas would be aware of views of the area but may not know the visual environment as intimately as residents do. Besides Ashwood Street and Maplevue Street, SR-67 is the largest road in the project area. Willow Road and the other roads in the project vicinity are smaller, primarily residential roads, which allows drivers and passengers time to study the visual environment. **Overall, drivers and passengers on area roadways have moderate to moderately high sensitivity to views while passing through the viewshed. Drivers and passengers on scenic roads are presumed to have high sensitivity to views of the surrounding area.**

High school patrons include students, teachers, staff, and any parents or visitors who also visit the high school regularly. The project viewsheds overlay most of the campus, which is located directly next to Ashwood Street. Most high school patrons are presumably focused on their activities within the campus, but where views to the project site are available, they would be available for long periods of time, and they are likely to know the area very well. **High school patrons are presumed to have moderately high sensitivity to views of the surrounding area.**

Trail and park users include users of Cactus park, such as athletes and spectators, as well as bicyclists on the trail and at the BMX course, and equestrians on trails north of the river within residential areas and the event arena. These viewers would be highly sensitive to the visual environment in the viewshed. **The Recreational trail users presumably would be seeking a scenic experience and would therefore be sensitive to the scenic qualities of the surrounding area.**

Residents of any area are presumably very sensitive to changes within the visual environment of their area. The views from their homes are stationary and familiar, and they usually are concerned about proposed changes to the area. **Overall, residents are highly sensitive to view of the surrounding area.**

4.2.3 VIEWER EXPOSURE

The project viewsheds overlay portions of SR-67 as well as Ashwood Street itself, and small portions of Maplevue Street and Willow Road. Few of the residential access roads in the area would have views of the proposed project. **Drivers and passengers on Ashwood Street, along which the project occurs, would have the highest exposure to project features.**

SR-67, a County Scenic Highway, is within 0.5 miles of the project site, and portions of SR-67 are overlaid by the project viewsheds, particularly the soil nail wall viewshed. Industrial lots and El Capitan High School are situated between SR-67 and the project site. These industrial and institutional land uses are not the scenic elements for which the roadway is designated; rather, the surrounding ridgelines provide some scenic quality. Additionally, the buildings and trees on these lots filter views from SR-67 toward the site, providing only small windows of opportunity to see the hillside along which the soil nail wall would be placed. Only the upper portion of the proposed wall may be in these areas. **Viewer exposure along SR-67, therefore, would be moderate.**

Willow Road is also a County Scenic Highway. Some project improvements, such as intersection signals at Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road and Willow Road, and realignment of Wildcat Canyon Road north of Willow Road, would be visible from Willow Road. Most of the proposed features along Ashwood Street, however, would not be visible from Willow Road. **Viewers along this Scenic Highway therefore would have moderately low exposure to most of the proposed project features.**

Over 1,500 students attend El Capitan High School. Despite their immediate proximity to the project site, a student's schedule required them to be inside most of the day, with potentially time before and after school and during a physical education class period to in an area where views toward the project site are available. A teacher schedule would likely be similar, and a visitor's schedule presumably much reduced. **High school patrons, therefore, would have moderately low exposure to views of the project site.**

There are fewer trail and park users than drivers, high school patrons, and residents. Cactus Park and the Class 1 trail between Ashwood Street and SR-67 have a high potential for viewers to see the project features. Other trails within the area are behind trees, however, which limits views from the equestrian event arena and the neighborhoods where equestrian ranches are located. The sport fields within Cactus Park are within the project viewshed and offer few obstructions to the project site. The fields are approximately 0.25 miles from the north end of the proposed soil nail wall. The Class 1 trail between Cactus Park and SR-67 extends along an elevated berm and alongside the sports fields at the high school, which support no structures that block views southeastward toward the project site. There are also not very many trees along this trail that block views, and bicyclists and hikers along the trail therefore have potentially extensive views of the hillside above Ashwood Street. Portions of this trail also are within 0.25 miles of the north end of the soil nail wall. **Trail users, overall, have moderate exposure.**

Residential areas highlighted by the project viewsheds are approximately 0.5 miles or more away from the proposed wall features. The intersection improvements at Willow Road and the realignment of Wildcat Canyon Road abut a rural residential area. Most of the private lots have vegetation and structures that block views, limiting direct sight lines to proposed project features. Where views are available of the project site from residential lots, the views may be of a long duration for stationary viewers. **Due to the limited number of residential lots with extensive views of the project site, however, the overall exposure for residential viewers is moderate.**

4.2.4 VIEWER AWARENESS

Roadways in the area have a variety of speed limits, from slow to almost freeway speeds. Driver and passenger awareness, while on the road, is hard to predict because it would vary based on their destination and the amount of traffic in the area. **Residents or school patrons going about their daily business may be familiar with the visual environment of the area, and thus both more and less aware than visitors.** Those highly familiar with the area may not focus on specific details of the area every day but would be very aware of any changes that may occur. Trail users are presumably in the area in order to enjoy a scenic experience, while park users would be focused on their activities within the park property. **Trail users would be highly aware of their visual environment in areas both far from and close to the project site, while park users may be aware of the surroundings, but focused elsewhere.**

High school patrons may have an awareness similar to residents': **familiar with the area and aware of potential changes, but not focused on the specific details of the area every day. Overall viewer awareness in the area would average to moderate.**

5.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Analysis of a project's impacts to visual resources is based on the identification of the change that would occur when a project proposes to alter the existing visual character and/or visual quality of the environment. The viewers' response to the change must also be considered in the impact analysis. If the project is hidden from sight and will only be seen by the project users, viewer response will likely be minimal. However, if the project is visible to many existing viewers, the viewers' sensitivity to and expectations of the view may place more importance on the change. The change must alter either the visual character or quality, or the viewers' response to the view, in a negative way to be considered an adverse impact. The viewer response to project changes is determined by viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity to the project. The resulting visual impact is determined by combining the severity of resource change with the degree to which people are likely to oppose or be disturbed by the change.

DEFINITION OF VISUAL IMPACT LEVELS

The following definitions will be used in subsequent sections of this document:

No impact: No visual impact would occur as a result of construction of the proposed project. Actual improvements to the visual environment may also occur in this category.

Less than significant impact: Adverse changes to the existing visual resources will not be perceived negatively by viewers, or the contrast is too small and occurs in an area with low visual quality and low sensitivity to visual changes, or the proposed project incorporates features that reduce the potential contrast of the overall project to less than significant levels.

Less than significant impact with mitigation: A moderate or high level of contrast to the visual resource is expected with a moderate or high level of viewer negative response. Mitigation would be required to reduce the impact to a less than significant level.

Significant impact: A moderate or high level of contrast to the visual resource is expected with a moderate or high level of viewer negative response. Mitigation would be required to reduce the impact to a less than significant level. If after mitigation, the project is still considered to be significant, then it would be considered an unmitigable significant impact.

5.1 GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

The visual impact assessment will be based on an evaluation of the project impacts on several categories, including: visual quality, landform quality, view quality, and community character. A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following changes. Conversely, if a project does not propose any of the following, it will generally not be considered to have a significant effect on visual resources:

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

In addition, the County Guidelines for Determining Significance for Dark Skies and Glare contains the following guidelines to evaluate whether a significant impact from glare will occur as a result of project implementation:

5. A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following, absent specific evidence to the contrary. Conversely, if a project does not propose any of the following, it will generally not be considered to have a significant effect on dark skies or from glare, absent specific evidence of such an effect:
 - The project will install outdoor light fixtures that do not conform to the lamp type and shielding requirements described in Section 59.105 (Requirements for Lamp Source and Shielding) and are not otherwise exempted pursuant Section 59.108 or Section 59.109 of the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.
 - The project will operate Class I or Class III outdoor lighting between 11:00 p.m. and sunrise that is not otherwise exempted pursuant Section 59.108 or Section 59.109 of the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.
 - The project will generate light trespass that exceeds 0.2 foot-candles measured five feet onto the adjacent property.
 - The project will install highly reflective building materials, including but not limited to reflective glass and high-gloss surface color, that will create daytime glare and be visible from roadways, pedestrian walkways or areas frequently used for outdoor activities on adjacent properties.
 - The project does not conform to applicable Federal, State or local statute or regulation related to dark skies or glare, including but not limited to the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.

The first three guidelines are analyzed through the key views and computer simulations and discussed below. The fourth category is discussed in **Section 2.3 Policies and Guidance**.

5.2 KEY VIEWS

It is not possible to analyze every point in the viewshed, therefore representative or “key views” with the highest degree of visibility and the greatest number of viewers have been chosen to illustrate the potential project impacts. A total of 12 “Candidate Key Views,” were selected. The location of each is shown on Figure 5a and 5b, and the Candidate Key Views are illustrated in Figures 6a and 6b.

Table 1, Candidate Key View Selection Table, is a summary of each view and a brief assessment of which were selected to use for full simulations and in-depth analysis. Of the 12 Candidate Key Views, four were selected, including Candidate Key Views 1, 3, 5, and 10.

REVIEW OF PHOTO SIMULATIONS FROM SELECTED CANDIDATE KEY VIEWS

Figures 7 through 10 represent photo-realistic computer simulations of the proposed project. The simulations were developed through the use of three-dimensional computer modeling of the existing site topography and the proposed project elements. The model was then transposed over the top of the photographs of the site. Additional texture, color, details, and shadows were added to increase the realistic look of the simulations. Each view is shown as currently exists and is simulated to represent the project after construction. Each simulation shows the erosion control seeding at approximately five years after construction (when fully established).

ORIENTATION

Key View 1

Key View 1 was taken from the Class 1 bicycle trail between Ashwood Street and SR-67, north of El Capitan High School and south of Cactus Park. The trail extends along a berm that separates the high school ball fields and Cactus Park. This view would be available to trail and park users as well as any high school patrons who use the berm trail to access the school and surrounding areas.

Key View 3

Key View 3 was taken from Ashwood Street at the entrance to El Capitan High School, looking northward. Existing cut slopes are at the viewer’s right side, with undeveloped hillsides in the background. El Capitan High School facilities are visible on the left. This view is available to drivers and passengers on Ashwood Street, some of whom may be high school patrons and nearby residents.

Key View 5

Key View 5 was taken from an access road within the El Capitan High School property, extending along the southern edge of the school and providing access to several parking areas and sports fields. A fenced parking area and working yard associated with shop classes is visible on the right, and the slope between Ashwood Street and the high school is on the left. This view would be available to high school patrons.

Key View 10

Key View 10 was taken from Ashwood Street near the northern edge of El Capitan High School, looking southward. A residential property is located on the right. Slopes below a private residential property accessed from Ashwood Street are visible on the left. This view would be available to drivers and passengers, some of whom may be residents and/or high school patrons.

Candidate Key View #	Existing Visual Quality			Viewer Groups	Viewer Sensitivity	Quality of Views	Length (time) of Viewer Exposure	Distance from Viewer to Proposed Project	Contrast with Setting	Notes	Use for Sims?
	Vividness	Unity	Intactness								
1	Moderately High	Moderately High	Moderate	Trail and park users, High school athletics	High	Low	Moderate	Middle to background	Low	Taken from Class 1 trail between Ashwood and SR 67, near El Capitan High School and Cactus Park. Looking east-southeast. Soil Nail Wall above Ashwood and Soldier Pile Wall below Ashwood would be visible behind the school buildings and parking areas.	Yes (best overview)
2	Moderate	Moderately High	Moderately High	Drivers; Recreational Trail Users	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Middle-ground	Moderate	Taken from the east end of the Class 1 trail at Cactus Park and Ashwood Street, looking south. The north end of the Soil Nail Wall would be visible, as would grading on the bank to the left.	No (limited walls and grading)
3	Moderate	Moderately High	Moderate	Drivers on Ashwood Street (including residents, school users, bicyclists, motorists)	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground	High	Taken on Ashwood Street near the entrance to El Capitan High School, looking north. The soil nail wall would be on the right, replacing the natural rock face, and may extend to the background where the road curves. The road would be wider, with more pavement and a median. Guard rails and other features may also be added.	Yes (closest view to see wall aesthetics)
4	Low	Moderate	Moderately Low	Students, teachers, visitors at El Capitan High School	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Middle to Background	Moderate	Taken from internal road at El Capitan High School, looking southeast. Both walls would be visible, beyond the parking and fence(s), as well as any guard rails and road features. Vehicles on the road also would be visible.	No (backup to 5)
5	Low	Moderate	Moderately Low	Students, teachers, visitors at El Capitan High School	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Foreground to Middleground	High	Taken from internal road at El Capitan High School, looking southeast. Both walls would be visible, along with any guard rails and road features. Vehicles on the road also would be visible. Closer to the wall(s) than CKV-4.	Yes (best view of soldier pile wall)
6	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Drivers; Recreational Trail Users	Moderate; Moderately High	Moderate	Moderate	Foreground to Middle-ground	Moderate	Taken from the east end of the Class One bicycle path at Ashwood Street, south of the Cactus Park driveway, looking north. The slope across the road from the viewer would be regraded and the road widened at this point.	No (changes are not very contrasting)
7	High	Moderately High	High	Drivers, residents	Moderately High	High	Low	Foreground to middle-ground	High	Northward view of Wildcat Canyon Road where the curve in the road would be realigned. The road would be straighter, extending across the exposed soil area on the viewer's right. The mailbox, fences, and shed on the right would be removed. The trees on the left would remain undisturbed. A new gutter would edge the west (left) side of the road, and the area that is currently paved would be regarded to slope down away from the road to meet existing grades at the edge of the trees. There would not be very much disturbance to the slopes in the background.	No (not enough change to warrant simulation.)

Table 1

Candidate Key View #	Existing Visual Quality			Viewer Groups	Viewer Sensitivity	Quality of Views	Length (time) of Viewer Exposure	Distance from Viewer to Proposed Project	Contrast with Setting	Notes	Use for Sims?
	Vividness	Unity	Intactness								
8	Moderate	Moderately High	Moderate	Drivers, residents, park users (including residents, school users, bicyclists, motorist)	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Background	High	Taken from Ashwood Street north of Cactus Park, looking south. The tree silhouetted on the east side of the road (viewer's left) would be removed, and the hillside would be regraded. The trees on the far left would remain, as would the trees on the west side (viewer's right). More pavement would be visible, as well as a bioswale (on the left) and new sidewalk (on the right).	No (the changes are not extensive, although oak tree would be lost)
9	Moderately High	Moderate	Moderate	Drivers, residents, park users (including residents, school users, bicyclists, motorist)	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Background	High	Taken from Ashwood Street near the northern boundary of El Capitan High School, next to an existing residential lot (a caretaker for the high school), looking south. The slope on the left would be graded back from the current road edge, which would remove existing vegetation and natural-appearing rocks.	No (could be back up for #10)
10	Moderately High	Moderate	Moderate	Drivers, residents, park users (including residents, school users, bicyclists, motorist)	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Middleground	High	Taken south of KV 9, looking south. The trees on the viewer's left would be removed for grading, and the soil nail wall proposed for the east side of Ashwood would be visible along the slope in the middleground. The road would be widened to the viewer's right. The viewer would see the new roadway, walkways, and guardrails.	Yes (best view of soil nail wall)
11	Moderate	Moderate	High	Students, teachers, visitors at El Capitan High School	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Middleground	High	Taken from the entrance driveway at El Capitan High School looking northeast. The soil nail wall would be visible to the viewer's right, as would intersection improvements. The soldier pile wall would be visible in the far middleground.	No (backup to #3)
12	Moderate	Moderate	High	Drivers, residents, park users (including residents, school users, bicyclists, motorist)	Moderate	High	Low	Foreground to Middleground	High	Taken from Ashwood Street north of the entrance to El Capitan High School, looking north. The soil nail wall would be on the viewer's right, and the soldier pile wall on the viewer's left, although the soldier pile wall will face the school, so mostly the viewer would see the new lanes, walkways, and guardrails. The road would be widened to the viewer's left	No (backup to #3)



Key View 1 - Taken from Class 1 trail between Ashwood and SR 67, near El Capitan High School and Cactus Park. Looking east-southeast.



Key View 2

Taken from Cactus Park driveway at Ashwood Street, looking south.



Key View 3

Taken on Ashwood Street near the entrance to El Capitan High School, looking north.



Key View 4

Taken from internal road at El Capitan High School, looking southeast.



Key View 5

Taken from internal road at El Capitan High School, looking southeast.



Key View 6

Taken from internal road at El Capitan High School, looking south.

Note: A red outline indicates a recommended view to simulate

Figure 6b



Key View 7
Northward view of Wildcat Canyon Road.



Key View 8
From Ashwood Street north of Cactus Park, looking south



Key View 9
From Ashwood Street at the north edge of El Capitan High School, looking south.



Key View 10
From Ashwood Street near El Capitan High School, looking south.



Key View 11
From the El Capitan High School driveway, looking north.



Key View 12
From Ashwood Street near El Capitan High School, looking north.

Note: A red outline indicates a recommended view to simulate



Figure 7b



Figure 8a

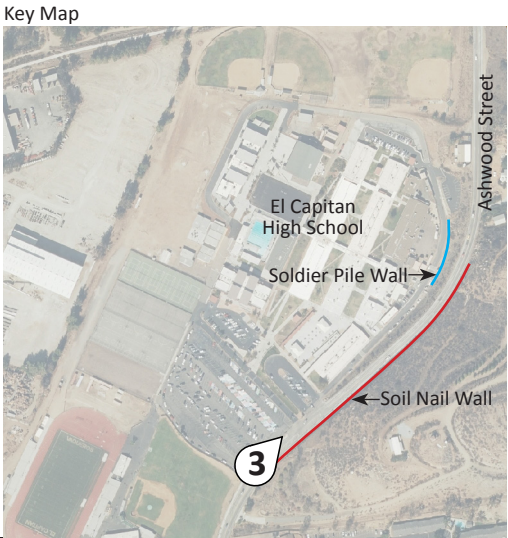


Figure 8b





Figure 9b





Figure 10b



5.3 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY

EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY

Each of the key views encompass mostly the moderately high and high visual quality of the parks and undeveloped hillsides. Institutional elements within the high school are also visible within most of the views.

Rural residential elements are visible in many of the views. Evenly spaced trees at the top of the hill above Ashwood Street are detectable in the background of each of the views. Residential structures are also visible along the top of the slopes in Key Views 1 and 10. These are small scale elements and not highly distinct.

Ashwood Street itself is a dominant feature in Key Views 3 and 10, and a roadway internal to the high school property is a prevalent feature in Key View 5. In each of these views, fences, power lines and poles, and roadway elements such as lane stripes, safety barriers, are also visible in three of the views. Key View 1 includes foreground and background views of fences, and background views of the powerlines, which at this distance are less distinct. In this view, the powerlines are not silhouetted, although sport field lights are present and more obvious.

PROPOSED PROJECT FEATURES

The proposed project, which would widen portions of Ashwood Street to improve traffic flow and provide enhanced motorist safety, would require two retaining walls and a substantial amount of grading. Each of the simulated key views was taken from a point where one or both of the retaining walls would be visible. The taller of the two retaining walls would be located on the east side of Ashwood Street, where the site's current conditions include steep, almost vertical slopes up to approximately 40 feet tall. The retaining wall proposed for this location would be constructed as a soil-nail wall covered with stained concrete and a natural-looking texture. The retaining wall would be approximately five feet taller than the existing slope. The soil-nail wall would be approximately 975 feet (0.18 mile) long. New turn lanes on Ashwood Street approaching the entrance to El Capitan High school would also be added, and small raised medians would be used to separate turning traffic from northbound through-traffic. Turning traffic and southbound cars would be controlled via new traffic signals.

Bioretention basins and a decomposed-granite (DG) shoulder would be located at the base of the wall, and a concrete brown ditch would be placed along the top. Where graded soil would be exposed, an erosion control seed mix would be sprayed to provide vegetative protection and stabilization to the slopes. At the northern end of the high school on the east side of Ashwood Street, a 250-foot length of the existing slope approximately 35 feet tall would be left undisturbed. North of this area, a 400-foot section of the existing slopes would be graded at approximately the same 1:1 steepness but would be approximately 5 feet taller (i.e 40 feet tall).

A second retaining wall would be constructed on the west side of Ashwood Street within the school property, directly east of the school's internal access road. This retaining wall would extend up to 25 feet tall and approximately 385 feet long. It would be constructed using a soldier pile method of driving steel I-beams into the ground and threading concrete slats between them to retain the soil behind. The concrete and the steel would be stained with a color similar to the soil nail wall, which would be selected to match the native soil and rock colors in the area. A concrete brow ditch would be placed at the top of the wall, and additional grading would extend another 25 feet above the soldier pile wall to meet the improved shoulder and new sidewalk along the west side of Ashwood Street.

A new sidewalk and a replacement guard rail would be installed along the west side of Ashwood Street from the entrance of El Capitan High School to the entrance of Cactus Park. An additional northbound left-turn pocket would be added along Ashwood Street at the entrance to Cactus Park as well. No new traffic signals would be added at this intersection.

North of San Diego River, the intersection of Ashwood Street and Willow Road would be signalized, new left turn lanes would be added in each direction, and the crosswalks would be improved with striping and curb ramps. From the intersection northward for approximately 1,400 feet (0.26 mile), the existing roadway curve

would be realigned to provide improved line-of-site for motorists. The traffic lanes would shift eastward by approximately 50 feet, and grading would occur to meet the existing slopes. Steep slopes on the west side of Wildcat Canyon Road above the roadway would not be disturbed, but an approximate 1:1 fill slope up to 15 feet tall would be necessary on the east side, below the roadway bed, to match existing grades.

Additionally, at the project's southern terminus, a new left-turn lane would be added to eastbound Maplevue Street at the intersection with Ashwood Street, and Maplevue Street would be restriped east and west of the intersection to accommodate the new lane.

Two versions of each visual simulation is included here. One shows the proposed project with the utility poles and lines remaining above-ground and shifted to accommodate the road widening. The other version of each illustrates the undergrounding of the utility poles and lines. The undergrounding of these utilities is a recommended design consideration to reduce any visual impacts of the project. However, it is not a binding mitigation requirement.

PROJECT EFFECTS

The proposed street improvements such as added lanes, traffic signals, and standard roadway elements such as striping, guardrails, sidewalks, and ADA curb ramps would not result in highly contrasting changes to the visual environment of the project site. Each of these elements would be visually similar to existing features, albeit larger, longer or wider. Except for new traffic lights, most all roadway improvements would be relatively low or ground-plane linear elements that would not be highly visible from a distance. These elements are all considered to be typical of roadways and tend to be located in low contrast with the existing roadway environment.

The traffic signals would be tall and, by necessity, noticeable new elements in the area. The traffic signals, however, would not visually contrast with the character of a roadway. Many tall trees along Willow Street would be taller than the proposed signal, and the existing power poles along Ashwood Street are approximately as tall as the signal would be.

The power poles and utility lines extending along Ashwood Street, if shifted to accommodate the widened roadway rather than undergrounded, would be similar in appearance to the existing poles, but due to the new location being farther from the slopes, would be silhouetted against the sky and therefore may be more noticeable from some viewpoints than the existing poles and lines.

The project elements with the highest potential to change the visual character of the area are the proposed retaining walls on each side of Ashwood Street, and the slope grading on the east side of Ashwood Street near the entrance to Cactus Park. None of these proposed features would change the profile or height of the ridgeline east of Ashwood Street.

The tallest of the two retaining walls would be the soil nail wall along the east side of Ashwood Street that walls would be approximately 48 feet at its highest point, with an average height of being approximately 30 feet. This soil nail wall is represented in the simulations of Key View 1, 3, and 5.

From Key View 1, the soil nail wall would be visible in the background above the existing buildings at El Capitan High School. From Key View 3 and from most points along Ashwood Street within the project viewshed, the new soil nail wall would be visible within the foreground and middleground, at the viewer's right. The soil nail wall also would be visible in the background of Key View 5 above the proposed soldier pile wall and existing fence.

The soil nail wall would replace the existing, steep cut slope along approximately 975 feet, and would be approximately 5 feet taller than the existing slope. The height difference and overall scale of the new wall would not be highly noticeable as different from the existing slope. The existing slope, which shows rocks that appear to have been left by blasting to create the roadway, has variegations of color and depth, visible rock outcroppings, and dark, weathered, and fissured rock faces. It also supports pockets of vegetation that soften the top edge of the cut face and spill down at least half of the face toward the roadway. As part of the engineering design process, the proposed soil nail wall would be textured with semi-realistic crevices

and variations, but overall would not appear as varied in color, or deeply fissured in texture and depth as the existing natural slope. This difference would be noticeable for viewers from close distances, such as from Key View 3 and 5.

The soldier pile wall would retain fill material that would support the widened Ashwood Street. It would partially replace the steep slope that currently exists in the location. This slope is not as steep or as visibly rocky as the slope along Ashwood Street's east side. The slope supports more vegetation, mostly weedy, sparse, and finely textured grasses and mustard plants. The tan and gray soil is visible between the plants. The slope angles away from the road, which slightly reduces its visible scale. In contrast, the proposed soldier pile wall would be a strongly vertical element. While it would be comparable to the height of the existing slope, the soldier pile wall combined with the graded slope above it would appear taller and more visibly dominant, and thus would appear to be closer to the viewer. It also would be smoother, with a less varied or natural texture than the existing slope and have a more uniform color. This difference would be most noticeable from close distances, as represented in Key View 5. The proposed conditions, including a vertical concrete panel and steel wall with limited aesthetic treatments, would be noticed as a high contrast and would likely be considered by some viewers as a negative change to the visual environment.

Without aesthetic treatment, there is potential that the large blank soldier pile wall could be used for illegal graffiti. In general, large walls without design treatments, vegetation, or vines covering them could become targets for illegal graffiti. Which has the potential to result in a negative aesthetic Prior to construction, the County would consult with representatives from El Capitan High School to determine whether the school desires any other color or treatment options beyond the proposed earth tone staining.

Grading would occur on the east side of Ashwood Street along several portions, including two areas between Cactus Park and the adjacent residential property, and north of the proposed soil nail wall to accommodate the widened and realigned roadway. These areas would be graded to approximately the same steepness as the existing slopes and would not include a retaining wall. The slopes would be approximately 5 to 6 feet taller and would be visible from the parks and trails located west of Ashwood Street (as shown in Key View 1) and from Ashwood Street itself (as shown in Key View 10).

Throughout the proposed project site, the existing slopes are approximately 25 to 30 feet tall at the highest points and are nearly vertical slopes. Along the roadway's current alignment, boulders and outcrops appear to have been left in place after blasting, and are fissured, angular, tan and gray to dark brown rocks with pockets of soil supporting small plants. Larger shrubs, succulents, and trees overhang the slope from the top, and cascade approximately half-way down. The proposed slopes would, at the time of construction, be smoother, and potentially lighter in color until exposed rocks weather and transition to a darker color over time. It is anticipated that current construction techniques, equipment, and grading standards would create a smoother slope with few boulders and outcrops remaining. Hydroseeding may occur to control erosion along these slopes and depending how much soil is available to the plants, the slopes could become covered with more vegetation than the existing slopes.

Immediately north of Willow Road, approximately 550 feet of Wildcat Canyon Road would realigned eastward, requiring the removal of small palm trees, chain link fencing with vines, a mail box, and sheds within a private property bordering the east side of Ashwood Street. A few utility boxes and poles also would be removed, and a private driveway would be realigned. This realigned portion of Wildcat Canyon Road is visible in Key View 7. The visual elements along this segment are not visually dominant or memorable and have only moderate visual quality. The taller, denser trees on the west side of Wildcat Canyon Road along this segment would not be removed.

5.3.1 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL QUALITY

The proposed project would introduce visual elements that are visually similar in line and form to the existing slopes, roadway, and features in the surrounding area. The proposed retaining walls and slopes would be similar in scale and visual dominance as the existing slopes. The most visible differences would include changes to the color, texture, and diversity within the visual environment. The retaining walls would be stained with colors similar to the existing soil but less texture diversity and vegetation would be present. The visual diversity of the naturally varying rocky faces would be lessened by the introduction of new human-made, mostly flat wall faces. Without any aesthetic treatment, the concrete soil nail wall would not match the geology of the existing rock outcrop slope and would not appear natural, specifically considering the close proximity of motorists to the retaining wall. The visual unity of the surrounding area would be reduced due to the lowering of intactness. Without these treatments, this visual change would highly contrast and be considered a highly contrasting retaining wall with the potential to be considered a significant impact to the existing character and quality of the roadway foreground environment.

With the inclusion of project design components such as colors, textures, and patterns on the retaining walls, this would lessen the contrast and negative aesthetics. Therefore, the County will include the aforementioned treatments with construction of the proposed project. As a result, **the visual quality of the existing slopes would be lessened from a moderately high visual quality and character, to a moderately low visual quality and character. The slopes would be less visually vivid due to the changes to color and texture. Furthermore, until the rocks and textured faces weather and transition into darker tones, the new walls would visually encroach and slightly contrast with the existing natural slopes, which would reduce the visual intactness of the visual environment along Ashwood Street and El Capitan High School.**

Despite the changes to the visual character, vividness and intactness resulting from the proposed retaining walls and slopes, the overall quality of the visual environment of Ashwood Street would not result in a significant visual character and quality impact. The silhouette of the ridgeline east of Ashwood Street would not be changed, and the surface level elements would not be highly visible from farther distances. These elements also would be visually similar to existing roadway features when viewed up close. **Therefore, the contrast and the likely viewer reaction that would result is expected to be moderately adverse, but would result in a less than significant visual impact based on the provided simulations.**

5.3.2 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL CHARACTER

The proposed project would not result in the removal of landmarks and historic features that contribute to the visual character of the area. Oak trees would be removed at the far north end of El Capitan High School on the east side of Ashwood Street and would have an adverse effect on the character of the area. The visually dominant rocky slopes along the east side of Ashwood Street and the ridgelines above them are contributors to the visual character of the immediate area. The proposed retaining walls and grading would change the existing slopes but would not change the ridgelines or be silhouetted in views toward the area.

While the proposed retaining walls would be large-scale elements that would potentially lessen the vividness of the slopes when seen from a close distance, the viewer would be approximately five feet higher than the existing slopes. With the proposed color and texture treatments, the retaining walls would not be out of scale and would not substantially change the visual environment of Ashwood Street. However, the existing slopes do include a dominant pattern of existing native vegetation from small shrubs to oak trees. The highly diverse shadows, colors, textures and existing vegetation would change due to the proposed retaining walls. The changes relating to the soil nail wall **will be adverse to the character of the study area, however, they do not contrast enough with the setting to be considered a significant visual impacts to the community character of the surrounding project area.**

The realignment of Wildcat Canyon Road north of Willow Road would remove visual elements existing along the east side of Wildcat Canyon Road, but would not affect existing rocky slopes or mature trees along the west side of the road. Similarly, roadway features such as new traffic signals, pavement and striping, and guardrails would not disrupt or change existing elements within or the overall visual character of Ashwood Street, Willow Road, Maplevue Street, or Wildcat Canyon Road. **Therefore, although the proposed project would moderately contrast with the existing setting, it would not change the visual character of the immediate area, and the project would result in a less than significant impact to community character.**

VIEW QUALITY

The proposed project would primarily install features consisting of small-scale, low elevation elements such as pavement and striping, fencing and guardrails, and similar items. None of these elements would obstruct, interrupt, or detract from vistas within the area. The largest proposed features include the retaining walls and slope grading along Ashwood Street. There are distant views found along this roadway, of distant views of peaks and canyons. These views would require a substantial change in topographic position to see distant peaks, slopes and canyons from Ashwood Street itself. Other than the proposed traffic signals, none of the proposed project elements are expected to block important views that are considered to be sub-regionally significant.

The proposed retaining walls would be visible from a public road, trails, scenic highways, and recreational areas. As referenced in the viewshed discussion above, but the proposed retaining walls not obstruct, interrupt or detract from panoramic vistas or valued focal points within the project area. The ridgelines above the slopes would not be changed, and views where the retaining walls can be seen (such as Key View 1), the walls would be relatively small in scale compared to the overall landform above and behind them.

From closer views along Ashwood Street (which is a public road), the proposed soil nail wall would be a dominant feature in views for up to 0.25 mile approaching the wall in either direction and while driving next to it. Although the wall would be smoother in texture, brighter in color, and less vivid than the existing rocky slopes, the color and stain treatment and relatively small change in scale from existing conditions (only five feet taller than the existing slope) would not substantially change views along Ashwood Street.

The proposed project features would be visible from a Class 1 trail between Ashwood Street and SR-76. The trail is located on a berm and next to sport fields along this length, which allows for expansive views that include the nearby undeveloped hillsides. Views from this trail are represented by Key View 1. Portions of the proposed retaining walls would be visible in views from this trail. However, the proposed walls would not change the ridgeline of the hill above them and would be similar in scale to the existing slopes. The differences in texture, color, and scale would be minor and not highly noticeable from the trail. **Changes to views from the trail, therefore, would not be substantial or detracting.**

Views from the scenic roadways in the area, SR-67 and Willow Road, would be brief and not expansive. As with views from the trail, the proposed soil nail wall, where visible from the scenic highways, would not create a highly noticeable change to the visual character or quality of the vistas available from these roads. The roadway, except for the cut rocky slope, are not generally part of a view scene visible from these potential scenic highways. **Changes to the viewing scene, would not be substantial or detracting.**

The proposed retaining walls would be visible from portions of Cactus Park. The San Diego River generally is too low in elevation to have views of the proposed project features. Views from Cactus Park would be similar to views from the Class 1 trail between Ashwood Street and SR-67. The wall and proposed project features would be similar in scale to the existing slopes. The differences in texture, color, and scale would be minor and not highly noticeable from the trail. **Changes to views from the trail, therefore, would not be substantial or detracting.**

CONFORMANCE WITH GOALS AND POLICIES

Refer to the matrix in Section 2.3 for a summary of the project's conformance with goals and policies.

The proposed project includes the installation of new street lights in combination with the new traffic signals. However, the fixtures would follow applicable design guidelines that would ensure compliance with dark sky goals and policies. In addition, the proposed project is not anticipated to create any glare.

The proposed project would not change or affect any portion of the El Cajon Mountain – El Capitan Reservoir RCA, and would not substantially change view from this RCA.

5.4 ASSESSMENT OF VIEWER RESPONSE

Key View 1 represents views available to trail and park users. Key Views 3 and 10 represent views available to drivers and passengers on Ashwood Street, northbound and southbound respectively. Key View 5 represents views available to high school patrons. Residents in the area also may be present in these viewer groups.

Trail and park users have high sensitivity and moderate exposure, as do local residents. High school patrons have moderate sensitivity and moderately low exposure. Drivers and passengers have moderate sensitivity to change in the visual environment, and high exposure when near the project area to low exposure from farther distances. It is expected that trail users, park users, property owners in the immediate area and those that visit the school, are likely to notice the changes and have a slight to moderate concern over the changes. However, they are not likely to have a significant concern for the changes, especially if the changes are important for safety and traffic flow, of which they are likely to benefit from and therefore, likely to accept these changes.

5.5 DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

VISUAL QUALITY IMPACTS

Some viewers of the proposed project are expected to have high responses to changes in the visual environment. However, in most views, the proposed project features would not create a substantial change in the overall quality of the visual environment of Ashwood Street. **Although moderately adverse and noticeable, the resulting impact to the visual quality of the immediate surroundings and the project area would be less than significant.**

COMMUNITY CHARACTER IMPACTS

While existing steep slopes and rock outcroppings would be changed by the proposed road realignment, grading, and retaining walls, these features would not be out of scale, and would not substantially change the visual environment of Ashwood Street or create an adverse change to the visual character of the immediate area. **Although moderately adverse and noticeable, the resulting impact to the visual quality of the area would be less than significant.**

VIEW QUALITY IMPACTS

The proposed retaining walls would not obstruct, interrupt or detract from panoramic vistas or valued focal points within the project area. The ridgelines above the slopes would not be changed, and the retaining walls would be relatively small in scale compared to the overall landform above and behind them. In closer views of the retaining walls, they would be smoother in texture, brighter in color, and less vivid than the existing rocky slopes, yet the color and stain treatment would result in a relatively small change in scale from existing conditions. Within views from trails and scenic roadways, the proposed project features would be similar in scale to the existing slopes. The differences in texture, color, and scale would be minor and not highly noticeable from the trail. **Overall, the proposed project's impact to the view quality of the area would be less than significant, with only a slight level of adversity for its effect on the view scene as noticed from local public viewing corridors.**

GOALS AND POLICIES RELATED IMPACTS

The proposed project would be consistent with adopted plans, policies, and guidance, as detailed in the table in Section 2.3 above, would not create glare or impact dark skies, and would not change views to or from the nearby Resource Conservation Area. **Therefore, the project would not have a significant impact.**

This study confirms the County General Plan and Lakeside Community Plan encourage undergrounding of utilities, which would be beneficial in high visibility areas along roadways and other public locations. Ashwood Street could be a location where undergrounding could benefit the local visual quality and community character of the area. However, the language of the community goal is focused on private

development in the community and the responsibilities to underground utilities associated with adjacent development. Therefore, the Ashwood Street Improvement Project is not directly required to underground the existing powerlines along the roadway. Although undergrounding the relocated utilities could result in an increased beneficial treatment, not undergrounding the utilities would not rise to a level of a significant community goal impact. The relocation of aboveground powerlines to the east would be noticeable in the visual environment along Ashwood Street since it will result in the poles and powerlines being silhouetted against the sky, and as a result, this change could potentially increase the adversity of the proposed improvements. However, since the visual environment already contains above ground powerlines, the potential adversity would not reach a level of significance that would require mitigation.

The visual simulations included here represent both a version of the project that includes the undergrounding of the utility lines, and a version of the project that moves the poles and lines eastward to accommodate the widened roadway. These simulations have been included to show the beneficial effect on the visual environment if the utilities are under-grounded. Normally, under-grounding would only be required if a visual quality or community character impact is considered to be significant. This study finds that the proposed design treatments of the soil nail wall are an integral component to avoid an adverse visual impact. In conjunction with the soil nail wall treatment, and based on County threshold standards, keeping the existing overhead utilities does not rise to a level of significance, as determined by assessing the simulations that relocate the utilities, but do not underground them.

5.6 SUMMARY OF PROJECT IMPACTS AND SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

The proposed project would change visual elements of the project site, but the features would moderately contrast with or create a substantial change to the visual environment of the surrounding area. As a result, the proposed project changes would have **less than significant impacts** due to changes in visual character and quality. However, the shifting of power lines and poles to accommodate the roadway improvements could moderately contrast with the existing environment. KTUA recommends that the utilities be undergrounded given the potential adverse visual changes in the environment, the community goal of undergrounding, and the fact that some of the costs of under-grounding could be offset by relocating the existing powerlines in the project area towards the west. However, this recommendation is not considered formal mitigation since impacts would be less than significant. However, if the utilities are not undergrounded and if the proposed wall treatments are removed from the project and only a blank shot-crete wall is constructed, the project would result in a significant visual impact to visual quality and character of the area.

The project would have a **less than significant impact** on views from scenic highways or scenic resources in the neighborhood, community, or area.

The project would conform with the San Diego County General Plan and Lakeside Community Plan, resulting in **no impacts** due to light or glare.

6.0 VISUAL MITIGATION AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed project would result in less than significant impacts to the visual environment of the area, and therefore, no mitigation measures are required or proposed.

As part of the engineering design, the proposed project would include erosion control vegetation and surface treatments of the proposed retaining walls. The treatment of the soil nail wall would include color stains and texturing to resemble the existing soil and rock of the hillside. The soldier pile wall would be stained with a similar color. Because these treatments are an integral part of the proposed project, they are not considered mitigation. It should be noted that if retaining wall treatments are not implemented, the project features could potentially create a substantial visual impact to the visual quality and community character of the area, and the project would need to be reevaluated for significance. Although not a mitigation requirement, this study still recommends the undergrounding of the poles that need to be moved eastward in order to lessen the adverse impacts of the project. Because these impacts are not considered significant under the County Thresholds, the undergrounding should be considered to be voluntary by the County in their efforts to lessen impacts from the project.

7.0 REPORT PREPARERS

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