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5.0 Aesthetics

This section of the draft EIR addresses the project's effects on visual resources, the change in the visual character of the project site and its surroundings due to the project, and the impacts of new sources of light and glare that could be added by the project. Unless otherwise noted the discussion in this section is based upon independent site investigation, information found in the *County of Monterey General Plan, Toro Area Plan, and the Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan*.

During the Draft EIR's NOP review period, members of the public questioned potential aesthetic impacts of the proposed project. The county's NOP and comment letters are included in Appendix B.

5.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Scenic Vistas

A scenic vista is generally described as a clear, expansive view of significant regional features possessing visual and aesthetic qualities of value to the community. The project site lies on a knoll at the northwestern end of the approximately 70-mile long Salinas Valley. The visual setting within the Salinas Valley is dominated by open space views comprised of agricultural land and the Gabilan and Santa Lucia mountains that border the valley. These features represent the primary scenic resources within Monterey County. Public views of the dominant rural agricultural landscape and mountains bordering the Salinas Valley are most common from roadways that traverse the valley. In the vicinity of the project site, State Route 68, River Road, and Reservation Road afford travelers sweeping views of agricultural and mountain landscapes.

Visual Quality and Character

The project site is a knoll rising above River Road and existing Las Palmas Subdivision #1 neighborhood to a largely flat plateau that would be the primary development area. The site is dominated by non-native grasses and non-native eucalyptus trees. There is no current active use of the project site, although a small portion of the southwest corner is occasionally grazed. There are no existing buildings or structures on the site. Site elevation ranges from approximately 70 feet above sea level in the northeastern area of the project site to 210 feet

above sea level in the southwestern area of the project site. Representative photographs showing the visual character of the site are presented in [Figure 3-4, Project Site Photos](#), in the Environmental Setting.

Public Views

Existing public views of the site that would be altered by the proposed project are available from State Route 68 and Reservation Road to the north, River Road to the west, and roadways and park and trail areas within the Las Palmas Subdivision #1 residential subdivision to the south.

Public views from State Route 68, Reservation Road, and River Road of the project site are partially obstructed by existing topography and vegetation along roadways. Private views of the site from within the Las Palmas Subdivision #1 residential subdivision are obstructed by existing single family residences and existing topography. [Figure 5-1, Viewpoints of Site](#), displays approximate locations of public and private views of the site. [Figures 5-2 through 5-8](#), display photographs from these locations. Viewpoints 5, 6, and 7 are private viewpoints within the private subdivision.

Light and Glare

The existing source of light and glare in the project vicinity is primarily generated by residential development in the Las Palmas Ranch #1 neighborhood and vehicular traffic on River Road.

5.2 REGULATORY SETTING

State

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) through its California Scenic Highway Mapping System considers certain scenic corridors along travel routes as visual resources of statewide importance. State Route 68 is a designated scenic highway from State Route 1 in Monterey to the Salinas River.

County

Monterey County General Plan

Goal OS-1 of the Monterey County General Plan strives to retain the character and natural beauty of Monterey County by preserving, conserving, and maintaining unique physical features, natural resources, and agricultural operations. The following policies in the General Plan are applicable to aesthetics and visual quality at the project site.



0 1000 feet



Project Site

Source: Monterey County GIS 2016, Google Earth 2017

Figure 5-1

Viewpoints of Site



River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-2
Public Viewpoint 1



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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-3
Public Viewpoint 2

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR



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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-4
Public Viewpoint 3



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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-5
Public Viewpoint 4

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-6
Private Viewpoint 5



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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-7
Private Viewpoint 6

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Source: EMC Planning Group 2017

Figure 5-8
Private Viewpoint 7

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Policies

OS-1.1 Voluntary restrictions to the development potential of property located in designated visually sensitive areas shall be encouraged.

OS-1.2 Development in designated visually sensitive areas shall be subordinate to the natural features of the area.

OS-1.3 To preserve the County's scenic qualities, ridgeline development shall not be allowed. An exception to this policy may be made only after publicly noticed hearing and provided the following findings can be made:

- a. The ridgeline development will not create a substantially adverse visual impact when viewed from a common public viewing area; and either,
- b. The proposed development better achieves the goals, policies and objectives of the Monterey County General Plan and applicable area plan than other development alternatives; or,
- c. There is no feasible alternative to the ridgeline development.

Pursuant to Policy OS-1.6, in areas subject to specific plans, the ridgeline policies and regulations of the applicable specific plan shall govern.

OS-1.6 In areas subject to specific plans, the ridgeline policies and regulations of the applicable specific plan shall govern. Each specific plan shall address viewshed issues, including ridgeline development, as part of the plan, including, but not limited to, provisions for setbacks, landscaping, height limits, or open space buffers.

OS-1.9 Development that protects and enhances the County's scenic qualities shall be encouraged.

OS-1.12 The significant disruption of views from designated scenic routes shall be mitigated through use of appropriate materials, scale, lighting and siting of development.

Toro Area Plan

The Toro Area Plan identifies the project site as located within an area designated as visually sensitive. The Toro Area Plan identifies State Route 68 as an existing scenic highway, and River Road and Reservation Road as proposed scenic routes (Figure #16). The following policies in the Toro Area Plan are applicable to aesthetics and visual quality at the project site.

Policies

T-3.1 Within areas designated as “visually sensitive” on the Toro Scenic Highway Corridors and Visual Sensitivity Map (Figure 16), landscaping or new development may be permitted if the development is located and designed (building design, exterior lighting, and siting) in such a manner that will enhance the scenic value of the area. Architectural design consistent with the rural nature of the Plan area shall be encouraged.

T-3.2 Land use, architectural, and landscaping controls shall be applied, and sensitive site design encouraged, to preserve Toro's visually sensitive areas and scenic entrances:

- a. River Road/Highway 68 intersection; and
- b. Laureles Grade scenic vista overlooking the Planning Area (Figure 16).

T-3.5 Exterior/outdoor lighting shall be located, designed, and enforced to minimize light sources and preserve the quality of darkness. Street lighting shall be as unobtrusive as practicable and shall be consistent in intensity throughout the Toro area.

T-3.7 Removal of healthy, native oak trees in the Toro Planning Area shall be discouraged. An ordinance shall be developed to identify required procedures for removal of these trees. Said ordinance shall take into account fuel modification needed for fire prevention in the vicinity of structures and shall include:

- a. Permit requirements.
- b. Replacement criteria
- c. Exceptions for emergencies and governmental agencies

Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan

The following policies in the Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan are applicable to aesthetics and visual quality at the project site.

Policies

Conservation and Open Space

1. The following constitute the open space elements of Las Palmas Ranch to be protected:
 - A. The Salinas River bank and the riparian vegetation adjacent thereto;
 - B. The agricultural land north of River Road;

- C. The central ridge lines and north-facing frontal slopes visible from the Highway 68 Scenic Corridor.
 - D. The Corey House.
2. Prohibit building on ridgelines visible from designated scenic corridors, as delineated.
 3. Higher density housing units shall be clustered behind natural landforms or on lower elevations.
 4. Open space areas shall be placed in scenic easements and open space zoning or otherwise adequately protected from development that could destroy the natural amenities of the site.
 5. Roads which are perpendicular to viewing areas or which involve excessive cut and fill shall be discouraged.
 6. Horizontal and vertical street alignments should relate to the natural contours of the site insofar as is practical.
 7. Utilize mounding, informal massing, or irregularly spaced trees, planting and other overall landscaping treatment to screen development.
 8. Visually obtrusive building materials and finishes shall be avoided.

Design and Sensitivity

1. All areas of the project proposed for structural development shall be placed in a sign and design control district to ensure county enforcement of the design policies of this specific plan.
3. All structure, including residential, including residential, commercial, recreational and accessory buildings; fences; walls; decks and signs shall require design approval. Approval shall be based upon conformity with the policies of this plan as well as the following specific criteria:
 - A. Compatibility of external design, materials and colors with existing ground elevations and natural land forms.
 - B. Conformity of design and location of structures with respect to existing ground elevations and natural land forms.
 - C. Mitigation of visual impacts from within the development and from major designated view corridors outside of the project.
 - D. Protection of significant trees and vegetation. Trees over 36" in circumference (four feet above the ground) shall be retained. Where it is necessary to remove such trees for better design or layout, then

they shall be replaced on a two for one basis subject to the approval of the Director of Planning.

E. Prevention of erosion, sedimentation and visual impacts resulting from grading, excavation, cutting or filling.

4. To the extent feasible, all structures should utilize natural materials such as wood and native stone and low intensity earth-tone exterior colors. Visually obtrusive building materials shall be avoided.

5. Low level exterior lighting, including street lighting shall be utilized with the local area, and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated and off-site glare is fully controlled. Street lights may not be used unless approved as conditions of permits obtained pursuant to this plan.

7. Mounding, informal massing, or irregularly spaced trees, planting and other overall landscaping treatment should be utilized to screen development.

8. Preserve vegetation significant to the maintenance of visual quality and to the provision of erosion control on sensitive slopes.

Title 21

Title 21 of the Monterey County Code implements the 2010 General Plan, 2010 Toro Area Plan and Las Palmas Ranch Specific Plan. The following sections explain the purpose of the Design Control district and provide the definitions in the County Code for Substantial Adverse Visual Impact and Common Public Viewing Area:

Design Control District -- 21.44.010 - Purpose.

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide a district for the regulation of the location, size, configuration, materials, and colors of structures and fences, except agricultural fences, in those areas of the County of Monterey where the design review of structures is appropriate to assure protection of the public viewshed, neighborhood character, and to assure the visual integrity of certain developments without imposing undue restrictions on private property.

21.06.1275 - Substantial adverse visual impact.

"Substantial adverse visual impact" means a visual impact which, considering the condition of the existing viewshed, the proximity and duration of view when observed with normal unaided vision, causes an existing visual experience to be materially degraded.

21.06.195 - Common public viewing area.

"Common public viewing area" means a public area such as a public street, road, designated vista point, or public park from which the general public ordinarily views the surrounding viewshed.

5.3 THRESHOLDS OR STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G) indicates that a project may have a significant effect on if it would:

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

Additionally, the Monterey County Code (21.06.1275) definition of substantial adverse visual impact is considered:

- "Substantial adverse visual impact" means a visual impact which, considering the condition of the existing viewshed, the proximity and duration of view when observed with normal unaided vision, causes an existing visual experience to be materially degraded."

These are the issues evaluated in the impact analysis below.

5.4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Scenic Vistas, Scenic Highways, and Visual Character

The project site has limited visibility from southbound River Road due to road alignment, topography, and native vegetation. Development on the project site would not occur within the 100-foot required setback from River Road. The project site is visible from northbound River Road at and near the intersection with Las Palmas Road. The project site is visible from southbound Reservation Road. Portions of the upper portion and roofs of some of the buildings will be visible from State Route 68 from the Salinas River crossing to the River Road exit. The project site is located approximately ½ to ¾ mile from State Route 68 and is visible for a distance of about 3,000 feet, more than ½ a mile. Therefore, at the normal driving speeds on that portion of State Route 68 the project site is visible for about 30-40 seconds.

The visual impacts of this project are not unexpected or significant. The LPRSP FEIR (pp 56-59) recognized that the development of Las Palmas Ranch, including this site, would "... be

expected to change from the existing open land/agriculture to a more urban setting softened by landscaping, entry way treatment and architectural control.” The LPRSP FEIR also states, “Given the distance from the highway (1/2 to 3/4 mile) and the level of development envisioned by the Toro Vista development [now Ferrini Ranch] visual impacts on Highway 68 are insignificant.” The FIER goes on to prescribe mitigations measures for the Las Palmas Ranch development. The River View at Las Palmas project incorporated those measures into its design.

The proposed project includes construction of 13 single-story Casitas structures, totaling approximately 28,000 square feet of living area, an approximately 43,500,000 square-foot, two-story assisted living facility, and an approximately 39,000square-foot, three-story Memory Care Facility. Construction of these facilities and associated infrastructure will require the removal of approximately 80 eucalyptus trees. A conceptual landscape plan has been included in the project application materials. The County of Monterey typically does not require a landscape plan as part of discretionary application materials, such as a conditional use permit, but has required one for the proposed River View at Las Palmas project given visibility concerns expressed by the community at public meetings, including two Toro Land Use Advisory Committee meetings and one additional community meeting, held on the project.

The proposed project will be visible from River Road, State Route 68, and Reservation Road, although it will not result in ridgeline development. The proposed project has been designed to minimize its visual impacts through the location of the various structures, use of colors and materials, and new landscaping which will be required as a condition of approval. Included in the project plans are a visual simulation from State Route 68, building elevations and renderings, and color boards. The colors have been selected to minimize visibility and blend with the hills that form the back drop for the project site. The landscaping plan incorporates a range of materials to provide visual screening for views of the project site. Initial planting will include range of size of the materials to include larger specimens (36” or 48” tree specimens) for more immediate screening and smaller plantings which will, at maturity, provide much more screening. Landscaped areas will be irrigated with reclaimed waste water.

An existing, mature eucalyptus grove will be retained on the north side of the memory care facility in order to provide additional screening of the project from State Route 68 while the project landscaping matures. Removal of the other 80 mature eucalyptus trees on the site will result in reduction of non-native species from the property, reduce potential fire hazards associated with the species, and eliminate the potential hazard of falling limbs and debris that occurs with this eucalyptus species. Initial landscape plantings include a mix of more mature plants to provide some immediate mitigation blended with younger, faster growing

plants which will provide long term mitigation. [Figure 5-9, Visual Simulation from State Route 68](#), presents how the proposed project would be viewed from State Route 68. [Figure 5-10, Visual Simulation from Reservation Road](#), presents how the proposed project would be viewed from Reservation Road. These locations were chosen because they were determined to provide the maximum visibility of the project site from these roadways.

Figure 5-9 Visual Simulation from State Route 68



Source: V. E. Tienne 2015

Figure 5-9
Visual Simulation from State Route 68

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Source: V. E. Tienne 2015



Figure 5-10 Visual Simulation from Reservation Road

River View at Las Palmas Senior Living Community Project Draft EIR

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Recreational Trail

A private recreational trail that is used only by homeowners and residents of Las Palmas Ranch is located to the south of the project site on the periphery of the existing neighborhood. Based on topography, the project site is not within the viewshed of the recreational trail. Components of the proposed project may be within viewpoints along the future trail should it be constructed.

Light and Glare

The proposed project would introduce new sources of light and potential glare as there would be development on a vacant site.

Applicant Proposed Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures intended to reduce impacts to visual resources have been proposed by the applicant.

1. The site shall be landscaped and screened from view from State Route 68, River Road and Las Palmas #1 to the extent feasible. Prior to the issuance of building permits, three (3) copies of a final landscaping plan shall be submitted to the Director of RMA - Planning. The landscaping plan shall be in sufficient detail to identify the location, species, and size of the proposed landscaping and shall include an irrigation plan. The landscaping shall be installed and inspected prior to occupancy. All landscaped areas and/or fences shall be continuously maintained by the applicant and all plant material shall be continuously maintained in a litter-free, weed-free, healthy, growing condition.
2. All exterior lighting shall be unobtrusive, down-lit, harmonious with the local area, and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated and off-site glare is fully controlled. The lighting source shall be shielded and recessed into the fixture. The applicant shall submit three (3) copies of an exterior lighting plan which shall indicate the location, type, and wattage of all light fixtures and include catalog sheets for each fixture. The lighting shall comply with the requirements of the California Energy Code set forth in California Code of Regulations Title 24 Part 6. The exterior lighting plan shall be subject to approval by the Director of RMA-Planning, prior to the issuance of building permits.
3. All new utility and distribution lines shall be placed underground.
4. Colors and materials used for the buildings shall be earth toned to blend with the existing landscape subject to the approval of the Director of Planning.

5.5 IMPACT SUMMARY AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT The Proposed Project Would have an Adverse Impact on Scenic Vistas and the Existing Viewshed when Viewed from State Route 68, River Road, and Reservation Road and Alter the Existing Visual Character of the Project Site (Less than Significant with Mitigation)

The proposed project would be within the existing viewshed of public areas, including from areas that offer views of scenic vistas and from viewpoints on designated and proposed scenic roadways (State Route 68, River Road and Reservation Road). The proposed project would also alter the existing, natural visual character of the project site. Although the LPRSP FEIR concluded that visual impacts on Highway 68 would be less than significant with full buildout of the specific plan area, including the project site, potential visual impacts of the proposed project are considered a significant adverse environmental impact. Implementation of following mitigation measures would reduce the significant impact to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measures

- AES-1 The applicant shall prepare and submit a landscape plan to enhance screening from State Route 68, River Road, Reservation Road, and the adjacent neighborhood and trail. The landscaping plan shall include, but not be limited to, the following:
- a. Location, species, and size of plantings, which must be native and drought-tolerant;
 - b. Mounding, informal massing, or irregularly spaced trees, and plantings;
 - c. Sufficient native trees and landscaping along the perimeter of the developed area to screen the buildings from State Route 68, River Road, Reservation Road, and the adjacent neighborhood; and
 - d. Irrigation plan.

The landscape plans shall be subject to review and approval by the Monterey County Resource Management Agency Planning Director, prior to issuance of building permits. The landscaping shall be installed and inspected prior to occupancy. All landscaped areas and/or fences shall be continuously maintained by the project proponent and all plant material shall be continuously maintained in a litter-free, weed-free, healthy, growing condition. This requirement will be included in permit conditions.

- AES-2 The applicant shall submit a final plan for colors and materials used for the buildings, which shall be earth toned to blend with the existing vicinity landscape, subject to the approval of the Monterey County Resource Management Agency Planning Director, prior to issuance of building permits.
- AES-3 The applicant's final improvement plans shall include construction of all new utility and distribution lines on the project site underground. The improvement plans shall be subject to review and approval of the Monterey County Resource Management Agency Public Works Director, prior to issuance of a grading permit.

Implementation of these mitigation measures will mitigate the impact by requiring the applicant to prepare, implement, and maintain a landscaping plan that will adequately screen the proposed project from vicinity roadways and the adjacent residential neighborhood and trail, utilize colors and materials harmonious with the existing landscape, and require undergrounding all new utility lines on the project site. Although the proposed development would remain partially within the viewshed from surrounding public viewpoints, as displayed in visual simulations prepared for the proposed project, the site design and mitigation measures would reduce public viewshed impacts. Therefore, with the implementation of mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

IMPACT The Proposed Project would Introduce New Sources of Light and Glare to the Project Site and Vicinity (Less than Significant with Mitigation)

Implementation of the proposed project would introduce new sources of light and glare to the project site and vicinity. This is considered a significant adverse environmental impact. Implementation of following mitigation measures would mitigate the impact.

Mitigation Measure

- AES-4 All exterior lighting shall be unobtrusive, down-lit, harmonious with the local area, and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated and off-site glare is fully controlled. The lighting source shall be shielded and recessed into the fixture. Prior to the issuance of building permits, three (3) copies of an exterior lighting plan which shall indicate the location, type, and wattage of all light fixtures and include catalog sheets for each fixture to the Monterey County Resource Management Agency Planning Director. The lighting shall comply with the requirements of the California Energy Code set forth in California Code of Regulations Title 24 Part 6. The exterior lighting plan shall be subject to approval by the Monterey County Resource Management Agency Planning Director, prior to issuance of a building permit.

5.0 Aesthetics

Implementation of this mitigation measure would reduce the impact by requiring lighting design and controls for the proposed project. Therefore, with the implementation of mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.