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## IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

### B. AESTHETICS

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#### INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the subject of aesthetics with respect to the proposed project and includes a description of existing visual conditions and an evaluation of potential aesthetic effects associated with implementing the proposed project. Computer-generated visual simulations illustrating "before" and conceptual "after" visual conditions at the project site as seen from four representative, public vantage points are presented as part of the analysis. These locations are from: Baywood Avenue near Crest Road looking southwest, Harry Allen trail near Crown Road looking north, Goodhill Road looking northwest, and Upper Road entrance to the project site. Digitized photographs and computer modeling and rendering techniques were used to prepare the simulation images.

The visual character of a project site is typically evaluated with respect to its physical components and within the context of its neighborhood through an analysis of its compatibility with the land uses of the immediately surrounding areas. The inherent subjectivity of issues and values relative to visual character often makes it difficult to form a conclusive determination of what constitutes a "significant impact" under CEQA.

Visual impacts are also analyzed through an examination of views and/or viewsheds. Viewsheds refer to the visual qualities of a geographical area that are defined by the horizon, topography, and other natural features that give an area its visual boundary and context, or by development that has become a prominent visual component of the area. Public views are those which can be seen from vantage points that are publicly accessible, such as streets, freeways, parks, and vista points. These views are generally available to a greater number of persons than are private views. Private views are those which can be seen from vantage points located on private property. Impacts to private views are not normally considered to be significant impacts, under CEQA. However, potential impacts to private views from immediately adjacent parcels are discussed in this Draft SEIR section. Potential effects on views from the private decks, windows, patios, etc. at residences in other parts of the larger Town of Ross area must be derived by analogy from assessment of views from nearby public viewsheds, however. Viewshed impacts are typically characterized by the loss and/or obstruction of existing scenic vistas or other major views in the area of the site which are available to the general public. Light and glare impacts are analyzed by considering the qualitative aesthetic characteristics of the existing nighttime lighting and daytime glare environments on the site and the modifications the proposed project would make to those environments.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

### Visual Context

As stated in the Town of Ross General Plan 2007 – 2025, “Set in a valley between open hillsides, Ross enjoys a natural environment where cultural and civic activities are encouraged and thrive. There's an abundance of green from tree-lined streets, parks and open space, to healthy creeks and watershed.” The General Plan further states that “The Town of Ross is a quiet residential community with tree-lined, shady streets. The wooded ravines, open grassy areas and long avenues of large shade trees provide an unmistakable sense that you have arrived in a unique and historic place.”

The combination of mountains, upland hills, valleys, valley floors, and trees creates a particularly scenic environment for Ross. The density of development is relatively low, especially in the hillside areas. As a result, even where they have been subdivided and developed, the foliage-covered hillsides generally provide a scenic backdrop when seen from the valley floor or from a distance across the valley.

In most areas of Ross, only a few residences can be seen from any given viewpoint at one time. This is because the heavy tree cover along the Town's streets, and on adjacent developed lots, blocks or filters views toward the hillsides from most public and private viewpoints. Where breaks in the tree cover are present and viewers can see a horizon, scattered hillside residences are visible but do not dominate the viewing experience. The built environment generally appears well-integrated with the natural topography and oak-bay-madrone woodland environment. While many of the residences are very large, the hillside lots are typically correspondingly large. The low-density and high design-quality character of the community is reinforced by the absence of ridgeline development and the presence of protected greenbelt and open space lands above the Town's westerly hillsides. Exceptional, sweeping views of prominent natural features are available from public and private viewpoints throughout Ross, including Bald Hill, the ridges and peaks of the MMWD watershed lands, and Mount Tamalpais State Park.

The streets on the valley floor and at the lower elevations are lined with tall, leafy trees, which are generally a mixture of exotic and native deciduous species, although evergreens, especially redwoods, are quite common as well. Vegetation cover in the hillside areas is thick and primarily native as the residential development has avoided wholesale tree removal. The density of tree cover on the lower slopes of Bald Hill has likely decreased in recent years due to Sudden Oak Death (SOD), which has infected the forests in Marin County, as well as coastal counties throughout California. Views from cars travelling Upper Road, Upper Road West, and other higher elevation streets in Ross reveal mostly oaks, bays, firs, redwoods, and toyon, with relatively small areas of formal landscaping around the individual homes. On most of the hillside parcels, a large proportion of virtually every site is undeveloped, private open space of varying slopes.

## Site Visibility

The project site, with an area of almost 36 acres lying on the southeastern slope of Bald Hill, is visible from many public and private locations in Ross Valley and surrounding hillsides and from some viewpoints along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, the key travel corridor linking Ross with surrounding communities. Most potential views of the site, however, are blocked by the trees and shrubs that are, themselves, a key part of the visual environment of Ross and the adjoining communities, as well as the lands managed by the MMWD.

A review of topographic maps shows that, theoretically, line of sight views of the parcel are available from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (westbound) between the Ross Valley Estates (formerly Ross Hospital) site and Lagunitas Road and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (eastbound) from Red Hill Road to Lagunitas Road. However, trees, landscaping and structures in the foreground block all but one or two glimpses of the parcel from this key view corridor. Similarly, the site is theoretically visible from anywhere on Lagunitas Road between Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Glenwood Avenue, while in fact, the tree cover is so complete that the project site is not visible when the trees have leaves. Occasional glimpses are available when the leaves have fallen in the autumn. This pattern also reflects the site's limited visibility from other streets in the lower elevations of Ross including portions of Shady Lane, Norwood Ave, Laurel Grove Avenue, and much of Glenwood Avenue, Fernhill Avenue, Bolinas Avenue, and to the south, segments of Popular Avenue, Redwood Drive and Bridge Road. Similarly, views of the site may occasionally be available through breaks in the tree cover from the Ross Common, Ross School and from Branson High School. Relatively open views of the site are available from the more elevated areas and buildings on the San Francisco Theological Seminary campus.

Many hillside areas on the opposite side of Ross Valley have direct line-of-sight views of the project site. There are openings in the tree cover along Baywood Avenue that provide unobstructed public views of Bald Hill and its lower flanks, including the project site. These views are typical of the private views available from the decks and windows of a number of homes built on these steep slopes where the views have been optimized - by design - for the enjoyment of the occupants. Other streets on the western flanks of Ross Valley where views of the site may be available, through breaks in the tree cover, include Upper Toyon Drive (Ross and San Rafael) and Jordan Avenue, Sequoia Drive and Longview Avenue (adjacent to Red Hill) in San Anselmo.

The site is also visible from a small area at the end of Goodhill Road on the northern flank of Ross Hill, on the south side of the Town. At this point, Goodhill Road is almost at an elevation of 700 feet; the view looks across to Bald Hill and the project site is well below the viewer. None of the other street segments on Ross Hill provide public views of the site. In addition, Ross Hill shields views of the site from other areas to the south including the Woodland Road commercial area of Kentfield, most of the College of Marin campus, and open space and trails along Corte Madera Creek between the college and Bon Air Hill.

Because of its position on the eastern flank of Bald Hill, the project site cannot be seen from most of the trails found in the nearby parks and open space lands which generally lie to the west and, south, on the other side of the ridge leading to Bald Hill. The site cannot be seen from the top of Bald Hill because its wide, mounded top blocks views down the steeper slopes below. From trails around Phoenix Lake only the upper reaches of the site are visible. The site is not visible from the Worn Springs Trail, which winds up the eastern face of Bald Hill. However, the site can be seen from a distance by walkers descending Windy Ridge from Knob Hill along the Indian Road trail, about two miles south of the site. There are many viewpoints of the site from various locations on MMWD lands, such as from Eldridge Grade, Indian Road, and from portions Harry Allen Trail located below Crown Road.

### **Views of the Project Site from Adjoining Parcels**

Except for several small, dilapidated and unoccupied structures and a narrow paved driveway, the entire 36-acre site is undeveloped mature woodland on unaltered topography. The only view of the parcel that shows evidence of development is the view of the site entrance from the hairpin turn in Upper Road, where the graded driveway intersects with the street. It is currently marked with a closed gate and a posted notice restricting access.

The four adjoining residential parcels are all smaller than the project site. Three of them (25, 27 and 31 Upper Road) have residences that are sited less than 100 feet from the property boundary. The fourth, at 7 Upper Road, is in a topographic bowl at the base of the project site. The residences at 7, 25 and 27 Upper Road face away from the site, so the site is potentially visible from their rear and side yards and windows, depending on foliage. The fourth residence, at 31 Upper Road, appears to be situated to optimize views to the south, toward Ross Hill. These views overlook the project site. While none of these residences were visited in conjunction with preparing this Draft SEIR, it is apparent that viewers from any of these locations see the site as an undeveloped natural, forested open space area.

Visitors to the park and open space lands that border most of the site's perimeter, have essentially the same visual impressions of the site as its adjoining neighbors. From Natalie Coffin Green Park, the site is visually indistinguishable from the park itself. Up above, there is only an old fence line to mark the site's border with the MMWD lands - visually the landscapes are blended. Only a trained eye would notice that the property ownerships may be different because of differences in past invasive shrub (Scotch broom) removal and wildfire fuel reduction- work on the respective properties. Due to topography, the site is essentially over the ridge and out of view from the Worn Springs Road trail, even though the trail passes close to the site's boundary at one point.



The photos presented in this discussion include views from vantage points in areas surrounding the project site in which the site is visible, as well as views of other surrounding land uses. In no way are the photos meant as an exhaustive collection of all the views that include the project site from all vantage points, but is meant to show representative views toward the site from the surrounding areas. Figure IV.B-1 shows views on and from the project site and Figure IV.B-2 provides views from the project site and near to the project site. Figures III-4 and III-5 in Section III (Project Description) also provide views of the project site; Figure III-6 shows views of the project site and surrounding uses; while Figure III-7 provides only views of nearby areas.





**View 1.** View of Swan Swale within the project site.



**View 2.** View of former water tank on-site.



**View 3.** View of dilapidated greenhouse on-site.



**View 4.** View of existing cabin on-site.

**Figure IV.B-1 Views of the Project Site**

**Upper Road Land Division Project  
Town of Ross, California**





**View 1.** View of Mt. Tamalpais from the project site.



**View 2.** Southeastern view of Upper Road from project entrance.



**View 3.** View of fencing along Upper Road adjacent to the project site.



**View 4.** View of Lagunitas Country Club located near the project site.

**Figure IV.B-2 Views of Surrounding Uses**

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### **Scenic Vistas and Ridgelines**

The Town of Ross General Plan 2007 – 2025, Excellence of Design section, contains policies aimed in part to preserve the visual character of the Town. Although the General Plan does not define the term “scenic vista” the section draws a connection between open space and the Town’s visual resources. The visual resources noted in this section are views from public areas of hillsides, ridgelines, Mount Tamalpais, and Bald Hill. The General Plan discusses the importance of protecting the Town’s important viewsheds and landforms.

### **Scenic Roadways**

There are no roadways or highways designated as “scenic” by the State of California in Marin County. In addition, no officially designated scenic roadways are discussed in the Town of Ross’s General Plan. However, General Plan policies that address the preservation of views from public places include those views from the Town’s “major thoroughfares.” The public views from these roadways are included in this analysis.

### **Light and Glare**

There are currently no sources of nighttime lighting on the site, nor are any reflective surfaces present. Daytime sources of glare in the vicinity of the site include reflections off of light-colored surfaces, windows, and metal details on cars traveling on Upper Road and the adjacent homes. Light sources in the vicinity of the site include headlights of cars traveling nearby, and outdoor and indoor lighting from the adjacent land uses.

## **REGULATORY SETTING**

### **Federal and State**

Currently no Federal and State policies and/or mandates related to aesthetics exist.

### **Local**

As previously mentioned, Town of Ross General Plan 2007 – 2025 includes several goals and policies considered to be applicable for aesthetics:

- **Goal 1: An Abundance of Green and Healthy Natural Systems.** Ross’ mystique lies in the beauty of its natural resources: the trees, hillsides, ridgelines and meandering creeks. These features have shaped the growth of Ross and affect how we experience the community. They provide habitat for wildlife, privacy between neighbors, and create scenic vistas around every bend.
- **Policy 1.1: Protection of Environmental Resources.** Protect environmental resources such as hillsides, ridgelines, creeks, drainage ways, trees and tree groves, threatened and endangered species habitat, riparian vegetation, cultural places, and other

resources. These resources are unique in the planning area because of their scarcity, scientific value, aesthetic quality and cultural significance.

- **Policy 1.2 Tree Canopy Preservation.** Protect and expand the tree canopy of Ross to enhance the beauty of the natural landscape. Recognize that the tree canopy is critical to provide shade, reduce ambient temperatures, improve the uptake of carbon dioxide, prevent erosion and excess stormwater runoff, provide habitat for wildlife and birds, and protect the ecosystem of the under-story vegetation.
- **Policy 1.3: Tree Maintenance and Replacement.** Assure proper tree maintenance and replacement.
- **Policy 1.4: Natural Areas Retention.** Maximize the amount of land retained in its natural state. Wherever possible, residential development should be designed to preserve, protect and restore native site vegetation and habitat. In addition, where possible and appropriate, invasive vegetation should be removed.
- **Goal 2: Sustainable Building and Community Practices.** As part of the larger community, Ross recognizes our responsibility to conserve the environment for future generations by incorporating sustainable practices as a guiding principle for all our actions, including project design, conservation and energy efficiency, integrated pest management, land use, circulation and transportation.
- **Policy 2.1: Sustainable Practices.** Support measures to reduce consumption and improve energy efficiency through all elements of the Ross General Plan and Town regulations and practices, including:
  - (d) Choose the most sustainable portion of a site for development and leaving more of a site in its natural condition to reduce land impacts on the natural environment.
- **Policy 2.4: Footprints of Buildings.** Utilize smaller footprints to minimize the built area of a site and to allow the maximum amount of landscaped and/or permeable surfaces.
- **Goal 3: Design with Nature, Neighborhood and Community.** Ross encourages architectural variety of buildings and the open feeling of the Town. Buildings recede into the background while landscaping and open space take center stage. Ross' neighborhoods mix old and new construction through the use of appropriate building materials and landscaping, and through the appropriate design, scale, and siting of improvements. We have come to expect an excellence of design that blends with the neighborhood setting.
- **Policy 3.1: Building and Site Design.** Design all structures and improvements to respect existing natural topographic contours. Open areas and buildings shall be located to protect land forms and natural site features, including cultural places and resources, wherever possible. Where feasible, site development must avoid intact or previously disturbed cultural resources during excavation and grading.

- **Policy 3.2: Landscape Design.** Where appropriate, encourage landscape designs that incorporate existing native vegetation, enhance the cohesiveness of the Town's lush, organic landscape and integrate new planting with existing site features. Plans shall recognize the importance of open space on a lot and shall address the look and feel of the space between structures so as to avoid overbuilding.
- **Policy 3.3: Buildings on Sloping Land.** New buildings and additions to existing, residential buildings constructed on sloping land should be designed to relate to the current landforms with the goal of integrating the building with the site. (E.g. step with the slope). Low retaining walls are encouraged where their use would minimize uphill cutting, and large single-plane retaining walls should be avoided. Cut and fill areas and on/off-hauling should be minimized, especially in locations of limited or difficult access. Special care should be taken to final grade all disturbed areas to a natural appearing configuration and to direct stormwater runoff to areas where water can naturally infiltrate the soil.
- **Policy 3.4: Bulk, Mass and Scale.** Minimize the perception of building bulk and mass so that homes are not out of scale, visually or structurally, with neighboring residences and their setting. Consider building bulk and mass during the design review process, and when applying requirements and guidelines addressing Floor Area Ratio (FAR), maximum home floor area and other development standards. Building heights should stay in scale with surrounding vegetation and buildings.
- **Policy 3.5: View Protection.** Preserve views and access to views of hillsides, ridgelines, Mt. Tamalpais and Bald Hill from the public right-of-way and public property. Ensure that the design, look, and feel along major thoroughfares maintains the "greenness" of the Town.
- **Policy 3.8: Driveways and Parking Areas.** Driveways and parking areas should be designed to minimize visibility from the street and to provide safe access, minimal grading and/or retaining walls, and to protect water quality. Permeable materials should be used to increase water infiltration. Driveways and parking areas should be graded to minimize stormwater runoff.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

### Thresholds of Significance

Based on the CEQA Standards of Significance, the project would generally be considered to have a significant impact on the environment if it would:

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

### Aesthetics Impacts not Further Analyzed

The following issues were addressed in the Initial Study (see Appendix A) and Section IV.A of the Draft SEIR and were determined to result in no impact or a less-than-significant impact and not warrant further analysis:

- Substantially Damage Scenic Resources within a State Highway

However, General Plan policies that address the preservation of views from public places include those views from the Town's "major thoroughfares." The public views from these roadways are included in this analysis.

### Project Description

The proposed project is the approval of a Vesting Tentative Subdivision Map for three residential sites and approval of Design Review and Hillside Lot Applications for grading, and retaining wall construction and approvals for a common driveway and utilities to serve the site. The proposed Map would divide the parcel into three lots of 11.09, 11.00, and 12.08 acres each.

Access to the site is from Upper Road via Lagunitas Road and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. The site entrance is located adjacent to a tight hairpin curve on Upper Road. A common road would serve the three home sites. Private driveways would connect each home to the common road. From the project entrance at Upper Road, a 20-foot wide common road would extend about 992 feet connecting Upper Road to 12-foot driveways for each parcel. The Parcel 1 driveway would be 39 feet long; the Parcel 2 driveway would measure 59 feet; and Parcel 3 would extend 126 feet, relying on an upslope retaining wall for support. Most of the common road would be depressed in a graded cut, with retaining walls on the westerly side and a cut upslope on the easterly side. The curving entranceway would have a maximum slope of 18 percent compared to the 27 percent average slope of the existing topography at this location.

A curb and gutter would line the westerly side and a two foot wide shoulder would mark the easterly side of the road. Natural rock-clad, tiered retaining walls in compliance with Town code would support the road. The depressed design of this common road would allow auto travel while buffering noise and headlight effects on neighboring properties.

The project site features moderate topography with an elevation change of approximately 220 feet from the Upper Road entrance to the area above the westerly boundary of Parcel 3. Accordingly, the road system climbs uphill as it traverses the site. The applicant has substantially shortened the road length from the previous proposal, from 2,741 to 992 feet, which is a change of 63 percent – and lowered the road grade from an average of 20-25 percent grade to an average of 15 percent. Parcel driveways would not exceed 18 percent in grade with more level transitions to building areas ranging from 2-8 percent.

The project objectives of balancing cut and fill on-site and reducing road grades is proposed to be accomplished by taking the cut material from the road system and incorporating it into a single fill pad on Parcel 1 with irregular contours which preserve the adjacent Redwood grove and swales. A series of six terraced concrete retaining walls of approximately six feet in height would also be constructed on Parcel 1 to buttress the fill material.

The Preliminary Landscaping Plan details tree removal and replacement landscaping (Figures III-14, III-15, and III-16). The arborist report identifies 72 trees that are "dead/fallen/hazardous/diseased" and 356 additional trees to be removed for development for a total of 428 trees proposed to be removed. The replanting plan (Figures III-15 and III-16) illustrates that 977 trees are proposed be replanted to completely reforest the site with a greater diversity of native trees. The proposed tree replacement design reduces tree loss by 57 percent compared to the previously-proposed project design. The Preliminary Landscape Plan also indicates that disturbed areas would be reseeded with a mix of native seeds and that drip irrigation systems would be installed for each lot.

No specific residential designs are proposed at this time and none would be reviewed as a part of the current application. If the subdivision were approved, the Town would review any subsequent applications for custom-built homes on each individual parcel in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance and other applicable standards and procedures. For a more comprehensive description of the project, see Section III (Project Description).

### **Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

As described previously, computer-generated visual simulations illustrating "before" and conceptual "after" visual conditions at the project site as seen from four representative, public vantage points are presented as part of the analysis. Four visual simulations were prepared using views from Goodhill Road, Baywood Avenue, Harry Allen Trail, and from Upper Road at the entrance to the project (Figures IV.B-3A, B – IV.B-6A, B). An existing conditions view figure and a visual simulation figure is included for each location. The visual simulations represent views of the project site five to ten years after construction has been completed and landscaping



planted. Digitized photographs, computer modeling, and rendering techniques were used to prepare the simulation images. Assumptions used for the production of the visual simulation images were that all of the houses constructed would be two-stories, 30 feet tall, with light, earth-toned colors. The house simulated on parcel 1 was assumed to be 6,639 square feet, on parcel 2, 8,834 square feet and parcel 3, 7,658 square feet. Landscaping and tree assumptions were based on the landscape plan provided by the applicant with 'box' sized trees in designated locations. Trees are shown between 5 and 10 years after planting.

The treatment of the retaining walls is assumed to be either with Concrete Masonry Units (CMU) construction or poured-in-place concrete walls, either of which would be clad with natural rocks. The project would maximize the use of on-site rocks, gathered during the site grading process. The rock-cladding would assist in lessening the aesthetic impact of the retaining walls. The Town, in conjunction with future development approvals, would require landscape plans for the individual residences. The visual simulations assume landscape treatments of the areas around the individual homes; however, no auxiliary structures, swimming pools or patios are shown.



Existing view from Goodhill Road looking northwest.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-3A Existing View - Goodhill Road

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Visual simulation of proposed project at 5-10 years.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-3B Visual Simulation - Goodhill Road

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Existing view from Baywood Avenue looking southwest.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-4A Existing View - Baywood Avenue

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Visual simulation of proposed project at 5-10 years.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-4B Visual Simulation - Baywood Avenue

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Existing view from Harry Allen Trail looking north.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-5A Existing View - Harry Allen Trail

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Visual simulation of proposed project at 5-10 years.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-5B Visual Simulation - Harry Allen Trail

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Existing view from Upper Road at project entrance.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-6A Existing View - Upper Road

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Visual simulation of proposed project at 5-10 years.

Source: Environmental Vision

Figure IV.B-6B Visual Simulation - Upper Road

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### *Impact AES-1: Impacts on Scenic Vistas*

A significant impact may occur if a project were to introduce incompatible scenic elements within a field of view containing a scenic vista or substantially block views of a scenic vista. The Town of Ross General Plan 2007 – 2025, Excellence of Design section contains policies aimed in part to preserve the visual character of the Town. Although the General Plan does not define the term “scenic vista” the section draws a connection between open space and the Town’s visual resources. The visual resources noted in this section are views of hillsides, ridgelines, Mount Tamalpais and Bald Hill from public areas. The General Plan discusses the importance of protecting the Town's important viewsheds and landforms.

Four computer simulations of the proposed development have been prepared from key, public viewpoints in order to communicate the degree of visual change that could result from construction of the project. Viewpoints were selected based on field observations of existing conditions, line-of-sight evaluations of topographic maps, input from comments received from the current and past Notices of Preparation, and a review of previous environmental studies, which entailed public input in the selection of key viewpoints. Viewpoints used in the simulations were views from Goodhill Road looking northwest; Baywood Avenue near Crest Road looking southwest across Ross Valley; Harry Allen Trail just below Crown Road on MMWD land, looking north; and Upper Road from the entrance to the project site.

#### *A. Goodhill Road Viewpoint*

From the Goodhill Road viewpoint on Ross Hill (Figure IV.B-3A), viewers are approximately 300 feet higher in elevation than the project site. Therefore, viewers would not only look out across at the project, but down on the site as well. The distance from the Goodhill Road viewpoint to the site is approximately 2,000 feet. The character of the existing view includes a small amount of residential development among a large cover of trees seen to the northeast of the site and the open space of Bald Hill and Natalie Coffin Green Park. The view looks across the Ross Creek canyon. Phoenix Lake is only a short distance to the west (left) but cannot be viewed from this location. In addition, the project site itself is not visible from Phoenix Lake.

Existing development in view from this location features a small number of widely spaced homes, which appear to be similar in size to the proposed homes, and a slight view of a fire road on the left side of the view. The density of development increases at the lower elevations, although this is not obvious from the photo in Figure IV.B-3A. The small number of existing homes visible in Figure IV.3A have light exterior colors and are quite evident. Other homes are relatively dark or feature natural finishes and are less conspicuous. For the most part, the hillside appears evenly-wooded to a point approximately three-quarters of the way up the slope toward Bald Hill. Above this point, the grass covered, rounded slopes of Bald Hill become the characteristic feature of the landscape.

A variety of tree species, including coniferous and deciduous trees is evident, particularly during the fall and winter months. The dense cover of surrounding vegetation softens the image of



development. Homes seem to be set among the trees. In a few instances, it is evident that the property in front of existing homes has been cleared of trees perhaps for a variety of reasons, such as to provide solar access, defensible space, views for occupants or for accessory buildings and parking. For the most part, this creates a pattern on the hillside that reflects that created by natural openings in the tree canopy. Access roads and driveways into existing residences are generally not evident. This is mostly due to the retention of tree cover along the shoulder of roadways, and to the winding nature of hillside access and driveways, which does not allow for direct lines-of-sight down the center of straight segments. As with the views from Baywood Avenue, none of the new buildings would appear to be located on ridgelines. From this viewpoint, only two of the three houses proposed would be able to be seen, after five to ten years of landscape growth, due to topography and tree cover (Figure IV.B-3B).

### *B. Baywood Avenue Viewpoint*

The view from the Baywood Avenue viewpoint is shown in Figure IV.B-4A. From this location, views are oriented in a southwesterly direction, toward the Town and the project site beyond. More existing structures are seen from this location than from the Goodhill Road viewing area. The Baywood Avenue viewpoint is northeast of the site, at an elevation slightly above the elevation of the proposed homes within the project site. The distance to the site is approximately 1.4 miles. Bald Hill and other natural open space lands form the horizon line, and below it, the view provides a relatively clear sense of Ross. Many large deciduous trees are visible among the rooftops of buildings situated in the valley, where most development is concentrated. Lower density residential development is seen on the hillsides, some of which is at a higher elevation than the project site. The homes with dark exterior colors tend to be visually absorbed into the hillside among the tree cover while those much lighter in color are more conspicuous.

Vegetative patterns in the lower areas of the valley have distinct color variations during the fall season, adding visual interest. On the hillsides, the dark gray-green colors of the oak woodlands have less seasonal variation, and at the upper elevations provide a crisp line of contrast where they meet the light colored grasslands that cover the top of Bald Hill. Openings in the tree cover, whether natural or constructed, are not particularly evident from this viewpoint. Access roads and driveways serving existing hillside homes are not evident. As can be seen in Figure IV.B-4B, the construction of the homes and access road would only minimally alter the site's existing natural character as viewed from this location, and would be slightly visible from Baywood Avenue and from a number of hillside private homes that are accessed by Baywood Avenue, Crest Avenue and other streets on the upper slopes of the east side of Ross Valley. The buildings themselves would barely be seen and would be seen in an overall context that includes more than 20 existing hillside homes on the slopes of Bald Hill. The maximum size of the buildings permitted under applicable Town policies would be 9,148 square feet, generally at the larger end of the range of existing homes that are visible. However, the residences are proposed to contain the following approximate square footages: Parcel 1 – 6,600; Parcel 2 – 8,800; and Parcel 3 – 7,650. The residences would be difficult to see from this location, after

five to ten years of tree growth, as shown in the visual simulation. However, the access road to parcel 2 would climb higher up the hillside than any other roads and would be slightly visible. However, the applicant has shortened substantially the road length from the previous proposal, from 2,741 to 992 feet, which is a change of 63 percent – and lowered the road grade from an average of 20-25 percent grade to an average of 15 percent. Parcel driveways would not exceed 18 percent in grade with more level transitions to building areas ranging from 2-8 percent.

### *C. Harry Allen Trail Viewpoint*

The existing view from Harry Allen Trail is shown in Figure IV.B-5A and the visual simulation at this location is shown in Figure IV.B.5B. From this location, views are oriented in a northerly direction toward the project site. The Harry Allen Trail viewpoint is south of the site and the distance from this location to the site is approximately 0.70 miles. Portions of the project site are visible from the upper segment of this public trail, near Crest Road, but the site is not visible further down the trail toward Phoenix Lake due to intervening topography and vegetation. Bald Hill and other natural open space lands form the horizon line, and below it, a portion of Phoenix Lake and the Phoenix Lake dam are visible. With the exception of the existing homes near the project site, no other homes are visible from this viewpoint. The homes with dark exterior colors tend to be visually absorbed into the hillside among the tree cover while those much lighter in color are more conspicuous. After five to ten years of landscape growth, only one house would be visible from this location. The structure would be located on the right side of the view, at a distance, in an area where other existing houses can be seen.

### *D. Upper Road Entrance Viewpoint*

The existing view at the entrance to the project site on Upper Road is shown in Figure IV.B-6A and the simulation is provided in Figure IV.B.6B. The existing view is that of natural trees, bushes, and low-lying plants. Cables are strung over the site, perhaps for electrical, telephone, or cable television service, and an existing telephone pole is visible on the right side of the photograph. A narrow unpaved access roadway is seen on the side of the road, which is the current access to the site. This view is accessible as drivers, pedestrians, or bicyclists pass the site briefly on Upper Road, but not to the public at large. There is no pedestrian sidewalk located on Upper Road, which is a narrow, winding roadway, providing access to residences in that area. As can be seen in Figure IV.B.6B, the new access roadway to the new proposed houses would be conspicuous to all viewers who passed by on Upper Road. The new road would be wider and paved with asphalt, as opposed to the current narrow road. Vegetation and trees would be required to be removed for the new accessway, resulting in less tree canopy above the entrance and more open views of the sky above. However, this view would be similar to many of the other views of driveways and accessways on Upper Road. Many other driveways along Upper Road begin with a closed gate of various construction, some which are solid and block views into that property.

As demonstrated by the visual simulations, the project would extend the existing low-density residential development pattern a little farther to the south. Site development, as seen from across Ross Valley, would be completely or partially screened by existing and proposed on-site tree cover, depending on the viewing location. Some of the roadway and driveways constructed as part of the project may also be visible from distant off-site viewpoints with this perspective. The current proposed project results in a substantial reduction of the aesthetic impacts, as compared to the previously-proposed project, as the water tank and associated roadway have been eliminated. Further, the driveways have been shortened and the common road grade has been lowered.

The proposed project would change the view from the viewpoints in the following ways:

1. The project would modify an area seen as undeveloped forest with the addition of three homes, and associated driveways and access road. Not all of the homes would be able to be seen from all locations analyzed. This would be a small continuation of home development seen to the north.
2. The project would be seen as a continuation of the existing low-density residential development on the lower flanks of Bald Hill.
3. The project site would be served by a widened and paved road off of Upper Road. Users of Upper Road would see this expanded accessway and native vegetation and landscaping would be required to be removed.

As discussed in Section III (Project Description), the Preliminary Development Plan (Figure III-9) depicts grading, drainage and utilities, and identifies the locations of the proposed building sites and driveways. Figure III-10 illustrates detailed grading and drainage plans. The plans identify anticipated volumes of cut and fill and locations of retaining walls, culverts, catch basins and the bridge, all associated with the road and driveway construction. Preliminary driveway profiles are illustrated in Figure III-11.

The project objectives of balancing cut and fill on-site and reducing road grades are proposed to be accomplished by taking the cut material from the road system and incorporating it into a single fill pad on Parcel 1 with irregular contours which preserve the adjacent Redwood grove and swales. A series of six terraced concrete retaining walls of approximately six feet in height would also be constructed on Parcel 1 to buttress the fill material.

As also described in the Project Description, the tree survey identified 2,187 subject trees; each numbered and tagged by the arborist. The arborist report identifies 72 trees that are "dead/fallen/hazardous/diseased" and 356 additional trees to be removed for development for a total of 428 trees proposed to be removed. The replanting plan (Figures III-15 and III-16) illustrates that 977 trees are proposed be replanted to completely reforest the site with a greater diversity of native trees. As illustrated, the proposed project includes the installation of box trees. Box trees give an immediate presence and maturity to a newly installed landscape. These trees create an instant effect while allowing trees growing from small containers to catch up over time,

thus reducing the aesthetic impacts of the project. The proposed tree replacement design reduces tree loss by 57 percent compared to the previously-proposed project design.

During the grading of the project site and the removal of trees, the change in the views of the site would be noticeable and from some locations, may appear to be a substantial change from what exists now. However, after the new trees and associated landscaping have matured, the visual changes would not be highly visible and it would appear that the project, as now designed, conforms to the relevant *General Plan* policies related to view preservation and visual quality. Accordingly, it is concluded that the project would have a **significant** visual impact from for a short time frame of approximately five – seven years and after that time period; the project would have a **less-than-significant** aesthetics impact once the new trees and associated landscaping have matured. No mitigation measures are available to mitigate for the short-term aesthetic impact; therefore, the short-term impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

*Impact AES-2: Impacts on Visual Character of the Project Site and Surroundings*

A significant impact may occur if a project were to introduce incompatible visual elements on the project site or visual elements that would be incompatible with the character of the area surrounding the site. As discussed previously in this section, the project site is located in a low-density area characterized by residential and recreational hiking land uses. Construction of the project would result in the three new houses, a common accessway, and driveways on the project site, which is consistent with the land uses in the area. Construction of the project and associated grading and tree removal is described in the Project Description and in Impact AES-1 above. The construction of the project and associated grading and tree removal would likely be viewable from immediately adjacent parcels. The short-term impacts to adjacent private views could be considered a major change and occupants would presumably regard it as a degradation of the site's existing visual setting. The massing and height of the proposed buildings would be similar to other residential structures in the area.

The project would have a **significant** visual impact for a short-term time frame of approximately five years on the character of the area from public and immediately adjacent private viewpoints, and after that time period, the project would have a **less-than-significant** aesthetics impact once the new trees and associated landscaping have matured. No mitigation measures are available to mitigate for the short-term aesthetic impact; therefore, the short-term impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Although the proposed project would slightly alter the visual character of the area, the alteration in the long-term, after trees and landscaping matured, would not constitute a substantial degradation and would not be visual from most locations. Therefore, long-term project impacts on the visual character of the surrounding area from private and public views would be **less than significant** and no mitigation measures are required.

### *Impact AES-3: Light and Glare Impacts*

A significant impact may occur if a project were to introduce new sources of light or glare on or from the project site which would be incompatible with the area surrounding the project site, or which pose a safety hazard to motorists utilizing adjacent streets. The project site is located in a low-density area with a large amount of foliage and steep topography. Daytime sources of glare in the vicinity of the site include reflections off of light-colored surfaces, windows, and metal details on cars travelling on Upper Road. Light sources in the vicinity of the site include streetlights in the lower, commercial area of Ross, headlights of cars on streets, and outdoor and indoor lighting from the adjacent land uses. There are no existing light sources on the project site.

Implementation of the proposed project would introduce new sources of light and glare, including interior and exterior building lighting and vehicle headlights, reflective surfaces, such as windows and light-colored paint on a site that is currently vacant. The areas immediately surrounding the project site include single family residential land uses and open space. The introduction of additional light and glare from the new development would be noticeable to some viewers in the surrounding area. However, the additional light and glare sources would not be substantial enough to significantly impact day or nighttime views in the area. Light and glare impacts would be ***less than significant*** and no mitigation measures are required.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The related projects listed in Section III, Project Description, Table III-1, primarily consist of bridge and existing school facility improvements. Some projects listed in the table are still in the planning stages. With the exception of the MMWD vegetation management plan and two water tanks, none of the related projects are located adjacent to the project site. While a few related projects are located within the same viewshed as the proposed project, they are dispersed sufficiently enough to not contribute to significant cumulative aesthetics impacts. Cumulative impacts would be ***less than significant***.

## **LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION**

Aesthetics impacts associated with the proposed project for the short-term would be ***significant and unavoidable***. However, after the maturing of landscaping, the aesthetic impacts would be considered ***less than significant***.

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