

5. *Environmental Analysis*

5.1 **AESTHETICS**

Characterizing aesthetics can be highly subjective. As evaluated in this section of the DEIR, aesthetics relates to visual resources and scenic vistas. Visual resources can be generally characterized as landforms (i.e., topography and grading), views (i.e., scenic resources), and light and glare (i.e., nighttime illumination). The aesthetic impacts of the general plan update are evaluated in this section based on an objective set of thresholds focused on visual features of the built environment and natural landscape as well as the sensitivity of receptors to these features.

5.1.1 **Environmental Setting**

While the City of Torrance is primarily built out, it retains a natural landscape that balances its heavily urbanized character. There are numerous aesthetic features, including a municipal beach, various recreational and natural open spaces, mature trees, and an ecologically significant wetland.

Visual Character

The City of Torrance is on an almost entirely flat land area in a highly developed area in the South Bay region of Los Angeles County. Approximately 87 percent (9,136 acres) of the 10,506 acres that compose the City of Torrance are developed.¹ Since the incorporation of Torrance in 1921, it has been characterized by a balanced blend of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses, making the visual character of the City relatively urban. Developed land uses such as residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, public, institutional, airport, and utility and transportation easements are located throughout the City. The prevalence of industrial land uses throughout the middle of the 20th century is still apparent with the presence of auto manufacturing headquarters, such as Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. and American Honda Motor Company, and a large Exxon Mobil oil refinery plant.

The dominant land use in Torrance, however, is housing, which totals 49 percent (2,276 acres) of the developed land and varies in density depending on location. Higher density housing primarily exists along major corridors throughout the City. Lower density residential areas are west of Hawthorne Boulevard. Approximately 1,273 acres (12 percent) of the City is composed of commercial uses. Commercial developments in the City exist either as stand-alone neighborhood-serving commercial businesses; commercial strips along Pacific Coast Highway, Hawthorne Boulevard, and Sepulveda Boulevard; or large commercial centers such as the Del Amo Mall on Hawthorne Boulevard south of Torrance Boulevard. Hawthorne Boulevard has a specific plan, the Hawthorne Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan, to guide the type and visual character of commercial development along this strip.

The City of Torrance is primarily built-out. Public/Quasi-Public/Open Space represents approximately 12 percent (1,254 acres) of the City's total area. Public/Quasi-Public/Open Space consists of public schools, parks, government, police and fire stations, libraries, and water treatment facilities, including the 20-acre Torrance Beach and the 44-acre Madrona Marsh Nature Preserve. Local parks are scattered throughout the City. Three larger parks include the Madrona Marsh Nature Preserve, Charles H. Wilson Park, and Columbia

¹ The 10,506 acres are net acres and do not include streets, railroads, freeways, and other rights-of-way.



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Regional Park. The City of Torrance has a limited supply of vacant land. Of the 116 acres of vacant land, 94 percent lies within commercial and industrial areas, and 6 percent lies within residential areas.

Visual Resources

Landforms

The City of Torrance is in the southwestern portion of Los Angeles County, south of the San Gabriel Mountains. The City lies at the northern end of the Peninsular Ranges. The Palos Verdes Hills are the westernmost onshore uplift in the Peninsular Ranges province. Near the City's southern boundary, the sedimentary rock is tilted to the north and northeast, generally in the range of about 15 to 45 degrees. At the base of the hills, within City limits, the major structural feature is the northwest-trending Palos Verdes fault zone, which is continuous for about 60 miles, mostly offshore. This fault zone is a steeply dipping oblique-slip fault. Elevation ranges from 60 to 100 feet above mean sea level (amsl) in the area of the El Segundo Sand Hills to approximately 1,480 feet (amsl) in the Palos Verdes Hills.

The low-lying areas of the City, including beaches and stream channels, are underlain by Holocene deposits. Pleistocene deposits are widespread in the western and central parts of the City, as well as along the north flank of the Palos Verdes Hills. The Palos Verdes Hills are underlain primarily by an assemblage of sedimentary rocks uplifted by multiple episodes of faulting and folding. All of these rocks are marine in origin, having formed from sediments deposited in a deep ocean embayment that encroached into the Los Angeles basin prior to uplift of the region.

Natural Features

Torrance contains significantly less natural vegetation, areas of ecological and other scientific study value, rivers, streams, plant and animal wildlife, etc., than the neighboring cities on the Palos Verdes peninsula. The City of Torrance is highly developed, and biological resources have been largely removed or modified throughout the City. Remnants of native habitats and vegetation communities are virtually absent throughout the City of Torrance. However, there are numerous mature specimen trees throughout the City. Native and nonnative trees and plants are present throughout developed areas of the City.

Although the City is nearly built out, one of the last vernal wetlands in Los Angeles County can be found in Torrance. The 44-acre Madrona Marsh is a nature preserve on undeveloped land once set aside for oil production, and is the most prominent land supporting wildlife habitat in the City. The habitat represents the most important habitat area in the City of Torrance. The Madrona Marsh Preserve includes four habitat associations: vernal marsh, vernal pool, alkaline margin, and back dune system.

Torrance is on the Pacific Ocean and in the Los Angeles Basin. Torrance Beach is in the southwest portion on the City and lies between Redondo Beach and Malaga Cove. Torrance Beach is framed by the hills of Palos Verdes south of Redondo Beach. The beach extends roughly one mile along the Pacific coast, reaches inland approximately 200 feet, and provides approximately 20 acres of beach for swimming, surfing, and sunbathing.

Regional geographic characteristics include the San Bernardino Mountains approximately 30 miles to the northeast, and the San Gabriel Mountains approximately 20 miles to the north. The Angeles National Forest and the San Bernardino National Forest border the Los Angeles Basin to the north and east.

Scenic Vistas

The relatively flat topography of the City of Torrance creates opportunities for many views of the community and surrounding natural features. The hillsides along the City's western and southern boundaries create scenic opportunities. The distant San Gabriel Mountains can be viewed to the north. In addition, the hillsides of the Riviera neighborhood provide panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean that are valuable to the residents of the community.

The City of Torrance is served by one interstate and four state highways. The San Diego Freeway (I-405) and Pacific Coast Highway (SR-1) traverse the City in an east-west direction. Western Avenue (SR-213), and Hawthorne Boulevard (SR-107) traverse the City in a north-south direction. These segments of I-405, SR-1, SR-213, and SR-107 have not been officially designated as scenic highways by the California Department of Transportation.

Unique Scenic Resources

Torrance has numerous tree corridors in the City. Many trees were planted in the early decades of the 1900s as street trees in residential neighborhoods and windbreaks on what was once agricultural land. The eucalyptus trees that parallel Torrance Boulevard between Madrona Avenue and Border Avenue average over sixty feet in height and eighty years in age. Eucalyptuses of similar age and height line segments of Pacific Coast Highway between Crenshaw Boulevard and Calle Mayor, along Plaza Del Amo from Carson Street to Arlington Avenue, and in the WALTERIA area. Downtown Torrance contains acacias, palms, camphors, jacarandas, and California pepper trees dating back to the establishment of the area. In the Hollywood Riviera neighborhood, there are excellent examples of pine, eucalyptus, palm, and bottle brush trees planted in the late 1920s.



5.1.2 Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a project would normally have a significant effect on the environment if the project would:

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

The initial study, included as Appendix A, substantiates that impacts associated with the following thresholds would be less than significant:

- Threshold AE-2

This impact will not be addressed in the following analysis.

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5.1.3 Environmental Impacts

The following impact analysis addresses thresholds of significance for which the initial study disclosed potentially significant impacts. The applicable thresholds are identified in brackets after the impact statement.

IMPACT 5.1-1: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE WOULD NOT SUBSTANTIALLY ALTER THE VISUAL APPEARANCE OF THE CITY. [THRESHOLDS AE-1 AND AE-3]

Impact Analysis: The Madrona Marsh and views of the Pacific Ocean from the hillsides of Riviera are the major natural landscape features of the Torrance area and provide significant scenic views for the Torrance community. The existing scale and design of the City, as well as its land uses, complement and preserve the Madrona Marsh and views of the Pacific Ocean. The municipal code recognizes the value of undisturbed places through the preservation of the Madrona Marsh. Policies in the community resource element maintain the Madrona Marsh Nature Preserve for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations. In addition, policies in the community resource element recognize the City's intent to conserve the maximum amount of beach area possible, support efforts to protect the environmentally and economically sensitive offshore waters of Torrance Beach, and preserve and restore natural plant and animal habitat at the beach (see Section 5.1.5 for relevant policies).

Development in accordance with the proposed land use plan could negatively affect the numerous tree corridors in the City. The City of Torrance Municipal Code recognizes the value of trees to the community and requires that, "no person may cut, trim, remove, prune, plant, injure or interfere with any tree upon any street, park, alley or public place of the City without first obtaining a permit from the Public Works Director." The general plan update provides additional policies preserving specimen trees and encourages the development and implementation a comprehensive citywide street tree program. Additionally, implementation of the general plan update encourages planting of new trees and preserves existing street trees in residential neighborhoods.

The majority of proposed land use changes are concentrated within seven land use study areas and reflect the existing conditions in these areas. These study areas were identified as in transition; that is, experiencing land use changes, physical blight, or stagnation and where properties are underutilized or undervalued. Focused development of these areas would enhance the visual appearance of the City. The land use element provides specific policies for these study areas that guide the City toward its land use goals. The goals and policies for these study areas are to encourage the recycling of older uses, the transition of land uses by providing opportunities for increased residential and commercial development, the encouragement of commercial/residential mixed-use development, and the buffering of commercial uses from residential areas to mitigate the effects of noise, traffic, etc. These study areas will be guided by policies in the general plan update. The land use element encourages the transition of incompatible, ineffective, and/or undesirable land uses to land uses that are compatible and consistent with the character of existing neighborhoods. In addition, the land use element recognizes the underutilization of the study areas along major corridors and ensures that new development is of high quality and attractively designed.

Currently, the only specific plan is the Hawthorne Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan (HBCSP), which reflects the City's attempt to accentuate and preserve the prominence of the Hawthorne Boulevard corridor as the retail and commercial backbone of Torrance and the South Bay. Land use change as a result of new development would alter the visual appearance of the HBCSP area. The plan includes provisions for new and more intense development, including increased housing opportunities, while protecting existing and future residential neighborhoods.

While the proposed land use plan would increase development and alter the visual environment and character of the City of Torrance, development projects would undergo environmental and design review to ensure visual compatibility with and enhancement of the surrounding environment. Furthermore, development would be guided by policies in the general plan update, especially the land use element and the community resources element which encourage the enhancement of the existing community character. Policy areas include but are not limited to encouraging the maintenance and upgrading of existing development; preserving, protecting, and maintaining open space, parks, and recreation facilities; requiring that new development be visually and functionally compatible with existing residential neighborhoods and industrial and commercial areas; requiring the provision of on-site open space in new developments; and making the preservation of scenic vistas an integral factor in land development decisions. Therefore, with adherence to the municipal code and review of projects with the policies of the general plan update, implementation of general plan update would not substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of Torrance.

**IMPACT 5.1-2: THE PROPOSED PROJECT WOULD GENERATE ADDITIONAL LIGHT AND GLARE.
[THRESHOLD AE-4]**

Impact Analysis: Sources of light include lighting needed to provide nighttime street and building illumination, security lighting, nighttime traffic, and lighting associated with construction activities. Artificial light sources can create glare effects and light pollution. Glare causes negative impacts by reflecting excessive light to in the surrounding environment; and light pollution can be distracting to neighboring sensitive land uses and hinder clear views of the night sky. Buildout in accordance with the proposed land use plan would generate new sources of light and glare that could affect day or nighttime views in the City. Although Torrance is predominantly developed, implementation of the proposed land use plan would allow for the development of underutilized parcels and vacant land. New development would incrementally contribute to lighting and glare impacts to the existing built environment.



The City of Torrance Municipal Code contains standards addressing the reduction of glare throughout its design policies related to: building surfaces; lighting in residential areas, the City's historic districts, public spaces, pedestrian areas, and recreational open space; sign policies; and screening and buffering of commercial corridors and industrial areas. The general plan update recognizes the adverse effects of light and glare on a community and proposes policies to reduce those effects. Policies in the community resources element encourage regulations for private lighting that minimize or eliminate light pollution, light trespass, and glare and require that nonresidential uses adjacent or near residential neighborhoods provide shielding or other protections from outdoor lighting and lighted signage. Adherence to the municipal code and policies of the general plan update will ensure that light and glare from new development would be minimized and that significant impacts would not occur.

5.1.4 Relevant General Plan Update Policies

Community Resource Element

- Continue to evaluate the environmental impact of public and private projects on properties that have significant open space value. (Policy CR.1.1)
- Require the provision of on-site open space in new developments. (Policy CR.1.2)
- Require that development projects involving modifications or additions include plans to upgrade or add open space and landscaping. (Policy CR.1.3)

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- Assign open space designations and apply preservation policies to significant natural habitat areas. (Policy CR.2.1)
- Encourage planting of new trees and preserve existing street trees in residential neighborhoods. (Policy CR.3.3)
- Use landscaping as an open space feature along City arterial and collector roadways, where sufficient right-of-way is available. (Policy CR.4.1)
- Require that developers and property owners improve their properties by providing landscaping and similar aesthetic treatments along roadways. (Policy CR.4.2)
- Maintain the Madrona Marsh Nature Preserve for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations. (Policy CR.16.1)
- Support the dual use of drainage detention and retention basins for open space, recreation, and/or wildlife habitat opportunities, and increased groundwater recharge as long as the secondary use does not conflict or interfere with the operation and maintenance of the primary function of flood control and drainage. (Policy CR.16.2)
- Reaffirm to the state and county authorities the City's intent to conserve the maximum amount of beach area possible. (Policy CR.17.1)
- Work with state and county agencies to limit improvements to structures which are absolutely necessary for recreation, safety, and beach protection. (Policy CR.17.2)
- Ensure full and easy access to the beach for all visitors. (Policy CR.17.3)
- Support efforts to have offshore environmentally and economically sensitive areas, including the offshore waters of Torrance Beach, deleted from future offshore oil lease sale plans. (Policy CR.17.4)
- Oppose any proposals for off-shore oil drilling in the Santa Monica Bay and off the Palos Verdes Peninsula. (Policy CR.17.5)
- Preserve and restore natural plant and animal habitat at Torrance Beach including dunes, slopes and bluff. (Policy CR.17.6)
- Preserve specimen trees whether they occur on public or private property, and promote the planting of new trees. (Policy CR.18.1)
- Provide, maintain, and encourage appropriate street trees along all sidewalks and property frontages. (Policy CR.18.2)
- Develop and implement a comprehensive citywide street tree program that includes sidewalk-appropriate, drought-tolerant, and native species. (Policy CR.18.3)
- Make the preservation of scenic vistas an integral factor in land development decisions. (Policy CR.19.1)

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- Look for opportunities to create public open space areas with scenic vistas that all can enjoy. (Policy CR.19.2)
- Coordinate with Southern California Edison and other utilities to underground utility lines in new developments and to systematically replace overhead lines with underground facilities, with a priority placed along major roadways, key commercial areas, and within viewsheds of the beach. (Policy CR.19.3)
- Establish regulations for private lighting that minimize or eliminate light pollution, light trespass, and glare (obtrusive light). (Policy CR.20.1)
- Require that nonresidential uses adjacent or near residential neighborhoods provide shielding or other protections from outdoor lighting and lighted signage. (Policy CR.20.2)

Land Use Element

- Encourage commercial and industrial development which enhances the visual character, quality, and uniqueness of the City's neighborhoods and districts. (Policy LU.11.1)
- Approve expansion of commercial centers only within the context of an overall design theme or master plan that is visually and functionally compatible with surrounding uses. (Policy LU.11.2)
- Identify neighborhoods and districts that can be enhanced and revitalized through the implementation of an urban design theme. (Policy LU.11.3)
- Establish corridor plans along major roads that integrate both public and private improvements and create identifiable and cohesive visual themes through the use of landscaping, hardscape, signage, and lighting. (Policy LU.11.4)
- Require that commercial and industrial developments establish a high-quality visual environment through the use of design elements such as landscape, hardscape, signage, and lighting. (Policy LU.11.5)
- Encourage site and building design whereby individual projects on separate lots function as unified developments to promote aesthetic and functional cohesiveness, where applicable and within the context of applicable regulations. (Policy LU.11.6)
- Encourage the use of cohesive design elements that encourage movement of pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-automotive modes of transportation between distinct commercial establishments, between commercial and residential areas, and between residential areas, schools, recreational and cultural facilities, libraries, and transit corridors and hubs. (Policy LU.11.7)
- Accentuate major gateways and entryways through the use of design elements such as landscape, hardscape, gateway monuments, and signage treatments. (Policy LU.11.8)
- Require that development along the City's boundaries emphasizes the qualities and uniqueness of Torrance by using attractive and cohesive design elements and architectural themes. (Policy LU.11.9)



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- Encourage site and building design that integrates Low Impact Development (LID) Principles. (Policy LU.11.10)
- Require that new development be visually and functionally compatible with existing residential neighborhoods and industrial and commercial areas. (Policy LU.2.1)
- Encourage the transition of incompatible, ineffective, and/or undesirable land uses to land uses that are compatible and consistent with the character of existing neighborhoods. (Policy LU.2.2)
- Consider both the impact of a proposed development on surrounding property and the impact of existing uses on new development. (Policy LU.2.3)
- Phase out primary oil recovery facilities located in unsuitable locations, such as residential neighborhoods. (Policy LU.2.4)
- Establish landscape or hardscape buffers between residential and non-residential uses, where appropriate, to minimize adverse effects. (Policy LU.2.5)
- To the extent possible, preserve the balance between jobs and housing in Torrance through land use decisions. (Policy LU.2.6)
- Protect natural resources by promoting superior sustainable development. (Policy LU.2.7)
- Require new development to be consistent in scale, mass and character with structures in the surrounding area. For distinct neighborhoods and districts, consider developing design guidelines that suit their unique characteristics. Create guidelines that offer a wide spectrum of choices and that respect the right to develop within the context of existing regulations. (Policy LU.3.1)
- Encourage development that identifies you are in Torrance, creates entry gateways, and edge boundaries. Encourage new development at the City's periphery where recycling of land uses can improve districts and neighborhoods and enhance property values. Allow intensification of uses in these areas, where appropriate. (Policy LU.3.2)
- Encourage revitalization of underutilized properties along major corridors such as Crenshaw Boulevard, Western Avenue, and Redondo Beach Boulevard. Ensure that new development along these corridors is of high quality and attractively designed, given their location along the City's prime corridors. (Policy LU.3.3)
- Continue to encourage the maintenance and upgrading of existing development. (Policy LU.3.4)
- Preserve, protect, and maintain open space, parks, and recreation facilities as desirable land uses, recognizing that such uses contribute to the high quality of life in Torrance. (Policy LU.9.1)

5.1.5 Existing Regulations and Standard Conditions

City of Torrance Municipal Code

- **Division 7, Public Works and Property, Chapter 5, Parkway Planting, Walls and Fences, Section 75.1.5, Permit Required to Cut, Trim, Remove, Etc.; Granting; Duration**, no person may cut, trim,

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remove, prune, plant, injure or interfere with any tree upon any street, park, alley or public place of the City without first obtaining a permit from the Public Works Director.

- **Division 9, Land Use, Chapter 1, Purpose – Districts Established, Article 43, Madrona Marsh District**, recognizes and defines the Madrona Marsh as a district. In addition, the ordinance prohibits any use prohibited in the original settlement agreement between the City and the Santa Fe Land improvement Company, and requires the City to give notice of any public hearing to the Planning Commission and the City Council, with written notice to the Torrance Investment Company and to Santa Fe Land Improvement Company.
- **Division 9, Land Use, Chapter 2, General Provisions, Section 92.30.5, Lighting**, all lighting on the subject property shall be constructed in such a manner that glare shall be directed away from all surrounding residential land uses.

5.1.6 Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Upon implementation of regulatory requirements and standard conditions of approval, the following impacts would be less than significant: 5.1-1 and 5.1-2.

5.1.7 Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are necessary.

5.1.8 Level of Significance After Mitigation

No significant adverse impacts were identified and no significant unavoidable impacts relating to aesthetics remain.



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