4.1 AESTHETICS

Visual resources include both natural and man-made features of the landscape. Intrinsic visual qualities and composition of a landscape together define the visual character of an area. This section describes the existing visual setting of the project site and assesses potential changes to the visual environment as a result of the proposed project.

4.1.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Regional Setting

The City of Sunnyvale (City) is situated within the Santa Clara Valley in the southwestern portion of the San Francisco Bay Area. Sunnyvale's visual characteristics include features typical for an urban/suburban area, generally consistent with neighboring cities such as Santa Clara, Mountain View, and Cupertino. The City's visual setting includes a mixture of man-made development and natural land patterns. The City is a highly developed area characterized by commercial and industrial areas, single- and multi-family neighborhoods, and parks and recreational areas. In certain locations, distant views of mountains are available, including the Santa Cruz Mountains to the south of the City and the Diablo Range to the east.

Visual Character

Project Site and Adjacent Areas

The project site is located along Fair Oaks Avenue, an arterial roadway in Sunnyvale. The Fair Oaks Avenue Overhead Bridge (bridge) travels amidst entirely urbanized areas including a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial areas. The bridge crosses a local street (Hendy Avenue), railroad tracks, and an apartment community. As shown in **Figure 4.1-1**, the project site offers diverse man-made visual textures.

A Home Depot retail store is located on the eastern side of Fair Oaks Avenue and south of Kifer Road, immediately north of the railroad tracks. The building includes a parking area with sparsely planted trees scattered throughout the lot. Industrial areas are prominent to the north of the railroad tracks as well, on the western side

of Fair Oaks Avenue, where warehouse and manufacturing-type structures predominate for an entire city block. Aerial views of the industrial area depict parking areas, equipment and storage areas, and above ground tanks.

The Heritage Park apartment community is located on the south side of the railroad tracks, straddling both sides of Fair Oaks Avenue. The community was constructed in the 1980s, subsequent to the bridge's 1967 original construction. The apartment units are one- and two- story structures with outdoor parking along the perimeter. Landscape trees and shrubs are apparent between buildings and increase the visual appeal and privacy for residents as described further below. Additionally, a pedestrian overcrossing (POC) spans the railroad tracks on the east side of the bridge (**Figure 4.1-2**). This structure is comprised of wide, thick concrete ramps and areas of chain link fence. The chain link fencing on the deck in particular lends a cage-like feel that somewhat degrades area visual character.

Tree Cover

The southwest and northeast ends of the bridge feature mature pine and eucalyptus trees, approximately 50-60 feet in height.

A variety of other trees are planted alongside the bridge. The portion of the bridge along the Home Depot parking lot is lined by a number of liquidambar trees, each approximately 20-25 feet in height. Within the Heritage Park apartment community, a line of mostly paperbark *melaleuca* trees and other ornamental trees about 20 feet in height run between a parking area and the bridge. **Figure 4.1-3** depicts the Heritage Park visual landscape.

Scenic Resources

The project site contains no identified scenic resources or documented scenic views. Notwithstanding, southbound drivers and bicyclists on the bridge have access to views of the Santa Cruz Mountains in the distance, as shown in **Figure 4.1-3**.

Light and Glare

Lighting sources in the project vicinity include both interior and exterior lighting within the Heritage Park community. In commercial areas, light sources include poles within parking areas and doors/windows. Along streets, there are streetlights on both the bridge deck as well as on the bridge columns to illuminate the underpass portion of Hendy Avenue. Headlights of vehicle traffic constitute another existing nighttime light source. Collectively, these light sources are somewhat typical for Sunnyvale; no unusual sources of lighting are present in the project site.

Sources of daytime glare can either be a direct source of light, or can be an object which reflects light from another source, such as windows. Existing sources of daytime glare within the project vicinity include light reflected from building or car windows. External nighttime lighting from buildings and residences adjacent to the project site contribute low levels of nighttime glare.

4.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

There are no federal or state laws that specifically define or protect visual resources; however, several federal, state and local regulations provide protection for scenic views and other visual resources. Moreover, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes that it is the policy of the state to take all action necessary to provide the people of the State "with…enjoyment of *aesthetic*, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities" (CA Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21001[b]). Pertinent local policies and guidelines are discussed briefly below.

Sunnyvale General Plan

According to the General Plan, Sunnyvale strives to maintain and enhance the appearance of the city as an attractive community to residents and visitors. To distinguish from other surrounding communities, Sunnyvale promotes high quality architecture, the preservation of historic districts and structures, maintenance of a healthy urban forest, and abundant open space. Additionally, Sunnyvale strives to create an attractive street environment for motorists with landscaping medians, street trees, private commercial landscaping, and undergrounded utilities.

The Community Character Element of the General Plan contains several relevant policies related to aesthetics:

Policy CC -2.1 Maintain and provide attractive landscaping in the public right-of-way to identify the different types of roadways and districts, make motorists more comfortable and improve the enjoyment of residential neighborhoods.

Policy CC -2.2 Minimize elements which clutter the roadway and look unattractive.

Policy CC -3.1 Place a priority on quality architecture and site design which will enhance the image of Sunnyvale and create a vital and attractive environment for businesses, residents and visitors, and be reasonably balanced with the need for economic development to assure Sunnyvale's economic prosperity.

Policy CC -5.2 Enhance the visual character of the City by preserving diverse as well as harmonious architectural styles, reflecting various phases of the City's historical development and the cultural traditions of past and present residents.

Scenic Resources and Landmarks

The General Plan includes visual landmarks and gateways within the City. These landmarks are visually prominent structures or natural features that serve as orientation points for residents of the city or possess historical characteristics for the community. According to the General Plan, one visual landmark is located within 0.5 miles of the project site, an unnamed "Water Tower" located at the Kifer Road and Wolfe Road intersection. Sunnyvale designated City Hall, Libby Can Water Tower, Fremont High School, and Murphy Avenue as other visual landmarks, all of which are located at least 1 mile away and are not visible from the project site.[1]

Project Consistency

In addition to structural improvements to the bridge, implementation of the proposed project would include design improvements that would increase the visual appeal of the bridge. Such improvements would echo goals of the General Plan as the project would enhance the visual character of the City by introducing high quality architecture. Additionally, the project's physical footprint would not disrupt views of any of the designated General Plan visual landmarks or historic resources (further described in **Section 4.4, Cultural Resources**) within the project vicinity. As a result, proposed improvements would be consistent with the General Plan.

Sunnyvale Municipal Code

Tree Preservation

Trees and natural vegetation help provide attractive landscaping that enhances the City's visual character. As such, the Sunnyvale Municipal Code includes parameters to encourage the protection of trees for both aesthetic and biological values. Accordingly, the City has policies in place to ensure that City-owned trees or "city trees" are protected and maintained properly. **Section 4.3, Biological Resources,** discusses Chapter 13.16 of the Municipal Code in more detail with regard to protecting City trees. Additionally, Chapter 19.94 of the Sunnyvale Municipal Code includes parameters for "protected" trees within the city. "Protected" trees must meet a particular "significant size" threshold to trigger this municipal ordinance.

[1] City of Sunnyvale. 2011. General Plan. Page 4-6

According to the Chapter 19.94.030 of the Municipal Code, a "significant size" for a single-trunk tree means a tree 38 inches or greater in circumference (measured 4.5 feet above ground). For multi-trunk trees, a "significant size" means a tree with at least one trunk circumference of 38 inches or greater (measured 4.5 feet above ground level). Multi-trunk trees are also "significant size" if the circumference of each multi-trunk (measured 4.5 feet above the ground level), are added together and equal an overall circumference of 113 inches or greater. Accordingly, the city has established a permitting process and penalties for non-compliance to ensure correct planting, maintenance, protection of Sunnyvale trees.

Project Consistency

The proposed project would require removal of some trees to accommodate proposed work components, as further described below. If the project requires removal of any tree classified as either "city" or "protected", as described in Chapter 13.16 and Chapter 19.94 of the Sunnyvale Municipal Code, permits would need to be obtained prior to any tree disturbing and/or removal activities in order to comply with City code. With adherence to these policies, the proposed project would be consistent with the Sunnyvale Municipal Code. Furthermore, as part of the project, the City has committed to replace trees removed as part of the project a on a one-to-one basis, with replacement locations contingent upon availability of irrigation.

4.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Significance Criteria

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines identifies environmental issues a lead agency can consider when determining whether a project could have significant effects on the environment. The project would have a significant impact 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 project site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views.

Discussion of No Impacts

Analysis of the details and site characteristics in the context of the four significance criteria stated above shows that no impacts would result for two of the criteria.

Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

According to the General Plan, no identified scenic resources exist within the project site and its immediate surroundings. However, motorists and bicyclists traveling on the bridge can see the Santa Cruz Mountain ridgeline in the distant viewshed above homes, trees, and suburban-like development.

The proposed project entails structural improvements and widening to enhance the safety of the existing bridge. Existing views of the mountains for users of the bridge will be maintained. These views will become available to pedestrians once the project's proposed sidewalk is completed. The project would have no adverse impact on a scenic vista and no mitigation is required.

Would the project damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

The project site is not located within or in proximity to a state-designated scenic highway, as discussed in **Subsection 4.1.2, Regulatory Setting**. As a result, proposed project components would have no effect on scenic resources, trees, outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. Therefore, the project would have no impact and no mitigation is required.

Discussion of Less-than-Significant Impacts

Analysis of the plans and site characteristics in the context of the four significance criteria stated above shows that less-than-significant impacts would result for two of the criteria.

Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings?

The majority of potential visual impacts are related to temporary construction and tree removal activities. Once construction is complete, the rehabilitated Fair Oaks Avenue overhead bridge would be enhanced relative to existing conditions with improved architecture and the removal of the pedestrian overcrossing.

These architectural improvements would be consistent with general plan policies to place a higher priority on infrastructure design to enhance the visual character of the city.

Figure 4.1-4a and **Figure 4.1-4b** depict the proposed design renderings for the bridge. The proposed design highlights Sunnyvale's history as a railroad community and industrial center.

The pedestrian overcrossing structure is comprised of wide concrete ramps and areas of chain link fence. Visually, the pedestrian overcrossing has a strong and somewhat negative visual character. The chain link fencing on the deck in particular lends a cage-like feel that somewhat degrades the area visual character. Removal of this structure would improve area visual character by removing the heavy ramps and cage-like aspects.

The proposed project would require removal of approximately 15-18 trees and pruning of several other trees, as shown in **Appendix C**. Removal of trees in the Home Depot parking lot may temporarily reduce the visual quality of the area. However, customers and employees traveling to Home Depot would likely be focused on the activity of finding a parking space and entering the store and thus would be unlikely to have substantial awareness of tree removal.

During construction, residents at the Heritage Park Apartments would likely notice tree removal and construction activities as removal of trees within the residential areas would temporarily reduce the visual quality for residents. That being said, the city has committed to replace all removed trees with new trees on a minimum one-to-one ratio, with new tree planting locations contingent on availability of irrigation.

The proposed project components would have little effect on visual character and quality and may in fact increase the visual appeal of the bridge once construction is complete. As a result, the impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required.

Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views?

Existing lighting along the bridge includes standard "cobra head" electroliers (light fixtures). These lighting structures are mounted on each side of the bridge and are typical for most similar-roadways in the area. The project proposes new light fixtures that would enhance the visual appeal of the bridge. New light fixtures would be fitted with high-efficiency lighting for lower energy usage and minimum light spillover. As a result, the proposed project would not introduce new substantial sources of light or glare. The impact would be less-than-significant and no mitigation is required.

4.1.4 REFERENCES

California Department of California. California Scenic Highway Program. 2012 Available: http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/scenic_hwy.htm

City of Sunnyvale. 2011. Sunnyvale General Plan. Available: http://ecityhall.sunnyvale.ca.gov/cd/GeneralPlan.pdf.

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Federal Highway Administration. 1981. Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects. Available: http://www.dot.ca.gov/ser/downloads/visual/FHWAVisualImpactAssmt.pdf.

Figure 4.1-1 Existing Fair Oaks Overhead Bridge

Figure 4.1-2 Existing Pedestrian Overcrossing

Figure 4.1-3 Distant Viewshed

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Figure 4.1-4a Proposed Renderings: Bird's Eye View

Figure 4.1-4a (back of page)

Figure 4.1-4b Proposed Design Renderings: Motorist View

Figure 4.1-4b (back of page)