

## 4.1 AESTHETICS

The analysis in this section provides focused updates to Chapter 4.1 Aesthetics in the 2011 Comprehensive Land Use Update (CLUU) Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), with an emphasis on potential aesthetic impacts that may change as a result of the Focused General Plan Update (FGPU).

“Aesthetics” generally refers to the identification of visual resources, the quality of one’s view, and/or the overall visual perception of the environment. In this Supplemental Program Environmental Impact Report (SPEIR), the Planning Area is defined as the geographic context and visual landscape within which the FGPU components can be viewed and could alter the aesthetics, streetscapes, scenic resources, or views of the area.

### 4.1.1 Existing Conditions

The built and natural environment provides major visual features for National City. The Planning Area is nearly fully developed, with a complementary mix of residential, industrial, commercial, public service, and recreational land uses that are essential in supporting a sustainable community. Natural and/or undeveloped areas within the Planning Area consist mainly of canyons, undeveloped slopes, several drainages, a portion of the Sweetwater River, Paradise Marsh, and Paradise Creek. Although approximately one decade has passed since the 2011 CLUU PEIR was developed, the visual resources of the Planning Area have not changed substantially. See Chapter 4.1 Aesthetics of the 2011 CLUU PEIR for details regarding the scenic resources, vistas, and visual quality and character of National City. The Focus Areas are urbanized corridors; therefore, lighting is expected as a common element. Sources of light and glare are predominantly limited to the interior and exterior lights of buildings, streetlights, vehicle lights, lighting visible through windows, and parking lots.

As of 2022, residential land use accounts for 27.8 percent of National City, and Industrial and Military accounts for 22.1 percent. Only 2.3 percent of the Planning Area is vacant, and 4.7 percent is designated as open space. Development over the past decade has primarily been infill throughout the Planning Area.

National City has a long and rich history, which has influenced its pattern of development and the variety of architectural styles throughout the Planning Area. The 2011 CLUU PEIR Chapter 4.1, Aesthetics provides additional detail on the visual character of the 13 neighborhoods of National City. Although it is a modern suburb of San Diego, National City is the second oldest city in San Diego County and has maintained many of its historic neighborhoods and structures that date back to the late 1880s.

### 4.1.2 Regulatory Framework

#### 4.1.2.1 Local

##### General Plan Land Use and Community Character Element

The Land Use Element includes the following relevant goal and policies regarding buildings and visual character:

##### *Community Design*

- **Goal LU-9:** *Enhanced community character and identity through good urban design that considers function, form, pedestrian scale, amenities, and aesthetics.*
  - **Policy LU-9.3:** *Support form-based zoning for areas along mixed-use and community corridors to guide physical form, achieve predictable built results, and foster a high-quality public realm.*
  - **Policy LU-9.5:** *Apply design standards that promote the use of high-quality building materials, architectural and site designs, landscaping, signage, and amenities.*
  - **Policy LU-9.7:** *Promote a variety of housing styles and encourage the use of front porches, stoops, and individual unit entries, where appropriate.*

- **Policy LU-9.9** *Promote appropriate transitions in building height and bulk which are sensitive to the visual and physical character of adjacent neighborhoods.*

#### Community Identity

- **Goal LU-11:** *A recognizable community identity and high-quality appearance and harmony between existing and new uses.*
  - **Policy LU-11.1:** *Continue to use Design Guidelines and Landscape Guidelines when reviewing development applications to ensure that proposed development is compatible with its surroundings and contributes to a positive image of National City.*
  - **Policy LU-11.4:** *Recognize, maintain, and enhance the character and identity of residential neighborhoods and business districts.*

#### Viewsheds

- **Goal LU-12:** *The preservation of scenic resources and significant viewsheds.*
  - **Policy LU-12.1:** *Encourage building placement, orientation, height, and mass to maintain and enhance views of San Diego Bay, open space, creeks, and other distinctive scenic resources.*
  - **Policy LU-12.3:** *Maintain and enhance views of locally admired buildings such as historic structures and other visually appealing manmade features.*

### National City Municipal Code

The City's Municipal Code regulates the form and character of development in the City through the Land Use Code. Revisions to the Land Use Code are a part of the FGPU evaluated by this SPEIR.

#### Land Use Code

The purpose of the Land Use Code (Title 18 of the Municipal Code) is to provide specific requirements for development in the City to achieve the general arrangement of land uses identified in the General Plan. The Land Use Code divides the City into distinct zones to implement the land use and development policies in the General Plan. Among the primary objectives of the Land Use Code are the regulation of building form, placement, and density and the provision of sufficient parking and open spaces in conjunction with development. Title 18, Division 4 General Design and Development Regulations addresses the details of site planning, building design, landscaping, parking and loading, outdoor lighting, and signs and outdoor advertising displays. These standards are intended to ensure that all development produces an environment of stable and desirable character, is compatible with existing and future development, and protects the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties, consistent with the General Plan.

State law requires that the Land Use Code be consistent with the General Plan. In part due to changes to the existing policies and actions of the 2011 General Plan, the Land Use Code is also being updated to reflect those changes.

### 24th Street Transit Oriented Development Overlay (TODO)

The City adopted the 24th Street TODO Plan in May 2021. The TODO project revolves around the 24th Street Transit Center where the Blue Line Trolley and multiple bus routes converge, connecting the community to local and regional employment centers and other major destinations. The TODO Plan analyzed existing land uses and developed an expanded vision for the area, including an enhanced public realm, transit-supportive land uses, and improved mobility and parking options. The land use recommendations complement the existing transit services, help activate public spaces, and increase opportunities for a variety of housing options.

The TODO land use concept centers around the following key recommendations:

- *Build Upon the Westside Specific Plan Concept of Securing the Ongoing Viability of Residential Uses*
- *Increase Opportunities to add Housing Near Transit*
- *Strengthen the Transit Station*

- Support Corner Infill on Highland
- Reinforce the Westside and Paradise Creek Open Space Connection with Active Land Uses at each End
- Activate Hoover Ave. with Mixed-Uses
- Complete and Extend the Existing Mixed-Use Corridors in the Area
- Allow for a Gradual and Deliberate Transition in Land Use from Commercial Automotive to Residential in the Neighborhoods Behind the Mile of Cars<sup>1</sup>

The FGPU includes the TODO's recommendations within all components of the FGPU per City Council direction.

### 4.1.3 Significance Determination Thresholds

The 2022 California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Issue I. Aesthetics includes the following significance thresholds:

- Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project: 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?*
- In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?*
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area?*

### 4.1.4 Methodology

The 2011 CLUU PEIR analyzed under significance threshold (c) if the proposed project would:

*Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.*

- Consistency with project objectives for community character and aesthetics.
- Consistency with Design Guidelines.

As of 2022, the CEQA Guidelines Section I. Aesthetics threshold (c) reads:

***In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?***

This change in threshold question format has been reflected in this 2022 SPEIR analysis.

Thresholds (a), (b), and (d) were determined through an initial analysis to not result in a change of significance as compared to the 2011 CLUU PEIR and therefore, were excluded from the analysis within this section. Details regarding the 2011 CLUU PEIR conclusions for these issue areas are included in Chapter 7 Comprehensive Land Use Update PEIR Subject Areas Requiring No Changes in Analysis.

### 4.1.5 Issue 3: Visual Character and Visual Quality

The Planning Area is considered urbanized, and therefore this analysis focuses on potential conflicts with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. It is noted that this analysis focuses on the programmatic impacts of the proposed buildout of the FGPU, and individual

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<sup>1</sup> City of National City, 24th Street TODO Transit Oriented Development Overlay, Public Review Draft, [http://24thstreettodo.com/24street/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NationalCity\\_24thStTODO\\_PublicReviewDraft.pdf](http://24thstreettodo.com/24street/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NationalCity_24thStTODO_PublicReviewDraft.pdf)

developments associated with buildout of the FGPU would be subject to conformance review with zoning regulations, design guidelines, and General Plan policies.

Overall, buildout consistent with the FGPU could result in potential impacts to the visual character of the Focus Area corridors through the proposed changes in allowable density, mix of uses, and building heights (see Table 4.1-1 for changes to building heights by Focus Areas). Zoning changes are proposed for Focus Areas to facilitate housing production and promote mixed-use development by increasing the maximum allowable density (see Table 3.3-1 in Chapter 3) and height, as well as allowing commercial uses for areas currently zoned for only residential use.

**Table 4.1-1 Changes in Height by Focus Area**

Focus Area	Current Adopted Zoning	Height Allowance (feet)	Proposed Zoning	Height Allowance (feet)
<b>24th Street</b>	Limited Commercial (CL)	50	Mixed Commercial Residential (MCR-1)	65
<b>18th Street</b>	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	35	Mixed Use Transition (MXT)	45
	Very High Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-3)	95	Open Space (OS)	0
<b>4th Street</b>	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	35	Large Lot Residential (RS-1)	35
<b>D Avenue</b>	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	35	Medium Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-1)	45
<b>Hospital Area</b>	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	35	Minor Mixed Use Corridor (MXC-1)	50
	Medium-Low Density Multi-Unit Residential (RS-3)	35		
	Institutional (I)	65		
<b>16th Street</b>	Mixed Commercial Residential (MCR-1)	50	Mixed-Use Overlay	65
	Limited Commercial (CL)	50		
	Service Commercial (CS)	50		

### **Municipal Code Title 18**

As detailed in Table 3.3-1 in Chapter 3, the FGPU proposes to rezone all of the Focus Areas to allow for an increase in dwelling units per acre (with the exception of the 18th Street Focus Area, in which one parcel will be rezoned from RS-2 to OS, which does not allow for development). These zoning changes would increase the allowable density of future development and mix of uses within the Focus Areas.

The FGPU also includes the addition of the following policies to Title 18:

- Minimum separation of primary structures for RS-3, RM-1, RM-2, RM-3 has been set for “10 feet if side-by-side; 15 feet if front-to-back.”
- “18.48.0540 Concessions, incentives, and development standards.
  - F. Concessions and Incentives
    - (2)(d) Four incentives or concessions for planned housing developments meeting the criteria of subparagraph (7) of paragraph (A) of subdivision 18.48.030. If the planned housing development is located within one-half mile

of a major transit stop, the applicant shall also receive a height increase of up to three additional stories, or 33 feet.”

The setback changes to the residential zoning regulations would assist in maintaining openness between buildings for natural light, ventilation, and sound attenuation while allowable density and height increases. This would serve to maintain the City’s existing viewpoints and visual character as development occurs through the year 2050. The increased height allowance for housing development located within one-half mile of a major transit stop would also serve to further the City and region’s goals of developing transit oriented development and increasing housing opportunities across the City.

As future developments consistent with the FGPU are proposed, each specific site plan would be reviewed for consistency with zoning and regulations guiding development. This would ensure visual character consistency within each Focus Area. Therefore, future development would have a less than significant impact on applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

### **Westside Specific Plan (WSP) Update**

In addition, the FGPU updates height restrictions within the WSP. The changes are summarized below:

- **Goal 3.3** Limit new building heights to five [*originally two and three*] stories within the residential, mixed-commercial residential and mixed-use commercial office land uses, while limiting the height to three [*originally five*] stories within limited commercial uses [*added*].
- **Mixed-use Commercial-Residential 12 (MCR-1)** - A maximum height of sixty-five (65) feet [*originally 50 feet*] and five stories would be permitted, including any ground level parking, with a maximum density of twenty-four (24) units per acre.
  - Maximum building height is five (5) [*originally 3*] stories and sixty-five (65) [*originally 50*] feet for development within the MCR-1 zone [*“and CL zone” was removed*].
- [*Addition of*] Maximum building height is three (3) stories and fifty (50) feet for development within the CL zone.

With these amendments and revisions to the WSP, all future development within the Specific Plan’s area consistent with the FGPU would be subject to these new standards. The height changes across the WSP serve to increase density in residential and mixed-use zones while reducing height in commercial zones, as consistent with the FGPU’s objective of creating sustainable and high-quality living environments. Therefore, as future development would be subject to review with these regulations, there would be a *less than significant* impact.

### **Objective Design Standards**

Furthermore, the FGPU includes the adoption of objective design standards that apply to multifamily projects located on a site that is zoned for residential use or residential mixed-use development or on a site that has a General Plan designation allowing residential use or a mix of residential and non-residential uses. The objective design standards provide architectural and design requirements to support high-quality development, including site design, building design, façade and articulation, building equipment and service areas, fence and walls, pedestrian access, outdoor/common spaces, landscaping, parking, bicycle parking, and lighting. These design standards would replace and take precedence over the zoning regulations of the applicable zone within the City’s Municipal Code. These standards ensure context sensitivity and design compatibility with existing neighboring uses and would ensure a *less than significant* impact on conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

### **House National City Opt-In Density Bonus Program (HNC Program)**

The FGPU also includes the HNC Program, which includes updates and revisions to floor-area ratios, maximum allowable heights, and parking requirements, and other incentives to increase housing

production throughout the Planning Area. A property would qualify for this program if it is covered by the base or overlay zone that allows at least 20 dwelling units per acre. As this is an opt-in program, individual developments would be reviewed to be in compliance with Municipal Code Title 18 and the Objective Design Standards and therefore would have *less than significant* impacts.

#### **4.1.6 Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting**

No mitigation is necessary.