

14. Visual Impacts

Setting

Overall Visual Character. The visual character of the Plan area is currently defined by two linear developed cores along Interstate 80 and Highway 49 with downtown Auburn as a focal point and surrounded by typical rural Sierra Nevada foothills landscape including grazing lands to the north, the American River to the east, and rural residential lands to the west and south. Approximately 6.3% of the Plan area is currently built out in urban land uses (commercial, office, industrial, residential parcels less than 2.3 acres in size). However, the actual geographic extent of the urban areas are larger than this total seems to depict due to the extent of underdeveloped lands within the urbanized areas.

Unique / High Quality Visual Features. Certain visual features in the Plan area are unique or of particularly high visual quality and help define its character.

- Agricultural lands and rural open spaces
- American River canyon
- Landforms including rolling hills and steep slopes
- Wooded areas
- Streams and riparian areas
- Scenic corridors and viewsheds of these and other major roadways including:
 - Bell Road
 - Northern Highway 49
 - Mt. Vernon Road
 - Christian Valley Road
 - Interstate 80
 - Dry Creek Road
 - Auburn Ravine Road
 - Foresthill Road
 - Auburn-Folsom Road
 - Indian Hill Road
- Individual communities and neighborhoods including the Bowman area and Christian Valley
- Cultural and historic features

IMPACT EVALUATION CRITERIA: The level of significance of visual change is based on a number of factors including number of viewers, their level of concern, the quality of the existing views and whether or not they are unique to the area. All of these factors combined result in the level of change which can be tolerated by viewers. These factors are rated for various features in the Plan area below.

**Table 133
DEGREE OF VISUAL CHANGE TOLERABLE BY VIEWERS**

	# Viewers	Existing Quality of Views	Level of Concern	Change Tolerable
1. Overall Visual Character				
- Rural areas	High	High	High	Low
- Urban areas (including urban fringe)	High	Degraded, Medium + High (Medium overall)	Moderate to High	Moderate
2. Unique Visual Features				
- Open space	High	High	High	Low
- American River* Cyn	High	High	High	Low
- Landforms	High	High	High	Low
- Streams* + riparian corrid.	Varies	High	High	Low
- Scenic corridors*	High	High	High	Low to Moderate
- Viewsheds of heavily traveled roads	High	High	High	Low
- Individual* communities	High	Medium	High	Low to Moderate
- Cultural/historic* features	Varies	High	High	Low

* Unique views.

Plan Proposals

The Plan includes an extensive set of design review policies, guidelines, principles, and landscape programs which are not duplicated here.

Impacts

1. **Overall change in visual character of the area.** As buildout under the Plan occurs, an overall degree of urbanization in the core urban area will result which will be perceptible to residents. Figure 43 illustrates land use designations over an aerial photograph of previous development. Urbanization at buildout over the entire Plan area (defined here as commercial, office, industrial, and residential lots less than 2.3 acres in size) could total approximately 36%. Most of this new urbanization will occur on the fringes of the existing urban area and on infill sites.

Within the urban area, full buildout will result in a much more urban feeling as remaining undeveloped parcels are developed. The degree of change expected can be rated moderate to high weighed against an overall degree of tolerance for a moderate level of change by residents. As a result, impacts are expected to be significant.

Within the rural residential regions of the Plan area, a low to moderate level of change can be expected due to parcelization consistent with the Plan.

While larger lot residential designations are proposed for these areas, planned parcelization will decrease the appearance of expansive open spaces existing residents have enjoyed. Since only a low level of change is expected to be tolerated by viewers in these areas, impacts are expected to be significant.

Conclusion: The Community Plan includes extensive design guidelines which will serve to foster a high level of quality in future urban and rural design. However, the degree of change expected due to overall urbanization is expected to be significant and unmitigable and is the inevitable result of even the most orderly growth.

2. **Existing agricultural lands and open spaces.** Plan impacts on the extent of agricultural lands are described in the Land Use section. The bulk of agricultural lands will be retained. However, views of expansive, large parcel open spaces outside the urban influence area will be decreased overall as large lot residential areas build out. A low to moderate level of change can be expected in these areas weighed against a low level of change which is expected to be tolerated by viewers in these areas. As a result, impacts are expected to be significant.

Conclusion: The Community Plan includes extensive design guidelines which will serve to foster a high level of quality in future urban and rural design. However, the degree of change expected due to overall urbanization cannot be mitigated and is the inevitable result of even the most orderly growth. This conclusion is consistent with that of the EIR on the previous Plan.

3. **American River canyon.** The steep river canyon will be protected by an Open Space designation.

Conclusion: Based on the impact evaluation criteria and the discussion above, impacts to American River canyon are expected to be less than significant.

4. **Landforms.** Impacts to landforms are discussed in the Geology/Landforms section of this EIR. To summarize, in that section impacts were expected to be significant and unmitigable.

Conclusion: See Geology/Landforms section for details.

5. **Streams and riparian areas.** These features are largely retained throughout the area as discussed in the Biotic Resources section. They are designated either as open space corridors or as environmentally-sensitive areas which will require more study to establish their actual boundary. These areas of environmental sensitivity, as well as minor areas not delineated on the Land Use Map will be largely retained through the project and design review

processes via specific policies in the Plan. As a result, from a visual standpoint, impacts are expected to be less than significant. (See Biotic Resources section for specific discussion of policies relating to these areas.)

Conclusion: Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, impacts to streams and riparian areas are expected to be less than significant.

6. Scenic corridors

6a. In general, via large lot land use designations and Plan design review policy guidelines, principles and landscape programs, the visual integrity of these corridors is expected to remain intact. Of particular note are:

- Land Use Policy r holding commercial development below Dry Creek Road on Highway 49
- Open Space, Open Space/Business Park, and Rural Residential designations along with a 450 foot setback along Bell Road and 750 feet along Highway 49 between Joeger Road and the County line defined in Community Design Policy 15
- Design guidelines and landscaping plan for the buildout urban portions of Highway 49. (Aesthetics are expected to improve in this area.)

One area of concern is the potential for the Bowman Mixed Use Area to appear as an extension of strip highway commercial uses in the vicinity. This issue is discussed in the Land Use section.

Another concern is the potential for recreational, golf course, or similar low intensity development which could be allowed consistent with land use designations in the scenic corridors and rural areas in general. An example of this is the Open Space/Business Park designation along Bell Road. The Plan notes that a golf course is proposed for this area, which would likely use most of the 187 non-business park acres remaining in the designation area. Designed properly, these facilities could reflect the aesthetics of the area. If poorly designed they could provide an incongruity to the rural, agricultural, "untended" appearance of these corridors. The County's design review process is expected to ensure avoidance of this type of impact.

6b. A land use designation change of 15 acres from Rural Residential to Commercial is proposed in the Florence Lane/Highway 49 area. (The change occurred in the Planning Commission draft. The original draft showed this area as Rural Residential. Current land use designations allow for 10 acres of Commercial.) Two existing parcels and a portion of a third parcel make up the area redesignated to commercial uses. Therefore, these parcels will be exempt from the 750 ft noise/scenic setback required as part of the Community Design Element Policy (15) which is expected to mitigate impacts in scenic corridors. However, this policy does require noise and aesthetic mitigation measures to be incorporated in project design for construction on existing parcels within the setback area via the "a" designation overlay. In addition, 5 acres of this area is limited to a mobile home park and only a "small portion" of the site is to be utilized for commercial uses per the Plan text (Land Use Policy 4i, ABCP, p.39). This is a somewhat general provision and does not alter the fact that additional commercial development outside

the urban core area of Highway 49 will be allowed and will be visible to highway travellers, significantly altering urban form. Significant, unmitigable impacts are expected as a result.

Conclusion: Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, impacts are expected to be less than significant except in the case of the Florence Lane/Hwy 49 area (significant, unmitigable).

7. **Viewsheds of heavily travelled roads.** Figure 44 overlays updated land use designations on the Plan's Viewshed map. Impacts to these areas are discussed in the Landforms/Geology section of this EIR relative to the primary concern of landform disturbance and accompanying vegetation loss. Other potential impacts are expected to be avoided via implementation of the Plan's design review policy guidelines, principles and landscape programs.

Conclusion: See Geology/Landforms section of this EIR.

8. **Individual Communities.** The urban form and character of existing communities is expected to be retained via Plan design review policies/guidelines and land use designations which generally reflect existing development patterns. A potential exception is the Bowman area which is discussed in the Land Use section.

Conclusion: Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, visual impacts to individual communities are expected to be less than significant. (See Land Use section for Bowman area discussion.)

9. **Cultural/historic resources.** These resources are discussed in detail in the Cultural Resources section of the EIR. To summarize, the Plan area's cultural resource include archaeological remains, structures, outbuildings, non-structural remains, remnants of orchards, ditches, flumes, etc. which all contribute to the essential visual nature of the Plan area. While the Plan's policies call for protection of these resources it is expected that there will be a cumulative loss of these resources. It was concluded that impacts are expected to be significant and unmitigable.

Conclusion: See Cultural Resources section of this EIR.

10. **Cumulative City plus County buildout.** As discussed, buildout per the County Plan is expected to result in significant unmitigable impacts. Combined with projected buildout within City limits, this conclusion would not change.

Conclusion: Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, cumulative impacts are expected to be significant and unmitigable.

**Mitigation
Measures**

1. Overall change in visual character of area. No mitigation available.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is considered unmitigable. The Plan's design review policies, guidelines, principles, and landscape programs partially mitigate impacts.

Implementation: N/A

2. Agricultural lands and open spaces. See measures related to growth inducing impacts in the Land Use section of this EIR.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is expected to be unmitigable. Measures described in the Growth Inducing Impacts section of this Plan's EIR and the design policies, guidelines, and principles will provide partial mitigation.

Implementation: N/A

3. American River canyon. No additional measures needed beyond those contained in the ABCP.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is expected to be less than significant. The Plan's Open Space designation ensures impact avoidance.

Implementation: N/A

4. Landforms. See discussion in Geology/Landforms section of this EIR.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: See discussion in Geology/Landforms section of this EIR.

Implementation: N/A

5. Streams and riparian areas. No additional mitigation measures needed beyond those contained in the ABCP.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is expected to be less than significant. The Plan's Open Space corridors and environmentally-sensitive areas are expected to avoid significant impacts.

Implementation: N/A

6. Scenic corridors.

6a. Overall. No additional measures needed beyond those contained in the ABCP.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is expected to be less than significant. The Plan's design policies, guidelines, principles and landscape programs will ensure significant impacts avoidance.

Implementation: N/A

- 6b. Scenic corridors. Highway 49/Florence Lane Commercial designation. No mitigation available.** A Land Use Map change would be required which is considered a Plan alternative rather than a mitigation measure.

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This measure was not included in the final Plan and, thus, this impact is considered significant and unmitigable. Plan provisions limiting the type of development which can occur (10 acres Commercial, 5 acres mobile home/RV park) will provide partial mitigation.

Implementation: N/A

- 7. Viewsheds. See mitigation measures Geology/Landforms section of this EIR.**

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: See Geology/Landforms section of this EIR.

Implementation: N/A

- 8. Existing communities. No mitigation measures recommended beyond those contained in the ABCP. (See Land Use section of this EIR for discussion of Bowman area.)**

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: Impacts are expected to be less than significant. The Plan's design policies, guidelines, principles and landscape programs will ensure significant impacts avoidance.

Implementation: N/A

- 9. Cultural/historic features. See Cultural Resources section of this EIR.**

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: See Cultural Resources section of this EIR.

Implementation: N/A

- 10. Cumulative City plus County buildout. No mitigation available.**

Effectiveness of Measure/Relevant Plan Provisions: This impact is considered unmitigable. The Plan's design review policies, guidelines, principles, and landscape programs partially mitigate impacts.

Implementation: N/A