

### 3. AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

#### 3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Manteca is located at the center of California's Central Valley and near the north end of the San Joaquin Valley. Typical of the Central Valley, the Manteca area is virtually flat, a quality that determines how the city is perceived. With the exception of views from highway overpasses that provide brief panoramic views, the entire cityscape and surrounding landscape are viewed from the ground level perspective.

On particularly clear days, however, there are distant views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east and the ~~Coast Range Mt. Diablo Range~~ 25 miles to the west and southwest. Mount Boardman and Eagle Mountain located to the southwest are the most prominent of these background features.

Manteca is surrounded by agricultural uses, primarily orchards and field crops. Although no major watercourse lies within or contiguous to Manteca, the San Joaquin River flows ~~approximately four miles to~~ along the west side of the Study Area and Walthall Slough is located along the southwest boundary of the Study Area.

The residential neighborhoods are typically composed of single family dwellings in a mix of one and two story structures. Many neighborhoods include a small park and detention basin (approximately 5 acres or larger) that serves the local neighborhood.

Although the distance between northern Manteca and southern Stockton is only four miles, the rural agricultural character of these four miles is critically important to the scenic and open space qualities that define the city. Only the southern two miles of this buffer area is located in

**Figure 3-1**

**Agriculture in the Study Area**



**Figure 3-1**

**Existing Neighborhood**



the Study Area.

### 3.1.1 Downtown

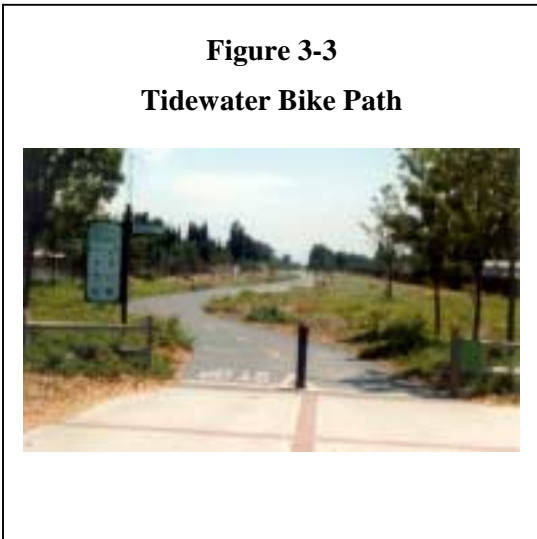
The Manteca Downtown area has undergone revitalization efforts in recent years. Projects have included the addition of packing facilities, benches and other pedestrian amenities, vehicular and pedestrian lighting, and signage. The City and the Redevelopment Agency have also established programs to enhance the economic viability of downtown, in an effort to encourage both visitors and residents to use the area.

The City's goal is to foster an authentic downtown. Factors that contribute to the authenticity of downtown include rehabilitation activities to restore the character of older buildings that have architectural details not ordinarily found in contemporary buildings. Pedestrian traffic has been encouraged by designing areas that are protected from winter and summer weather, and that have landscaping to the rear of stores. Pedestrian-scale parking lots, thoughtful signage, and street lighting also enhance this ambience.



### 3.1.2 Tidewater Bikeway and Pedestrian Path

A prominent visual feature of the city is the Tidewater Bike Path. It is a 3½ mile Class I bikeway and pedestrian path. The trail runs from the south end of the city along Moffat Boulevard to the north end at Lathrop Road. The path passes through Downtown, Library Park, and many residential neighborhoods.



### 3.1.3 Railroad

The Union Pacific Railroad running generally north-south through Manteca is another prominent visual feature.

## 3.2 REGULATORY SETTING

### 3.2.1 Applicable Federal Regulation

A number of federal, state, and local agencies establish policies and programs relative to visual resources and impacts on those resources as follows:

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).** Provides information on potential impacts to the environment, including aesthetic resources (Section 101 [b]). NEPA is implemented by regulations included in the Code of Federal Regulations (40CFR6), which require careful consideration of the environmental effects of federal actions or plans, including projects that receive federal funds, if they may have a significant adverse affect on the environment. Impacts on scenic resources (40CFR6, Section 6.108 [f]) and conflicts with state, regional, or local plans and policies (40CFR6, Section 6.108 [b]) are among the considerations included in the regulations. The regulations also require that projects requiring NEPA review seek to avoid or minimize adverse effects of proposed actions, and restore and enhance environmental quality as much as possible.

**Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).** The reauthorization legislation that closely follows the intent of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), which had earlier made major changes in federal transportation policy and programs. TEA-21 includes numerous provisions for improvements and changes to the implementation of transportation enhancement activities, which are funded by a ten percent set aside of Surface Transportation Program funds that is earmarked for transportation enhancement projects. TEA-21 includes a list of qualifying transportation enhancement activities which include several items supportive of visual quality enhancement such as acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites, scenic or historic highway programs, landscaping or other scenic beautification, and control and removal of outdoor advertising, among others.

Transportation enhancement activities are no longer required to have a direct link to surface transportation, and they are sufficiently qualified if they merely relate to surface transportation.

**Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – National Scenic Byways Program.** Designates selected highways as an “All American Road” (a roadway that is a destination unto itself) or “National Scenic Byway” (a roadway that possesses outstanding qualities that exemplify regional characteristics). However, no roadway within the SJCOG region currently has either of these designations.

### **3.2.2 Applicable State Regulations**

**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).** Similar to the NEPA, CEQA affords protection for the environment, including aesthetic resources. The CEQA Guidelines provide four criteria that may be used to evaluate the significance of visual quality impacts: negative effects on a scenic vista, damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway, degradation of the visual character or quality of a site and its surroundings, and creation of a new source of substantial light or glare affecting views.

**California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) – California Scenic Highways Program.** Created by the State legislature in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway

corridors from change that would reduce the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. To be included in the State program, the highways proposed for designation must meet Caltrans' eligibility requirements and have visual merit.

### **3.2.3 Applicable Local Regulations**

**County and City Controls.** Most local planning guidelines to preserve and enhance the visual quality and aesthetic resources of urban and natural areas are established in the jurisdiction's General Plan. The value attributed to a visual resource generally is based on the characteristics and distinctiveness of the resource and the number of persons who view it. Vistas of undisturbed natural areas, unique or unusual features forming an important or dominant portion of a viewshed, and distant vistas offering relief from less attractive nearby features are frequently considered to be scenic resources. In some instances, a case-by-case determination of scenic value may be needed, but often there is agreement within the relevant community about which features are valued as scenic resources.

In addition to federal and State designations, counties and cities have their own scenic highway designations, which are intended to preserve and enhance existing scenic resources. Criteria for designation are commonly included in the conservation/open space element of the city or County General Plan.

Cities and counties can use open space easements as a mechanism to preserve scenic resources, if they have adopted open-space plans, as provided by the Open Space Easement Act of 1974 and codified in California Government Code (Section 51070 et seq.) According to the Act, a city or County may acquire or approve an open-space easement through a variety of means, including use of public money.

### **3.3 IMPACT EVALUATION CRITERIA**

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, the proposed project would have a significant adverse impact on the environment if the project would:

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

### 3.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

**POTENTIAL IMPACT AV-1: Buildout of the proposed General Plan 2023 would degrade the existing scenic vistas found in the General Plan Study Area.**

Buildout of the General Plan Study Area will occur as development at the edge of Manteca, primarily in current agricultural areas. New development will be visible from locations within the community, from the highway overpasses, and from the nearby unincorporated agricultural areas beyond the Study Area boundaries. New development will impact the current views of open space, which are primarily vistas of agricultural fields and orchards.

**Level of Significance: Significant and Unavoidable**

Mitigation Measures:

**AV-1.1** The Resource Conservation Element of the proposed City of Manteca General Plan 2023 provides the following policy (P) regarding existing scenic vistas:

RC-P-17 New development shall maximize the potential for open space and visual experiences.

**Residual Level of Significance: Significant and Unavoidable**

The level of significance will remain significant and unavoidable, even after implementation of the above policy.

**POTENTIAL IMPACT AV-2: The existing visual character or quality of the area will be degraded.**

The visual character and quality of agricultural open space will be impacted if the proposed development occurs. Residential development will be similar in character to any existing residences in the immediate vicinity. However, commercial uses and higher-density residential will be different in character from any existing nearby residential, and therefore may be considered a degradation of the existing visual character and quality of the area.

**Level of Significance: Potentially Significant**

**Mitigation Measures:**

**AV-2.1** The proposed City of Manteca General Plan 2023 provides the following goal, policies (P) and implementation (I) measures to minimize effects to ~~maintain~~ existing visual character:

**Resource Conservation Element**

RC-P-15 ~~Provide~~ ~~Promote the provision of~~ public and private open space within urbanized parts of Manteca, in order to provide visual contrast with the built environment and to provide for the recreational needs of residents.

**Community Design Element**

Goal CD-11 To the extent possible, new development shall retain or incorporate ~~Retain~~ visual reminders of the agricultural heritage of the community.

CD-P-47 Allow pockets of agricultural activity to remain within the urban areas of the city where such uses are compatible with the surrounding urban use.

CD-P-48 Allow ~~Encourage~~ use of small under-utilized or undeveloped portions of parcels for temporary, seasonal ~~of new~~ agricultural activity, such as truck farms, strawberries, and small orchards.

CD-P-49 In order to establish a visual character that retains the agricultural heritage, the city will permit the use of orchard trees (or similar non-fruiting species) in landscape corridors along major streets adjacent to residential neighborhoods, in-lieu of formalized landscape. In such landscapes, the groundcover may be limited to bare earth and weed control and/or groundcovers compatible with the orchard characteristics.

CD-I-14: Establish design guidelines for non-residential uses within 200 feet of SR 99 and SR 120. The guidelines should address the following concepts...The landscape along SR 120 and SR 99 will reflect the natural character of the region in the selection of trees and groundcover.

**Residual Level of Significance: Significant and Unavoidable**

Although conformance with the goal, policies, and implementation measure identified above will lessen the impact to some extent, the impact of development on the existing visual character of the City of Manteca will remain significant. There is no way to fully mitigate the impact of development of agricultural open space.

**POTENTIAL IMPACT AV-3: There will be an increased impact of light or glare from buildout of the General Plan 2023.**

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Proposed development in the current agricultural open space areas will constitute new sources of light and glare. Impacts associated with nighttime light and glare are directly related to the level of development.

**Level of Significance:                    Potentially Significant**

**Mitigation Measures:**

The impact of light and glare can be minimized by incorporating design features and operating requirements into new development that limit light and glare on-site.

**AV-3.1:**            The Community Design Element of the Manteca General Plan 2023 provides the following policies ~~which may assist in the mitigation of~~ to mitigate the degradation of the existing night sky amenity in the City of Manteca:

CD-P-44:            Provide minimal levels of street, parking, building, site, and public area lighting to meet safety standards and provide direction.

CD-P-45            Provide directional shielding for ~~street and parking lot~~ all exterior lighting to minimize the annoyance of direct or indirect glare.

CD-P-46            Provide automatic shutoff or motion sensors for lighting features in newly developed areas. The City shall adopt light and glare standards that minimize the creation of new light source and the annoyance of direct and indirect glare.

**Residual Level of Significance:            Less Than Significant With Mitigation**

The level of significance will be mitigated to less than significant if the above listed policies and are implemented. Given that the areas proposed for new development are contiguous with existing development, some nighttime light and glare already exist in the area.

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