

## 3.5 Aesthetics

### Environmental Setting

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#### PHYSICAL SETTING

##### Visual Character Overview

The Planning Area is characterized primarily by large vacant or developed parcels with highway-oriented commercial or office uses. Much of the development within the Planning Area consists of large-scale “campus-style” office buildings arranged in groups that are generally surrounded by parking lots, pedestrian walkways, and landscaped communal areas. Significant barriers such as I-580 and Isabel Avenue, as well as the area’s adjacency to steep hillsides, agricultural areas, and the airport, have resulted in few local through-streets, irregularly-shaped super-blocks, and large-scale uses.

##### Scenic Resources and View Corridors

As described in the City’s General Plan, views of the hills and ridgelines surrounding the city are Livermore’s most distinctive features. The General Plan identifies views of the hillsides and ridgelines to the north and south of I-580 as scenic vistas within the Planning Area. These views include those of the ridgelines south of the city, and those associated with regional preserve areas, regional wilderness areas, and other views of rolling hills and rangelands north of the city. An example of protected views within the Planning Area are shown in Figure 3.5-1.

In addition, Arroyo Las Positas and Collier Canyon Creek within the Planning Area break the continuity of the ridges and, in some locations, support vegetation and trees, imparting topographical and visual features to the general landscape.

**Figure 3.5-1: Existing Views from I-580**



*(Left) Looking north just east of the Portola Avenue overpass*



*(Right) Looking north just east of the Portola Avenue overpass*



*(Left) Looking north just east of the Shea Sage Homes site*



*(Right) Looking north just west of the Shea Sage Homes along the seasonal drainage area corridor*



*(Left) Looking north just west of Shea Sage Homes along the seasonal drainage area corridor*



*(Right) Looking north just east of the Isabel Avenue overpass*

**Figure 3.5-1: Existing Views from I-580 (Continued)**



*(Left) Looking north just east of Collier Canyon Road*



*(Right) Looking north just west of Collier Canyon Road*



*Looking south near Isabel Avenue off-ramp*



*Looking south near Isabel Avenue off-ramp*



*Looking south near Nissen Drive*

## **REGULATORY SETTINGS**

### **State Regulations**

#### ***California Scenic Highways Program***

Recognizing the value of scenic areas, the California State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program in 1963. This legislation views scenic highways as "a vital part of the all-encompassing effort...to protect and enhance California's beauty, amenity and quality of life." Under this program, a number of state highways have been designated as eligible for inclusion as scenic routes.<sup>1</sup>

There are no officially designated scenic highways within the Planning Area. However, Caltrans classifies I-580 as an Eligible State Scenic Highway from Highway 5 southwest of Vernalis, CA to Highway 80 (Caltrans, 2017). This includes the portion of I-580 that passes through the Planning Area.

### **Local Regulations**

#### ***City of Livermore General Plan***

The 2003-2025 General Plan is the City of Livermore's fundamental land use and development policy document that guides development and conservation in the City through 2025. The Community Character Element of the General Plan, last updated in 2015, is the element most relevant to the preservation of the city's scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual quality. General Plan objectives and policies from the Community Character Element include minimizing obtrusive glare and wasted energy from excessive nighttime lighting, preserving views of the nighttime sky, and encouraging high quality design for new development, redevelopment, and public facilities. Encouraged design requirements and amenities consist of:

- Interconnected street layout;
- Clustering of buildings;
- Landscaping on each lot;
- Visual buffers;
- Facilitating pedestrian activity; and
- Distinctiveness in architectural design.

The Community Character Element also includes objectives and policies that focus on scenic routes. Objectives include providing a continuous, convenient system of scenic routes, using landscaping to increase the quality of scenic routes, and establishing architectural and site design review

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<sup>1</sup> As described in the Community Character Element, scenic routes are roadways that "pass through areas of high scenic value, or provide access to important scenic, recreational, cultural, or historic points." Scenic Routes within the Planning Area are limited to I-580; Isabel Avenue north and south of I-580; and Doolan Road north of I-580.

procedures for projects within scenic routes. Additionally, the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan addresses the protection and enhancement of the appearance of natural habitats, including alkali sinks, riparian vegetation, wetlands, creeks, and woodland forests.

As described in Section IV.C.4 of the Community Character Element, the City has established view angles that shall be applied at any point at 90 degrees to I-580 except for Subpart D (Shea Property East) where the view angle shall be applied due north from the freeway. The view surface created by this application shall establish a proposed building's compliance with the height envelope maximum determined for preservation of ridgeline and hillside views in Subarea 1 of the I-580 Scenic Corridor. Figure 3.5-2 and Tables 3-5.1 and 3-5.2 summarize the *Section C* conditions that apply to the Planning Area—specifically:

- View plane angles in Subarea 1, Subparts A, B, C, and D, as taken from 4 feet above the outside westbound I-580 travel lane (see Figure 3.5-2);
- View plane angle in Subarea 6 Subpart 6B, as taken from 4 feet above the outside eastbound I-580 travel lane (see Figure 3.5-2);
- Limitations on the Triad and Collier Canyon scenic corridors (see Figure 3.5-2);
- Limitations on ground contour changes in Zones I, II, and III (see Figure 3.5-2 and Table 3.5-1); and
- Exceptions to the view angle limits and allowed ground contour changes (see Figure 3.5-2 and Table 3.5-2).

Table 3.5-1 lists the ground contour changes allowed within each of the three Scenic Corridor Zones shown in Figure 3.5-2. Table 3.5-2 describes the exceptions to the alterations allowed within the Scenic Corridor Zones and Subarea.

**Table 3.5-1: Ground Contour Changes Allowed within Scenic Corridor Zones**

<i>Zone</i>	<i>Alterations Allowed</i>
I	Where slope $\leq$ 10%, plus 5% of Zone I area within the property where $10\% \leq$ slope $\leq$ 15%
II	Where slope $\leq$ 15%, plus 7.5% of Zone II area within the property where $15\% \leq$ slope $\leq$ 20%
III	Where slope $\leq$ 20%, plus 7.5% of Zone III area within the property where $20\% \leq$ slope $\leq$ 25%

Source: City of Livermore General Plan.

**Table 3.5-2: Exceptions to View Angles and Allowed Ground Contour Changes**

<i>Number</i>	<i>Exception</i>
1	A maximum of 3.1 acres above 10% of shaded area may be altered.
2	Hatched knoll areas may be altered; total area of alteration not to exceed 1.5 acres.
3	100-foot building setback required on Parcel E. <sup>2</sup>
4	Exemptions may be granted by the City Council for public works projects and facilities.
5	Parcel shall remain landscaped and undeveloped.
6	Development shall be located on the western half of the parcel; may include up to a two-story building not to exceed 40 feet in height.
7	Development shall include a landscaped buffer of 25 feet along the freeway. Trees shall be placed a minimum 30 feet apart.
8	Arroyo Las Positas should be maintained in its natural form with minimal alterations.
9	Building height is not restricted by view angles on the north side of I-580 within a 1,000-foot radius of the center of the interchange, as the overpass already impacts views
10	Allowable building heights not determined by view angle plane; see GP Amendment 13-004 and GP Amendment 15-003.
11	“Clothesline” elevation applies; see General Plan Community Character Element, Section IV.C.5: Establishing View Angles.

Source: City of Livermore General Plan.

**Livermore Development Code**

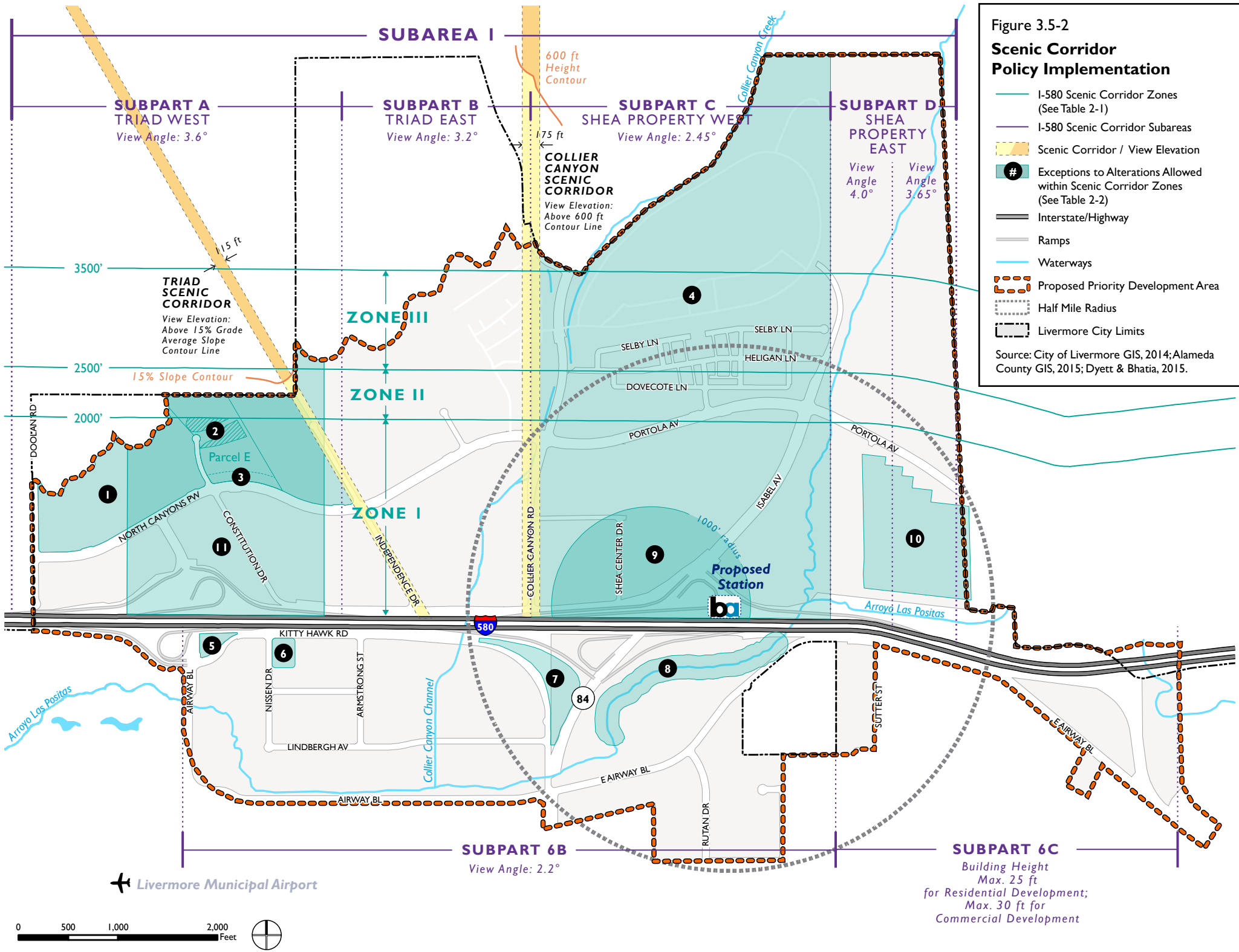
The Livermore Development Code contains provisions to guide the design of development throughout the City. The Development Code provides restrictions on land development and design through zoning and development standards, such as maximum building heights, floor area ratios, lot requirements, parking requirements, and building placement requirements.

**Livermore Design Standards and Guidelines**

The Livermore Design Standards and Guidelines addresses site plan and design review with the aim of ensuring aesthetic quality and compatibility with adjacent developments and public areas, in addition to preventing visual deterioration. Standards are requirements, while guidelines are recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Figure 4-1.1, *North Canyons Parkway Exceptions*, in the General Plan Community Character Element.

**Figure 3.5-2  
Scenic Corridor  
Policy Implementation**



- I-580 Scenic Corridor Zones (See Table 2-1)
  - I-580 Scenic Corridor Subareas
  - Scenic Corridor / View Elevation
  - # Exceptions to Alterations Allowed within Scenic Corridor Zones (See Table 2-2)
  - Interstate/Highway
  - Ramps
  - Waterways
  - Proposed Priority Development Area
  - Half Mile Radius
  - Livermore City Limits
- Source: City of Livermore GIS, 2014; Alameda County GIS, 2015; Dyett & Bhatia, 2015.

**Livermore Municipal Airport**



**SUBPART 6C**  
Building Height  
Max. 25 ft  
for Residential Development;  
Max. 30 ft for  
Commercial Development

## Impact Analysis

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### SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

For the purposes of this EIR, a significant adverse impact would occur if the proposed Plan would:

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

### METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS

Potential impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed Plan were evaluated based on information from existing conditions assessments of scenic and visual resources in the Planning Area. The assessments were made using data from observation, spatial analysis, and a photographic inventory.

Programmatic impacts are discussed in broad, qualitative terms. This assessment does not satisfy the need for project-level California Environmental Quality Act analysis for individual projects. Individual projects under the proposed Plan may require a project-level analysis at the time they are proposed based on the details of these projects and the existing conditions at the time such projects are pursued.

### IMPACTS

#### **Impact 3.5-1 Implementation of the proposed Plan will have a substantial adverse effect on some scenic vistas. (*Significant and Unavoidable*)**

As described in the Setting above, the City has established policies for the I-580 Scenic Corridor that apply to development in the Planning Area. The main purpose of these policies is to preserve views of the surrounding hillsides from I-580. The Plan proposes three amendment areas to the I-580 Scenic Corridor policies in the Planning Area, as illustrated in Figure 3-5.3. Figure 3.5-4 shows the maximum building height limits within these three amendment areas, expressed in feet above mean sea level.

The first amendment proposes to expand an existing exemption area north of the Isabel Avenue interchange, such that new development in the Isabel Neighborhood core would not be subject to height limits based on view angles. Second is a new exemption area on the south side of the Isabel Avenue interchange. The third amendment involves increasing the height limit for residential development in the vicinity of Portola Avenue/East Airway Boulevard.



The proposed Plan focuses much of the future development in the first two amendment locations. It also seeks to preserve the best existing views through regulating building height and massing at key locations within the core area. These locations include:

- Just west of the Shea Sage project, to preserve the view of the ridgelines when travelling westbound on I-580 and looking north at an oblique angle (about 45 degrees).
- East and west of Collier Canyon Road, when looking north at 90 degrees or at an oblique angle (about 45 degrees).

The Isabel Avenue interchange currently blocks many of the views of the hills along the second exemption area on the south side of Isabel Avenue interchange, particularly when travelling eastbound and looking south. At the third exemption area, existing sound walls, vegetation, and distance from I-580 limit the visibility of these residential sites. The new height limits proposed under the third exemption area are intended to preserve views of the ridgelines over the building rooflines. Therefore, the third exemption area would not significantly affect a scenic vista.

All other areas of the Planning Area would be subject to the I-580 Scenic Corridor policies regulating height limits based on view angles. This includes preserving the existing limitations on the Collier Canyon, Triad, and Doolan Canyon view corridors under the policy. The Plan also establishes new view corridors along Main Street and Montage Drive as well as upper-story building step-backs along Main Street, recognizing that hillside views from within the Planning Area, not just from I-580, are also key visual resources.

New development could affect some scenic vistas from public streets and open spaces in the existing residential area south of Las Positas College. When compared to existing conditions, residents would see less undeveloped grassland and more urbanized development that may block some views of the valley and distant hills. Under existing regulations, development of these vacant lands north of Portola Avenue could be up to 45 feet tall, which would remain the same under the proposed Plan. The height limits, combined with the design standards and guidelines, would reduce the potential for adverse effects on scenic vistas from this area.

In addition, the construction of new projects in the Planning Area could potentially result in short-term visual impacts including blockage or disruption of views by construction equipment and scaffolding, the removal of landscaping, temporary route changes, temporary signage, exposed excavation, and construction staging areas. However, these visual impacts would be short-term during phased periods of construction at specific locations within the Planning Area. The final built condition of the projects would include landscaping and other design features to enhance the visual character and preserve view corridors of Livermore's scenic vistas.

Given the amendment areas, the proposed height and intensity of development within the Planning Area would affect some of the existing views of hillsides and ridgelines beyond the city limits to a significant level. The views from I-580 that would be most impacted are oblique views to the north as one approaches the Planning Area from the east and west. Many of the Plan's policies and standards provide long-term protections of some scenic vistas from the scenic routes and corridors. The Plan establishes new building height limits in select areas to specifically preserve portions of key views of hillsides and ridgelines from I-580. Combined with the proposed building development standards, the proposed building height limits ensure that buildings step down in

height from the Neighborhood core to the edges of the Planning Area; that buildings remain in scale with neighborhoods adjacent to the Planning Area; and that portions of key views of the hillsides and ridgelines remain visible from I-580.

Impacts to the existing scenic vistas are shown for four key views in Figure 3.5-5. Given the substantial effects on scenic vistas, the proposed Plan would have a significant impact.

***Proposed Plan Goals and Policies that Reduce the Impacts***

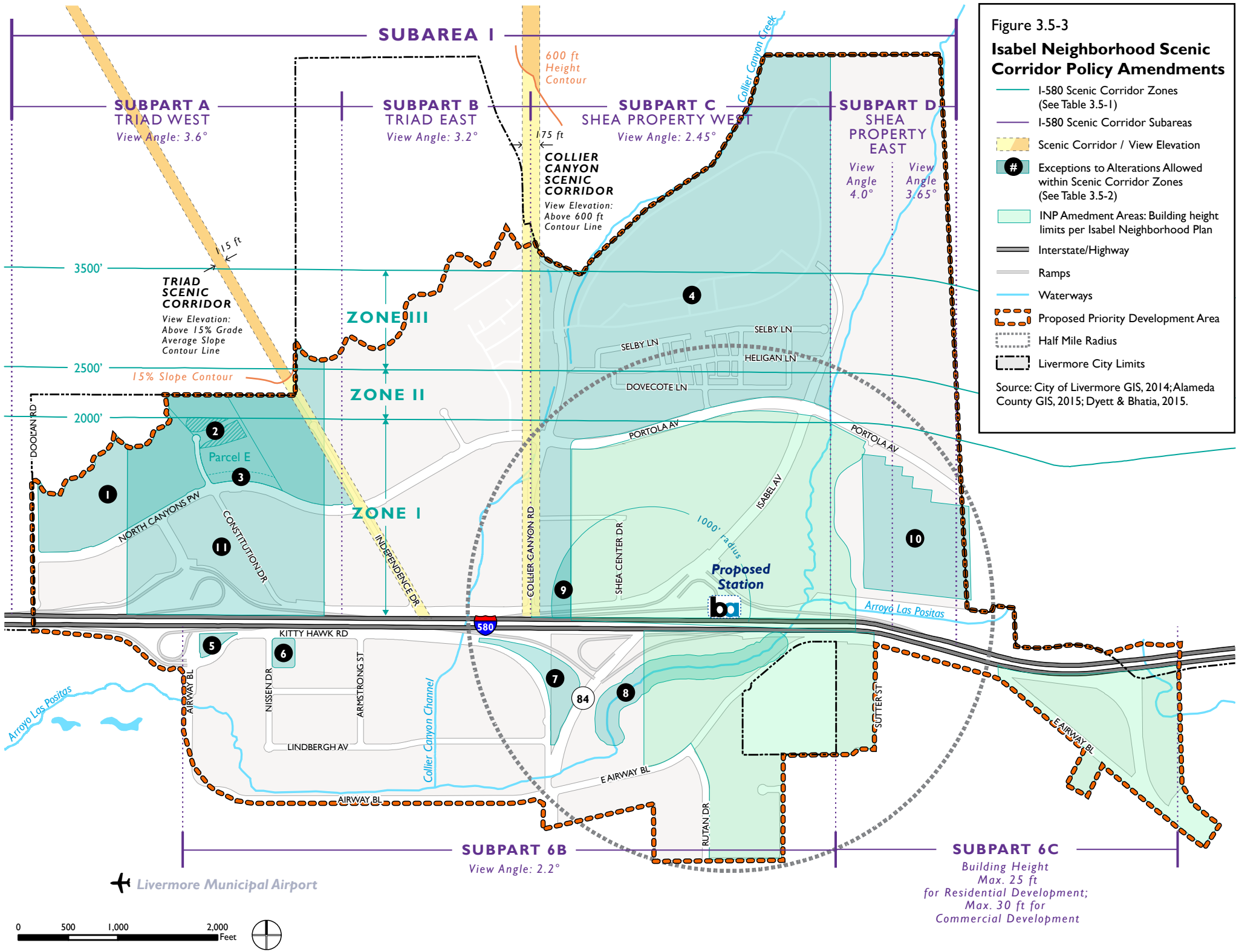
*Land Use Chapter*

**G-LU-2:** Protect existing scenic views to the extent possible and create new view corridors from within the Planning Area.

***Mitigation Measures***

None required.

**Figure 3.5-3**  
**Isabel Neighborhood Scenic Corridor Policy Amendments**



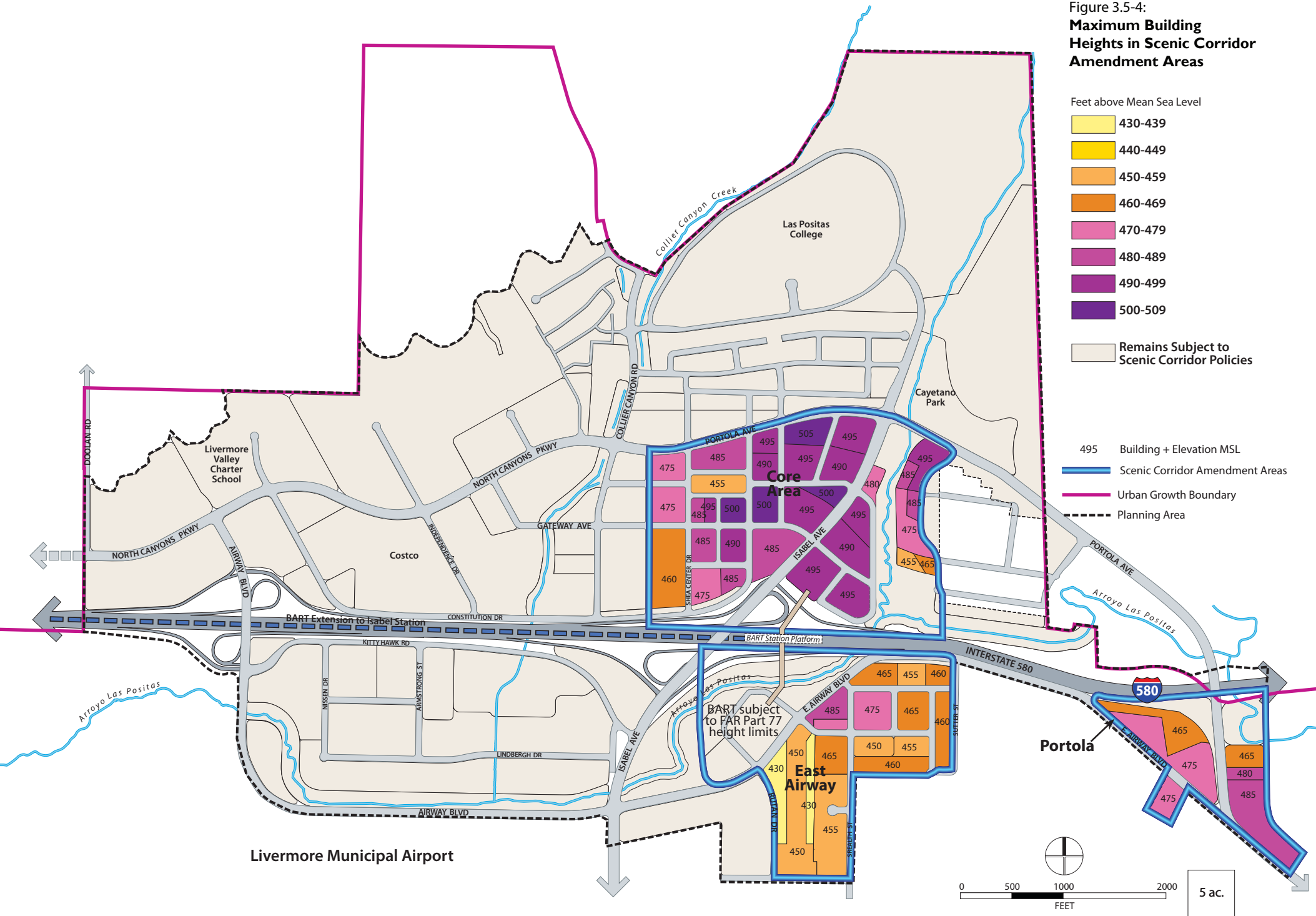
- I-580 Scenic Corridor Zones (See Table 3.5-1)
  - I-580 Scenic Corridor Subareas
  - Scenic Corridor / View Elevation
  - # Exceptions to Alterations Allowed within Scenic Corridor Zones (See Table 3.5-2)
  - INP Amedment Areas: Building height limits per Isabel Neighborhood Plan
  - Interstate/Highway
  - Ramps
  - Waterways
  - Proposed Priority Development Area
  - Half Mile Radius
  - Livermore City Limits
- Source: City of Livermore GIS, 2014; Alameda County GIS, 2015; Dyett & Bhatia, 2015.

**SUBPART 6C**  
 Building Height  
 Max. 25 ft  
 for Residential Development;  
 Max. 30 ft for  
 Commercial Development

Livermore Municipal Airport



Figure 3.5-4:  
**Maximum Building  
 Heights in Scenic Corridor  
 Amendment Areas**



Livermore Municipal Airport

BART subject to FAR Part 77 height limits

**Core Area**

**East Airway**

Portola

Las Positas College

Cayetano Park

Livermore Valley Charter School

Costco

Arroyo Las Positas

Collier Canyon Creek

NORTH CANYONS PKWY

GATEWAY AVE

PORTOLA AVE

PORTOLA AVE

INTERSTATE 580

580

BART Extension to Isabel Station

BART Station Platform

CONSTITUTION DR

KITTY HAWK RD

ARMSTRONG ST

LINDBERGH DR

ISABEL AVE

E AIRWAY BLVD

INTERSTATE 580

580

E AIRWAY BLVD

SUTTER ST

COLLIER CANYON RD

AIRWAY BLVD

NISSER DR

ARMSTRONG ST

LINDBERGH DR

ISABEL AVE

E AIRWAY BLVD

INTERSTATE 580

580

E AIRWAY BLVD

SUTTER ST

COLLIER CANYON RD

AIRWAY BLVD

NISSER DR

ARMSTRONG ST

LINDBERGH DR

ISABEL AVE

E AIRWAY BLVD

INTERSTATE 580

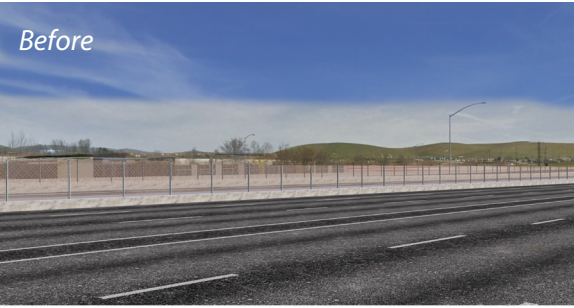
580

E AIRWAY BLVD

SUTTER ST

**Key Scenic Vistas – Existing and Proposed Buildout**

Looking Northeast toward Innovation Hub Area



Looking Northwest near Collier Canyon Corridor



Looking Norwest toward BART Station Area



Looking West near Portola Avenue



**Impact 3.5-2 Implementation of the proposed Plan would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. (*Less than Significant*)**

As stated above, I-580 is classified as an Eligible State Scenic Highway by Caltrans. The hills north and south of I-580 comprise the scenic resources visible from the route passing through the Planning Area. There are no significant rock outcroppings within the Planning Area. The Gandolfo Farm is a historic resource eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Some of the existing trees located along the freeway may be removed as part of the BART to Livermore project, although private development and public improvements associated with the proposed Plan would result in a net increase in trees visible from the freeway. Proposed policies call for tree plantings along creek corridors, streets, and adjacent to buildings, while balancing the desire to preserve views of the hills – the primary scenic resource. As discussed above, implementation of the proposed Plan and associated General Plan amendments would not result in a significant impact to scenic vistas along I-580.

The Planning Area’s scenic resources consist primarily of the hillsides and ridgelines to the north and south of the City. As these resources lie outside of the Planning Area, they will not be impacted by implementation of the proposed Plan.

Other scenic resources within the Planning Area include existing vegetation and trees along the creeks – specifically, along the Arroyo Las Positas south of I-580 and Collier Canyon Creek north of I-580. However, implementation of the proposed Plan would maintain these areas as open space and therefore would not have a significant impact on this vegetation.

***Mitigation Measures***

None required.

**Impact 3.5-3 Implementation of the proposed Plan would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. (*Less than Significant*)**

Given that there are several large parcels of vacant land in the Planning Area, development under the proposed Plan would change the visual character when compared to existing conditions. In addition, adoption of the land use designations in the proposed Plan would enable higher density or intensity of development when compared to the current land use designations and zoning districts that apply to the Planning Area.

The proposed Plan, however, includes development standards in Chapter 2: Land Use that would regulate building height and setbacks to minimize the visual impacts of new construction and redevelopment. In addition, the proposed Plan includes design standards and guidelines in Chapter 5: Urban Design, which address the street interface, building massing, architecture, colors, materials, landscaping, and signage. The design standards and guidelines establish a comprehensive urban design scheme that requires high-quality materials and attention to detail. The proposed policies aim to encourage design diversity and visual richness by promoting a variety of architectural building styles. In this respect, the Plan seeks to balance cohesiveness across the neighborhood with design flexibility to accommodate a range of uses and changes over time.

Pedestrian orientation would be emphasized through maximizing active frontages along key streets and requiring highly-articulated facades, ample fenestration, and entries located off the street. The proposed Plan would further enhance the aesthetics of the street environment through landscaping, street furniture, lighting, and public art. Together, implementation of the development and design policies would help ensure harmony with the scale and character of surrounding development.

Given the Plan's aim to enhance the visual character of the largely vacant Isabel Neighborhood with well-designed urban development, the potential of the plan to degrade the visual character of the Planning Area is considered less than significant.

***Mitigation Measures***

None required.

**Impact 3.5-4 Implementation of the proposed Plan would create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.  
(Less than Significant)**

There are a number of existing light sources in the Planning Area, including street lights, buildings, and vehicles. New development under the proposed Plan would increase sources of light and glare in the Planning Area. Land around the proposed BART station in the Planning Area would have the most intense development, and thus, the largest potential to generate excessive light.

Light pollution is typically related to the use of high voltage light fixtures with inadequate shields and improper positioning or orientation. Nighttime lighting impacts are significant when they interfere with or intrude into neighboring residences. The Livermore General Plan contains policies for controlling outdoor artificial light (see Objectives LU-6.1 and CC-1.3) and Chapter 15.18 of the Livermore Municipal Code contains lighting regulations for commercial and residential areas. Compliance with these policies would reduce potentially significant long-term light and glare impacts. The proposed Plan's design standards would further help to ensure that lighting for new development is held to high design standards for light pollution and glare reduction. This potential impact is considered less than significant.

***Mitigation Measures***

None required.

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