



Section 5.0

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS



5.3 VISUAL EFFECTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

5.3.1 Existing Conditions

Visual Setting and Site Characteristics

The project site is located in the Carmel Valley community within the City of San Diego at the southwestern corner of Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real. It is graded but vacant land, and is surrounded by existing development. It remains the last large piece of vacant developable land in Carmel Valley. As illustrated in Figure 2-2, surrounding land uses in the vicinity include a mixture of commercial office, commercial retail, and residential uses. Schools, parks, and civic uses also occur in the surrounding neighborhood. Surrounding uses in the immediate area include Del Mar Heights Road and multi-family residences to the north; El Camino Real, the Del Mar Highlands Town Center shopping center, and one single-family residence to the east; a commercial office complex to the south; and a bicycle path, High Bluff Drive, and commercial offices to the west. I-5 is located approximately 0.25 mile to the west, and SR 56 is located approximately 1.0 mile to the south.

The project site is vacant and contains three terraced building pads that were graded as part of a larger phased map within the 118-acre Carmel Valley Employment Center project. The graded pads consist of cleared land with exposed fill soils and minimal ground cover, as well as temporary sediment basins. The pads are terraced with an elevation difference of approximately 15 feet. The northern pad is the highest at an elevation of approximately 215 feet amsl, with the eastern pad at approximately 200 feet amsl and the southern pad at approximately 185 feet amsl. Roadside landscaping exists along the street frontage of Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real and includes mature street trees and low-lying groundcover. Additional trees and ornamental landscaping are located on the western site perimeter between the site and High Bluff Drive. The project site is lower in elevation relative to High Bluff Drive and the Del Mar Heights Road frontage (with an elevation difference of up to approximately 35 feet), and is higher in elevation relative to El Camino Real (with an elevation difference of up to approximately 5 feet). A manufactured on-site berm is located along the Del Mar Heights Road frontage. Due to the graded and disturbed nature of the project site and the absence of natural landforms or vegetation (besides the ornamental perimeter trees and landscaping), the existing visual quality of the project site is considered low. There are no visual elements or aesthetic features within the project site that are considered scenic or important visual resources,

Community and Neighborhood Character

A large number of elements may define the visual character of an area including, but not limited to, land use patterns, lot size and configuration, circulation, open space, physical features, site grading, building placement, bulk and scale, architectural style, material and colors, signage, and lighting. Depending on the circumstances, a specific element or elements may create a recognizable identity. A number of distinct differences exist in visual character between the variety of neighborhoods (Neighborhoods 1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8a, 8b, 8c, 9, and 10) that comprise Carmel Valley (refer to Figure 5.1-1). Collectively, these neighborhoods define the existing identity of the Carmel Valley Community Planning Area as a whole.

The City's Significance Determination Thresholds do not address the geographic area or viewshed to be considered in determining "neighborhood" character. An evaluation limited to Neighborhood 2 (Carmel Valley Employment Center), which includes the project site, would omit important information about adjoining Neighborhoods 3, 7, and 9 (refer to Figure 5.1-1). Therefore, the following analysis considers immediately adjacent neighborhoods, as well as the larger community planning area to define neighborhood character.

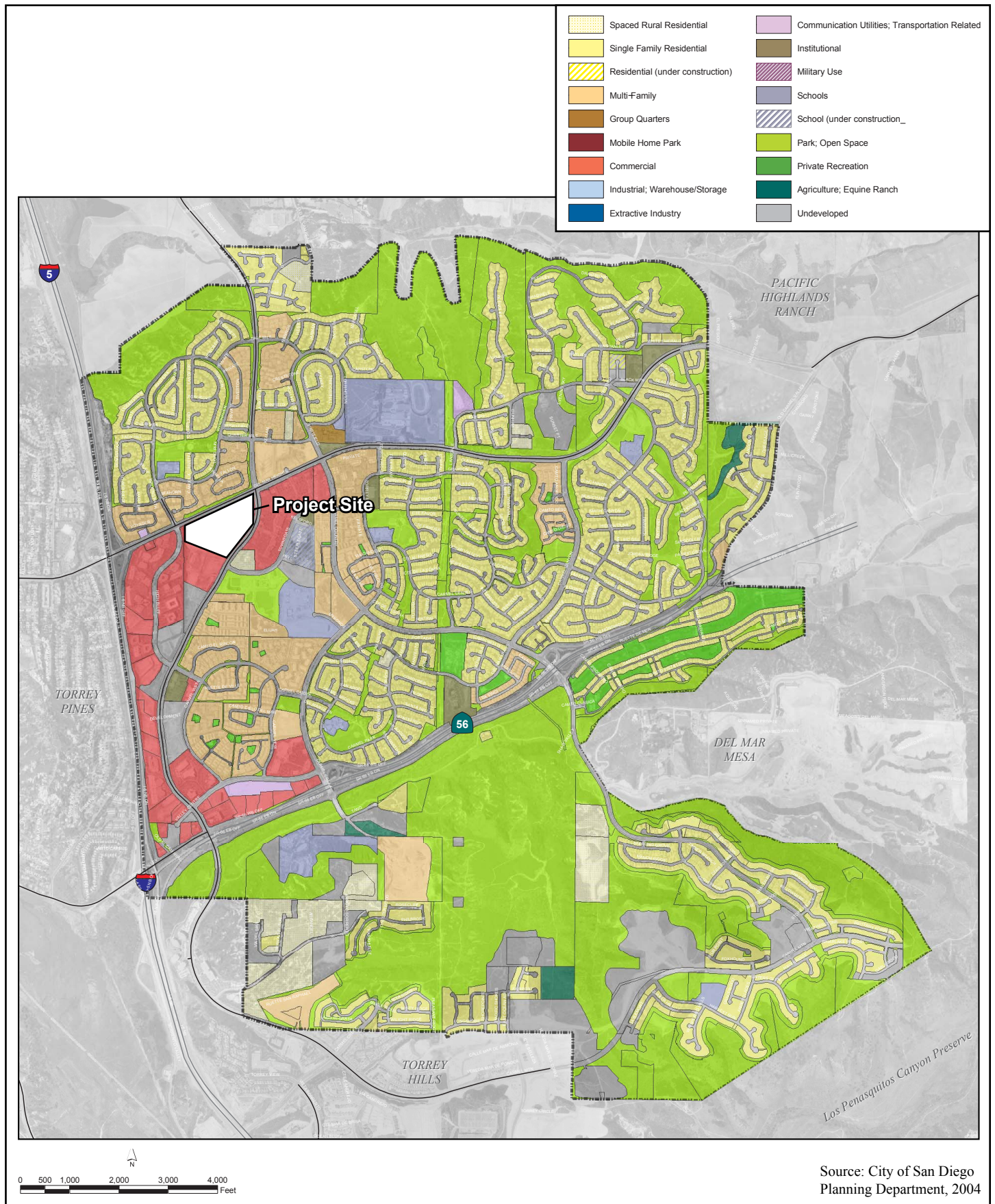
Carmel Valley

The project site is located within the developed Carmel Valley community of San Diego. Carmel Valley is a master-planned community encompassing approximately 4,300 acres and comprised of residential, commercial office, retail, hotel, recreational, and civic uses. It is generally bound by I-5 on the west, Gonzales Canyon and the San Dieguito River Valley on the north, the community of Pacific Highlands Ranch on the north and east, the community of Del Mar Mesa on the east, and the community of Torrey Hills and Los Peñasquitos Canyon on the south (refer to Figure 5.1-1).

In 1975, the City approved the Carmel Valley Community Plan that envisioned development of a new self-contained, planned community of approximately 40,000 people centered around an urban core and surrounded by decreasing residential densities. The project site is situated within the portion of Carmel Valley that has been planned for the most intense form of development within the community.

The 1979 General Plan designated the Community Plan area as a Planned Urbanizing Community. Land was opened for urbanization in a staged, contiguous manner through the orderly extension of public facilities and the provision of a variety of housing types. Development of the planned community began in 1983 and has been almost entirely developed with a current population of 36,359 people (SANDAG 2010a). The current General Plan designates Carmel Valley as an Urbanized Community.

Carmel Valley has been developed in accordance with the planning principles and overarching goals identified in the Community Plan. These comprehensive principles focus on (1) providing a balance of dwelling types, convenient shopping, office and business centers, educational, cultural, recreational, and health services facilities while preserving natural terrain and open space; and (2) developing the center of the community with more intense land uses than the surrounding and outlying areas of the community. The land use and development patterns of Carmel Valley reflect these principles, as shown in Figure 5.3-1, *Existing Carmel Valley Development Patterns*. The center, or urban core, of the Carmel Valley is located at the crossroads of Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real, the major east-west and north-south roadways in the community. This area contains the Town Center and associated retail uses, as well as public facilities such as the library, recreation center, police station, fire station, and several schools. Residential uses in this area consist of multi-family developments at a higher density than surrounding areas within the community. Office uses are also concentrated around the core along El Camino Real and High Bluff Drive. Lower density residential primarily consisting of single-family neighborhoods are interspersed with parks, schools, and open space beyond the Town Center.



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Existing Carmel Valley Development Patterns
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Figure 5.3-1

Regional access to Carmel Valley is provided from I-5 and SR 56, and major roadways include Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real. I-5 forms the western boundary of Carmel Valley and provides direct access to the community via Del Mar Heights Road and the SR 56 interchange. Indirect access to Carmel Valley from I-5 is provided from the Carmel Mountain Road interchange, which ultimately connects to El Camino Real. SR 56 traverses Carmel Valley in an east-west alignment in the southern half of the community and provides access from I-5 and communities to the east between I-5 and I-15. Del Mar Heights Road is the major east-west roadway within the community and serves as the main route to the community's activity centers, including the Employment Center, the Del Mar Highlands Town Center, and several schools. El Camino Real serves as the major north-south roadway in the community and also provides access to community activity centers, as well as to Via de la Valle to the north. Both Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real are highly traveled roadways. Other notable roadways in Carmel Valley include High Bluff Drive, Carmel Country Road, Carmel Canyon Road, Carmel Creek Road, Valley Centre Drive, and Carmel Valley Road. All of these roadways connect to SR 56, Del Mar Heights Road, or El Camino Real.

Carmel Valley is characterized by varying topography and landforms consisting of east-west trending valleys and canyons with steep slopes, mesa tops, and other relatively level areas from mass grading and development. Figure 5.3-2, *Carmel Valley Topography*, illustrates the topographic variation within the community. The southern portion of the community, generally south of SR 56, is higher in elevation than the rest of the community with a high of approximately 400 feet amsl. Development within this area has mostly occurred on the mesa tops, and the steep slopes have remained undeveloped. Most of the development in the southern portion of Carmel Valley consists of newer residential housing along with schools and commercial uses near I-5. Some older rural residences and equestrian uses also occur in this area. North of SR 56, Carmel Valley is developed with residential, office, retail, recreational, hotel, and civic uses.

Project Site

The project site is centrally located within Carmel Valley and along two major roadways that provide access within the community, Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real. The topographic grade changes and alignments of Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real result in the project site being in a highly visible location. Del Mar Heights Road peaks at its intersection with High Bluff Drive and then slopes down to a low point near the El Camino Real intersection. Views down into the project site are visible from the high point along Del Mar Heights Road at High Bluff Drive. El Camino Real rises from south of the project site to north and curves along the project site frontage. The slope and curve of the roadway provide views for motorists across the project site from El Camino Real. Due to the combination of its central location and visibility from major roadways, the project site is at a visually prominent location within Carmel Valley. The existing condition of the site, however, consists of graded vacant building pads that contrast with the surrounding developed neighborhood and the larger community.

Furthermore, the project site is located at a transition point between land uses within the community. Multi-family residential development exists north of the site across Del Mar Heights Road, commercial office uses are located west and south of the site between I-5 and El Camino Real, and retail uses at the Del Mar Highlands Town Center occur directly east of the site. This area will be further discussed as it shows the intensity within the core. Figure 5.3-3, *Surrounding Land Uses Relative to the Project Site*, illustrates how the surrounding uses within the community converge at the project site. The confluence of land uses at the project site in a central location within the community further contributes to the visual prominence of the location of the project site.

Visual Character

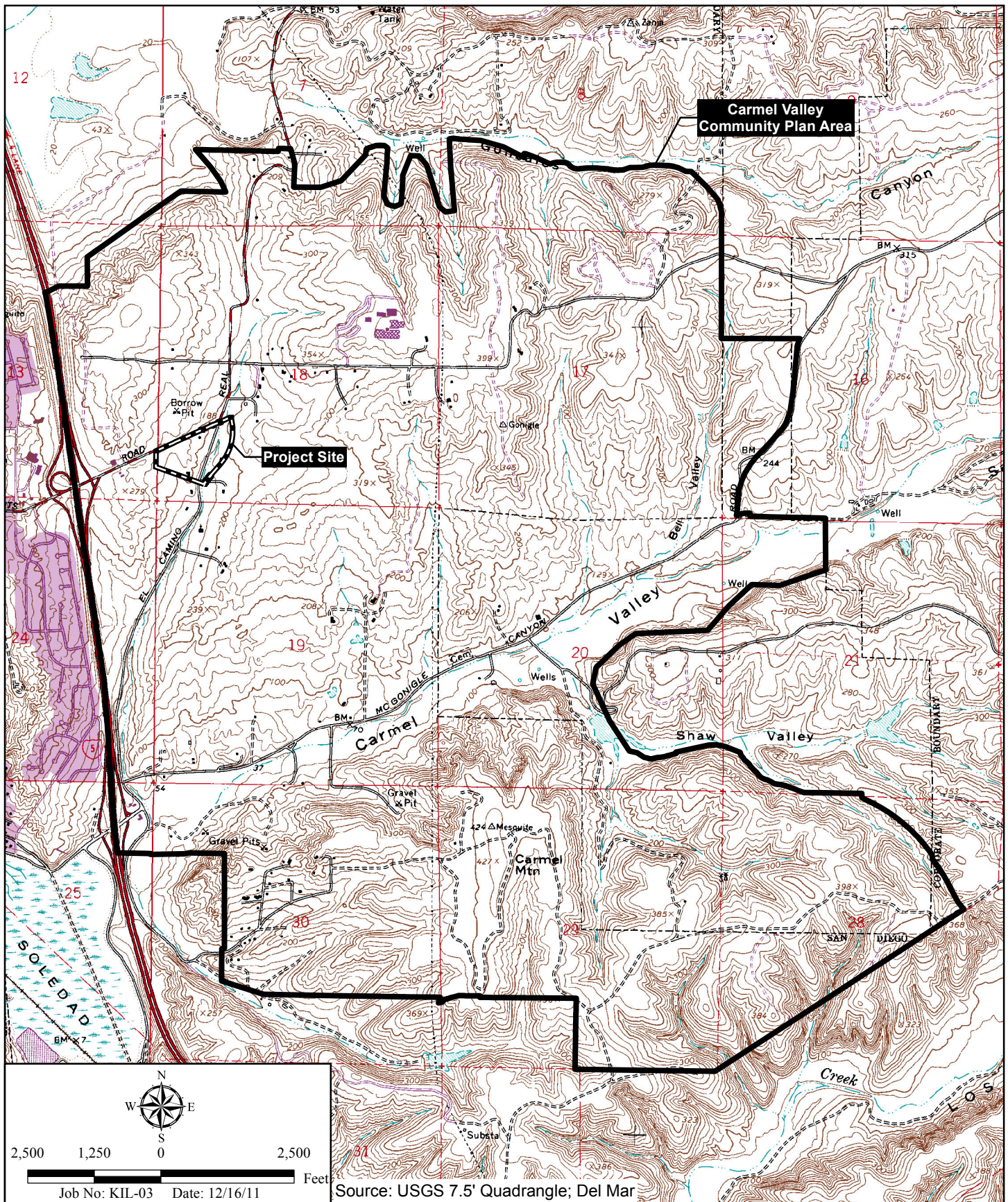
The existing visual character of the surrounding neighborhood and community is described below. Photographs were taken to illustrate the character of the various land uses and how those uses relate to the project site and contribute to community and neighborhood character. The locations of the photographs and distances to the site are identified in Figure 5.3-4, *Key Map*.

Existing Residential Development

Residential development in the community has followed the overall Community Plan principle of concentrating higher densities in the center of the community and lower density residential in surrounding areas. This pattern is evident in Figure 5.3-1 as the tan-shaded areas represent multi-family residential uses that are centrally located within the general Town Center area that is adjacent to the project site. As stated previously, the project site is situated at a confluence of uses with multi-family residential directly adjacent to the north and northeast.

Residential development to the immediate north and northeast includes East Bluff and Signature Point, which are multi-family residential developments. Photograph 1 in Figure 5.3-5a, *Community and Neighborhood Character*, depicts a typical residence in the East Bluff condominium development and Figure 5.3-5a, Photograph 2 shows a typical multi-family residence of the Signature Point Apartments. As visible in the photographs, the structures are two-story neutral earth-tone (tans, off-white, light browns, and browns) stucco structures with terra cotta-tiled roofs. These residences are elevated approximately 15 to 20 feet above the adjacent Del Mar Heights Road. The East Bluff condominium complex is heavily landscaped with trees and large bushes, while the Signature Point residential complex includes landscaping that partially screens views beyond the property. A pedestrian bridge over Del Mar Heights Road connects the residential areas near Signature Point apartment complex with Del Mar Highlands Town Center.

Several other multi-family residential developments are located north of the project site and Del Mar Heights Road. One representative multi-family development in this area is Regents Square located approximately 0.25 mile northeast of the project site, just west of the Carmel Country Road/Quarter Mile Drive intersection. This residential development consists of three-level buildings with two-story residences above garages. As shown in Photograph 3 in Figure 5.3-5a, the buildings are configured in a linear arrangement and include earth-tone stucco facades with varying rooflines. Landscaping is provided along the driveway frontage.



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Carmel Valley Topography

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Figure 5.3-2



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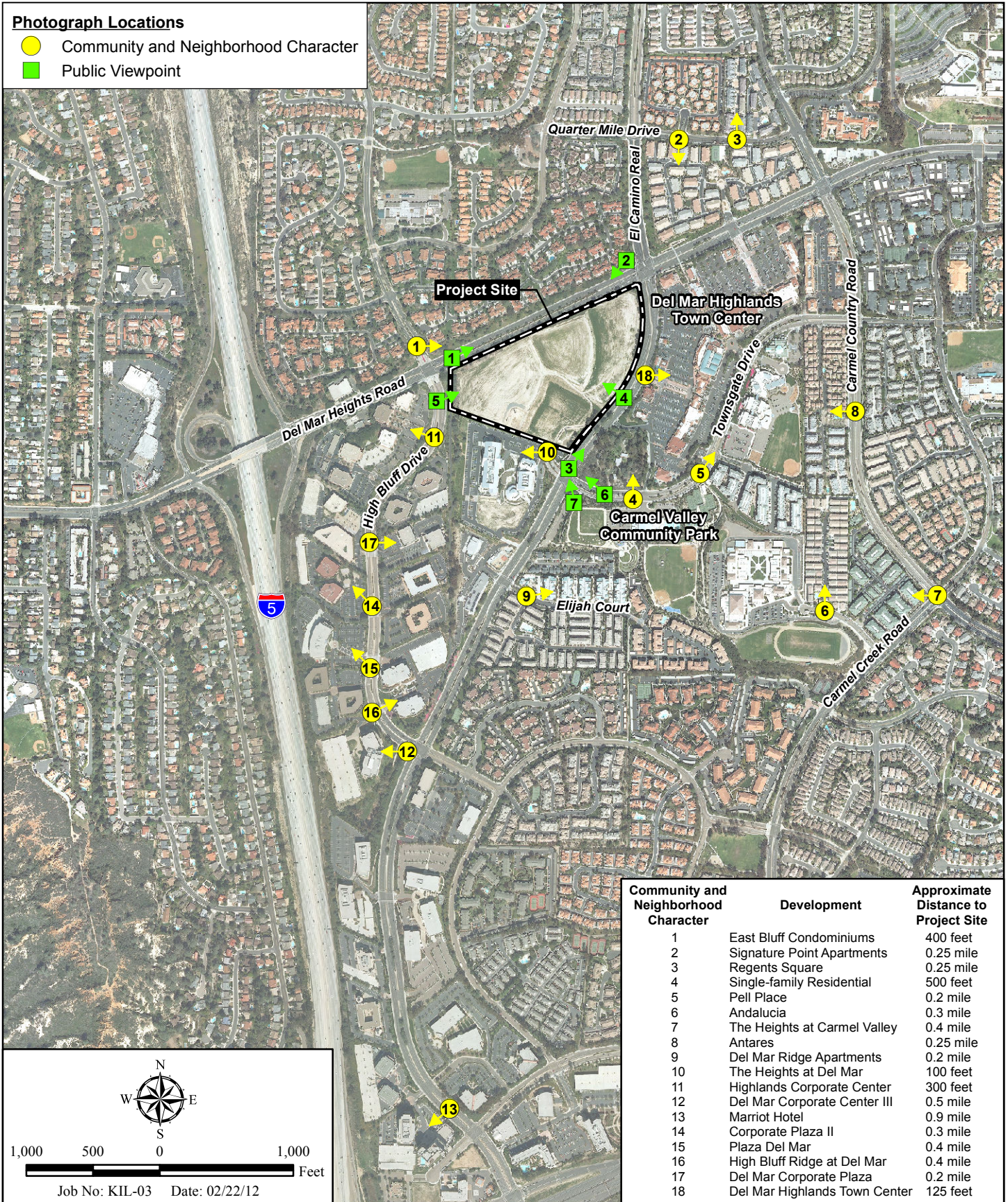
Surrounding Land Uses Relative to the Project Site

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Figure 5.3-3

Photograph Locations

- Community and Neighborhood Character
- Public Viewpoint



Key Map

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Figure 5.3-4



Photograph 1 - East Bluff Condominiums



Photograph 2 - Signature Point Apartments



Photograph 3 - Regents Square



Photograph 4 - Single-family Residence

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Community and Neighborhood Character

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Figure 5.3-5a

A single rural residence (which pre-dates the Community Plan) is located on a 3.8-acre lot to the immediate southeast on the northeastern corner of El Camino Real and Townsgate Drive. This property is slightly higher in elevation relative to El Camino Real. This residential property is a remnant of a former ranch that originally encompassed much of the land in the immediate project area. Several structures are located on this adjacent site, including a mint green structure with a flat white roof and enclosed metal patio, and two wooden, brick-red structures (Figure 5.3-5a, Photograph 4). Both of the red structures include sloped roofs, although one has a red roof and one has a white roof. A wood crate, pick-up camper shell, pallet, and other items are also located on the site. This lot is surrounded by a chain link fence and supports dense mature trees and bushes. This residential lot has a different visual character than other nearby residential uses; it is much older, has a different architectural style, and is located on a larger lot with more vegetation. The rural visual character of this house contrasts with the surrounding newer development and development patterns, as well as the density of multi-family residential development in the surrounding area.

Numerous other multi-family residential developments are located in the project vicinity to the east, southeast, and south. The area generally between El Camino Real, Del Mar Heights Road, Carmel Creek Road, and Valley Centre Drive is predominantly developed with multi-family residential uses (refer to Figure 5.3-1). Representative of these development types in the project vicinity and community include Pell Place, Andalucia, The Heights at Carmel Valley, Antares, and the Del Mar Ridge Apartments. Pell Place is a condominium complex comprised of 316 units in seven, three-story structures along Pell Place, northeast of Carmel Valley Community Park approximately 0.2 mile southeast of the project site. The residential buildings are stucco, each with tan, light brown, gray, and salmon-colored elements (Photograph 5 in Figure 5.3-5b, *Community and Neighborhood Character*). A salmon-colored retaining wall extends along the front of the structure near the sidewalk, and landscaping, consisting of trees and shrubs, is located above the wall along the frontage as well as between the structures. They are at approximately the same elevation as the fronting roadways, and include subsurface parking below the buildings.

Andalucia (Photograph 6 in Figure 5.3-5b) consists of a 181-unit multi-family development located approximately 0.3 mile southeast of the project site. Residential buildings are arranged in two rows that are separated by an access driveway between them. The buildings are three stories tall with garages on the ground floor and two-story residences above them. Buildings have light earth-toned color facades and red-tiled roofs and are accented by palm trees and streetside landscaping along the access driveway.

The Heights at Carmel Valley (Photograph 7 in Figure 5.3-5b) is comprised of 225 residential units located just west of the Carmel Creek Road/Carmel Country Road intersection, approximately 0.4 mile southeast of the project site. The buildings are three-stories with earth-tone colors and varied rooflines. A stucco wall and retaining wall in an earth-tone color that matches the buildings, as well as a landscape buffer, are located between the buildings and abutting roadways.

Antares (Photograph 8 in Figure 5.3-5b) is located approximately 0.25 mile east of the project site, southwest of the Townsgate Drive/Carmel Country Road intersection. This multi-family

residential development is comprised of three building levels and buildings are configured in groups that share a common driveway. The buildings are darker earth-tone in color and have red-tiled roofs. Landscaping occurs throughout the development with palm trees lining the main access drive.

The Del Mar Ridge Apartments are located approximately 0.2 mile to the south, and consist of five, large multi-story, apartment buildings with subsurface parking along Elijah Court (Photograph 9 in Figure 5.3-5c, *Community and Neighborhood Character*). The Del Mar Ridge buildings have bold-colored facades, varied metal roofs, windows of varying size, and patios.

Residential development within Carmel Valley that is further from the project site consists of single-family neighborhoods. The location of these residential areas within Carmel Valley is shown as the light yellow-colored areas in Figure 5.3-1.

The residential development types in the project vicinity and within the community as a whole have varied architectural styles, colors, and building mass. While individual architectural themes guided development of each individual residential complex or neighborhood, there is not a common architectural theme used for all the residential buildings in the area or community. Common visual elements include earth-tone and/or neutral colors, stucco facades, and landscaping.

Existing Commercial Office Development (Employment Center)

The Employment Center encompasses 118 acres and is comprised of commercial office development located to the west and south of the project site generally between I-5, Del Mar Heights Road, El Camino Real, and Valley Centre Drive. This area is developed with multi-story office buildings ranging between 2 and 12 stories surrounded by surface parking lots.

Two office buildings are located to the immediate south of the project site on the 13-acre The Heights at Del Mar office development site (Figure 5.3-5c, Photograph 10). The two tan, concrete-block structures are both three stories tall, with stone accent walls, varied facades, large windows, exposed roof-support beams, and pale olive metal roofs. One of the structures includes an attached, enclosed gazebo-like structure. The landscaping between the two buildings includes a rock waterfall, pedestrian pathways, and an amphitheater feature. This site is accessed from Neurocrine Place, an extension of Townsgate Drive that extends west from El Camino Real. Landscaping around the entry and in the parking lot islands includes grass, shrubs, and trees.

The Highlands Corporate Center is located just west of the project site at the southwestern corner of the intersection of High Bluff Drive and Del Mar Heights Road, and includes five structures and associated asphalt parking lots. This center is illustrated in Figure 5.3-5c, Photograph 11. The Highlands Corporate Center structures are three- to four-story-tall block structures covered in red brick, with entries accented by grey concrete elements. The parking lot areas near the buildings are paved with bricks. Trees, shrubs, and lawns are located along Del Mar Heights Road, High Bluff Drive, and within in the parking lot, at the driveways, and around the perimeter of the buildings.



Photograph 5 - Pell Place



Photograph 6 - Andalucia



Photograph 7 - The Heights at Carmel Valley



Photograph 8 - Antares

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Community and Neighborhood Character

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Figure 5.3-5b



Photograph 9 - Del Mar Ridge Apartments



Photograph 10 - The Heights at Del Mar



Photograph 11 - Highlands Corporate Center



Photograph 12 - Del Mar Corporate Center III

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Community and Neighborhood Character

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Figure 5.3-5c

The Del Mar Corporate Center III is located at the southwestern corner of the intersection of High Bluff Drive and El Camino Real, approximately 0.5 mile from the project site. This office development, pictured in Photograph 12 of Figure 5.3-5c, consists of a six-story office building and a parking structure. The building has varied facades covered with glass and earth-toned stone accent walls. Landscaped slopes are located along the High Bluff Drive frontage that features lawns, groundcovers, and trees.

The Marriott Hotel is located at the northwest corner of the El Camino Real and Valley Centre Drive intersection at the southern portion of the Employment Center, approximately 0.9 mile from the project site. The hotel is 12 stories tall and set back from the roadways by an attached 2-story restaurant. The façade of the restaurant consists of a mixture of glossy brown-colored walls with windows, and the attached hotel is surfaced with tan and brown walls with uniform windows, as pictured in Photograph 13 in Figure 5.3-5d, *Community and Neighborhood Character*.

Additional office buildings line both sides of High Bluff Drive and El Camino Real. These range in height from two to six stories tall, and have varied architectural styles, colors, and building mass. These developments are generally arranged in a business park setting, with landscaped perimeters and parking lots; some include internal pedestrian spaces and cafés as well. Representative existing office developments include the Corporate Plaza II, Plaza Del Mar, High Bluff Ridge at Del Mar, and Del mar Corporate Plaza and are pictured in Photographs 14, 15, and 16 in Figure 5.3-5d, and Photograph 17 in Figure 5.3-5e, *Community and Neighborhood Character*.

Existing Commercial Retail Development

The Town Center, comprised of retail development located east of the project site, consists of the Del Mar Highlands Town Center and Carmel Country Plaza. The Del Mar Highlands Town Center is an approximately 30-acre shopping center that was constructed approximately 20 years ago and contains retail shops, restaurants, a major grocery store, and a major drug store, a theater, a small outdoor amphitheater, and surface parking lots. This shopping center currently provides the primary retail uses within Carmel Valley. The center's structures are one- to two-story, and are fronted by large surface parking lots. A portion of the center includes a second deck of retail stores. Most of the buildings are connected and arranged in a linear configuration; the mass of the buildings is varied by architectural features such as articulation and variation in height, roof style, and color. Other free-standing buildings occur around the perimeter and are smaller in scale. The buildings are earth tone (orange-browns, tans, off-white, light browns, and browns) stucco with terra cotta-tiled roofs (Figure 5.3-5e, Photograph 18). The Town Center entrance roads are lined with tall palm trees; pine and palm trees are located around the perimeter of the shopping center. Parking islands within the surface lots and storefront areas are planted with mature trees, manicured shrubs, large potted plants, and flowers. Hardscaped areas are paved with white concrete, tan-surfaced concrete, brick inlays, and asphalt. The Town Center is located on three distinct development pads at different grades that are all higher in elevation than Del Mar Heights Road and El Camino Real. One pad contains the upper parking lot and a daycare center; a second is adjacent to El Camino Real; and the third is northeast of the

El Camino Real and Del Mar Heights Road intersection. The Town Center is currently undergoing renovations and modernization.

Carmel Country Plaza is located immediately east of Del Mar Highlands Town Center, at the southwest corner of the Del Mar Heights/Carmel Country Road intersection, approximately 0.3 mile from the project site. This community shopping center is smaller than the adjacent Town Center and includes several restaurants, a video rental store, medical offices, and other commercial retail uses. The buildings are one- to two-stories tall with earth tone colors and red-tiled roofs. Palm trees line the driveway and other ornamental landscaping is planted throughout the site.

Commercial retail uses outside of the Town Center include Piazza Carmel, which is located near the SR 56/Carmel Creek Road interchange, approximately 0.75 mile to the southeast. This shopping center includes a major grocery store, a hardware store, several restaurants, banks, and other retail services. The configuration of Piazza Carmel is similar to the Del Mar Highlands Town Center in that it has a linear orientation with one- to two-story buildings fronted by large surface parking lots. A few free-standing buildings are located along the street frontages. The buildings are earth-tone stucco with some articulation on the facades. Street side landscaping occurs along the Valley Centre Drive and Carmel Creek Drive frontages, and trees, shrubs, and groundcover are located in the parking medians within the shopping center.

Existing Civic Uses

Civic uses, including schools, parks, a library, a fire station, and a police station, are generally located east, north, and south of the project site interspersed among residential development. Buildings associated with these civic uses are architecturally diverse and visually consistent with materials of the surrounding development.

Roadways

The major roadways within the project area include Del Mar Heights Road, El Camino Real, and High Bluff Drive. The visual character along these roadways within the project area is described below.

Del Mar Heights Road is the major east-west roadway within Carmel Valley and provides direct access to the community from I-5, particularly to the central and northern portions of Carmel Valley, including the Town Center. The segment of Del Mar Heights Road fronting the project site consists of a six-lane prime arterial with a roadway width of 102 feet, a landscaped center median, sidewalks, and mature street trees and landscaped berms lining both sides of the roadway. The roadway exhibits an approximate 55-foot grade change between the I-5 and El Camino Real as it peaks at its intersection with High Bluff Drive and then slopes down to a low point near the El Camino Real intersection. The roadway lies at a much lower elevation than the abutting multi-family residences to the north, which are separated by large manufactured landscaped berms. Development pads on the south side of the roadway also sit at higher elevations than the road and are buffered by landscaped berms, but to a lesser extent compared to the north side. No on-street parking is allowed along this section of the roadway. Bike lanes are



Photograph 13 - The Marriott



Photograph 14 - Corporate Plaza II



Photograph 15 - Plaza Del Mar



Photograph 16 - High Bluff Ridge at Del Mar

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Community and Neighborhood Character

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Figure 5.3-5d



Photograph 17 - Del Mar Corporate Plaza



Photograph 18 - Del Mar Highlands Town Center

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Community and Neighborhood Character

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Figure 5.3-5e

located along both sides of the road. This segment of Del Mar Heights Road has a speed limit of 40 mph.

El Camino Real is the major north-south roadway within Carmel Valley and the segment abutting the project site consists of a six-lane major roadway with a width of 102 feet. The roadway contains a center median (portions contain landscaping), sidewalks, mature street trees, and landscaping along both sides of the road. The alignment of El Camino Real curves along the project site frontage and the grade rises approximately 10 feet from south to north. In general, abutting development sits at slightly higher elevations than the roadway. Bike lanes are located along both sides of the road and no on-street parking is allowed along this section. The speed limit is 50 mph.

High Bluff Drive is located along the western project site boundary and is constructed as a three-lane collector on the NB side of the roadway, and a four-lane collector on the SB side of the roadway. The roadway contains center landscaped medians, sidewalks, mature street trees, and street edge landscaping. Topographically, the roadway sits at a high point in the project area of approximately 250 feet amsl. Abutting office development generally lies at slightly higher elevations than the roadway. Bike lanes are located along both sides of the road and no on-street parking is allowed along this section. The speed limit is 30 mph.

Existing Public Views

Designated Views

No designated viewpoints, view corridors, scenic routes, or scenic vistas occur in the project vicinity.

Public Views

Existing public views of the project site are available from portions of public roadways in the immediate vicinity, including Del Mar Heights Road, El Camino Real, High Bluff Drive, and Townsgate Drive. Existing trees and topography along the project street frontage partially obstruct views into the site from these roadways, but open views are available intermittently between the vegetation and in locations where vegetation is absent, or where the road is higher than the project site.

Del Mar Heights Road

Views of the project site from Del Mar Heights Road are partially screened by intervening vegetation and topography. Viewpoint 1 in Figure 5.3-6a, *Public Views of the Project Site*, depicts the view just east of the Del Mar Heights Road and High Bluff Drive intersection looking east along Del Mar Heights Road. The northern boundary of the project site is located on the right side of the photograph; the project site generally abuts the sidewalk on the south side of the roadway (right side of the photograph). The berm on the south side and the slope on the north side of the roadway (left side of the photograph) are lined with dense vegetation. The strong perspective lines created by the roadway stripes, landscaped median, and sidewalks, as well as