

4.1 AESTHETICS

4.1.1 Setting

a. Visual Character of the Specific Plan Area. Scotts Valley is a relatively small City, with a current population of 11,697 (Department of Finance, 2008). The City lies within the Santa Cruz Mountain Range, and though much of the area is characterized by an urban landscape, it maintains an “urban forest” character. The City considers itself to be a “mountain community,” which is exemplified by the surrounding mountainous topography of the City and Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) groves, as well as a variety of other trees that can be found sporadically throughout the area. The City hosts a variety of land uses including low, medium, and high density residential, commercial, light industrial, research and development, open space, and public.

The Specific Plan area is primarily characterized as an urban landscape, consisting of various retail commercial uses such as Kings Village Shopping Center and Kmart, which include grocery stores, restaurants, bike shops, electronics stores, and hardware stores. The area also includes various recreational and civic uses such as Skypark Park, a post office, a park and ride lot, and bus depot. Two propane facilities (AmeriGas and Suburban) are also located within the plan area, along Mount Hermon Road. Although it is the intent of the proposed Town Center Specific Plan to relocate these propane facilities to the industrial area of the City, there is a possibility that they may remain. The rest of the Specific Plan area consists of vacant land that formerly served as Skypark Airport.

The visual environment surrounding the site varies considerably from north to south, with predominantly natural scenery toward the north and west consisting of coastal redwoods, and various urbanized surroundings toward the south and east. The site is approximately 520 feet above mean sea level. Although the topography of the plan area is relatively flat, elevations increase quickly in both north and south directions as the terrain becomes more mountainous. To the north, older rural residences exist in a dense wooded setting, sometimes visible from the site between large trees. Lands to the east and south of the project site are presently developed, consisting of various land uses. The uses include, but are not limited to, industrial, a senior center, a church, a roller rink, a post office, a shopping center, and residences along Blue Bonnet Lane. Scotts Valley Square is a shopping center located on the north side of Mt. Hermon Road, bordered by the site on the east and west. Refer to Figure 2-3 in Section 2.0 *Project Description*, which illustrates the site’s surrounding land uses.

b. Regulatory Setting. The City regulates scenic views and aesthetics of buildings and public spaces through its General Plan policies. Policies in the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan that are relevant to the proposed project include the following:

- *Policy OSP-374: Prominent ridges shall be protected to allow clear views from streets and roads, and that scenic easements should be established to protect the ridgelines.*
- *Policy OSP-380.1: Site planning for development in the City should include public art where it may have a significant impact.*



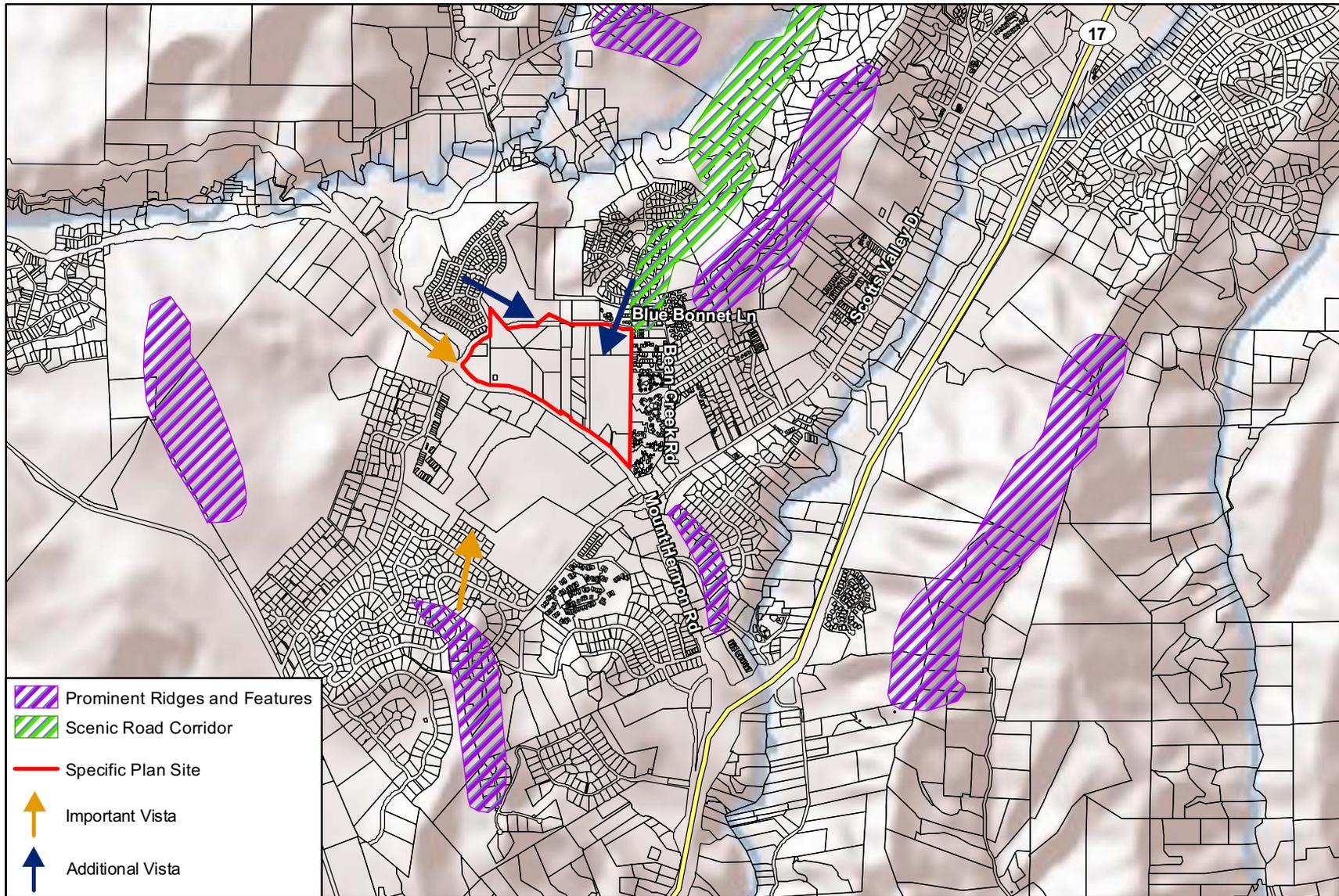
- *Policy OSP-381: The City shall discourage scattered development or urban sprawl which may be detrimental to the City's visual beauty and increase significantly the cost of providing City services.*
- *Policy OSP-382: Encourage infilling on vacant land within existing developed areas; infilling development shall be compatible with surrounding existing development.*
- *Policy OSP-385: The City shall protect the visual resources of Scotts Valley by requiring that new development be integrated into the natural setting.*

In 1995, the City adopted *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines*. The purpose of the document is to establish guidelines for the development of buildings and property in the emerging commercial "downtown" area, a large portion of which would include development along Mount Hermon Road. The guidelines strongly encourage the use of natural exterior materials, such as wood and stone, to maintain a "mountain motif." The proposed Specific Plan area is located within the boundaries of the design guideline area map. Elements include guidelines for architectural features, style, signs, and lighting, landscape and tree maintenance, and pedestrian and bicycle paths.

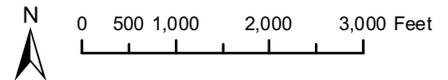
In addition, several prominent forested ridgelines, vista points, and scenic road corridors exist near the Specific Plan area, as shown on Figure 4.1-1. A General Plan designated "important vista" is located along Mount Hermon Road and Skypark Drive. The vista provides scenic views for motorists traveling eastward along Mount Hermon Road. Another "important vista" is located in the residential tract near Estrella Drive and Lockwood Lane. The vista provides scenic views to residents in a northern direction. Two prominent ridges exist to the north of the Specific Plan area, as well as Bean Creek Road scenic road corridor. Other prominent ridges exist to the south and southwest of the plan area.

Furthermore, the City of Scotts Valley Zoning Ordinance Section 17.44.080 regulates the removal of native and significant trees. In general, protected trees are described as any oak tree measuring 25 inches or greater in circumference (eight inches in diameter, measured at diameter breast height [dbh] four to six inches from existing grade), any other tree (except eucalyptus and acacia) which has a 40-inch or greater circumference (13 inches in diameter), and any trees identified in Exhibit A of the Ordinance, "City of Scotts Valley Heritage Tree Inventory." Except as provided in this ordinance, it is unlawful to destroy or remove any protected trees without a tree removal permit. No qualifying native, significant trees or Heritage trees are located in the Plan Area.





Source: RRM Design Group, 2008 City of Scotts Valley, 2008.
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Important Vistas and Prominent Ridgelines

Figure 4.1-1
City of Scotts Valley

4.1.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Impact Criteria. The assessment of aesthetic impacts involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. This evaluation measures the existing visual resources against the proposed action, analyzing the nature of the anticipated change. The City's General Plan was reviewed for policy instruction relative to mitigating potential impacts.

The following impact criterion was dismissed within the Initial Study (refer to Appendix A) as being less than significant:

- *Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.*

Based on the criteria set forth in the Initial Study for this project, a significant impact could occur under the following conditions if the project would:

- *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;*
- *Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings; or*
- *Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.*

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

Impact AES-1 Development of the proposed Specific Plan could have an adverse effect on scenic vistas within the plan area vicinity. This would be a Class II, significant but mitigable impact.

The City of Scotts Valley General Plan has designated two viewsheds near the project site as "important vistas" (refer to Figure 4.1-1). The first is located on Mount Hermon Road at Skypark Drive. The vista provides motorists traveling eastward on Mount Hermon Road with scenic views of prominent ridgelines located to the west and north of the project site. The second is located near Whispering Pines Drive and Estrella Drive, south of Mount Hermon Road. The vista provides motorists and pedestrians with scenic views of prominent ridgelines located north of the Plan Area. In addition, although not designated by the General Plan, this EIR also examines public viewsheds from Skypark Park and Blue Bonnet Lane, near Kings Village Road. Photographs of viewsheds of prominent ridgelines and natural features from designated and non-designated vistas are shown in Figure 4.1-2.

Structures developed in the Specific Plan area have the potential to impact views to both of these prominent ridgelines, if they were to reach approximately 55 to 60 feet in height. Currently, Scotts Valley zoning ordinances limit existing commercial uses in the area to a maximum 35 feet. The Specific Plan would allow for an increased height maximum of 55 feet. Development of buildings that reach this new height maximum would include mixed-use buildings and proposed parking structures. Furthermore, upon approval of the Planning Commission, height limits could exceed 55 feet if granted through a planned development. A planned development could be granted for architectural features that would exceed 55 feet,





Photo Point 1. From General Plan designated “important vista,” facing east on Mount Hermon Road. Note the designated “prominent ridgeline” in the distance. The Specific Plan area is located approximately 500 yards northeast from this point, and, from this viewpoint, it is screened by the trees visible in the upper left corner of the image.



Photo Point 2. View of General Plan designated “prominent ridgeline,” from General Plan designated “important vista,” facing north on Whispering Pines Lane. The former airport, where mixed-use development under the Specific Plan would occur, is visible. The Plan Area is approximately 0.5 miles from this view point.

Photos from Key Viewing Areas

Figure 4.1-2

City of Scotts Valley





Photo Point 3. From SkyPark Park facing east, towards the Specific Plan area and former airport. Note the General Plan designated “prominent ridgeline” in the distance. The Plan Area is approximately 1,000 yards from this public view point.



Photo Point 4. From the Bus Depot on Bluebonnet Lane, facing southwest toward the Specific Plan area. Note the mountains visible in the distance. The Plan Area is approximately 600 yards from this point, however the Plan Area is not clearly visible from this view point.

Photos from Key Viewing Areas

Figure 4.1-2
City of Scotts Valley



such as telecommunications antennas and service structures located on rooftops. The Specific Plan would also allow, through the planned development process, buildings to exceed 55 feet in height if they acted as points of entry for the plan area, particularly along Mount Hermon Road.

A cross-sectional topographic image was generated to simulate viewpoints from the “important vistas” to prominent ridgelines, as illustrated in Figure 4.1-3. The image indicated that buildings 55 feet in height would not block views from the “important vista” points. Buildings 55 feet in height would reduce existing visibility of prominent ridgelines; however, visibility would not be reduced far beyond that which is already diminished by a 35-foot height maximum. Additionally, prominent ridgelines and natural resources would still be visible despite the 20-foot height maximum increase. Thus, a 55-foot maximum would remain consistent with General Plan Open Space Element Policy 374, which states prominent ridges shall be protected to allow clear views from streets and roads. However, if building heights increased beyond 55 feet, it is possible that views of prominent ridgelines and natural features would be substantially diminished.

Viewsheds from Skypark Park and Blue Bonnet Lane, near Kings Village Road, were also simulated in this manner. The viewshed from Skypark Park provides park goers with views of prominent ridgelines located to the east. The viewshed from Blue Bonnet Lane provides motorists and pedestrians views of prominent ridgelines located to the south. Figure 4.1-3 shows that viewsheds of prominent ridgelines from Skypark Park may be reduced from development within the Plan area; however, a 55-foot building height would still allow prominent ridgelines to be seen. Viewsheds from Blue Bonnet Lane would also be minimized, but would also still allow views of prominent ridgelines to be seen.

Viewsheds of prominent ridgelines and natural features from designated and non-designated vistas, though reduced due to the increased height maximum, would be maintained if buildings do not exceed 55 feet in height. However, it is possible that buildings which are granted a planned development to exceed 55 feet in height could substantially impact “important vistas” and other non-designated scenic viewpoints throughout the Plan Area. Furthermore, due to their relatively small structural size, less prominent structures such as antennas or service units on rooftops that would exceed 55 feet in height would not likely have a substantial impact. However, if those ancillary structures were to exceed 60 feet in height, it is possible they would impact “important vistas” and other nearby viewsheds. Overall, impacts to scenic vistas within the Plan Area vicinity would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigative Aspects of the Proposed Specific Plan. The proposed Specific Plan does not include aspects to mitigate for this impact.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measure would minimize impacts to scenic vistas and other viewsheds within the Plan Area vicinity to the extent feasible.

- AES-1** **Height Maximum.** No building within the Specific Plan area shall exceed 55 feet in height. Structures that would be placed on top of a 55 foot building, such as service units, or other architectural features should not exceed five feet in height. Thus, no building and rooftop



structure, or architectural feature, or combination thereof granted a planned development should exceed 60 feet in height.

Significance after Mitigation. Limiting building heights to 55 feet and additional rooftop structures to not exceed a combined total of 60 feet in height would reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-2 The proposed Town Center Specific Plan would result in new residential, commercial public facilities, and mixed use development in an urban landscape, which could alter the existing visual character of the Plan area if applicable design guidelines are not followed. Impacts to visual character would be Class II, significant but mitigable.

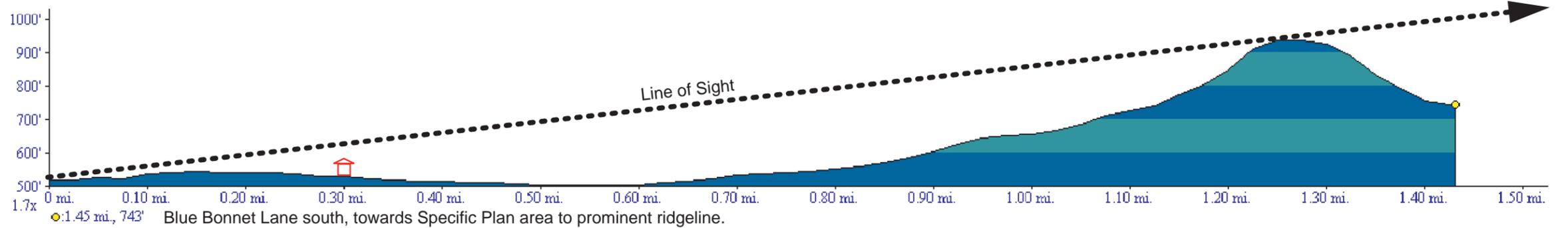
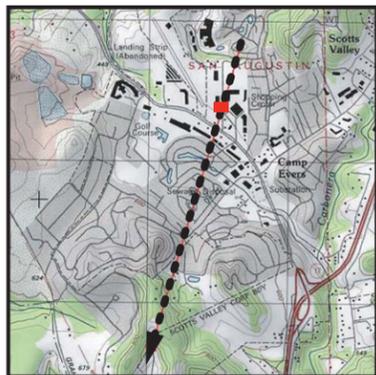
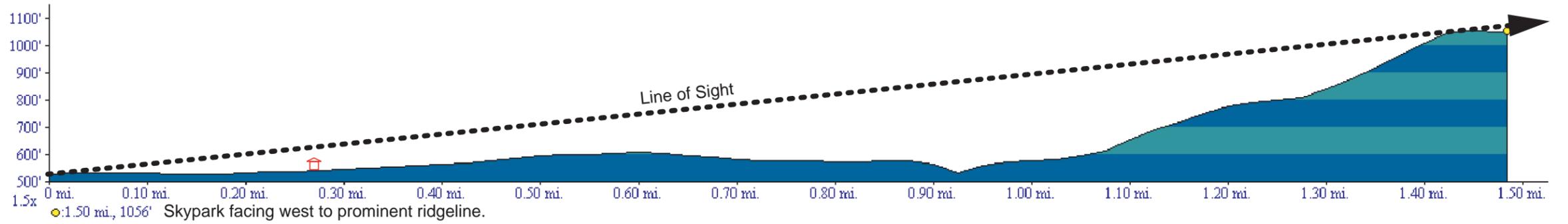
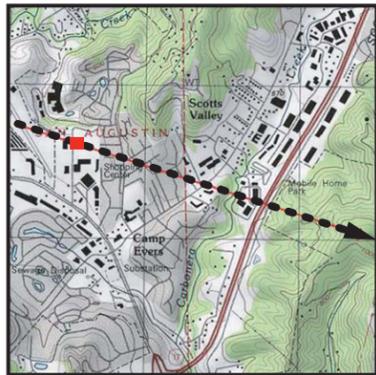
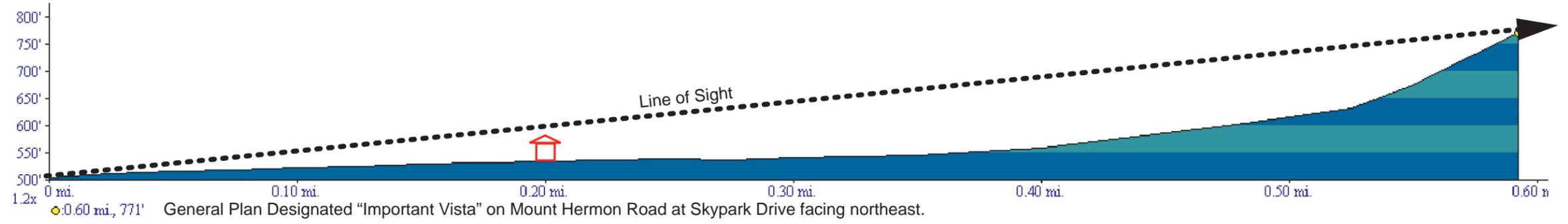
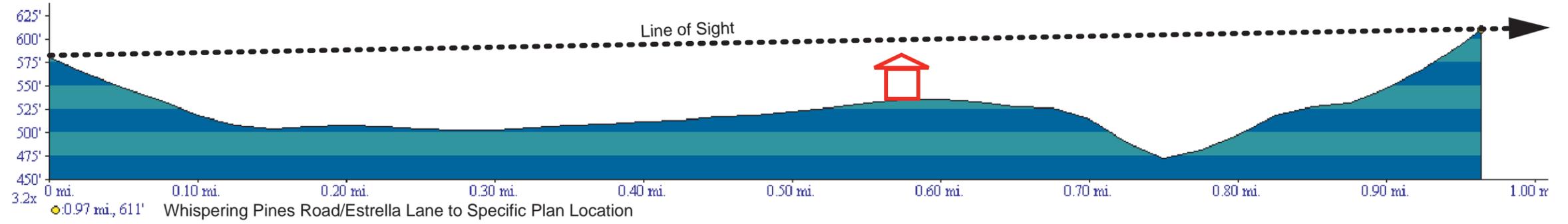
In 1995, the City adopted the *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines*. These guidelines encourage design elements and natural building materials that create and maintain their desired “mountain motif”. They also include other elements that encourage pedestrian and bicycle access, parks, courtyards, public open spaces, intersections of contrasting materials to identify entry and crossing areas, public art in pedestrian connections, use of recycled water, extensive use of trees within landscape design, minimal use of obtrusive business signs, and minimal use of lighting.

Development adjacent to the Plan area along Mount Hermon Road consists of various commercial and retail land uses. Two of the newest and largest commercial developments are located south of Mount Hermon, and east of Kings Village Road. In general, these developments reflect the broad design elements set forth in the *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines*, as illustrated in the photographs shown in Figure 4.1-4.

The proposed Specific Plan design guidelines are also generally consistent with elements set forth in the *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines*. The Specific Plan recognizes that Scotts Valley is located within the Santa Cruz Mountains and has “hillsides covered in Redwoods.” The general architectural style proposed in the Plan strongly encourages the use of natural materials and colors such as stone and wood. The Plan also emphasizes the development of a well connected system of streets and paths and the proposed town green is considered by the Specific Plan to be a critical component to establishing the area as a downtown. Additionally, public areas are encouraged to consist of trees, fountains, landscaping, and public art. This element is also consistent with General Plan Policy OSP-380.1, which encourages public art. As discussed in Impact AES-3, the lighting system is proposed to be sufficient for safety purposes, but not such that it spills onto adjacent properties. Lastly, the Specific Plan encourages the use of drought tolerant landscaping, low water demand fixtures, dual flush toilets, and waterless urinals in order to reduce overall water consumption, all of which are consistent with the existing design guidelines.

The proposed Specific Plan design guidelines would be consistent with *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines*, and as such, future development under the Plan would largely reflect the same visual character as its adjacent land uses. Although two- or three-story development currently does not exist within the area, current zoning standards allow maximum heights of 35 feet, and the larger commercial shopping centers in the area are close to





Profile of Important Vistas

Figure 4.1-3
 City of Scotts Valley



Photo Point 1. Shopping center located to the east of Kings Village Road. Note the exterior features such as earth toned colors, dark colored metal roofs and stonework, which exemplify a mountain motif.



Photo Point 2. Shopping center located to the south of Mount Hermon Road. Note the prevalent landscaping and exterior features such as earth toned colors, wood features and stonework, which exemplify a mountain motif.

Visual Character Photos

Figure 4.1-4

City of Scotts Valley



this height. The Specific Plan encourages two- to three-story development, with a maximum building height of 55 feet. As stated above, this height maximum is only 20 feet greater than what is allowed under current zoning standards. Such an increase would not likely result in dramatic changes to scale, massing or character, thus, visual character impacts would be minimal and consistent with surrounding development. Additionally, the Specific Plan is an infill project in an area that is already developed and urbanized. Infill projects are encouraged by General Plan Policy OSP-382 and fulfill the City's goal to avoid sprawl as stated in Policy OSP-381.

As mentioned in the *Setting* discussion above, there are two existing propane facilities located within the project area along Mt. Hermon Road. Although it is the goal of the proposed Town Center Specific Plan to relocate these facilities outside of the project area to the City's industrial zone, there is no guarantee that this will occur. If these facilities were to remain where they are, they would conflict with the aesthetic goals proposed in the Specific Plan. Mitigation would be required to ensure that these facilities would be visually compatible with future development in the plan area, in case they were not able to be relocated offsite.

Overall, the proposed Town Center Specific Plan's impact to visual character would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.

Mitigative Aspects of the Specific Plan. The Specific Plan includes several design elements that are inherently mitigative, and would reduce potential aesthetic impacts discussed above. The mitigative design elements include the following:

- *Natural materials and colors such as stone and wood are encouraged for exterior materials.*
- *Façade materials that are discouraged include mirrored glass, windows with "tape-on" divisions, vinyl and aluminum siding, painted or baked enamel metal awnings and rough Spanish lace stucco finish.*
- *A well connected system of streets and paths, as well as a town green.*
- *Roof materials that are highly discouraged include reflective or brightly colored material, corrugated metal roof panels, and roof tiles with S-profile.*
- *Trees should be located throughout the parking lots and not merely at the ends of parking rows. A minimum of one tree for every four parking spaces should be provided.*
- *Parking areas should be landscaped to minimize summer glare and heat, and to reduce negative visual impacts.*

Mitigation Measures. If the existing AmeriGas and Suburban propane facilities were to remain onsite, the following mitigation would be required to ensure compatibility with the visual character envisioned in the proposed Specific Plan.

- AES-2 Screening of Existing Propane Facilities Using Landscaping.**
The landscaping of the Specific Plan area shall incorporate plantings and other landscape features that help screen existing propane facilities from public view and help blend these facilities into the surrounding area. Substantial landscaping, such as rows



of trees, including native trees suitable to site conditions in addition to shrubs and groundcovers, shall be used.

Significance After Mitigation. The proposed Specific Plan's consistency with existing design guidelines inherently mitigative aspects, and limited increase in building scale and massing, along with implementation of Mitigation Measure AES-2, would reduce potential aesthetic impacts to a less than significant level.

Impact AES-3 Development of the proposed Specific Plan would introduce new sources of light and glare, which would increase overall ambient night-time light in the area and daytime glare from building materials, thus, potentially impact adjacent residents and passing motorists. Design elements in the Plan would reduce potential impacts to a Class III, less than significant.

The proposed Specific Plan would result in potential redevelopment of existing buildings, as well as new development of vacant land. The sources of light could include new streetlights, lighting from within commercial buildings, lighted parking lots and structures, lighted commercial signage, and lighting from residences in the area. The Plan Area has several existing commercial buildings and parking lots, which already contribute to nighttime lighting; however, the Specific Plan would result in increased lighting within the overall area. Adjacent residences located on Blue Bonnet Lane and near Skypark Drive would be exposed to this increase, as would new occupants of proposed residences within the Plan area. The number of residents exposed to such impacts would be greater than current conditions, since an increase in residential development within the plan area is anticipated under the proposed Specific Plan.

Glare impacts could also increase, depending on the types of materials used in the construction of new buildings in the plan area. Large glass windows, metal roofs, and other reflective material could be considered annoying to area residents and could present potential safety concerns to passing motorists, depending on the time of the day and angle of the sun. Although reflective roofing or "cool roofs," described in Section 2.0, *Project Description*, could potentially result in annoying light and glare, surrounding residences, public roads, and scenic views are not elevated high enough such that rooftops could be seen from these points and would therefore not result in additional glare.

Mitigative Aspects of the Specific Plan. In addition to the Specific Plan's mitigative elements listed under Impact AES-2, the Specific Plan includes additional design elements that would mitigate potential lighting and glare impacts. The mitigative design elements include the following:

- *Light fixtures should be sited, directed, and/or shielded to prevent spot lighting, glare, or spillage beyond property lines.*
- *Incorporate timers and sensor to avoid unnecessary lighting.*
- *The height of lamp poles should be at maximum 20 feet high, and where adjacent to residential use, light poles should not exceed 15 feet.*
- *All roof mounted equipment should be effectively and attractively screened through the use of various architectural detailing, including, but not limited to, roof form, decorative parapets, or cornices.*



- *Full roofs are desirable, hipped or gable roofs covering the entire building are preferred to mansard roofs and segments of pitched roofs at the buildings edge.*
- *Ground floor commercial buildings should use clear glass or lightly tinted glass. Opaque, reflective, or dark tinted glass should not be used for any portions of the building.*
- *Parking structure lighting should be appropriately shielded so as not to spill into adjacent residential areas.*

These design elements generally encompass the mitigation measures that would otherwise be required through CEQA review to reduce lighting and glare impacts. The design elements would encourage the use of non-reflective building materials, natural colored materials, screening of parking lots to reduce light impacts from vehicles, and shielded parking lot and walkway lights. The incorporation of these design elements would reduce potential lighting and glare impacts a *less than significant* level.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. The proposed Specific Plan's self-mitigating development standards would reduce potential light and glare impacts to a less than significant level.

c. Cumulative Impacts. The intensity of development that would be allowed under the Specific Plan is generally greater than what is envisioned in the City's General Plan. This project, combined with those either proposed or currently under construction near the City's commercial core would cumulatively contribute to the urbanization of Scotts Valley. However, as development occurs, the goals outlined in *Mount Hermon Road Downtown Design Guidelines* would require development to be visually consistent and maintain a "mountain motif," thereby limiting minimizing visual impacts. Cumulative aesthetic impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*.

