

3.13 Visual Resources

This section describes the existing visual resources in Visalia and the potential impacts that projects contained in the proposed General Plan could have on those resources. Visual resources evaluated for impact include scenic views, scenic features, and the visual quality of neighborhoods with historic or scenic character that should be preserved.

Environmental Setting

PHYSICAL SETTING

The Planning Area is located on the flat, agricultural plain of the San Joaquin Valley, about 10 miles west of the beginning of the Sierra Nevada foothills. The high mountain peaks, about 40 miles distant, create a dramatic backdrop on clear days. With a population of some 125,000, Visalia is the largest city in Tulare County, but retains what residents describe as a “small town feel.” The city has grown concentrically around its historic core, and is surrounded by productive agricultural land.

Spatial Organization and Urban Character

Downtown Visalia remains the physical, cultural, and economic center of the city, with government offices, a major hospital, a convention center, and shops and restaurants. Predominantly single family neighborhoods with clusters of historic houses lie to the north and south of downtown and in the West Main Street corridor. Moving out from the core area, Visalia’s neighborhoods are of increasingly recent vintage, with much of the city developed since the 1970s. Neighborhoods are arranged along the primary grid of major streets that stems from the rural road network. Within large blocks, curving and disconnected street patterns predominate.

Highway 198 is the city’s primary east-west route, and also serves as an important regional connection to Sequoia National Park and the Sierras. The highway also serves as the southern edge of downtown. Perpendicular to the Highway 198 corridor, Mooney Boulevard acts as the primary community and regional commercial core in the city. Smaller pockets of retail and neighborhood-oriented commercial development are distributed throughout the rest of the city. Although the core of the city is located several miles to the east from Highway 99, development in the western reaches of the city has evolved over time to include the city’s employment and industrial core, airport, and regional park space.

Visalia is surrounded by agricultural lands and natural open space. While some edges of the city are well defined by physical features like Highway 99, St. Johns River, and the airport, development feathers out into these agricultural areas, often resulting in an indistinct urban edge.

Scenic Resources and Views

Views of the Sierra Nevada range to the east and agricultural lands beyond the edges of the city help define the overall image and character of Visalia. Valley Oak trees, both individually and in groves, also provide an important scenic feature and link to the natural setting of the San Joaquin Valley. Some groves are protected as part of regional parkland, while others are on agricultural land or within the city itself. Visalia's regular urban grid overlays the natural forms of the Kaweah Delta. While the St. Johns River plays an important role in defining the city's edge to the north-east, the smaller creeks and ditches generally have little visibility in the urbanized environment today. Preserving and re-establishing the city's natural waterway system and Valley Oak tree groves with parks, conservation areas, and trailways is a goal of the proposed Plan.

Scenic Routes and Gateways

The 44-mile stretch of State Route 198 between State Route 99 and Sequoia National Park is classified as eligible for State Scenic Highway status, but is not officially designated. This includes the length of SR 198 within the Planning Area. While the City has not requested official designation, it has evaluated the corridor in the Scenic Highways Element of the existing General Plan and has taken steps to preserve and enhance the corridor's scenic quality.

The main "entrance" to the city is from the west, on Highway 198. Here, agricultural land has been maintained from Plaza Park nearly to Akers Street. The landscape features orchards, fields, and oak trees, and oaks are planted along portions of the roadway itself. As development occurs in the area, a 200-foot conservation buffer will maintain the rural character in that portion of the community

Between Akers Street and County Center Drive, the highway frontage is urbanized, with primarily commercial uses on both sides. Between County Center and Ben Maddox Way, through the heart of the city, Highway 198 is depressed below grade, with fully landscaped banks and limited views into the city. Advertising signs are not permitted along this segment. Between Ben Maddox and Lovers Lane, heavy commercial uses are predominant and highly visible. The highway frontage east of Lovers Lane includes a patchwork of residential development and agriculture.

Other entrances into the city are from main roads and highways from other directions, including neighboring communities and rural areas to the east, north, and south. Along Route 63, Mooney Grove Park provides a scenic entrance to the city from the south on Mooney Boulevard, while the St. Johns River and the new Sports Park provide a green entrance from the north along Dinuba Boulevard. Within the city, these major corridors are highly commercial, and do not have a strong streetscape character. Some corridors have been landscaped or planted with trees, providing a more scenic quality to the urban environment.

Chapter Three: Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures
3.13 Visual Resources

Figure 3.13-1: Visual Resources



Left to right: Downtown Visalia remains the physical, cultural, and economic center of the city. Predominantly single family neighborhoods with clusters of historic houses lie to the north and south. The city is surrounded by productive agricultural land.



Left to right: Views of the Sierra Nevada range and agricultural lands help define the overall image of Visalia. Valley Oak trees also provide an important scenic feature and link to the natural setting. The St. Johns River plays an important role in defining the city's edge to the northeast.



Left to right: Agricultural land has been maintained along the west Highway 198 corridor, the main entrance to the city. Mooney Boulevard, the major corridor leading from the south, has a highly commercial character. Some corridors provide a more scenic quality to the urban environment.

REGULATORY SETTING

State Regulations

CEQA Statute and Guidelines

CEQA establishes that it is the policy of the State to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state “with...enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic, and historic environmental qualities.” [California Public Resources Code Section 21001(b)]

California Scenic Highways Program

Recognizing the value of scenic areas and the value of views from roads in such areas, the State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program in 1963. Under this program, State highway segments are designated as eligible for inclusion as scenic routes. Once the local jurisdictions through which a roadway passes have established a corridor protection program, the State may officially designate a roadway as a scenic route. Proposed projects must then be evaluated for their impact on the scenic qualities of the corridor. Each designated corridor is monitored by the State and designation may be revoked if a local government fails to enforce the provisions of the corridor protection program.

Highway 198 through the Planning Area is classified as eligible for State Scenic Highway status, but is not officially designated.

Local Regulations

Scenic views provided by the Sierra Nevada to the east and much of the rural agricultural land surrounding the City is beyond Visalia’s jurisdiction. Tulare County retains sole jurisdiction outside Visalia’s Sphere of Influence (SOI). The City of Visalia has authority for land use decisions that could affect scenic views within City limits or on land in the SOI that would be urbanized under the General Plan. Caltrans has jurisdiction over the design of its facilities, and Tulare Irrigation District (TID) retains control over its canals within the City.

Visalia adopted its Scenic Highways Element in February 1976, in which Highway 198 is identified as a scenic resource. Highway 198 is below grade through the city core.

Tulare County General Plan

The Tulare County General Plan 2030 Update was adopted in the fall of 2012. The Plan directs growth to urbanized communities such as Cutler-Orosi, Ivanhoe, Farmersville, and Goshen, while protecting agricultural lands.

Scenic Landscapes Element

The proposed Plan’s Scenic Landscapes Element includes policies to protect views of working and natural landscapes; protect views for travelers along the County’s roads and highways; plan the edges of communities to protect the scenic qualities of natural landscapes; and design infrastructure that minimizes visual impacts on rural and natural places. Key specific policies include:¹

¹ These policies may include additional detail not provided here.

Chapter Three: Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures
3.13 Visual Resources

SL-1.1 Natural Landscapes. During review of discretionary approvals, including parcel and subdivision maps, the County shall as appropriate, require new development to not significantly impact or block views of Tulare County's natural landscapes.

1. Be sited to minimize obstruction of views from public lands and rights-of-ways,
3. Screen parking areas from view,
4. Include landscaping that screens the development,
5. Limit the impact of new roadways and grading on natural settings, and
6. Include signage that is compatible and in character with the location and building design.

SL-1.2 Working Landscapes. The County shall require that new non-agricultural structures and infrastructure located in or adjacent to croplands, orchards, vineyards, and open rangelands be sited so as to not obstruct important viewsheds and to be designed to reflect unique relationships with the landscape.

1. Referencing traditional agricultural building forms and materials,
2. Screening and breaking up parking and paving with landscaping, and
3. Minimizing light pollution and bright signage.

SL-1.3 Watercourses. The County shall protect visual access to, and the character of, Tulare County's scenic rivers, lakes, and irrigation canals.

SL-2.2 Gateways to the Sequoias. The County shall ensure that the "gateway highways" (State Highway 190 and State Highway 198) to the Sequoias feature the County's unique history and scenery by:

1. Maintaining the rural character of roadway rights-of-ways, highway signage, and related roadway and structure design,
2. Protecting primary viewsheds from development,
3. Prohibiting development of highway commercial projects that do not respond to their physical or cultural context, and
4. Featuring the community centers/main streets of the gateway communities of Three Rivers and Springville.

SL-2.4 New Billboards. Unless superseded by State law, the County shall prohibit billboards and other forms of offsite advertising along State scenic highways, County scenic routes, and within areas designated for agriculture and open space.

SL-3.2 Urban Expansion–Edges. The County shall design and plan the edges and interface of communities with working and natural landscapes to protect their scenic qualities by:

1. Maintaining urban separators between cities and communities,

2. Encouraging cities to master plan mixed-density neighborhoods at their edges, locating compatible lower density uses adjacent to working and natural landscapes, and
3. Protecting important natural, cultural, and scenic resources located within areas that may be urbanized in the future.

SL-4.1 Design of Highways. The County shall work with Caltrans and Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) to ensure that the design of State Highway 99 and other State Highways protects scenic resources and provides access to vistas of working and natural landscapes by:

1. Limiting the construction of sound walls that block views of the County's landscapes (incorporate setbacks to sensitive land uses to avoid noise impacts whenever feasible),
2. Using regionally-appropriate trees and landscaping and incorporating existing landmark trees,
3. Preserving historic and cultural places and vistas,
4. Avoiding excessive cut and fill for roadways along State scenic highways and County scenic routes, and along areas exposed to a large viewing area.

City of Visalia Zoning Ordinance

Design Districts

Site planning and building standards for Visalia's commercial, office and industrial zones are contained in "Design Districts." The districts provide lot size, building height, setback, parking, and landscaping requirements, among others, and are meant to facilitate function, attractive, and distinctive areas that suit different needs. In some districts, development standards are established through detailed master or specific plans. In the Downtown Retail Design district, new buildings must support the traditional character of downtown Visalia, following guidance provided in the Downtown Retail Design District Building Design Criteria. In District I, along West Main Street, development regulations aim to maintain the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, including its many historic houses. Key districts are summarized below.

- **Design District A.** District A is along Mooney Boulevard, extending from Avenue 264 to Highway 198. It includes nearly all of Visalia's Regional Retail Commercial (P-C-R) zoning, but also includes areas with other zoning designations. Development in District A must occur on sites of at least five acres. Buildings can rise up to 50 feet, but must be set back considerably from streets.
- **Design District G.** District G coincides with the Planned Business Research Park (P-BRP) zone, on the north side of Highway 198 at Plaza Drive. The P-BRP zone has its own development regulations, as well as a requirement that all development be approved through Specific or master plans.
- **Design District I** is very small, covering several blocks along West Main Street zoned for offices and other corridors with historic homes. The District limits buildings to 30 feet in height, to maintain the scale of the surrounding older neighborhood. Rear yards are re-

quired, and parking is required to be located behind buildings. Sites as small as 6,000 square feet may be developed.

- **Design District K** covers convenience, neighborhood, and community commercial areas scattered throughout the city. The District specifies that development regulations for these sites are to be determined through the planned development process or site plan review.
- **Downtown Retail Design District (DRD)** covers the downtown core along Main and Center streets. This district is focused on preserving the traditional character of downtown Visalia, as defined in the Downtown Retail Design District Building Design Criteria. New buildings are to have setbacks and heights consistent with their neighbors, but in no case rise over 50 feet. Building owners are required to adequately maintain their properties. For new or renovated buildings, façade elements are to be harmonious with and to the scale of traditional facades, and the use of brick is encouraged.

City of Visalia Valley Oak Ordinance

The City's Valley Oak Ordinance provides basic standards, measures and compliance requirements for the preservation and protection of native Valley oak trees and landmark trees. The Ordinance prohibits destruction of oak trees except with an oak tree removal permit. A permit may be granted only if it is found that the oak tree is in danger of falling on a structure or is host for a plant, pest or disease endangering other species; if removal is necessary to allow the reasonable enjoyment of private property; or if urban forestry or land management practices warrant removal. If a tree removal permit is granted, the tree must either be replaced by new oak trees on the same property, or by paying mitigation fees to be used for establishment of new oak trees on other property.

West Highway 198 Corridor Open Space Buffer

In April 2010, the Visalia City Council approved the establishment of a 200-foot open space buffer on both sides of Highway 198, creating a scenic corridor between Highway 99 and central Visalia. The Council directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to begin formal corridor design and landscaping efforts.

Impact Analysis

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Implementation of the proposed General Plan would have a potentially significant adverse impact if it would:

- Criterion 1:** Block panoramic views or views of significant landscape features or landforms (mountains, rivers, or significant man-made structures) as seen from public viewing areas.
- Criterion 2:** Substantially damage scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings) that would alter the appearance of or from state- or county-

designated or eligible scenic highways. Such projects would be judged against a higher standard for visual impacts due to this designation.

Criterion 3: Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Planning Area and its surroundings.

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

This programmatic visual assessment was conducted through multiple windshield surveys of the Planning Area and photographs taken of views from representative locations throughout the city.

IMPACT SUMMARY

<i>Proposed Project Impact</i>	<i>Mitigation Measure</i>	<i>Significance after Mitigation</i>
Implementation of the proposed General Plan could block panoramic views or views of significant landscape features or landforms (mountains, rivers, or significant man-made structures) as seen from public viewing areas.	None required	Less than significant
Implementation of the proposed General Plan could substantially damage scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings) that would alter the appearance of or from state- or county-designated or eligible scenic highways. Such projects would be judged against a higher standard for visual impacts due to this designation.	None required	Less than significant
Implementation of the proposed General Plan could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Planning Area and its surroundings.	None required	Less than significant
Implementation of the proposed General Plan could create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.	None required	Less than significant

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact

3.13-1 Implementation of the proposed General Plan could block panoramic views or views of significant landscape features or landforms (mountains, rivers, or significant man-made structures) as seen from public viewing areas. (*Less than Significant*)

As noted in the settings section, the Planning Area is in a basin bounded by the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west. Visalia has dramatic views of the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains to the east on clear days. Views of agricultural lands

Chapter Three: Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures
3.13 Visual Resources

beyond the edges of the city, including croplands, orchards, vineyards, and open rangelands, contribute to Visalia’s visual character. The city also has scenic vistas of waterways, including the St. Johns River, ponds, and irrigation canals. Valley Oak trees link the city to the natural setting and play an important role in enhancing its visual character.

Development consistent with the proposed General Plan has the potential to obstruct views currently available to the public from developed areas currently at the edge of urban development, particularly views of farmland, mountains, and waterways. These views would be partially or completely blocked in some public areas by new construction beyond the current edge of development. Overall, however, public views of panoramic vistas or significant landscape features or landforms would not be significantly altered or blocked. Although views may be obstructed in localized areas due to proposed new development, public views would not be impacted on an area-wide basis. Proposed new development may limit some existing views, though it is expected that overall, new views will compensate for any lost views.

Street connectivity required in the proposed General Plan will result in longer views along roadways and fewer disruptions to views, ensuring that views to agricultural lands and mountains are maintained. In places where the street grid is extended, visual connections will be enhanced. Therefore, the proposed General Plan is expected to result in less than significant impacts.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

LU-P-28 Continue to use natural and man-made edges, such as major roadways and waterways within the City’s Urban Area Boundary, as urban development limit and growth phasing lines.

LU-P-29 Use regional and community parks and open space to enhance gateways to the City and as a buffer between adjacent communities.

LU-P-30 Maintain greenbelts, or agricultural/ open space buffer areas, between Visalia and other communities by implementing growth boundaries and working with Tulare County and land developers to prevent premature urban growth north of the St. Johns River and in other sensitive locations within the timeframe of this General Plan.

Techniques to be applied selectively at appropriate locations in consultation with land- owners with the objective of preserving agricultural lands and open space around the City could include voluntary programs for establishing open space and conservation easement, purchasing development rights, support for agricultural land trusts and “land banking” and, if feasible, establishing a program for transfer of development rights. This program will need to be coordinated with post-2030 planning to avoid creating the potential for “leapfrog” development. See policy LU-P-27.

LU-P-31 Promote the preservation of permanent agricultural open space around the City by protecting viable agricultural operations and land within the City limits in the airport and wastewater treatment plan environs.

Visalia General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report

- LU-P-34 Work with Tulare County to prevent urban development of agricultural land outside of the current growth boundaries and to promote the use of agricultural preserves, where they will promote orderly development.
- LU-P-37 Adopt specific development standards for scenic entryways (gateways) and roadway corridors into the City, including special setback and landscape standards, open space and park development, and/or land use designations.
- These standards will apply to the west and east entries into Visalia along Highway 198 and to the “gateway boulevards” identified in the Transportation Element: Caldwell and Riggins Avenues; Shirk Road; and Lovers Lane.*
- LU-P-41 Use Mill, Packwood and Cameron Creeks and other waterways as natural amenities and links between neighborhoods.
- LU-P-42 Develop scenic corridor and gateway guidelines that will maintain the agricultural character of Visalia at its urban fringe.
- LU-P-43 Work with utilities and transportation companies to landscape power line and railroad right-of-ways throughout the community and to underground utilities where possible.
- LU-P-44 Develop land use and site design measures for areas adjacent to high-voltage power facilities. Measures will include landscape buffers and mandatory setbacks from substations and transmission towers and lines.
- LU-P-59 Ensure that natural and open space features, such as Valley Oak trees and community waterways, are treated as special site amenities as part of any residential development.
- LU-P-77 Restore Mill Creek and Jennings Ditch as open space features in new parks; citywide linkage elements; and shapers of local circulation patterns in Downtown and East Downtown.
- Implementation considerations include gaining year-round water flow and potential realignment and daylighting of portions of Mill Creek.*
- LU-P-78 In East Downtown emphasize creating and enhancing strong economic, pedestrian and visual connections to adjacent neighborhoods and downtown. East Main is envisioned as the “central spine”; Burke and Santa Fe as north-south civic streets; and Oak Street and Mill Creek as key east-west connectors.
- LU-P-100 Establish zoning standards to assure high-quality design and site planning for large-scale industrial development.
- Standards should include requirements for landscaping in parking lots, along perimeters and along building foundations visible from the street; visual screening of loading and parking areas visible from the street and adjacent residential*

Chapter Three: Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures
3.13 Visual Resources

neighborhoods; and basic requirements to break up large building masses and provide a unified façade treatment.

LU-P-110 Create design guidelines to be used in preparing and evaluating master plans for public facilities.

Guidelines should promote an open relationship with the public realm and pedestrian accessibility both within the site and between the site and neighboring land uses.

PSCU-P-4 Create one large new park at the City’s eastern edge to enhance the City’s eastern gateway along Highway 198, ensure separation between communities, and provide ample recreation space for the larger area.

PSCU-P-11 Develop a system of natural corridors and greenways, consistent with the Parks and Open Space diagram

These corridors will have biking and walking trails offering recreational opportunities and links between neighborhoods, parks, and Downtown. The system of corridors will include waterway corridors as well as linear landscaped corridors to create natural gateways, parkways or buffer areas. More specifically, this system is envisioned to include:

- Greenway corridor along the St. Johns River, including broader areas to the northwest to accommodate open space areas, large group picnic facilities, a nature center, or other uses;
- Greenway corridors along Mill, Packwood and Cameron Creeks, and segments of other waterways, with sufficient width to protect riparian habitat and accommodate a multi-use trail;
- A landscaped corridor on both sides of Highway 198 providing a scenic gateway into Visalia from the west; and
- A landscaped buffer zone or parkway along Shirk Road separating industrial from residential areas, and a greenway along Road 148 marking the eastern edge of the City, both accommodating a multi-use trail.

PSCU-P-18 Continue to work closely with Tulare County to ensure that Mooney Grove and Cutler regional parks are operated, maintained, and enhanced.

Mooney Grove and Cutler Parks provide important large park areas for Visalia residents, and act as gateways to the City.

OSC-P-2 Develop open space corridors along selected community waterways, power transmission line right-of-ways and abandoned railroad right-of-ways to serve as links between park and recreation facilities.

OSC-P-7 Maintain active contact with organizations, such as the Sequoia Riverlands Trust and other appropriate agencies, regarding additions to the Kaweah Oaks Pre-

serve, programs at Mooney or Cutler parks and acquisition of new open space sites throughout the area.

The Trust for Public Land or Nature Conservancy may temporarily acquire property for subsequent re-purchase or transfer to the City.

- OSC-P-8 Protect, restore and enhance a continuous corridor of native riparian vegetation along Planning Area waterways, including the St. Johns River; Mill, Packwood, and Cameron Creeks; and segments of other creeks and ditches where feasible, in conformance with the Parks and Open Space diagram of this General Plan.
- OSC-P-9 Protect and enhance plant and wildlife habitat at the designated Conservation/ Open Space area around the confluence of Mill Creek and Evans Ditch, and promote use of this area as an interpretive center for education and research.
- OSC-P-10 Ensure that building and vehicle service areas, loading docks, trash enclosures and storage areas are setback back from waterways and/or screened from view from the creek corridor to minimize environmental and visual impacts.
- OSC-P-13 In new neighborhoods that include waterways, improvement of the waterway corridor, including preservation and/or enhancement of natural features and development of a continuous waterway trail on at least one side, shall be required.
- OSC-P-17 Require that new development along waterways maintain a visual orientation and active interface with waterways. Develop design guidelines to be used for review and approval of subdivision and development proposals to illustrate how this can be accomplished for different land uses in various geographic settings.
- OSC-P-21 Place special emphasis on the protection and enhancement of the St. Johns River Corridor by establishing extensive open space land along both sides.
- OSC-P-28 Protect significant stands of Valley Oak woodlands from further development by designating them for Conservation, creating habitat management plans, where needed, and undertaking restoration activities as appropriate.
- OSC-P-34 Enhance views and public access to Planning Area waterways and other significant features such as Valley Oak groves consistent with flood protection, irrigation water conveyance, habitat preservation and recreation planning policies.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

3.13-2 Implementation of the proposed General Plan could substantially damage scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings) that would alter the appearance of or from state- or county-designated or eligible scenic

highways. Such projects would be judged against a higher standard for visual impacts due to this designation. (*Less than Significant*)

The 44-mile stretch of State Route 198 between State Route 99 and Sequoia National Park is classified as eligible for State Scenic Highway status, but is not officially designated. This includes the length of SR 198 within the Planning Area. While the City has not requested official designation, it has evaluated the corridor in the Scenic Highways Element of the existing General Plan and has taken steps to preserve and enhance the corridor's scenic quality.

As stated earlier, Visalia's scenic resources are an important part of its identity, and the proposed Plan intends to protect the city's scenic resources from substantial damage, particularly when visible from State-eligible scenic highways. A number of the Plan's policies provide protections for the city's scenic resources, including trees, creeks, and historic buildings to ensure that they remain visible from scenic roadways. For example, a 200-foot conservation buffer on either side of Highway 198 has been established to create a scenic entry corridor to the City and to maintain the visual separation between Highway 99 and the core of the city. Given that buildout under the proposed Plan is not expected to substantially damage scenic resources visible from scenic highways, this impact is expected to be less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

- LU-P-39 Improve tree planting, landscaping and site design standards to minimize the visual impact of large parking lots and buildings, to enhance and promote natural characteristics compatible with urban form, to minimize heat gain and promote energy conservation, and to improve stormwater infiltration.
- Standards should establish tree spacing and size requirements, and shading requirements for parking lots and usable open space. Standards should be integrated with requirements for stormwater infiltration and the use of native, drought-tolerant plants.*
- LU-P-40 Where possible, through the Site Plan Review process, retain native trees as landscape elements and for shading.
- LU-P-41 Use Mill, Packwood and Cameron Creeks and other waterways as natural amenities and links between neighborhoods.
- LU-P-42 Develop scenic corridor and gateway guidelines that will maintain the agricultural character of Visalia at its urban fringe.
- LU-P-43 Work with utilities and transportation companies to landscape power line and railroad right-of-ways throughout the community and to underground utilities where possible.
- LU-P-59 Ensure that natural and open space features, such as Valley Oak trees and community waterways, are treated as special site amenities as part of any residential development.

Visalia General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report

- LU-P-75 Provide incentives for infill development of opportunity sites and adaptive reuse and restoration of existing buildings in Downtown and East Downtown.
- New development in Downtown and East Downtown will realize the inherent potential for higher intensity use of this district, and should include offices, mixed-use and live-work buildings, storefront commercial buildings, apartments, condominiums and townhouses, and small-lot single-family houses.*
- H-P-4 Continue to ensure that proposed new development within any Historic District or on any properties listed on the Local Register of Historic Structures is compatible with its surroundings, using criteria of height and scale; spacing of buildings; materials and textures; street walls; landscaping; and other elements which contribute to the historical neighborhood character.
- H-P-5 Continue to facilitate the conversion of older structures to new uses, with minimal alterations to building or site appearance, by providing exceptions to zoning and building code requirements for structures on the Local Register of Historic Structures and within the Historic District, where such exceptions shall contribute to and enhance the historic character of the area.
- H-P-7 Continue to use the Historic Preservation Ordinance development review process to protect structures listed on the Local Register of Historic Structures or located within the Historic District.
- H-P-9 Periodically survey historic resources and nominate historically and/or architecturally significant sites, structures, and neighborhoods to the Local Register of Historic Structures and/or Historic District, State of California Inventory of Historic Resources, National Register of Historic Places to ensure they are protected.
- H-P-13 Identify, survey and establish new additions to the Historic District and Local Register of Historic Structures.
- PSCU-P-11 Develop a system of natural corridors and greenways, consistent with the Parks and Open Space diagram
- These corridors will have biking and walking trails offering recreational opportunities and links between neighborhoods, parks, and Downtown. The system of corridors will include waterway corridors as well as linear landscaped corridors to create natural gateways, parkways or buffer areas. More specifically, this system is envisioned to include:*
- Greenway corridor along the St. Johns River, including broader areas to the northwest to accommodate open space areas, large group picnic facilities, a nature center, or other uses;
 - Greenway corridors along Mill, Packwood and Cameron Creeks, and segments of other waterways, with sufficient width to protect riparian habitat and accommodate a multi-use trail;

Chapter Three: Settings, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures
3.13 Visual Resources

- A landscaped corridor on both sides of Highway 198 providing a scenic gateway into Visalia from the west; and
- A landscaped buffer zone or parkway along Shirk Road separating industrial from residential areas, and a greenway along Road 148 marking the eastern edge of the City, both accommodating a multi-use trail.

PSCU-P-18 Continue to work closely with Tulare County to ensure that Mooney Grove and Cutler regional parks are operated, maintained, and enhanced.

Mooney Grove and Cutler Parks provide important large park areas for Visalia residents, and act as gateways to the City.

OSC-P-7 Maintain active contact with organizations, such as the Sequoia Riverlands Trust and other appropriate agencies, regarding additions to the Kaweah Oaks Preserve, programs at Mooney or Cutler parks and acquisition of new open space sites throughout the area.

OSC-P-28 Protect significant stands of Valley Oak woodlands from further development by designating them for Conservation, creating habitat management plans, where needed, and undertaking restoration activities as appropriate.

OSC-P-33 Develop a list of recommended native plants and landscaping guidelines. Make this list and guidance accessible through the Community Development Department, the public library, and the City website.

OSC-P-34 Enhance views and public access to planning area waterways and other significant features such as Valley Oak groves consistent with flood protection, irrigation water conveyance, habitat preservation and recreation planning policies.

OSC-P-35 Use native trees in street and public landscaping designs, where appropriate, to preserve Visalia's character.

OSC-P-38 Revise the City's Valley Oak Ordinance to include cottonwood groves and other mature native trees, and update the map of landmark trees and distinctive biotic areas.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

3.13-3 Implementation of the proposed General Plan could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Planning Area and its surroundings. (Less than Significant)

For most neighborhoods within the existing urbanized area of Visalia, the proposed General Plan calls for no substantive changes to land use or building design, and thus will create no contrasts with the scale, form, line, color, or overall visual character of these existing neighborhoods or

landscape areas. New development on infill sites will be required to conform to the city's zoning ordinance and Design Guidelines to ensure visual compatibility with the surrounding built environment.

While the character of new growth areas would change substantially, the proposed General Plan would ensure that development in new growth areas is high quality and consistent with Visalia's existing character. High quality visual character would be ensured by requiring that new development includes a well-connected street network, street trees, other streetscape improvements, and architectural variation. Any proposed changes in land use and physical design are intended to increase the visual quality of Downtown, create a more unified visual experience, and fill in vacant visual areas with attractive and economically vibrant new development.

The proposed General Plan will minimize negative aesthetic impacts, ensure harmony with the scale and character of existing neighborhoods, and foster livable neighborhoods along existing corridors. It contains several policies that would specifically improve the visual character throughout the city and that are designed to minimize any negative impacts on visual character. Therefore, the proposed General Plan will not substantially degrade the visual character of the City, resulting in less than significant impacts.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Policies listed under impacts 3.13-1 and 3.13-2 apply.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

3.13-4 Implementation of the proposed General Plan could create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (*Less than Significant*)

The construction of new buildings in the Planning Area may result in nighttime light pollution or daytime glare. However, their impacts are likely to be insignificant. As in most typical residential areas, homes emit some light and glare during the day and evening hours. Development under the proposed General Plan would include indoor lighting and outdoor lighting for safety purposes, but would generally not be out of character with the existing urban environment, and would not rise to a level of being significant.

There are a number of circumstances that mitigate the potential for new or significant sources of light pollution in Visalia. The proposed General Plan policies help to ensure that lighting for new development is held to high design standards for light pollution reduction. In addition, the proposed General Plan includes policies related to buffering between urbanized and agricultural areas, further reducing the impact of light and glare associated with urbanization on neighboring rural areas.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Compliance with the following proposed General Plan policies would reduce potentially significant long-term light and glare impacts to less than significant levels:

- LU-P-72 Ensure that noise, traffic, and other potential conflicts that may arise in a mix of commercial and residential uses are mitigated through good site planning, building design, and/or appropriate operational measures.
- LU-P-100 Establish zoning standards to assure high- quality design and site planning for large-scale industrial development.
- Standards should include requirements for landscaping in parking lots, along perimeters and along building foundations visible from the street; visual screening of loading and parking areas visible from the street and adjacent residential neighborhoods; and basic requirements to break up large building masses and provide a unified façade treatment.*
- LU-P-106 Develop performance standards to supplement and augment design standards to minimize the negative impacts (glare, signage, noise, dust, traffic) associated with the establishment of new or expansion of existing service commercial and industrial development.
- T-P-57 Amend the Zoning Ordinance to include updated off-street parking and loading area design standards that have multiple benefits and reduce environmental impacts. Strategies may include, but are not limited to:
- Require parking and loading to be provided on the side of or behind buildings, where feasible;
 - Promote the use of time and/or motion sensitive parking lot and security lights, where feasible;
 - Establish specific standards for perimeter landscaping for parking lots and structures;
 - Separate pedestrian pathways from car lanes where feasible;
 - Promote the use of porous pavement and low impact drainage features, as appropriate to the site; and
 - Restrict use of vacant lots as vehicle parking and outdoor storage of commercial equipment, construction equipment, and similar unless screened from public view.
- PSCU-P-14 Provide lighted facilities for tennis, basketball or other recreational facilities and along pathways in order to extend usable hours.
- Lighting should be energy-efficient and designed to minimize light pollution.*

Mitigation Measures

None required.