

## 4.6 AESTHETICS/LIGHT AND GLARE

### Existing Conditions

#### A. General Character of the City

Lemon Grove retains a small-town character although it is a suburb in a large metropolitan region. In general, it presents a positive visual image. Its planning, architecture and mature landscaping identify the City as a community that became fully established in the post-World War II boom years. The City has matured well by maintaining distinct residential and commercial use areas, modest scale development, and avoidance of extreme planning and architectural styles. The City's effective zoning and code enforcement coupled with civic pride are important components in maintaining this positive image. Because the City is fully developed and has very little open space, it has an urban vitality that sometimes contrasts with its traditional appearance. Increased traffic, automobile-oriented commercial development and denser residential development are a few examples of the contrast between the traditional and contemporary City.

Physical aspects of the City have a tangible, "human" scale. The City's overall size and shape, distinct land use areas, small-scaled buildings and circulation system are fairly easy to comprehend. Topographic changes provide a sense of separation and identity in some areas of the City. The commercial "downtown" is at a lower elevation, and some residential areas, schools and parks are in higher elevations which have views into the downtown as well as dramatic distant mountain views.

The following sections describe the aesthetic qualities of various areas of the City in more detail.

#### B. Residential Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods are comprised predominantly of individual, single-story bungalow and ranch houses dating from the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The houses of that era do not exhibit strong architectural styles or distinctive architectural details. Less common are houses dating from the turn of the century through the 1930s which have distinctive styles including Victorian, Craftsman and Spanish Revival. The architectural styles and details of this earlier era are valued by the community. Recent development in the City has either recreated these styles or derived inspiration from them. Unfortunately, these styles lack the presence needed to create a strong city-wide theme and instead only contribute to an eclectic mix.

Several planned housing developments recently built in Lemon Grove have utilized Spanish or Mediterranean architecture. Generally, these new planned communities have maintained the same building scale as other residences, but they lack site planning and architectural similarity with older development.

A theme throughout the residential areas of the City is mature landscaping. In the early part of the century, residents of Lemon Grove planted a wide variety of trees and plants. Large, mature trees contribute shade and beauty to the City, but also create a sense of history and permanence.

### **C. Multi-Family Residential**

Multi-family residential development in Lemon Grove includes apartment buildings and condominium complexes. This type of development constitutes a small portion of the housing in the community, and does not dominate the character of the City because it occurs sporadically. Where multi-family projects are located appropriately, their larger scale does not contrast or conflict with single-family residential neighborhoods. Multi-family development often serves as a transition between high-intensity land use areas, such as commercial districts and single-family residential neighborhoods. Because the majority of the land area of Lemon Grove consists of single-family residential development, it is unavoidable that multi-family development will appear as a contrast and disruption in some areas of the community.

### **D. Downtown**

The central commercial area is a significant historic element of Lemon Grove and is locally referred to as "the downtown". The area was designed in a traditional manner with attached one- and two-story buildings fronting onto the main thoroughfares. Currently, road widths and traffic speeds, parking lots and noise conflict with pedestrian use of the area. The downtown also includes The Lemon Grove monument, trolley station and City Hall. The civic buildings are modest in scale and architectural design and do not project a traditional "town hall" image. The trolley station is a reproduction of an historic building that has set a standard of design excellence in the City.

In the late 1980s, the downtown area was improved with landscaping, street lights and facade treatments which included new signs, awnings and building colors. However, some of the improvements have not proven durable, and maintenance is needed. In order for downtown to be commercially competitive, it must be well-maintained, attractive and adaptable to market trends.

### **E. General Commercial**

Outside the downtown area is a mix of commercial development. Primarily, the commercial development consists of small shopping centers lining the major City thoroughfares. This commercial development reflects contemporary commercial design goals and visually contrasts with the older, traditionally-designed commercial areas. The architecture tends to be simple and landscaping is minimal due to the desire to maintain the visibility of shop signs and to maximize land use for stores and parking.

Some regional commercial uses are located adjacent to SR-94 which enables businesses, that rely on regional users, to be easily seen and accessible. They differ in scale and visual quality from other development in the City, however, their location adjacent to the freeway is appropriate.

#### **F. Industrial**

Industrial development is located in the northwest part of the City along SR-94. The industrial area is accessible from Federal Boulevard. These uses are appropriate to the location and are somewhat isolated from the rest of the City. The Federal Boulevard area provides affordable accommodations for warehouses, services and manufacturing businesses. Unfortunately, many of the buildings are large, boxy, prefabricated metal, with little aesthetic appeal. There is very little landscaping to soften the architecture and storage yards and other utilitarian aspects of the businesses that are visible from SR-94. Freeway-oriented billboards and signs in the area contribute to an overall chaotic appearance.

#### **G. Cultural and Institutional**

Cultural and institutional development in the City includes a number of churches, schools and residential care facilities. Most of this type of development is modest in scale and design and is well-integrated with other development in the City. Some of the churches, such as St. John of the Cross on Broadway, are noticeable exceptions due to their larger scale and distinctive architectural styles. Due to economics, schools have been expanded using pre-fabricated buildings that lack visual interest and a sense of quality and permanence. Landscaping is also lacking around some schools. Playing fields are an important open space amenity in the City, but they present a stark appearance without landscaping.

#### **H. Open Space**

Open space in the City is limited to about 65 acres of undeveloped property, four small municipal parks, playing fields adjacent to schools, and a few hillsides and drainage areas. Open space is an important element in providing visual relief in a densely developed environment. Due to the need for recreation facilities, the City parks have been developed with buildings, play equipment, and ball courts. Despite the pressure for recreational uses, City parks provide desirable green spaces. In the parks and throughout the residential areas, mature landscaping contributes continuity and a sense of permanence.

#### **I. Community Views**

The topography of the City limits the view potential in and around the community. The downtown is in a low-lying area which can be viewed from SR-94. This is a significant view into the City because it orients visitors to the downtown commercial businesses and helps define entries to the city. From most areas of the City, and in particular higher elevation areas, there

are views to surrounding hills and distant mountains. Most of the surrounding hillsides are occupied by established residential neighborhoods with mature landscaping, contributing to an overall suburban character.

## **J. Light and Glare**

Light is generated by various sources in the City. Night lighting is used in commercial districts, parking areas, outdoor sport facilities and roadways. Light is also generated by the headlights of travelling vehicles. The northern portion of the City has the greatest amount of commercial development and experiences the greatest light levels. Higher light levels are also maintained throughout hours of darkness by freeway-oriented commercial businesses and other businesses such as convenience and grocery stores. Other commercial areas of the City have lighting to maintain security, but less for advertisement and access during hours when the businesses are closed. Street lighting on major roadways through the City is generally concentrated in commercial areas. Outside the commercial areas of the City, light levels are fairly low with the exception of major roadway lighting and special event lighting associated with outdoor sports facilities.

Glare is generated by sunlight reflecting off polished surfaces such as windows, pavings, building surfaces and automobile windshields. Tall buildings with reflective glass exteriors are absent in Lemon Grove, thus avoiding this common source of glare in urban communities. However, Lemon Grove, like most cities in the region, receives abundant sunlight and localized daytime glare levels are naturally high, particularly during the summer months.

### **Threshold of Significance**

A project will normally have a significant aesthetic effect if it will:

- Have a substantial, demonstrable adverse aesthetic effect;
- Block public view corridors;
- Destroy prominent visual characteristics of the community; or
- Conflict with existing community design and character.

A project will normally have a significant effect on light and glare if it will:

- Produce intrusive night lighting and glare effects, such as interrupting light sensitive uses (such as an observatory) or intrusively shining in adjacent properties.

## Impacts

### A. Plan-wide

#### Community Design/Aesthetics

Increased growth of the City has the potential to significantly impact the existing small-town community design and character of Lemon Grove. Potential adverse impacts include denser development patterns, large massive structures, non-traditional architecture, and increased roadway widths and parking areas. Positive impacts include community renewal, elimination of blight and improved land uses, public spaces, architecture, landscaping, pedestrian amenities, signs and lighting.

There are no visual features, focal points, or view corridors that will be significantly affected by proposed land use changes. Proposed land uses, architectural standards, landscaping and sign improvements, and City code enforcement will generally improve views into and throughout the City.

#### Light and Glare

New development, particularly in the northern commercial areas of the City, and roadway improvements have the potential to increase the use of night lighting, which could result in significant adverse impacts to surrounding residential neighborhoods. At a regional level, City growth would produce an incremental increase in urban light which affects light sensitive uses, such as Palomar Observatory.

### B. STAs and Other Development Areas

#### Downtown Village (STA I)

Proposed redevelopment of the area as a pedestrian-oriented village could have a significant impact on the existing community design and character of the City by creating denser, mixed-use development. Positive aesthetic impacts include improved architecture, landscaping, pedestrian amenities and signs.

#### Massachusetts Station (STA II)

Neighborhood commercial and residential development at this site has the potential to create a lively and attractive amenity to the southern part of the City. However, new development could contrast with the existing surrounding neighborhood resulting in a significant impact.

### Regional Commercial (STA III)

Potentially significant visual impacts from regional commercial development include large-scale development, massive structures, utilitarian service and storage areas, large parking lots, and an increase in the number of signs and use of lighting. Significant positive aesthetic changes with such development include elimination of deteriorated or blighted development, unscreened storage areas, chain link fences, and cluttered signs. Well-planned new development can provide more attractive architecture, landscaping and consistent design elements such as signs and lighting.

### West Central Residential (STA IV)

The development of this area could result in a significant change of community character from open space to residential development. Although this STA does not provide public open space, the proposed development will demonstrate the rural feeling of the surrounding area. The proposed single-family residential use would be compatible with the character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The proposed preservation of ravine drainage would preserve some of the existing open space.

### Federal Boulevard Automobile Sales District (STA V)

The proposed General Plan does not include any changes from existing conditions, thus, no impact related to aesthetics would occur.

### Skyline Commercial Center (STA VI)

The existing church is proposed to be replaced with neighborhood commercial development. Potential significant impacts include change in the character of the site and its surroundings from traditional small town to contemporary suburban. The site location, mass and scale, and architecture could be significantly different from the existing use.

### Troy Street/SR-125 Planning Area (STA VII)

The aesthetic impacts from construction of the SR-125 freeway are evaluated in the EIS/EIR for the planned SR-125 freeway, and mitigation is required.

### Other Development/Land Use Changes

***Multiple-Family Residential Development.*** The potentially significant impacts of this land use could include intensified land development and building scale and a change in architectural character. Positive impacts include elimination of deteriorated and blighted development and a transitional use between commercial and single-family residential areas.

***Industrial and Commercial Areas.*** The potential significant impacts of this land use could include intensified land development and building scale and a change in architectural character. Positive impacts include elimination of deteriorated and blighted development and improvement in architecture, landscaping and site design.

***Skyline Neighborhood Commercial Area.*** Proposed residential replacement of commercial uses could have a significant impact on the existing neighborhood character. A positive impact will be that the proposed use is more appropriate and compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.

***Civic Center Concept Area.*** The proposed civic center is a significant change from the existing modest city facility. Positive impacts include the potential for landmark architectural design, increased public open space, and improved pedestrian amenities and landscaping.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### **A. Plan-wide**

##### **Aesthetics**

Mitigation Measures 4.1-3 and 4.1-4 would reduce impacts to aesthetics to below significance.

##### **Light and Glare**

***Mitigation Measure 4.6-1:*** The City shall review all new development projects to determine if the projects will have adverse light and glare impacts. The City shall require design methods to avoid or reduce light and glare impacts such as shielded light fixtures, judicious use of reflective surfaces including building materials, glass, and pavement surfaces, and inclusion of landscape elements such as trees for shade and ground covers to reduce ground surface glare. (General Plan Implementation Manual, Community Development Program #34).

#### **B. STAs and Other Development Areas**

The mitigation measures described above include all of the STAs and other development areas. These mitigation measures will reduce potential impacts associated with aesthetics and light and glare. Additionally, Section 4.1, Land Use, contains mitigation measures to reduce land use impacts caused by the planned development in the STAs. These measures contain provisions for compatible design that will reduce the significant visual impacts from the STA development.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation**

With implementation of the mitigation measures identified above, impacts related to aesthetics and light and glare will be reduced to below significance.