

5. Environmental Analysis

5.1 AESTHETICS

This section of the section of the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) discusses the potential impacts to the visual character of the plan area associated with the proposed project. This section includes a discussion of the qualitative aesthetic characteristics of the existing environment that would be potentially altered by the project's implementation and the consistency of the project with established relevant policies.

5.1.1 Environmental Setting

5.1.1.1 REGULATORY BACKGROUND

Laws, regulations, plans, or guidelines related to aesthetics that are potentially applicable to the proposed project are summarized below.

State

California Scenic Highway Program

Caltrans's California Scenic Highway Program was created in 1963, and it maps and describes all scenic highways in the state. The program protects these state scenic highway and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. State Route 243 (SR-243) from State Route 74 to the Banning city limits is designated a State Scenic Highway (Caltrans 2011). This segment of SR-243 is in unincorporated Riverside County.

City of Banning Municipal Code

The following provisions from the City's Municipal Code help minimize light and glare impacts associated with new development projects and are relevant to the proposed project.

- **Section 17.12.170 (Lighting).** This section regulates lighting for commercial and industrial projects. Lighting should only be the minimum required for safety and security and should be limited to 18 to 25 feet in height. Smaller pedestrian oriented lighting is encouraged in downtown commercial districts. Lighting should also be integrated into the structure's architecture to the greatest extent as possible. All lighting fixtures shall not have a visible lighting source, must be shielded, and directed downward to confine light spread within the site boundaries.
- **Section 17.24.100 (Lighting).** General development standards related to lighting requires that lights do not blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness. Exterior lighting shall be shielded or recessed and directed downward and away from adjoining properties and public right-of-ways.

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5.1.1.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Visual Character

The majority of the 831-acre project site consists of rural, open space with mountain backdrops. The site also includes gentle rolling hills, valleys, and incised drainage courses (see Figures 5.1-1a, *Photo Location Map*, and 5.1-1b, *Visual Character*). Four major drainage courses cross the site: Smith Creek, Pershing Creek, Montgomery Creek, and Gilman Home Channel (see Figure 3-3, *Aerial Photograph*). There is also a rugged bedrock knob in the southeast corner of the site. The site slopes downwards to the east-southeast with an average grade of about 2 percent.

Grassland vegetation covers about 83 percent of the site. Most of the balance of the site is vegetated with coastal scrub in and near Smith Creek, Pershing Creek, and Montgomery Creek. The creeks are ephemeral and stay dry most of the time; therefore, there is little to no riparian habitat along the creek beds.

Two overhead electrical transmission lines cross the site: one crosses the entire site from east to west; the second passes through the southeast part of the site, continuing west just south of the south site boundary. The transmission lines in the southeast part of the site are suspended from two parallel rows of towers; the lines in the central part of the site are suspended from one row of towers (see Figure 3-3, *Aerial Photograph*).

Surrounding land uses include Dysart Park along Victory Avenue and residential properties to the north along Westward Avenue, a KOA Campground to the east, Banning High School to the northeast, and Mt. San Jacinto Community College San Gorgonio Pass Campus to the northwest. Other surrounding land to the east, south, and west consists of rural residential and agricultural uses and vacant land.

Landform

The site is in the San Gorgonio Pass, an elongated east-west-trending valley situated between the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. This valley is part of the major drainage divide between the Pacific Ocean and Salton Trough. San Gorgonio Pass slopes downward to the east until it merges with the Coachella Valley. To the west, the valley merges with the Beaumont Plain.

Scenic Vistas and Corridors

The San Jacinto Mountains rise steeply from the southeast project boundary; the base of the mountains curves toward the west until one mile south of the southwest boundary of the site. The San Bernardino Mountains rise steeply from the north side of the San Gorgonio Pass about two miles north of the site. The Little San Bernardino Mountains are also visible to the east. Two of the highest peaks in southern California bracket the project site: San Gorgonio Mountain in the San Bernardino Mountains, the highest point in southern California at 11,503 feet, is about 6.5 miles north of the site and visible from nearly the whole site. San Jacinto Peak in the San Jacinto Mountains, 10,834 feet, is about 6.6 miles southeast of the site and visible from the northeast portion of the site.

In addition to vistas of surrounding mountain ranges, the site affords vistas of rolling hills and valleys on and near the vicinity of the site.

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Scenic Highways

According to Caltrans, State Route 243 (SR-243) from SR-74 in the south to the Banning city limits in the north is officially designated a State Scenic Highway; it is also a portion of the Palms to Pines Scenic Byway designated by the US Forest Service (Caltrans 2011; USFS 2012). This State Scenic Highway is 28 miles long and ends right at Banning's southern city limit in unincorporated Riverside County, adjacent to the project site's eastern boundary (see Figure 5.1-1a, *Photo Location Map*). As an official scenic highway, SR-243 is protected by a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. The CMP includes five mandated elements: regulation of land use and density of development; detailed land and site planning; control of outdoor advertising; careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and the design and appearance of structures and equipment. Incorporated into the CMP are Riverside County General Plan policies related to enhancing the County's and state scenic highways (see Section 5.1.1.1 above).

Light and Glare

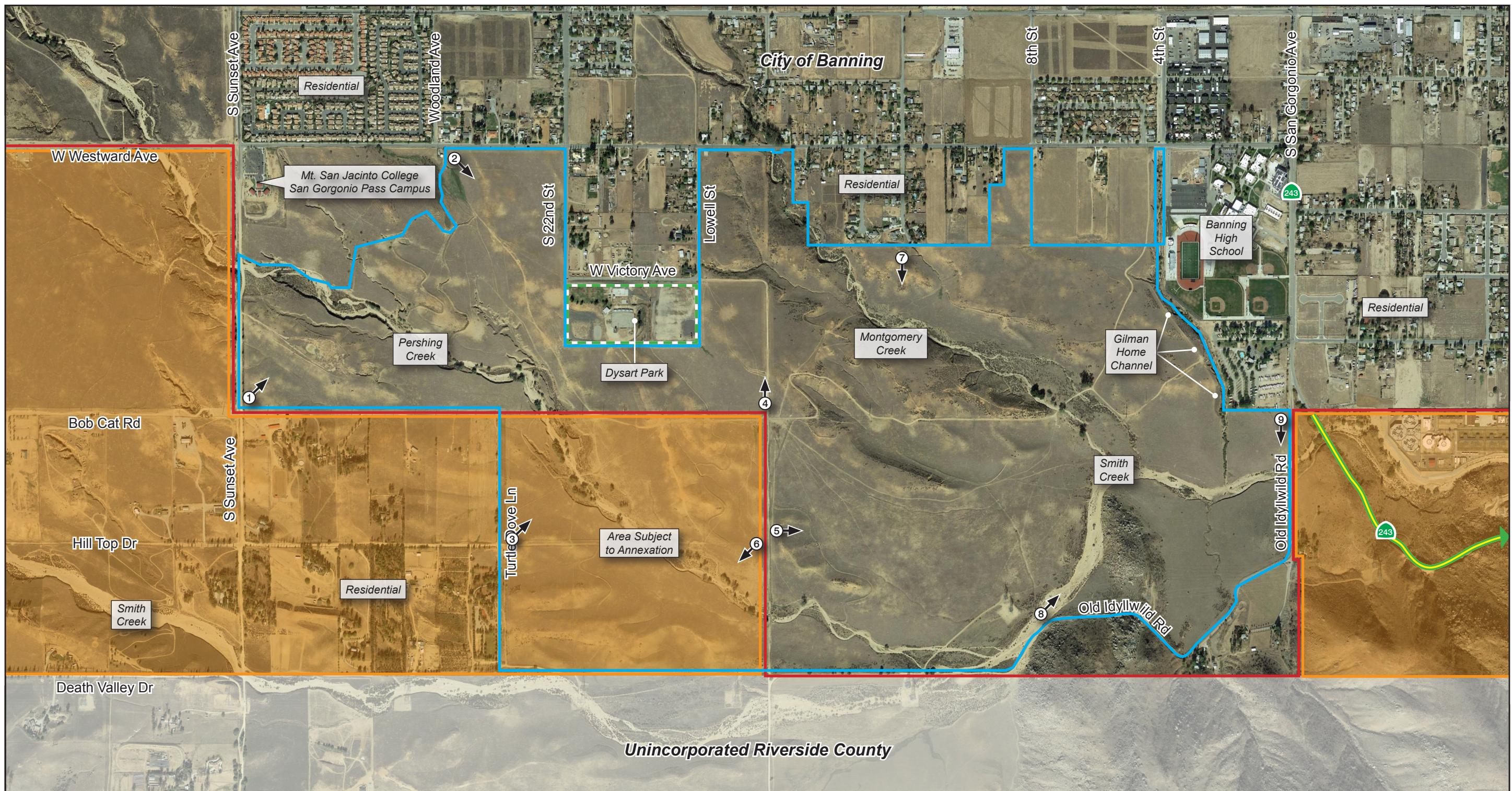
The site is currently vacant, without existing sources of light or glare onsite. Existing light sources next to the site include outdoor safety and security lighting at residences, Banning High School (including a lighted football stadium), Mount San Jacinto Community College San Gorgonio Pass campus, and the KOA campground, and vehicle lights on surrounding roadways (e.g., SR-243 and Westward Avenue).

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Figure 5.1-1a - Photo Location Map
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City Boundary

Sphere of Influence



Photograph Location and Direction (9)

Specific Plan Boundary

Park Limits



State Scenic Highway

0 900
Scale (Feet)



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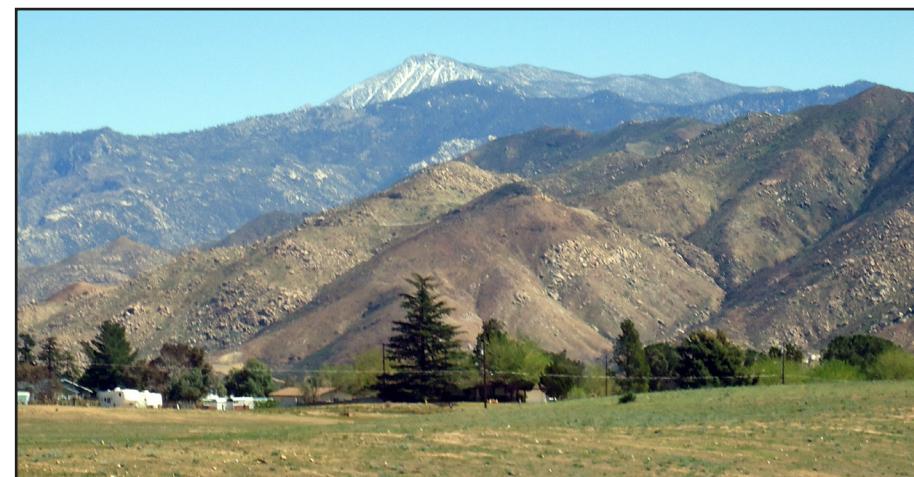
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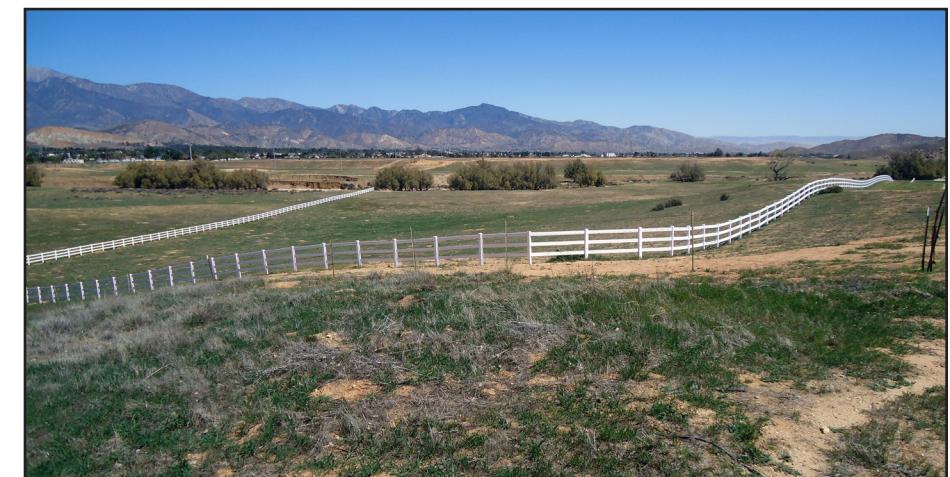
Figure 5.1-1b - Visual Character
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① View looking northeast from west site boundary; the San Bernardino Mountains are in the background.



② View looking southeast from the northwest site perimeter. The houses in the middle ground are offsite; Mt. San Jacinto is in the background.



③ View looking northeast from southwest site perimeter. The San Bernardino Mountains are in the background.



④ View looking north from the central part of the site. The rust-colored hill in the middle ground is offsite. Mt. San Gorgonio is in the background.



⑤ View looking east from the central part of the site. The San Jacinto Mountains are on the right and the San Bernardino Mountains on the left.



⑥ View looking southwest from the central part of the site. The trees in the middle ground are onsite along Pershing Creek. The San Jacinto Mountains are in the background.



⑦ View looking south along a minor drainage from the north site perimeter; the San Jacinto Mountains are in the background.



⑧ View of Smith Creek bed looking northeast from southeast site perimeter. The hill covered with rock outcrops in the middle ground is onsite. The San Bernardino Mountains are in the background.



⑨ View looking south from the east site boundary; Old Idyllwild Road is on the left, and the San Jacinto Mountains are in the background.

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5.1.2 Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a project would normally have a significant effect on the environment if the project would:

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

5.1.3 Environmental Impacts

The evaluation of aesthetics is highly subjective, yet it requires the application of a process that objectively identifies the visual features of the existing environment and their importance. The characterization of aesthetics involves establishing existing visual character, including resources and scenic vistas unique to the project area. Visual resources are determined by identifying existing landforms (e.g. topography and grading), views (e.g. scenic resources such as natural features or urban characteristics), viewing points/locations, and existing light and glare (e.g. nighttime illumination). Changes to the existing aesthetic environment that would result due to implementation of the proposed project are identified and qualitatively evaluated based on the proposed modifications to the existing setting and the viewer's sensitivity. Project-related impacts are compared to the context of the existing setting, using the thresholds listed above.

The following impact analysis addresses thresholds of significance for which the Initial Study disclosed potentially significant impacts. The applicable thresholds are identified in brackets after the impact statement.

Impact 5.1-1: Implementation of the Specific Plan would substantially alter the visual appearance of the project site; however, it would not degrade the visual and scenic quality of the area. [Thresholds AE-1 and AE-3]

Impact Analysis: The proposed Rancho San Gorgonio Specific Plan would allow for development of either 3,385 residential homes or 3,133 units and 101,277 square feet of commercial use¹ on a currently vacant and undeveloped site. As shown in Figure 3-5, *Proposed Land Use Plan*, the project would consist of Very Low and Low Density Residential development in the southern and central portion of the site where there is currently no development, and Medium and Medium High Density Residential development in the northern half of

¹ The maximum number of dwelling units to be allowed in the Specific Plan area is 3,385 units if Planning Area (PA) 9 and PA-16C are not developed as commercial or school uses, respectively, and instead are developed in accordance with their Residential Overlay Alternatives.

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the site near existing residential development along Westward Avenue and near the urbanized surroundings of Mt. San Jacinto Community College San Gorgonio Pass Campus.

Given that the project site is currently undeveloped, development of any kind would alter the visual appearance of the project area. However, the proposed Specific Plan would preserve many of the scenic vistas and qualities of the area. For example, 210 acres (25 percent) of the project site would be designated for parks (including a community park, confluence park, two neighborhood parks, village paseos, and creek edge linear parks) and natural open space. Areas along Pershing and Smith Creeks and the proposed open space areas would remain undisturbed; linear parks would be designated near the two creeks as a buffer from development and to maintain the natural creek flows through the southern portion of the site (see Figure 5.1-2, *Master Landscape Concept Plan*). In addition, proposed residential development near the open space, creeks, and parks is Very Low or Low Density Residential to complement the nearby park space and create a more scenic and less dense environment. The proposed village paseos would be incorporated throughout the project area to provide walking, riding, and vehicle access that connects the project's distinct walkable 'village' neighborhoods together. As stated above, the Medium and Medium High Density Residential land use designations would be in areas already adjacent to existing development and blend with the current visual character.

Scenic vistas further in the distance include the San Jacinto Mountains to the southeast and the San Bernardino Mountains to the north. Two of the highest peaks in the region include: the San Gorgonio Mountain in the San Bernardino Mountains, about 6.5 miles north of the site and visible from nearly the whole site, and the San Jacinto Peak in the San Jacinto Mountains, about 6.6 miles southeast of the site and visible from the northeast portion of the site. Development in accordance with the proposed project would not alter or block views of these peaks and mountains from surrounding uses.

In addition, maximum building heights would be 35 feet (two stories) for Very Low, Low, and Medium Density Residential; 45 feet (three stories) for Medium High Density Residential; and 50 feet for Neighborhood Commercial. The Medium High Density Residential and Neighborhood Commercial uses would be located close to existing buildings and development along Westward and Sunset Avenues; therefore, their heights would not block or alter views of the San Jacinto or San Bernardino Mountains.

Mass grading of the project area is not expected to significantly raise or lower the overall elevation of the site from current conditions. Grading would include approximately 4,200,000 cubic yards of cut and approximately 4,230,000 cubic yards of fill earthwork (see Figures 5.1-3a and 5.1-3b, *Conceptual Mass Grading Plan*). This would include remedial grading (alluvium and colluvium removal and recompaction); therefore, it is anticipated that there would not be any need for off-site export or import of earthwork. While construction activities would alter the visual appearance of the site, these activities would only be temporary. In addition, drainage ways along Pershing and Smith Creeks would consist of light grading in limited locations to create more stable banks. The majority of the creek beds would remain as is and relatively ungraded. Therefore, the two major drainage ways would not undergo sufficient change due to the proposed project. As shown in Figures 5.1-4 through 5.1-7, the creeks would also be buffered by 100-foot setback areas on both sides of the creek banks where the trails and linear parks are proposed. Overall, the proposed

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grading would be sensitive to onsite natural landforms and would not adversely impact the site's natural quality.

Furthermore, the proposed Specific Plan Design Guidelines (Section 3) provides community design, neighborhood crafting, landscaping, and architectural standards for the proposed Rancho San Gorgonio community. Landscaping design guidelines emphasize the rustic and natural character of the site's surrounding rural foothill environment. The design guidelines follows a "historic California desert ranch" theme, which includes natural, rustic architectural elements and materials (e.g., stone walls, rustic entry monuments, trail fencing, etc.), drought-tolerant plant palette, and low-maintenance streetscape and landscaping designs. The following design guidelines would serve to minimize impacts to the visual character and quality of the site and surrounding uses.

- Development edges are to be landscaped so as to minimize aesthetic impacts by providing appropriate landscaping where possible to screen the views of structures when viewed from lower elevations and adjacent properties; landscape materials may be used in conjunction with berming to accomplish this objective; and in transition areas where native undisturbed vegetation meets a development area, only those species similar to existing native vegetation must be used. (*Public Landscapes*)
- All manufactured and cut/fill slopes which exceed 3' in height shall be planted with an effective mixture of groundcover, shrubs, and trees from the RSG plant palette. Such slopes shall also be irrigated as necessary to ensure germination and establishment. (*Slope Landscaping*)
- In transition areas where native undisturbed vegetation meets a development area, only those plant species similar to existing native vegetation must be used. Additionally, where residential or commercial buildings abut native vegetation transition areas, landscaping must consider applicable fuel modification zone requirements, including building setbacks, thinning of native vegetation and provision for interim and/or permanent irrigation where warranted. (*Fuel Modification Interface Areas*)
- Use real stone veneer on all entry monuments and community identity pilasters. Stone materials should be selected to complement the native stone materials found on and offsite to appear more natural and in keeping with the site. The use of real stone increases durability, lowers long term maintenance costs, and adds a high quality timeless appearance to the project. (*Landscape Materials Guidelines*)
 - Accent boulders used in site landscaping should be natural, rounded and weathered to match in color to on-site and offsite boulder outcroppings. (*Landscape Materials Guidelines*)
- Between proposed residential and existing residential areas, a 6' high minimum masonry perimeter wall shall be provided per Section 3.3.9, Community Walls and Fencing. (*Buffer, Edge Treatments and Transitional Areas*)
- In edges between commercial uses and residential uses, the residential use shall be buffered from the commercial side by a solid decorative masonry wall and a minimum of a 10' wide continuous planter strip

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with upright evergreen screening trees, shrubs and groundcovers to be placed on the commercial development side. (*Buffer, Edge Treatments and Transitional Areas*)

The proposed Design Guidelines also detail the architectural styles for homes, including Spanish Style (Monterey, Spanish Colonial, Santa Barbara, and Andalusian), California Eclectic Style (Ranch, Farmhouse, Prairie, Napa, and Craftsman), and Mediterranean Style (Tuscan). Each of the home styles has specific architectural form/massing, roofing, detailing, walls and windows, and color guidelines to properly reflect the appropriate styles and California desert ranch theme.

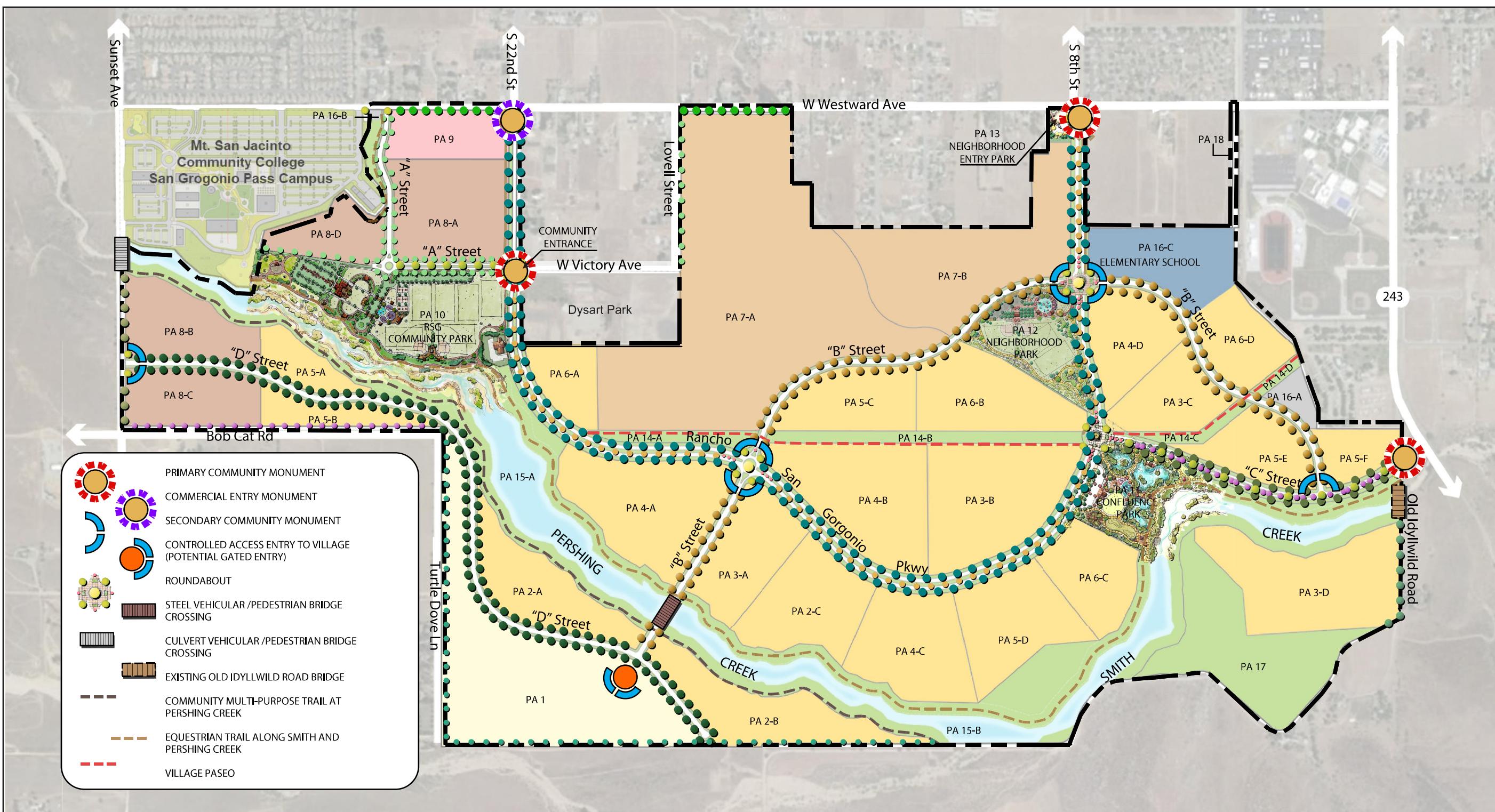
Overall, while implementation of the proposed project would alter the visual quality of the currently vacant and undeveloped site, the project would not adversely affect existing scenic vistas (including Pershing and Smith Creeks and the San Jacinto and San Bernardino mountains), nor would it degrade the visual quality and character of the site. The proposed Specific Plan includes a number of design guidelines that work with the natural landscape of the site (e.g., limited grading, creek bank stability, buffered landscaping) and enhance the open space qualities of the site through the creation of parks and paseos and the preservation of natural open space. Thus, impacts would be less than significant.

Impact 5.1-2: The proposed project would not alter scenic resources along State Route 243. [Threshold AE-2]

Impact Analysis: According to Caltrans, SR-243 (from SR-74 to the Banning city limits) is officially designated a State Scenic Highway, and is also a portion of the Palms to Pines Scenic Byway designated by the US Forest Service (Caltrans 2011; USFS 2012). The scenic route is 28 miles in total and ends right at the southern boundary of Banning near the KOA Campground and Banning High School. The project's easternmost portion along Old Idyllwild Road is also slightly visible from the end point of this scenic highway. However, existing topography and vegetation block the frontage of the project site along SR-243 as it enters developed areas of Banning. In addition to the KOA Campground and Banning High School on the west side, there are also residential homes visible to the east.

The proposed Specific Plan would allow for Low Density Residential uses south of the KOA Campground and would also include a continuation of the linear creek park along Smith Creek (see Figure 3-5, *Proposed Land Use Plan*). The proposed residential and park uses would blend with surrounding uses nearby and would also be buffered and blocked by planned street trees along Old Idyllwild Road and "C" Street. In addition to street trees, a landscaped parkway, multipurpose trail, shrub and vine planting area, and a masonry perimeter wall is proposed along Old Idyllwild Road (see Figure 5.1-7, *Old Idyllwild Road Perimeter Streetscape Concept*). Therefore, the proposed project's eastern boundary would mostly be buffered by landscaping, and scenic resources along SR-243 would be preserved. Impacts would be less than significant.

Figure 5.1-2 - Master Landscape Concept Plan
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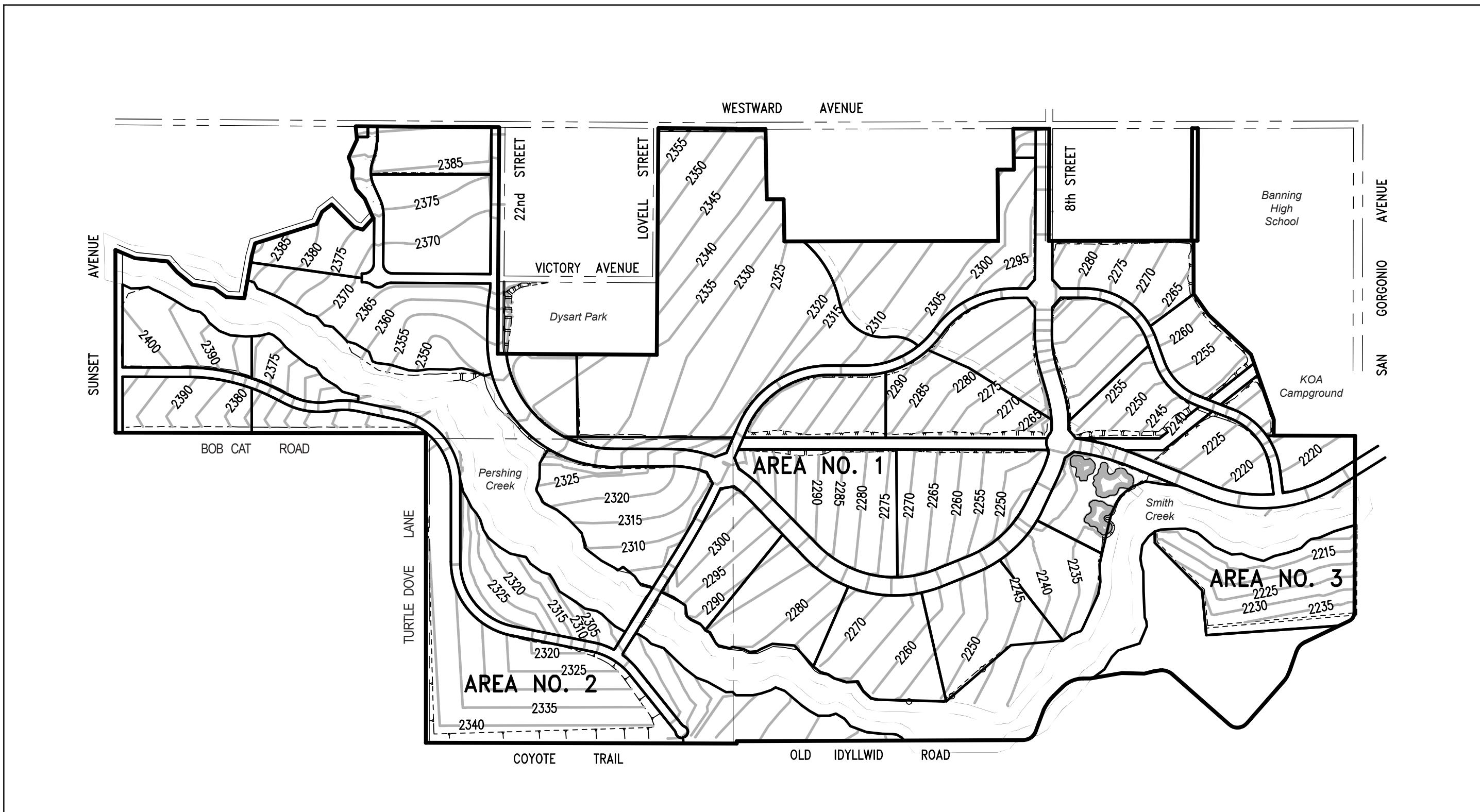


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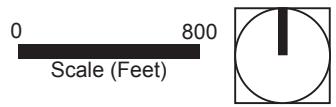
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Figure 5.1-3a - Conceptual Mass Grading Plan 5. Environmental Analysis



Base Map Source: Michael Baker International, 2015

PlaceWorks

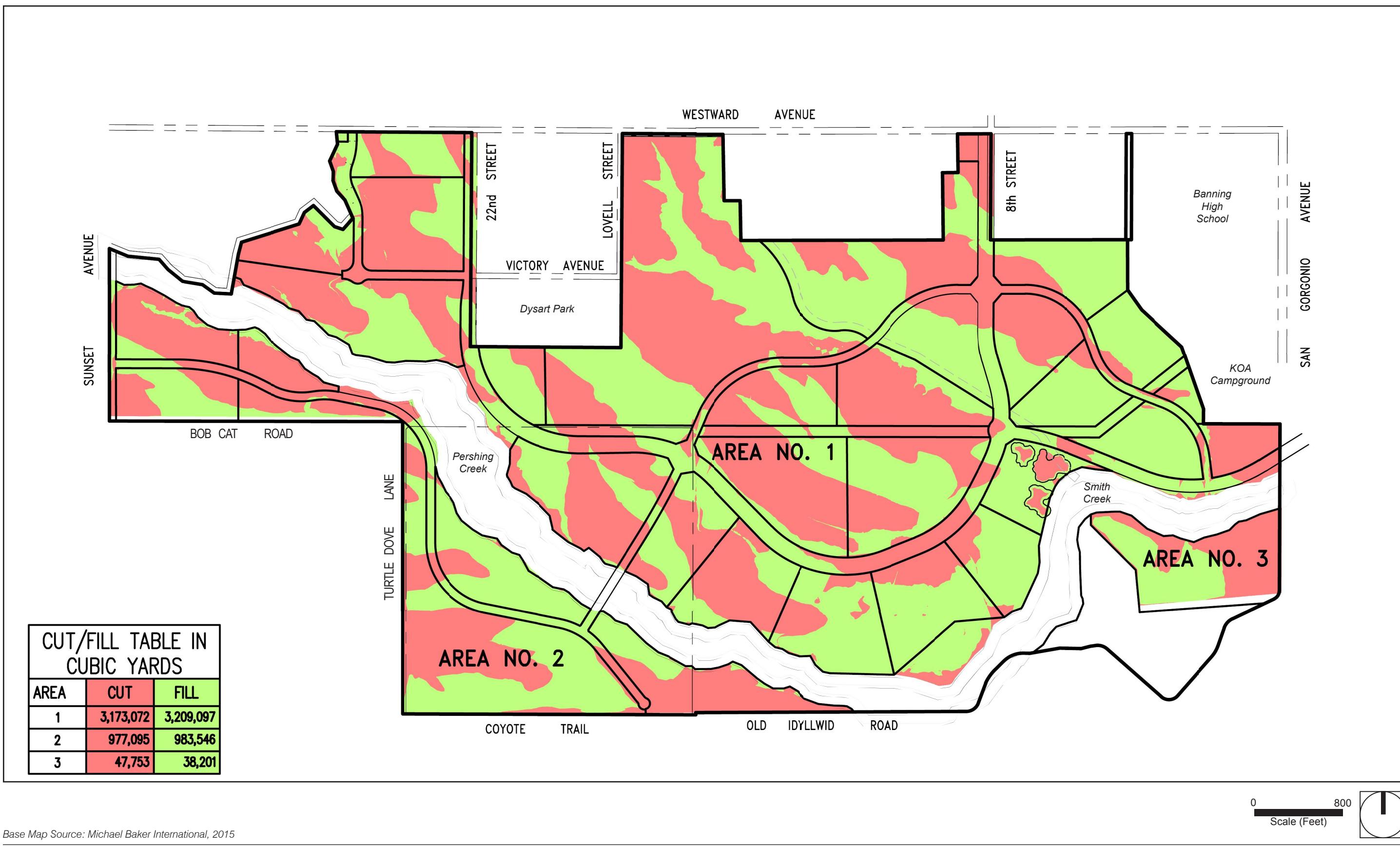


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Figure 5.1-3b - Conceptual Mass Grading Plan
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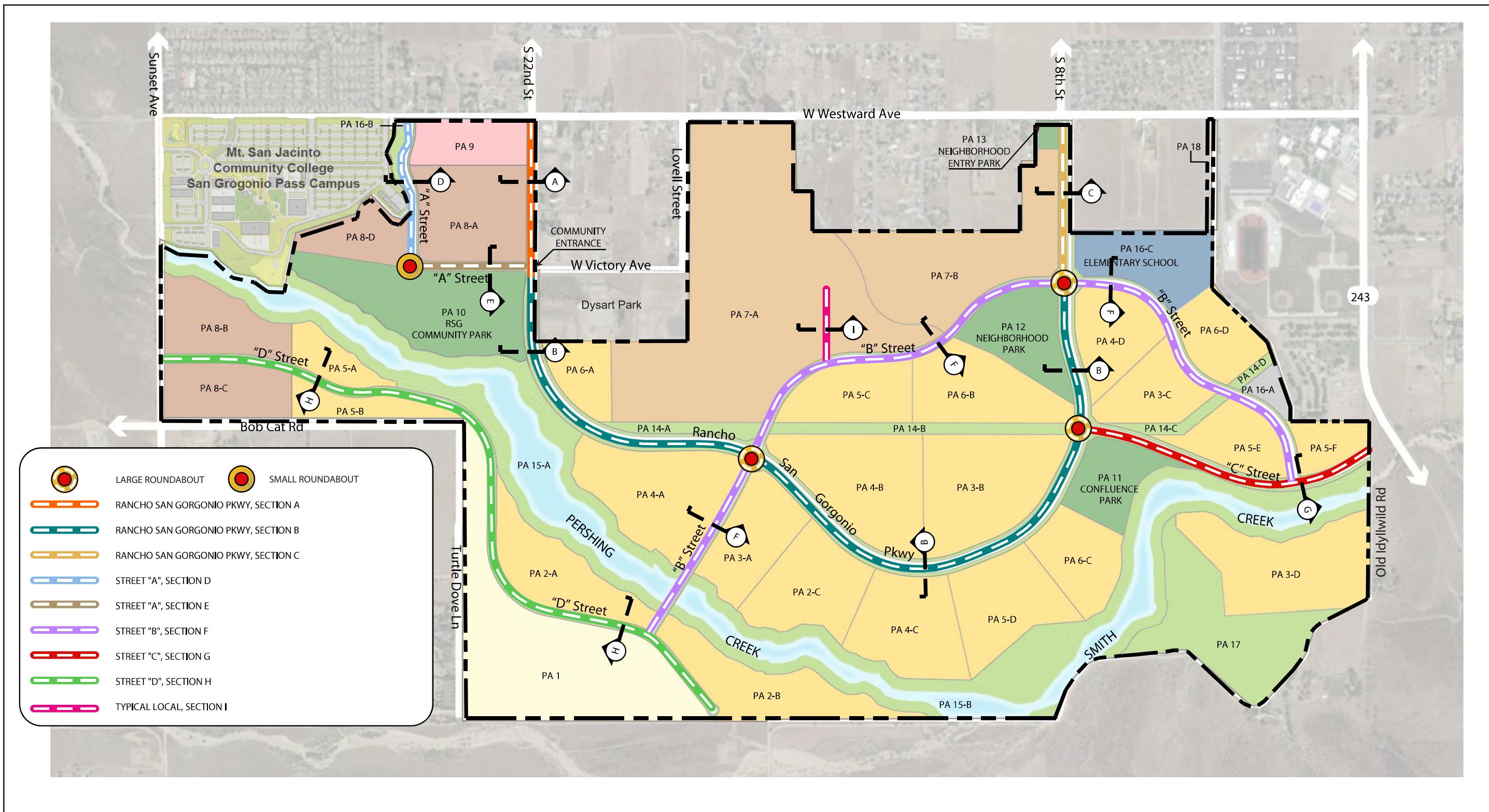


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Figure 5.1-4 - Streetscape Cross-Section Locations

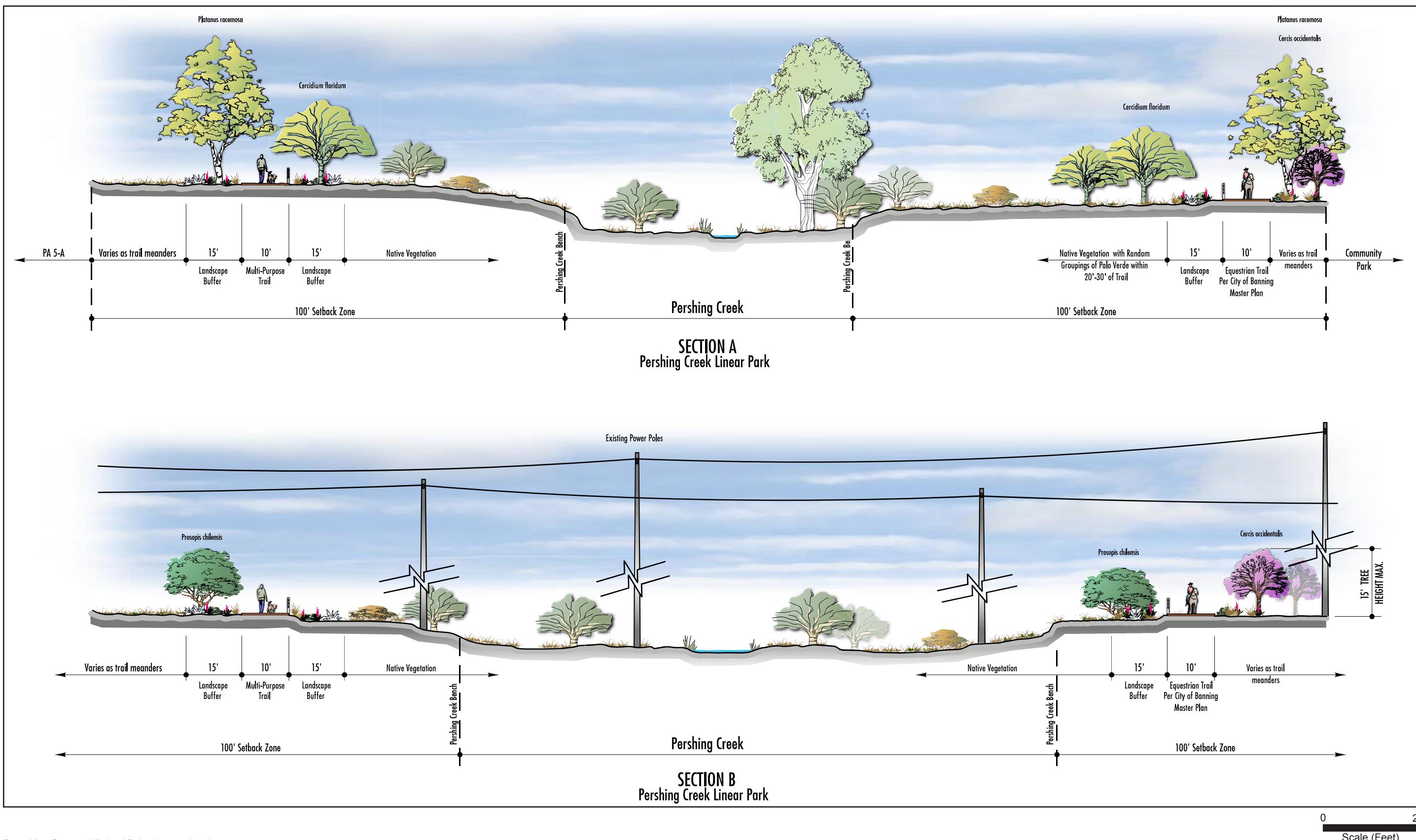


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Figure 5.1-5 - Creek Edge Linear Park Concept
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Figure 5.1-6 - Community Park Concept
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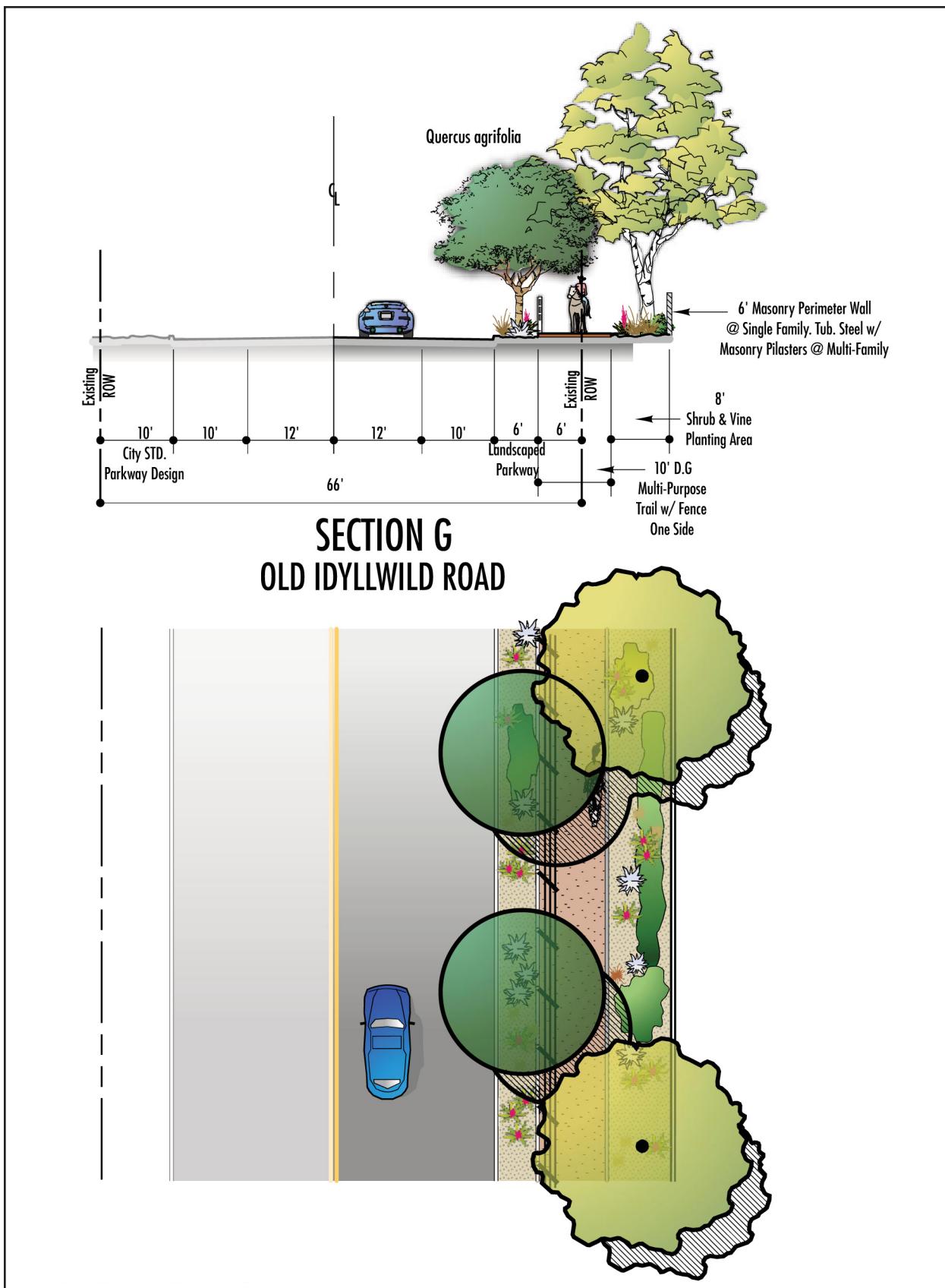
Note: Concept illustration only, final design may vary.

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Figure 5.1-7 - Old Idyllwild Road Perimeter Streetscape Concept
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Impact 5.1-3: The proposed project would generate new sources of light and glare; however compliance with lighting standards and regulations would minimize potential light and glare impacts. [Threshold AE-4]

Impact Analysis: Given that the project site is currently vacant and undeveloped, there are no sources of light or glare onsite. Development in accordance with the proposed Specific Plan would generate new sources of light and glare from building lighting (interior and exterior), street lighting, security lighting, sign illumination, aesthetic lighting (e.g., illumination of architectural and façade detailing), and vehicular traffic. However, low and medium density residential uses do not generate substantial sources of light and glare.

According to the proposed Specific Plan, all project lighting plans shall be in accordance with applicable City of Banning standards, which include Sections 17.12.170 and 17.24.100 of the City's Municipal Code. Section 17.12.170 regulates commercial development and would be applicable to the proposed Neighborhood Commercial use. Under this section, only the minimum amount of lighting required for safety and security is allowed and should be limited to 18 to 25 feet tall while being integrated into the structure's architecture to the greatest extent possible. All lighting fixtures must not have a visible light source, and must be shielded and directed downward to prevent light spread to adjacent properties. Section 17.24.100 regulates exterior lighting and prohibits the use of lighting that blinks, flashes, or is of unusually high intensity or brightness. All exterior lighting must be shielded or recessed so that light is contained within the boundaries of the parcel on which the lighting is located.

The Specific Plan also has lighting requirements to ensure new sources of light minimize potential glare and do not adversely impact surrounding land uses. The single family and multifamily design criteria matrices outline lighting requirements, which state that homeowner and association lighting other than street lighting shall be shielded to minimize illumination of adjacent lots or properties and to reduce glare. Freestanding poles used for homeowner or association lighting other than street lighting shall not exceed a maximum height of 14 feet. The Specific Plan's Sustainable Community Design Strategies also promote the reduction of light pollution through the use of automatic controls on exterior lighting, shielding to prevent light spillover, and lighting technologies that reduce glare and light pollution affecting night sky access and impacts to wildlife environments. By complying with the City and Specific Plan's development standards, potential light and glare impacts would be reduced to less than significant.

5.1.4 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative aesthetic impact analysis encompasses a review of the City and County's General Plan land use designations and related projects (see Table 4-3) relative to open space preservation; assessment of area-wide vistas towards the San Bernardino Mountains and San Jacinto Mountains; cumulative effects on designated scenic highways; and review of the incremental increases in light and glare.

City and County land use designations surrounding the project site include Ranch/Agriculture and Rural Residential to the south and southwest, Very Low Density Residential to the east and north, and Low Density Residential to the west (see Figure 3-4, *Current Land Use Designations*). Therefore, future projects in these areas

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would not introduce high density development that could cause cumulative adverse aesthetic impacts in the project area.

Figure 4-2, *Related Projects*, shows the locations of known major developments in Banning relative to the project site. All major developments are located north of I-10 and the project site. Given the distance, development of these projects would not cumulatively contribute to aesthetic impacts, including scenic vistas towards the San Bernardino Mountains to the north and San Jacinto Mountains to the south.

Additionally, no cumulative effects would adversely impact SR-243 as state scenic highway. As shown on Figure 5.1-1a, *Photo Location Map*, its scenic designation begins at the southern city limit of Banning and extends southerly into unincorporated Riverside County. Land use designations along this portion of SR-243 include Very Low Density Residential and Rural Residential which would not adversely impact the scenic quality of SR-243. Future projects would also be required to comply with County policies related to scenic highway preservation and enhancement. For example, LU 13.3 requires the design of new landscaping, structures, equipment, signs or grading within scenic highway corridors to be compatible with the surrounding scenic setting or environment. LU 13.4 requires at least a 50-foot setback from the edge of the right-of-way for new development adjacent to Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways, and LU 13.6 prohibits offsite outdoor advertising displays that are visible from Designated and Eligible State and County Scenic Highways.

The incremental amount of light and glare generated from the project would make a minimal contribution to the cumulative impact of other development projects in the area. As stated above, all known major development projects in the City are north of I-10 and the project site, and at least three miles from the site. In addition, all new development projects in the City are required to comply with existing lighting regulations under Sections 17.12.170 and 17.24.100 of the City's Municipal Code. In consideration of the preceding factors, the project's contribution to cumulative aesthetic impacts would be less than significant and would not be cumulatively significant.

5.1.5 Existing Regulations

- City of Banning Municipal Code
 - Chapter 17.12 (Commercial and Industrial Districts), Section 17.12.170 (Lighting)
 - Chapter 17.24 (General Standards), Section 17.24.100 (Lighting)

5.1.6 Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Upon implementation of regulatory requirements and standard conditions of approval, the following impacts would be less than significant: 5.1-1, 5.1-2, and 5.1-3.

5.1.7 Mitigation Measures

Impacts are less than significant, and no mitigation measures are required.

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5.1.8 Level of Significance After Mitigation

No mitigation measures are identified, and impacts remain less than significant.

5.1.9 References

Caltrans. 2011, September 7. California Scenic Highway Mapping System: Riverside County, Route 243.

http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/.

US Forest Service (USFS). 2012, July. Palms to Pines Scenic Byway State Highways 243 and 74 Points of Interest. http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5389286.pdf.

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