4.2 AESTHETICS

This section evaluates the effects of the project on visual resources, including views from public areas in the project vicinity. This analysis also considers the project's consistency with applicable City of Belmont visual resources-related policies. Photos are included to illustrate the site's existing visual character. A photo simulation is included to illustrate views of the project site from a surrounding viewpoint once the project is constructed.

This analysis has been prepared using available information which was collected to identify aesthetics and visual resources for the City of Belmont. The project site's existing aesthetics and visual resources were evaluated to determine the project's potential to degrade and/or improve existing measures of visual character and visual quality.

4.2.1 Environmental Setting

Belmont is located on the San Francisco peninsula, approximately 33 miles south of San Francisco and 31 miles north of San Jose. The project site is located within the western portion of city of Belmont, in the West Hills neighborhood. The project vicinity is generally characterized as a hilly area, rising from the San Francisco Bay to the top of the San Francisco peninsula.

Belmont itself is a relatively suburban area, with areas of residential development separated by open space lands. Retail and commercial use development is primarily located along Highway 101, El Camino Real, and Ralston Avenue. Belmont's downtown core is located near the intersection of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue.

4.2.1.1 Visual Character

Surrounding Area

The surrounding project area contains a mix of business and commercial uses, school, residential, and open space areas. Adjacent land uses include Ralston Middle School to the west, office and parking uses to the north and east, Water Dog Lake Park (also known as John Brooks Memorial Open Space) and an open space canyon area to the south. Trails extend by the project site and through Water Dog Lake Park, connecting with Ralston Middle School and surrounding residential areas. Land uses across Ralston Avenue and south of Water Dog Lake Park are composed of single-family residential uses. More distant surrounding land uses east of the project site include a mix of single-family and condominium residential uses.

Project Site

The project site is located within Ralston Park, an office park developed with office buildings and parking lots. The project site is developed office, warehouse, and parking lots. The project site is approximately 500 feet in elevation. Water Dog Lake is located in a basin approximately 150 below the project site. Surrounding residential uses to the south are approximately 50 to 150 feet higher than the project site. The visual character of the project site is shown in Figure 4.2-1.

Views of the Project Site

The project site is visible from the Ralston Park office uses and parking lots on Davis Drive (see Figure 4.2-2). Although residential uses south of the project have views of the site, publicly accessible views on streets of the project site are limited by residential development. Views of the project site from publicly accessed places include a small undeveloped area along Hallmark Drive, between Waterloo Court and Wakefield Drive, and Hallmark Park.

Existing Structures

The project site is currently developed with a vacant office/warehouse building and an office building. The northern portion of the project site (6-8 Davis Drive) is improved with a single-story office/warehouse building, with mezzanine, totaling approximately 22,500 square feet. The northernmost office/warehouse building is a slab-on-grade construction and contains two loading docks. The site was previously landscaped with turf and contains mature pines and other non-native trees.

The southern portion of the project site (10 Davis Drive) is developed with a vacant, partial two-story office building, totaling approximately 62,000 square feet. The southernmost office building also contains a loading dock and two separate basement areas located beneath the western and northeastern portions of the building.

Light and Glare

The buildings are vacant, but outside common areas are lit at night. The parking areas include site lighting which is lit during the night.

Daytime sources of glare in the project vicinity include reflections off light-colored or reflective surfaces, such as windows and metal details from existing structures adjacent to the site. In addition to street lighting on the adjacent streets, light sources in the project vicinity include indoor and outdoor lighting on the school adjacent to the site and residential structures in the area.

4.2.2 Regulatory Setting

There are no federal or state laws or regulations that are applicable to aesthetics in relation to this project. This section discusses the local laws and regulations that pertain to aesthetics for this project.

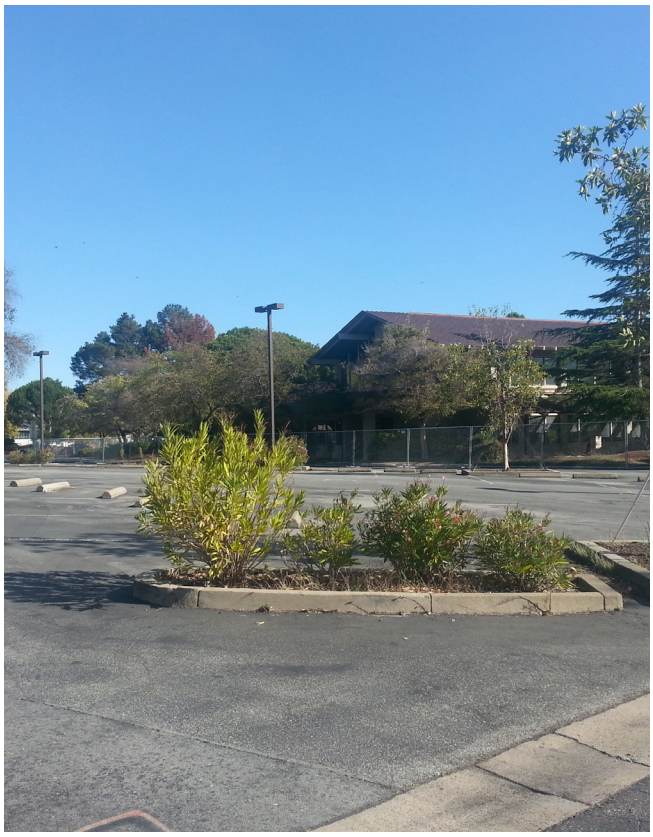
4.2.2.1 Local

City of Belmont General Plan

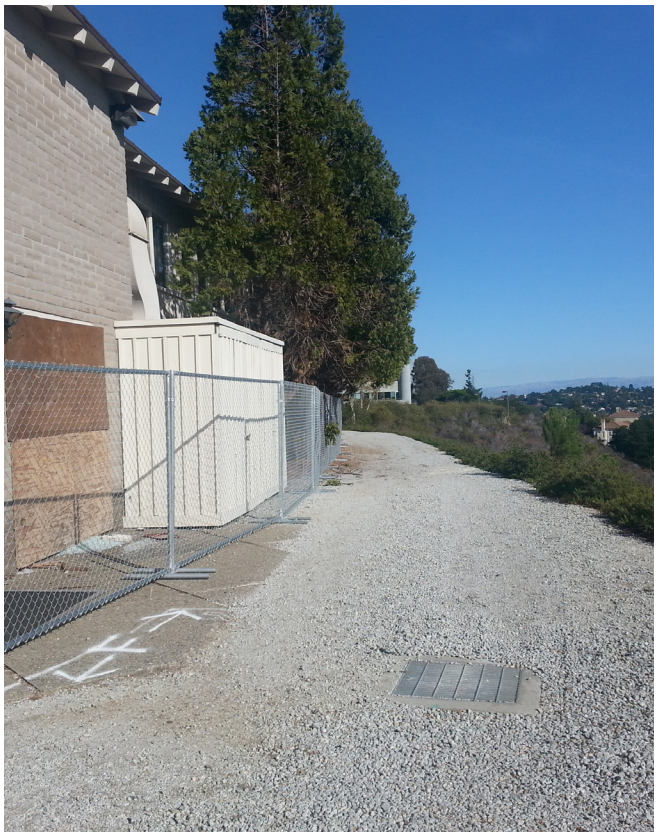
The City of Belmont General Plan Land Use-Open Space Element includes goals and policies to protect and enhance the physical elements (both natural and created) that have shaped the unique identity of the city.

Although the portion of Ralston Avenue between Highway 101 and I-280 is designated as a Scenic Street and Highway by the City of Belmont General Plan, the project site itself is not

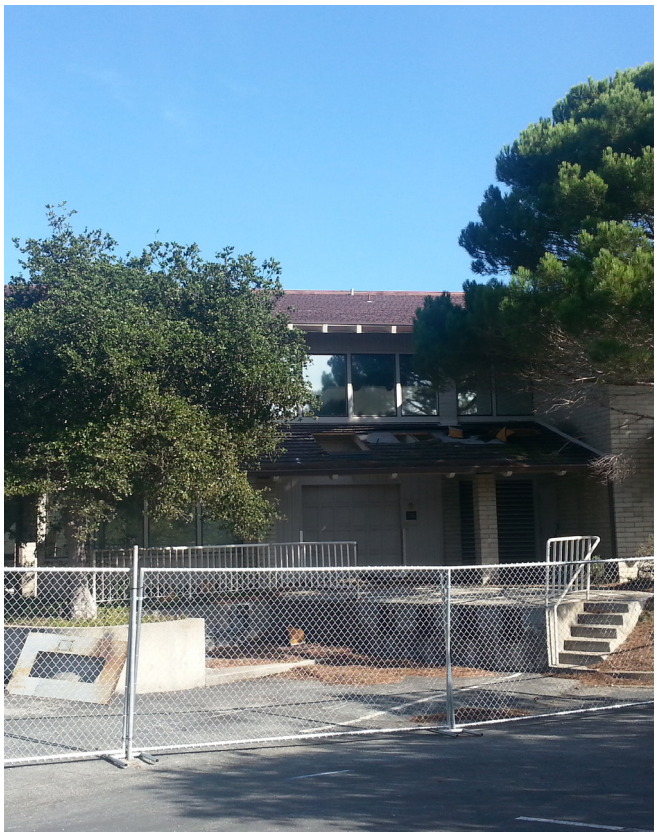
Views of 6-8 Davis Drive



Views of parking area and 10 Davis Drive



View of back side of 10 Davis Drive



View of 10 Davis Drive

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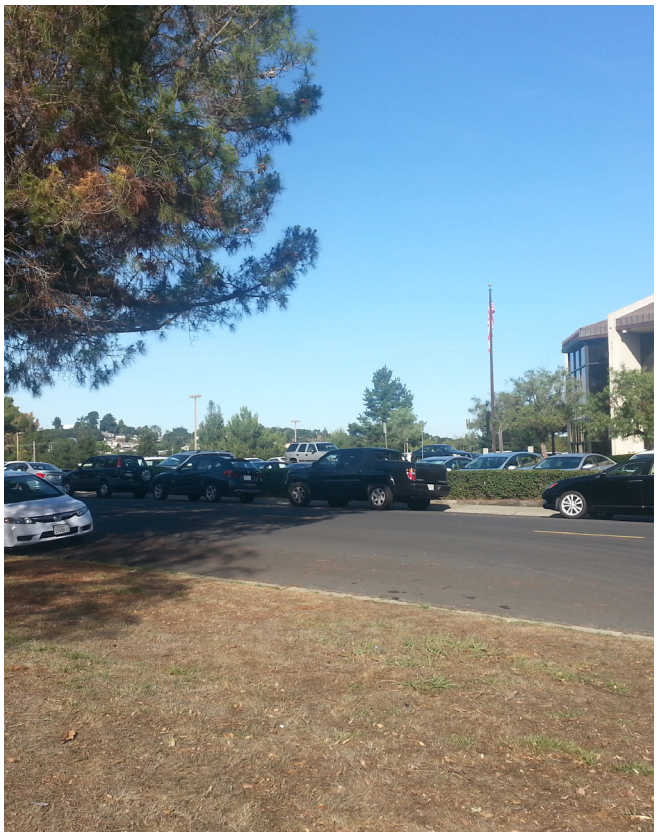
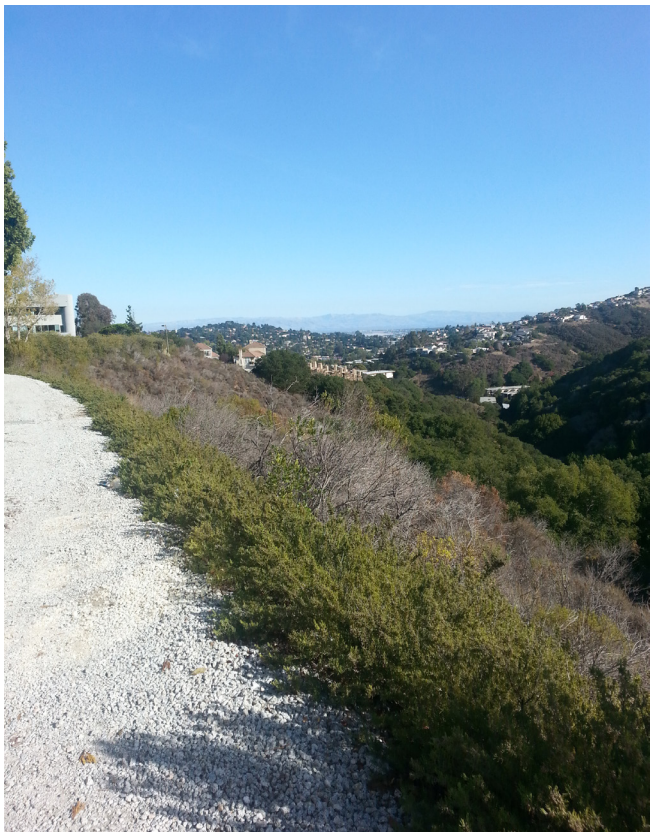
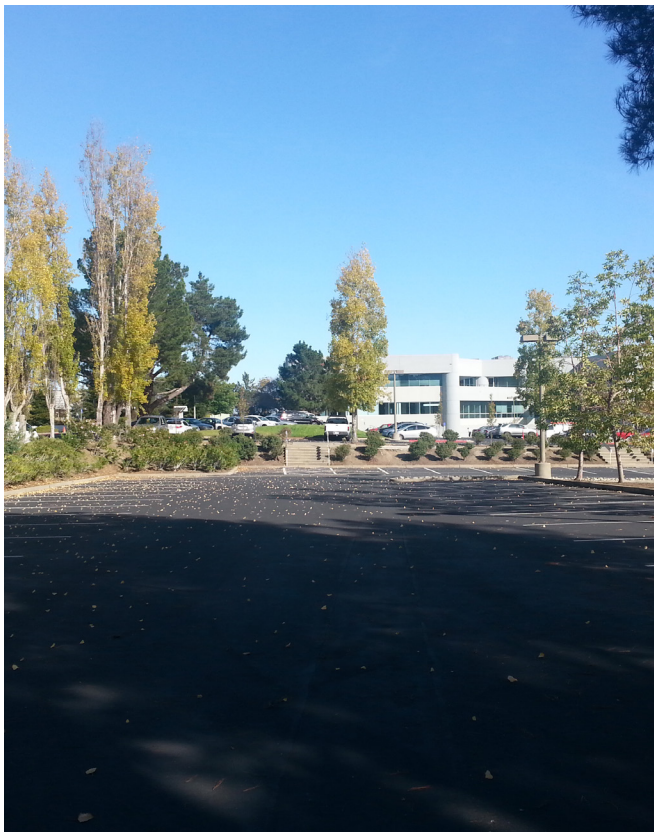
Figure 4.2-1
Project Site Visual Character



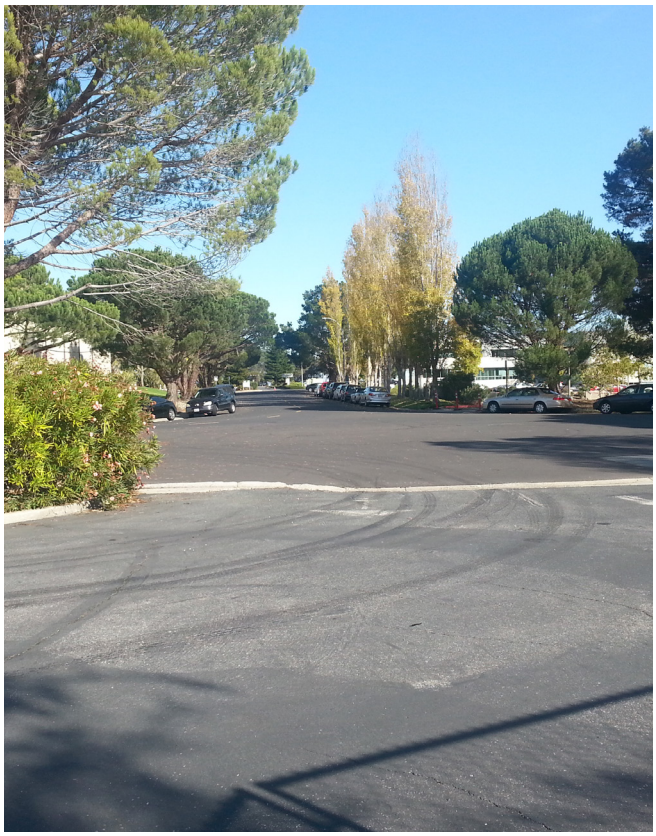
Views from project site



Views from back of 10 Davis Drive to the south-east



Views of surrounding parking and commerical uses



Views from project site

M I G Belmont Crystal Springs School
Belmont, CA

Figure 4.2-2
Project Site Views from Adjacent Areas

located in a scenic vista.[1] Additionally, the project site is located outside of a San Mateo designated scenic corridor.[2] The goals and policies applicable to this project are as follows:

- **Community Goals Policy 1016-2.b:** The lowest intensities of use should occur on the steep hillsides to limit storm runoff, prevent increased erosion, avoid unstable slopes, protect vegetation and watersheds, and maintain scenic qualities.
- **Open Space Policy 2071-1:** In any land development project, the basic visual character of the Planning Area should be conserved through project design.
- **Open Space Policy 2071-5:** A variety of vistas should be provided and preserved ranging from the small enclosed private views to the more distant views shared by many people.
- **Open Space Policy 2071-7:** Landscaped open spaces should be included in new developments, especially in commercial areas and along streets and pathways.
- **Open Space Policy 2071-11:** In the West Hills and San Juan Canyon areas, development shall be clustered to the maximum extent possible with the majority of the land retained in open space.
- **Conservation Goal 3051-8:** To protect scenic views to and from hillsides.
- **Conservation Policy 3052-1:** New development shall be located and designed to preserve specimen trees and significant stands of trees to the extent possible.
- **Circulation Policy 2083-3:** Views from Ralston Avenue of the hillsides and canyons of the western hills, Sugarloaf Mountain and the steeply sloped, wooded canyons in the San Juan area should remain unobstructed.

4.2.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This subsection analyzes impacts related to aesthetics that could result from implementation of the project. The subsection begins with the criteria of significance, which establish the thresholds for determining whether an impact is significant, and concludes with aesthetics impacts associated with the project.

4.2.3.1 Criteria of Significance

The proposed project would have significant aesthetic impacts on aesthetics if it would:

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

[1] City of Belmont, Belmont Genera1 Plan, August 24, 1982.
[2] San Mateo County. http://maps.smcgov.org/planning/. Accessed on 12/19/14.

4.2.3.2 Methodology

Available information was collected to identify aesthetics and visual resources for the City of Belmont. Reviewed material includes the City of Belmont's General Plan, site visits, and project visual simulations. The EIR authors evaluated the project site's existing aesthetic and visual resources to determine the project's potential to degrade existing visual qualities and views. Based on a comparison of the reviewed information, the regulatory requirements, and the project's construction and implementation, the EIR authors qualitatively evaluated potential aesthetics and visual resources and, as necessary, mitigation measures proposed.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) provides limited guidance in identifying the thresholds for significance for the specific issues of concern listed in Appendix G of CEQA (Environmental Checklist). In assessing critical viewing areas, CEQA analyzes impacts from public viewpoints. Viewer expectation or concern from public viewpoints is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to the visual resource, the elevation of viewers relative to the visual resource, the frequency and duration of views, the number of viewers, and the type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

Visual expectation is dependent on the number and type of viewers and the frequency and duration of views. Visual sensitivity is also modified by viewer activity, awareness, and visual expectations in relation to the number of viewers and viewing duration. For example, visual sensitivity is generally higher for views seen by people who are traveling for pleasure; people engaging in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or camping; and homeowners. Expectations tend to be lower for views seen by people traveling to and from work or as part of their work. Commuters (motorized and non-motorized) have generally fleeting views, tending to focus on commute traffic and not on surrounding scenery, and therefore are generally considered to have low visual sensitivity.

4.2.3.3 Less Than Significant Impacts

Project implementation would result in the following less than significant aesthetic impacts.

Impact AES: Project construction and implementation would not result in substantial adverse physical impacts on a scenic vista. (NI)

According to the City of Belmont General Plan,[3] Ralston Avenue is designated as a scenic road within the City, and therefore, the project vicinity. Although the project site is not located on Ralston Avenue it would be minimally visible from Ralston Avenue. The primary viewers would be motorists along Ralston Avenue who would have brief, minimal views of the northern edge of the project site. Changes to these views would be less than significant and are addressed under Impact AES-3. Therefore, no designated scenic vistas or resources would be affected by the project and there would be ***no impact***.

Impact AES-2: Project construction and implementation would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway. (NI)

According to the California Department of Transportation's Scenic Highway Program, I-280 is an officially designated state scenic highway.[4] However, the project site is not visible from I-

[3] City of Belmont, Belmont Genera1 Plan, August 24, 1982.
[4] Caltrans, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm. Accessed 12/19/14.

280; therefore, the project would have ***no impact*** on scenic resources along a State Scenic Highway.

Impact AES-3: Project construction and implementation would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. (LTS)

The project is currently developed with unoccupied office and warehouse uses. The project would result in a change to the project site from land developed with office and warehouse uses to a private school. Close-range views of the project site are primarily available from the surrounding office uses on Davis Drive. As shown in Figures 4.2-3 and -4, the project would be constructed from a mix of materials and surrounded by incorporate landscaping. Although the building would be more modern in design than the surrounding office buildings, construction of a private school on a site previously developed with office and warehouse uses would be consistent with the surrounding uses and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the site and its surroundings.

Other public views of the project site are located along Ralston Avenue, a short segment of Hallmark Drive, and at Hallmark Park. Views from Ralston Avenue would be available to motorists and pedestrians at the intersection of Ralston Avenue and Davis Drive.

Views from Ralston Avenue

Views of the project area at the intersection of Ralston Avenue and Davis Drive consist of office uses, associated parking, and site landscaping. Currently, the view of the project site from Ralston Avenue includes the two-story warehouse structure, parking areas, and mature landscaping. The project would result in the demolition of land uses on the site and construction of a private school facilities on land previously developed with office and warehouse uses. The view of the project site would change from an existing structure, parking, and landscaping to new landscaped parking areas. Project buildings on the site would be minimally visible from this viewpoint.

For viewers traveling along Ralston Avenue, project views are limited as seen from a typical passenger vehicle traveling at 35 miles per hour on either the east- or westbound lane. Views from vehicles stopped at the traffic signal would be longer in duration. The project site and surrounding area is already developed with Ralston Park office uses and the development of private school uses would not be out of character with this development.

Therefore, in the context of the urban nature of existing surrounding area, the project would not significantly degrade the visual quality of the area. Visual impacts on views of the project site from Ralston Avenue would be less than significant.

Views from Hallmark Drive and Hallmark Park

The project site is above Water Dog Lake Park, an open space area located in a drainage to the south of the project site. Hallmark Drive is located at a higher elevation than the project site to the southwest. Hallmark Drive is developed with one- and two-story single family residential uses. A small area of Hallmark Drive, located adjacent to the sidewalk and near Hallmark Park, is undeveloped. Views of the project site are available from this area.

Crystal Springs Uplands School - New Middle School

boora architects

Figure 4.2-3
Conceptual Project Renderings

Crystal Springs Uplands School - New Middle School

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Belmont, CA

Figure 4.2-4
Conceptual Project Renderings

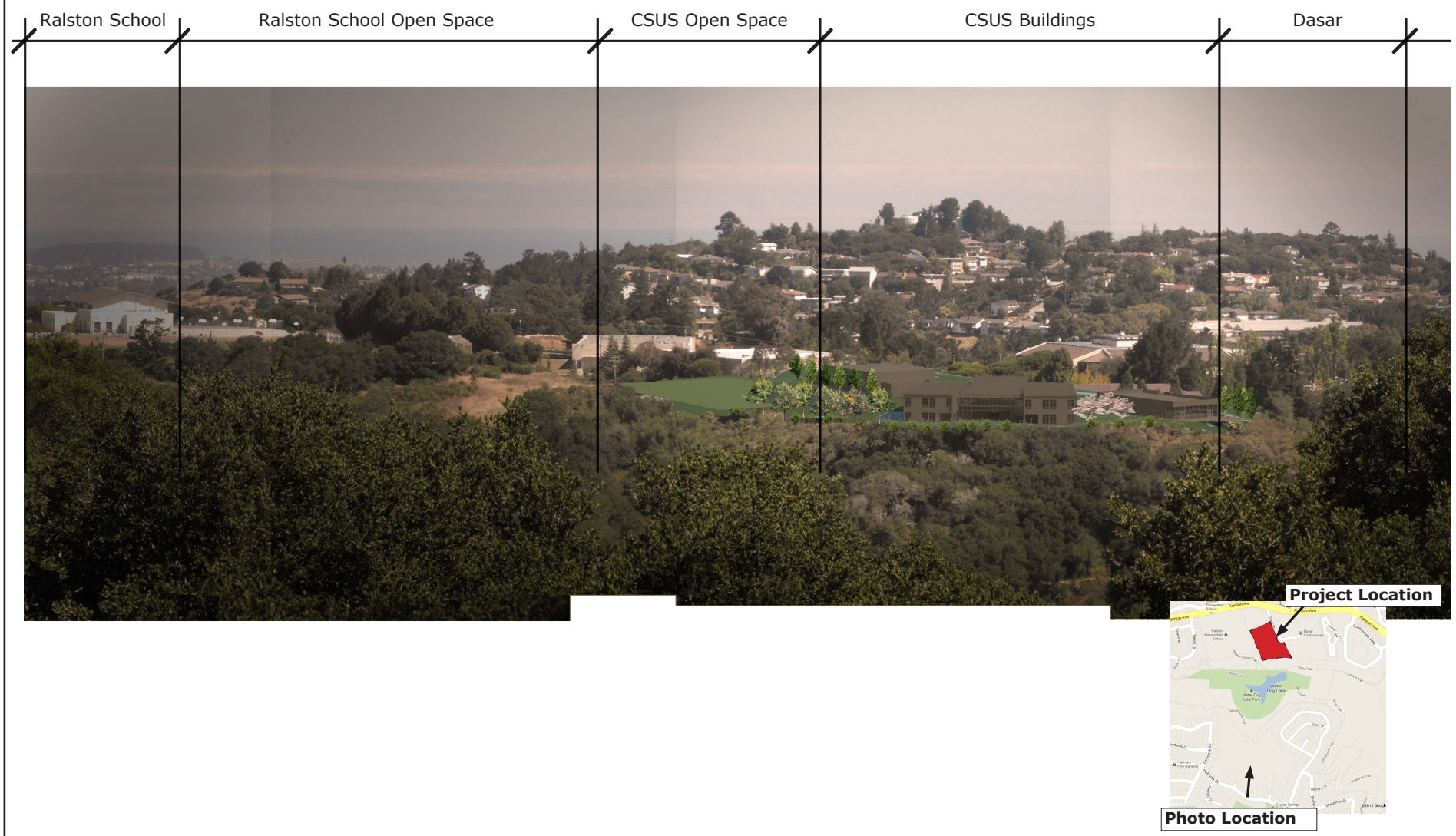
Hallmark Park is located at 2599 Hallmark Drive. Hallmark Park contains two tennis courts and landscaping. Hallmark Park also provides access to Crystal Springs Cross County Course, an open space area with loop trails. The project site is visible from Hallmark Park and Crystal Springs Cross Country Course, although these sites provide more distant views than the area on Hallmark Drive.

The project site is currently developed with office, warehouse, and parking lot uses and is surrounded by other office and parking uses in the Ralston Park office complex. As shown in Figure 4.2-5, the project would be visible from Hallmark Drive. The exterior walls of the Academic Center would be clad in wood siding stained a medium-toned color to blend in with the natural setting and reduce visibility from across the canyon. The roof would consist of a medium-colored membrane to blend in with the surrounding area landscape, thus reducing visibility from neighboring homes. Photovoltaic panels would lay flat on the roof and have a low reflectivity surface. Most of the mechanical equipment required would be located in the ceiling space of the second floor, thus minimizing the amount of rooftop equipment. The few mechanical items placed on the roof would be screened to reduce visibility from neighboring properties.

The Multi-Purpose, Gymnasium, storage building, and future Pool building would be constructed on site with cast tilt-up panels. The entire perimeters of these buildings would be heavily landscaped, and flowering vines would be planted on the concrete walls. The result, when completed, would be that of buildings hidden in the landscape. Roofs would consist of a medium-colored membrane to blend in with the color of the landscape, thus reducing visibility from neighboring homes. The storage building would not contain any mechanical equipment of photovoltaic panels. Photovoltaic panels for the Multi-Purpose building and Gymnasium would lay flat on the roof and have a low reflectivity surface. Most of the mechanical equipment required for the Multi-Purpose building and Gymnasium would be located in the ceiling space, thus minimizing the amount of rooftop equipment. The few mechanical items placed on the roof would be screened to reduce visibility from neighboring properties.

Although the project would require the removal of mature landscaping on the site, new landscaping would be installed on the site and other mature landscaping at Ralston Park would remain. Additionally, the project would include natural turf sports fields, lawns, landscaped open space areas, and vegetable gardens. With time, landscaping installed on the project site would mature and blend with views of existing landscaping.

As shown in Figures 4.2-3, -4, and -5, the change in visual quality created by the project would not be out of character with the existing development at Ralston Park office complex on in the surrounding area. Although the project would result in the construction of a new private school, this development would occur on previously developed land and would not be inconsistent with views of these existing uses from surrounding areas. Therefore, the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings and the visual change created by the project would not be out of character with the existing urban setting. Impacts on visual character or quality of the site from Hallmark Drive, Hallmark Park, and Crystal Springs Cross County Course would be ***less than significant.***



New Crystal Springs Uplands School - Belmont, CA

boora architects

Belmont Crystal Springs School
Belmont, CA

Figure 4.2-5
View Towards Project Site from Across Canyon - As Viewed from Hallmark Dr.

Impact AES-4: Project construction and implementation would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (LTS)

The project would not incorporate any reflective materials that would induce glare. The Academic Center would be organized so that most of the instructional spaces are facing east or west. This arrangement would minimize the amount of glass that would be facing neighboring homes across the canyon, thus reducing the potential for glare. The potential for glare would be reduced further through the use of a low-e coating on all exterior glazing, which typically reduces reflectivity by 20 percent compared to uncoated clear glass. The primary glass area in the Academic Center would be located on the south side of the Great Hall. The glass would be set back from the main canyon-facing façade, and would also be shielded by a significant overhang, reducing any potential glare towards the canyon.

The interior and exterior lighting of the Academic Center would be designed to reduce glare and light trespass. This would be achieved by using fixtures with cut-offs to restrict the direction of the light and/or the use of indirect fixtures that focus light onto ceilings, floors, walls and other ground surfaces while hiding the lamp from direct view. The Great Hall within the Academic Center and the Multi-Purpose Room would both have interior window shades for use during evening events to contain light within the spaces.

The Multi-Purpose building windows would be located primarily on the southern and western sides of the building, with an upper row of glass on the north wall of the music classroom. This building would also have significant overhangs on the roof line to reduce glare from all glass surfaces. Similar to the Multi-Purpose Building, windows would be located primarily on the south with significant overhangs, to limit glare from all glass surfaces. The storage building would contain no windows.

The project would include the installation of new site lighting. However, street and site lighting is already present on the project site and in the areas surrounding the project site. The interior and exterior lighting of the campus, and the Academic Center in particular, would be designed to limit glare and light trespass. This would be achieved by using fixtures with cut-offs to restrict the direction of the light and/or the use of indirect fixtures that focus light onto ceilings, floors, walls and other ground surfaces while hiding the lamp from direct view.

Project street lights would be standard and similar to ones used throughout the City and would be in accordance with city engineering standards. Project construction would occur only during daylight hours. Therefore, lighting or glare impacts would be ***less than significant***.

4.2.3.4 Significant Impacts

The project would have no significant impacts related to aesthetics, and no mitigation measures would be required.