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## 4. AESTHETICS

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This EIR chapter describes the existing visual environment within and surrounding the project site and identifies associated City plans and policies and the potential impacts of the project on these conditions.

### 4.1 SETTING

#### 4.1.1 Visual Character of the Project Site and Vicinity

(a) Project Vicinity. As illustrated on Figure 3.2 in chapter 3, the project site is located on the northern waterfront edge of the City, separated from the San Pablo Bay and Hercules Point by the Union Pacific Railroad line. Most of Hercules, including the project site, lies within the lower portion of Refugio Valley encompassed by a perimeter hilly area and fronting on the Bay. The Refugio Creek Valley floor has elevations of approximately 8 to 14 feet above the creek bed. Higher elevation hill forms in the site vicinity, including the southwest promontory portion of the project site, above the Bowl area, where the former Hercules Powder Company Administration Building and Clubhouse building still sit, extend up to approximately 80 feet above mean sea level. Rounded foothills exist along the northeast and southwest perimeter of the project site.

The City's San Pablo Bay waterfront, including Hercules Point, the Refugio Creek drainage feature, the perimeter hill backdrop to the northeast and east, and Pinole Ridge to the south, are key topographic features that distinguish the community.

The existing visual character of Hercules is also distinguished by clear and unobstructed views of San Pablo Bay, Hercules Point and San Francisco Bay from vantage points throughout the community. The Waterfront District in particular is visually enhanced by vistas of San Pablo Bay from high points and from north-south oriented streets, including the northernmost segments of Railroad Avenue, Promenade Street, Taraya Terrace, Avocet Drive, Baywood Lane and John Muir Parkway.

(b) Project Site. The project site is bounded by the San Pablo Bay shoreline, Hercules Point, and the Union Pacific Railroad line on the north; the developed Northshore Business Park on the east; the developed Refugio Neighborhood (Baywood), Central Neighborhood (Promenade), and Central Quarter (Bayside) residential neighborhoods on the south; and San Pablo Bay and the San Pablo Bay Regional Shoreline on the west. The active Union Pacific Railroad tracks run immediately north of, and parallel with, the project site's northern boundary.

The project site was once occupied by facilities of the Hercules Powder Company and subsequently by a fertilizer production operation. The project site and its Waterfront District vicinity have been extensively modified by these past industrial activities, as well as past flood control improvements, and more recently, grading associated with contaminated soil remediation and surcharge activity associated with WDMP implementation. The site otherwise remains clear and undeveloped except for two visually distinctive vacant structures: the former

Hercules Powder Company Administration Building (listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in the City's General Plan as a valued historic resource; see "before" image on Figure 4.2), and the former Hercules Powder Company Clubhouse building (listed in the City's General Plan as a valued historic resource). The majority of the project site is either devoid of vegetation or supports a sparse cover of non-native grasses and ruderal (weedy) vegetation, scrub bushes, and small trees. Refugio Creek, which adjoins and bisects the project site, as well as the adjacent North Channel, support brackish marshland and riparian vegetation.

#### **4.1.2 Views of and Through the Project Site**

The project site is directly visible from existing adjacent segments of Railroad Avenue, Bayfront Boulevard and Linus Pauling Drive, as well as from surrounding neighborhood vantage points, including vantage points along the northwest and north edges of the Central Quarter (Bayside), Central Neighborhood (Promenade) and Refugio Neighborhoods. The project site is also partially visible in focal views from approaching north-south and east-west running neighborhood and collector roadways including the Main Street and Sycamore Avenue approaches to Railroad Avenue, the Earnest Street and Promenade Street approaches to Bayfront Drive, and the current northbound terminus of John Muir Parkway.

Figure 4.2 later in this chapter illustrates the location of seven selected viewpoints considered indicative of the existing project site appearance from surrounding views.

#### **4.1.3 Views from the Project Site**

The project site itself includes dramatic distant vistas northward to Hercules Point and the scenic San Pablo Bay and San Francisco Bay waters and shoreline.

### **4.2 PERTINENT PLANS AND POLICIES**

#### **4.2.1 City of Hercules General Plan**

The City of Hercules General Plan *Land Use Element* and *Open Space/Conservation Element* contain the following policies pertinent to consideration of the potential visual effects of the proposed project:

**(a) *Land Use Element:***

- *Multi-family residential land should be developed with a balance of open space, landscaping, and recreational amenities and should be accessible to commercial and recreational areas and public transportation. (Policy 6B)*
- *Achieve a pattern of development that is consistent with the City's desired image. (Objective 7)*
- *Establish a visual identity for the City that distinguishes it from the surrounding areas. (Policy 7A)*

- *Provide landscaping along major regional streets and highways. This landscaping should soften the appearance of traffic and parking along these routes, while allowing view corridors to retail and other businesses. (Program 7A.1)*
- *Attain compatible land uses within existing and planned development areas. (Objective 13)*
- *Continue to improve and protect Refugio Creek as a major environmental amenity. (Program 14A.3)*

**(b) Open Space/Conservation Element:**

- *Preserve and enhance scenic views within the community. (Objective 13)*
- *Development proposals shall be reviewed in terms of natural objects in the vicinity that have aesthetic significance. This may include open space, eucalyptus groves, or vegetation that serves as a view corridor or has important visual attributes. Development proposals shall be sited to ensure that these features are retained or replaced to the extent feasible, resulting in minimal view impairment. (Policy 13a)*
- *The following views, for publicly accessible viewpoints, shall be preserved to the maximum extent feasible as the City evaluates new development on a parcel-specific basis as identified within the Land Use Plan EIR [only identified views that would be affected by the project are included in the following listing]:*
  - iii) Lower drainage ridge views from the promontory of San Pablo Bay, Lone Tree Point, Franklin Canyon and the Refugio Creek floodplain.*
  - iv) Views from the former Hercules Powder Company offices on the promontory to the west, north and east. (Program 13d.1)*
- *The City of Hercules shall evaluate the light and glare potential of new development on a parcel-specific basis and apply the following measures:*
  - i) Screening of parking areas by using vegetation or trees. This will reduce the amount of glare generated from painted and chrome automobile surfaces and prevent expanses of stationary and moving automobiles.*
  - ii) Hooded lights for nighttime illumination should be used for parking areas, shipping and receiving docks and industrial development. Hooded lights direct the light beam towards the ground, which if a dark pavement, will not reflect light and cause spillage into neighboring uses.*
  - iii) Regular windows should be used instead of the glass walls or massive reflective windows often used for research and development, and office park developments. (Program 13e.1)*

#### **4.2.2 Hercules Waterfront District Master Plan (WDMP)**

The project site is located entirely within the Hercules Waterfront District Master Plan (WDMP) area and is subject to the following associated City objectives, policies and guidelines:

(a) Waterfront District Master Plan. The Waterfront District Master Plan was originally adopted by the City in 2000 with a described overall intent to facilitate development of the designated 167-acre Waterfront District “as a fully master planned and integrated community” (WDMP, section 1.2, p. 3). As paraphrased below, the stated specific aesthetic and urban design purposes of the WDMP include:

- Recognize, preserve, and re-use the historic structures of the Hercules Powder Company town site;
- Allow new construction while maintaining the District’s architectural quality;
- Provide a network of public spaces that have access to views of Hercules Point and San Pablo Bay;
- Provide access along the Bay shoreline while preserving its natural resources;
- Provide a location for a commuter rail station with adjacent mixed-use development;
- Provide a variety of complementary office and retail uses;
- Accommodate both residential and commercial uses in a well-planned, mixed-use development;
- Provide a balanced mix of public spaces and facilities;
- Allow lower cost live-work opportunities for start-up businesses that are compatible with the District’s residential and commercial uses;
- Provide the opportunity for upper floor residential over ground-floor commercial uses;
- Provide careful design review to maximize the benefits of mixed-use development while minimizing its negative impacts; and
- Provide the opportunity for housing affordable to moderate- and low-income households.

The WDMP includes the following elements to guide the design and design review of development within the District:

- The Public Space Master Plan, which defines the network of circulation and open space elements that organize and connect the community. This network divides the private land into blocks. The Public Space Master Plan consists of two elements:
  - (1) a Circulation Master Plan, which fixes the location and design of all public ways within the District, and



(2) an Open Space Master Plan, which fixes the location and design of parks, greens, plazas, and trails within the District.

- The Code, which defines the manner in which lots within the blocks may be developed. The Code includes:

(1) The Regulating Plan, which indicates which types of buildings that may be built within a block or on a lot;

(2) Urban Regulations, which define the permitted Building Types, and for each Type, identify specific development and use standards regulating the location of the building(s) on each lot, the permitted configurations of the buildings, the required locations and sizes of yards, and the permitted locations of various uses within the building(s) and on the lot;

(3) Architectural Regulations, which define the permitted architectural styles, elements, materials, techniques, and details, with the intent to limit the range of architectural expression within the District in order to ensure a reasonable level of architectural harmony and well-defined public outdoor spaces conducive to the active public life envisioned by the General Plan; and

(4) Landscape Regulations, which control landscape design for roadways, public open spaces, private lots, street lighting and furnishings.

(b) WDMP Initiative. By mid-2008, approximately 70 percent of the WDMP area had been developed consistent with the WDMP. In July 2008, the City adopted the WDMP Initiative that amended the WDMP to further guide and facilitate build-out of the remaining undeveloped Historic Town Center and the Hercules Point sub-districts, including the 42.36-acre Hercules Bayfront Project site and adjacent Intermodal Transit Center project site. The adopted WDMP Initiative (section 2, Purposes and Findings) lists the following additional aesthetic and urban design objectives for these sub-districts:

- Promote and enhance the unique waterfront character and scenic resources of the Waterfront District through development of a transit-oriented neighborhood that includes walkable streets, a variety of dwelling types and businesses, and public plazas with views of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays;
- Implement the final stages of the WDMP through adoption of design and development guidelines for the Historic Town Center, Transit Village, and Hercules Point sub-districts that encourage a transit-oriented and pedestrian-oriented mix of uses along the bayfront in the City of Hercules;
- Implement the goals and objectives of the WDMP by providing for the location of a Multi-Modal Transit System linking together rail service, a connection to downtown San Francisco via a ferry terminal, and bus service via WestCAT, making Hercules home to the first train, ferry, and bus center in California;
- Preserve and reuse existing historic structures within the Historic Town Center Sub-District--the Clubhouse and Administration buildings of the old Hercules Powder Company--and weave these historic buildings into the fabric of an architecturally cohesive and harmonized downtown bayfront area;

- Assist the City of Hercules in meeting its housing needs for all economic segments of the population, while promoting the planning principles of New Urbanism and Smart Growth, by adopting detailed design and development standards for those areas within the Waterfront District that have not yet been developed;
- Amend the City of Hercules General Plan as necessary to provide for establishment of a transit-oriented, traditional neighborhood project that includes residential, commercial, retail, and public uses of unique architectural character within the Hercules Waterfront District;
- Enter into a Development Agreement, consistent with California law, providing for the long-term planning and development of the Hercules Waterfront District; and
- Ensure that prior to further development of the Hercules Waterfront District, the City of Hercules, at the developer's expense, evaluates the environmental impacts associated with such development, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA").

The adopted WDMP Initiative also amended the WDMP Form-Based Code to add a new section 4 that describes additional development standards and design guidelines for development of the Hercules Bayfront Project site, ITC Transit Station project site, and Hercules Point sub-district.

## 4.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### 4.3.1 Significance Criteria

As defined by Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines,<sup>1</sup> the proposed project would have a significant environmental impact on visual quality if it would:

- (a) have a substantial, adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- (b) substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a *state scenic highway*;
- (c) substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- (d) create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. "Glare" is defined in this EIR as the reflection of harsh bright light sufficient to cause physical discomfort or loss in visual performance and visibility.

### 4.3.2 Proposed Project--Pertinent Design Characteristics

(a) Project-Proposed Development Program. The proposed project illustrative site plan, including proposed subareas and blocks, is shown on Figure 3.6 in chapter 3 of this EIR. The proposed project includes:

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<sup>1</sup>CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Items I(a-d).

- a residential total of 1,392 units, consistent with the maximum estimated by the City's WDMP (including the 2008 WDMP Initiative) for the Historic Town Center and Transit Village sub-district (1,392 units);
- an office (non-flex) space total of 115,000 square feet, more than the maximum estimated by the City's WDMP (including the 2008 WDMP Initiative) for the Historic Town Center and Transit Village sub-district (81,000 square feet);
- a retail (non-flex) space total of 90,000 square feet, more than the maximum estimated by the City's WDMP (including the 2008 WDMP Initiative) for the Historic Town Center and Transit Village sub-district (74,500 square feet; see Table 3.1); and
- a flex-space total of 134,000 square feet, the same as the maximum estimated by the City's WDMP (including the 2008 WDMP Initiative) for the Historic Town Center and Transit Village sub-district (134,000 square feet).

(b) Project-Proposed Changes in Building Height Allowances. The applicant is proposing amendments to portions of the current WDMP "Allowable Building Height Overlay" diagram and related key (p. 1-5 in Exhibit I of the WDMP Initiative) to reflect the proposed revised "Allowable Building Height Overlay" and reconfigured block pattern shown on Figure 4.1 (reproduced from applicant's Zoning Amendment application Exhibit B[7], Summary of Changes, dated October 5, 2009). The revised building height diagram shown on Figure 4.1 would supersede the Allowable Building Height Overlay base map and block pattern currently described in Exhibit B (3) of the WDMP. Table 4.1 describes these applicant-proposed amendments to WDMP building height allowances. The proposed changes would reduce the building height range on three blocks (A, C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub>) and increase the building height range on two blocks (L and O). In particular, to allow for desired additional flexibility, the applicant proposes to remove the 3-story height restriction on Block O and be permitted to construct buildings up to 4 stories in any location on this block, so long as the development design would otherwise be consistent with the WDMP (including the WDMP Initiative).

This Draft EIR chapter includes a "ground-up" analysis of the visual impacts of the overall development program for the project site envisioned by the WDMP, with these height allowance revisions.

(c) Project-Proposed Characteristics by Subarea. The proposed project development characteristics for the four subdistricts illustrated on Figure 4.2 are described below:

(1) Bowl Area. (See Figure 4.2.) Situated on the former Hercules Powder Company factory town center site, this approximately 9.96-acre portion of the project site, which includes Blocks A, B, C<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>, and C<sub>3</sub>, has been designed to integrate the historic Hercules Powder Company Clubhouse building and Hercules Powder Company Administration Building into the development plan, as called for in the WDMP. The existing historic buildings would be renovated for adaptive re-use as commercial space. Maximum building height allowances in the Bowl Area would range from 2 to 3, 3½ and 4 stories (see Table 4.1), which would be slightly lower than what is currently permitted and would be generally consistent with adjacent existing 2, 3, and 3½ story buildings in the Bayfront Boulevard Mixed-Use area to the northeast (see simulation on Figure 4.4).







Table 4.1  
 ALLOWABLE BUILDING HEIGHT COMPARISON--CURRENT WDMP (INCLUDING WDMP  
 INITIATIVE) VS. PROJECT-PROPOSED WDMP AMENDMENTS

Building Form Zone (see Fig. 4.2)	Current WDMP (including 5/27/08 WDMPI)	Project-Proposed WDMP Amendments <sup>1</sup>
<b>Bowl Area:</b>		
A	2-3½ stories	2-3 stories <sup>2</sup>
B	2-3 stories, 4 stories in indicated location	2-3 stories, 4 stories in indicated location
C <sub>1</sub>	2-4 stories	2-3 stories <sup>2</sup>
C <sub>2</sub>	2-3½ stories	2-3 stories <sup>2</sup>
C <sub>3</sub>	2-3 stories, 4 stories in indicated location	2-3 stories, 4 stories in indicated location
<b>Bayfront Boulevard Mixed-Use Area:</b>		
D	2-4 stories	2-4 stories <sup>2</sup>
E	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
F	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
G	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
I	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
J	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
<b>The Village Area:</b>		
K	2-4 stories	2-4 stories
L	2-3 stories on southeast edge, 2-4 stories on north and west edges	2-4 stories <sup>2</sup>
M	8 stories max.	2-8 stories <sup>2</sup>
N	2-4 stories on northeast and southeast portions, 2-3 stories on southwest portion	2-4 stories on northeast and southeast portions, 2-3 stories on southwest portion
O	mix of 2-3 story and 2-4 story designations	2-4 stories <sup>2</sup>
P	8 stories max.	2-8 stories <sup>2</sup>
Q	2-4 stories	2-4 stories <sup>2</sup>
R	2-4 stories	2-4 stories <sup>2</sup>

SOURCE: Wagstaff/MIG

<sup>1</sup> From applicant's Zoning Text Amendment Application Exhibit B(7).

<sup>2</sup> Indicates proposed WDMP change--i.e., a revised building height allowance and/or revised block shape and surrounding local street configuration.

(2) *Bayfront Boulevard Mixed-Use Area.* (See Figure 4.2.) This approximately 10.03-acre portion of the project site is proposed to be a mixed-use, downtown district comprised of a variety of dwelling types and businesses. The area is intended to have the character of a traditional town center street lined with shop fronts, galleries, and arcades. Similar to the Bowl Area, maximum building height allowances would range from 2 to 4 stories (see Table 4.1) which would be unchanged from what the current WDMP allows, but would be up to one story higher than adjacent existing 2 to 3 story neighborhood uses.

Public plazas are proposed in this area along Bayfront Boulevard to provide access to the planned adjacent Bayfront Promenade/Bay Trail extension to be constructed as part of the adjacent ITC Project. The Bayfront Promenade/Bay Trail extension would run parallel to the railroad tracks and provide pedestrians and bicyclists with a connection to planned future transit and trail systems, including a planned Creekside Trail along Refugio Creek, also to be constructed as part of the ITC Project.

(3) *Village Area.* (See Figure 4.2.) This approximately 22.37-acre portion of the project site north and east of Refugio Creek is planned for the highest density housing as well as office and flex space. The area is intended to encourage a variety of housing types to serve a diverse range of household needs, which in turn are intended to support the nearby planned commercial uses and transit facilities. This area would accommodate the tallest structures in the project, with an allowable height of 2 to 8 stories in all of Block M and P. Maximum building height allowances in the other six blocks of the Village Area (K, L, N, O, Q and R) would range from 2 to 4 stories. Refugio Creek would provide a buffer between the area and existing single-family homes south and west of the creek.

(d) Planned Civic Space and Park Concepts. The proposed project has also been designed to be integrated with the planned off-site civic space and park and recreational facilities illustrated on Figure 3.9 (Proposed Civic Space Regulating Plan) in chapter 3 herein. In particular, the project would be integrated with planned civic space, park and recreational components to be implemented as part of the ITC Project. These include public plazas and civic space associated with the transit station itself as well as the planned Bayfront Trail/Promenade, the proposed restoration of the lower Refugio Creek channel east of Sanderling Drive, and the proposed Creekside Trail.

(e) Future More Detailed Design Phases. Neither a detailed landscape plan nor detailed architectural designs are required at this application phase (see section 3.7, Required Jurisdictional Approvals, in chapter 3 herein). The project applicant would be required to prepare such detailed landscape plans and detailed architectural designs for City design review and approval prior to issuance of building permits. Section 4.0 (form-based code) of the City's WDMP contains mandatory architectural and landscape regulations that would apply to these future phases of design review.

### **4.3.3 Visual Simulations**

To support the visual impact analysis, prepared computer-generated "before and after" visual simulations of the project as seen from seven representative offsite vantage points selected in consultation with City staff have been prepared by the project applicant (for viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) and by Environmental Vision, the EIR visual simulation consultant (for viewpoints 5 and 7).

*Using computer modeling and imaging techniques in combination with digitized photographs, computer-generated visual simulations are intended to indicate maximum potential (allowable) building heights (see Table 4.1) and massing only, based on the urban design framework and building form characteristics described in the applicant-proposed project site plan (Figure 3.6) and applicant-proposed Form-Based Code amendments. The simulations intentionally do not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

The simulations have been prepared using objective computer modeling techniques. The images are accurate within the constraints of site plan and Form-Based Code information made available by the applicant.





----- HERCULES BAYFRONT PROJECT AREA BOUNDARY (APPROXIMATE) 1 ●→ PHOTO VIEWPOINT A DESIGNATED PROJECT BLOCKS

SOURCE: Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists

Figure 4.2

# VISUAL SIMULATION VANTAGE POINTS





SOURCE: Hercules Bayfront, LLC

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.3  
**VIEWPOINT 1: MAIN ST. AT  
 RAILROAD AVE. LOOKING NORTH --  
 BEFORE AND AFTER**





SOURCE: Hercules Bayfront, LLC

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.4  
**VIEWPOINT 2: RAILROAD AVE. AT SYCAMORE AVE. LOOKING NORTH -- BEFORE AND AFTER**





SOURCE: Hercules Bayfront, LLC  
 Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.

Figure 4.5

**VIEWPOINT 3: RAILROAD AVE.  
 APPROACH TO BAYFRONT BLVD.,  
 LOOKING NORTHWEST--BEFORE AND AFTER**





SOURCE: Hercules Bayfront, LLC

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.6  
**VIEWPOINT 4: PROMENADE ST.  
 APPROACH TO BAYFRONT BLVD.,  
 LOOKING NORTH --BEFORE AND AFTER**





Existing View - Bay Trail at Bridge (VP 2)



Conceptual Visual Simulation - Proposed Project

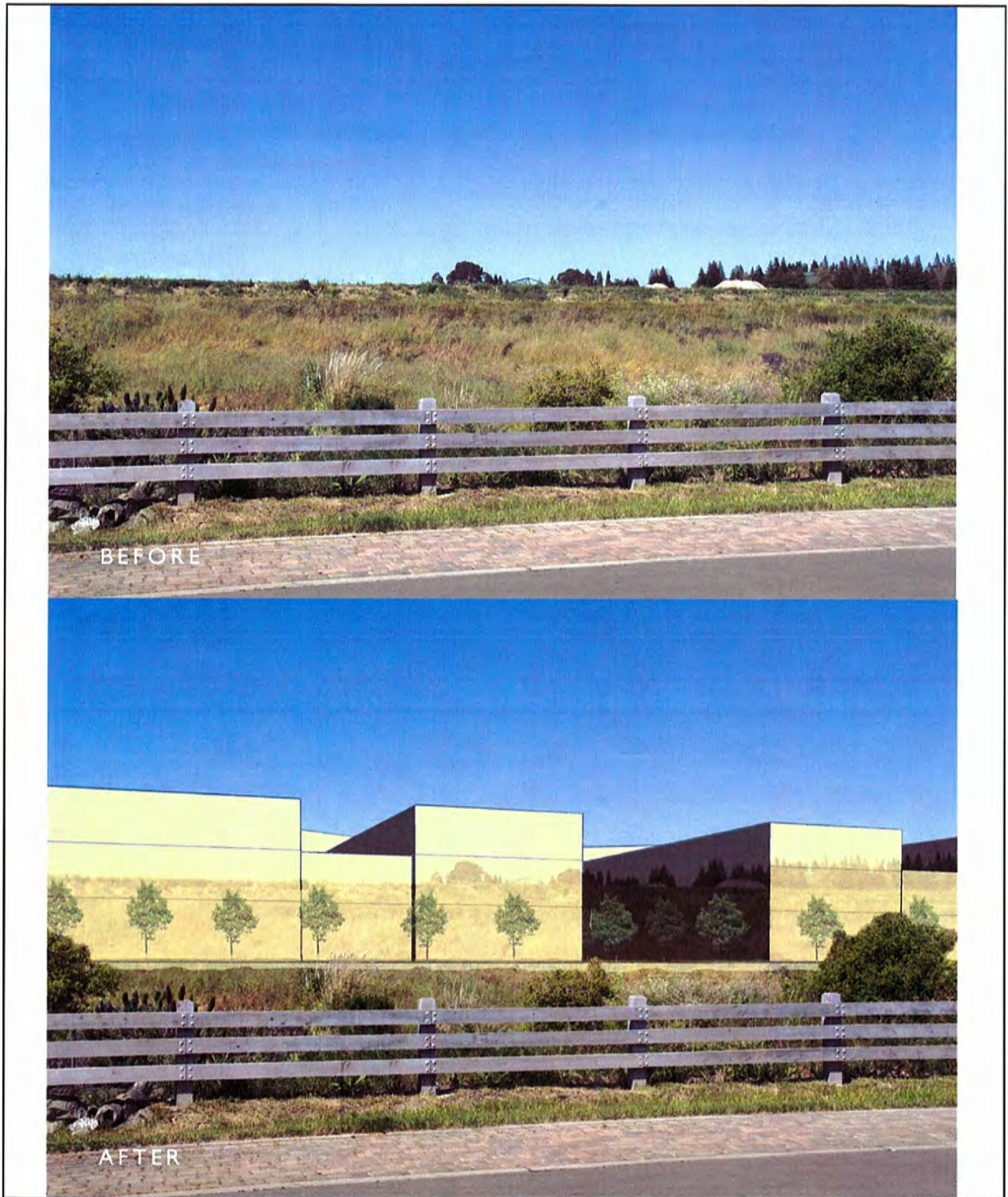
SOURCE: Environmental Vision

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.7

**VIEWPOINT 5: PROPOSED BAY TRAIL  
PROMENADE, LOOKING EAST --  
BEFORE AND AFTER**





SOURCE: Hercules Bayfront, LLC

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.8  
**VIEWPOINT 6: AVOCET DR.  
 AT SANDERLING DR., LOOKING NORTH  
 --BEFORE AND AFTER**





Existing View - John Muir Parkway looking northwest (VP 3)



Conceptual Visual Simulation - Proposed Project

SOURCE: Environmental Vision

*Please Note: This "before and after" simulation is intended to indicate maximum potential building heights and massing only. The simulation intentionally does not show future yet to be developed architectural and landscaping details.*

Figure 4.9

## VIEWPOINT 7: JOHN MUIR PARKWAY APPROACH TO PROJECT, LOOKING NORTHWEST--BEFORE AND AFTER

#### 4.3.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

**Impact 4-1: Project Impacts on Scenic Vistas.** The proposed project site plan (Figure 3.6 in chapter 3) includes an internal network of plazas that would preserve and provide public access to selected views of Hercules Point and San Pablo Bay, as called for in the WDMP. The proposed project site plan also includes block configurations and a roadway layout that would extend some existing adjacent north-south neighborhood streets into the project site, thereby preserving “framed” Bay vistas from these existing roadway approaches (e.g., Railroad Avenue approach to Bayfront Boulevard and Sanderling Drive approach to Bayfront Boulevard). Nevertheless, existing views of the Bay and Refugio Creek corridor from the promontory area within the project site (Blocks A, C<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>3</sub>) would be potentially obscured by introduced project structures and landscaping. The proposed layout would also substantially constrain or block existing Bay vistas from a number of other existing north-south approaches to the project site (e.g., Viewpoint 1: Main Street approach at Railroad Avenue, Viewpoint 2: Railroad Avenue approach at Sycamore Avenue, and Viewpoint 4: Promenade Street approach at Bayfront Boulevard), replacing these vistas with focused foreground views of the project. These effects would represent a **significant environmental impact** on visual quality (see criterion [a] in subsection 4.3.1, “Significance Criteria,” above).

*Explanation:* As indicated in section 4.2 herein (Pertinent Plans and Policies), the City’s General Plan Land Use Element seeks a “*pattern of development that is consistent with the City’s desired image*” (Objective 7). The City’s General Plan Open Space/Conservation Element seeks to “*Preserve and enhance scenic views within the community*” (Objective B) and “*Preserve selected views from publicly accessible viewpoints...to the maximum extent feasible as the City evaluates new developments on a parcel-specific basis*” (Program 13d.1), including views of San Pablo Bay and the Refugio Creek floodplain, and other views to the west, north, and east from the onsite “promontory” (the high point at the southwest portion of the project site where the former Hercules Powder Works Administration Building and Clubhouse building are located and where proposed project Blocks A, C<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>3</sub> are designated).

The WDMP also calls for new development within the plan area to *provide a network of public spaces that have access to views of Hercules Point and San Pablo Bay and “promote and enhance the unique waterfront character and scenic resources of the Waterfront District that includes...public plazas with views of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays.”*

The proposed site plan does include an internal network of plazas that would preserve and provide public access to selected views of Hercules Point and San Pablo Bay, as called for in the City’s WDMP, including view plazas at the following five locations:

- between Blocks B and D,
- between Blocks D and E,
- between Blocks E and G,
- on Block I, and
- between Blocks L and M.

However, existing views of the Bay to the north, northeast, and east from the promontory within the project site would be potentially obscured by introduced project structures and landscaping. Existing views from within the project site towards the Refugio Creek corridor would also be largely obscured.

The proposed project site plan (Figure 4.2) includes block configurations and a roadway layout that would extend some existing adjacent north-south streets into and through the project site, thereby preserving "framed" Bay vistas, including focal views from the following north-south roadway approaches:

- Railroad Avenue approach to Bayfront Boulevard (see Figure 4.5),
- John Muir Parkway approach to Bayfront Boulevard, and
- Sanderling Drive approach to Bayfront Boulevard.

However, the proposed project layout would also substantially limit (constrain) or block existing Bay vistas from the following existing north-south roadway approaches:

- Main Street approach at Railroad Avenue (see simulation on Figure 4.3),
- Railroad Avenue approach at Sycamore Avenue (see simulation on Figure 4.4), and
- Promenade Street approach to Bayfront Boulevard (this particular vista would be blocked by both the proposed ITC project and Hercules Bayfront Project, as illustrated by the simulation on Figure 4.6).

In summary, although the proposed project site plan would provide for, preserve and feature a number of existing Bay vistas, its introduction would also have a substantial adverse effect on a number of other existing long-range Bay vistas, replacing these vistas with focused foreground views of the project (see simulations on Figures 4.4, 4.6, and 4.8).



**Mitigation 4-1.** The applicant could be required to modify the proposed project layout and roadway grid to more effectively preserve and feature additional existing Bay vistas, including existing vistas from the Main Street approach to Railroad Avenue (Viewpoint 1), the Railroad Avenue approach at Sycamore Avenue (Viewpoint 2), and the Promenade Street approach to Bayfront Boulevard (Viewpoint 4). City and applicant agreement on this mitigation approach would reduce this impact to a ***less-than-significant level***. Alternatively, the City may determine that because the currently proposed project layout adequately preserves some existing Bay vistas (the north-south Railroad Avenue approach to Bayfront Boulevard, and the Sanderling Drive approach to Bayfront Boulevard), and also includes at least three internal public accessible plazas featuring views of the Bay (see Figure 3.9, Proposed Civic Space Regulating Plan), the benefits of the substantial modifications to the proposed project layout and roadway grid that would be necessary to preserve some or all of these additional existing vistas may not outweigh the economic and other benefits of retaining the proposed layout. This latter determination would mean City acceptance of a ***significant and unavoidable environmental (visual) impact***.

**Impact 4-2: Project Impact on the Existing Visual Character of the Site and its Surroundings.** The project site is located on the City's northwest waterfront edge, separated from San Pablo Bay by the UPRR line. The site surroundings have been extensively modified by development of the Northshore Business Park to the east and the medium density Baywood, Promenade and Bayside residential neighborhoods to the south. The majority of the project site itself is either devoid of vegetation or supports a sparse cover of non-native grasses and weedy vegetation. The proposed Hercules Bayfront Project is generally consistent in intensity and form with the WDMP. Required project compliance with the WDMP "Form-Based Code" provisions would ensure general compatibility with the existing adjacent residential neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the project site is prominently located at the waterfront base of Refugio Valley, is directly visible from higher surrounding community vantage points to the south, southwest and west (including I-80), and provides for clear, unobstructed views of San Pablo Bay, Hercules Point and San Francisco Bay. In this context, the proposed conversion of this last large remaining 42.36-acre waterfront open space area to an intensive, transit-oriented mixed use development could be perceived as a substantial degradation of the visual character and quality of the Refugio Valley area. This anticipated project effect represents a ***potentially significant impact*** (see criterion [c] in subsection 4.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation 4-2.** Required implementation of the WDMP "Form-Based Code" provisions, including the applicant-proposed revisions to the Code, to City satisfaction, as determined through the City's established design review process, can be expected to ensure that the visual character of future buildings within the Historic Town Center and Transit Village sub-districts would be generally sensitive to and compatible with the existing adjacent residential neighborhoods south of the project site. The proposed project site plan also extends some of the existing neighborhood street grid into the project site; promotes housing of various densities and sizes throughout the sub-district; indicates a system of public plazas and other open space elements; proposes to preserve and rehabilitate the old Powder Works Administration Building and Clubhouse building for adaptive re-use; proposes a variety of building forms and range of building heights throughout the sub-district, with frequent breaks in building facades and rooflines to reduce apparent mass and bulk; and incorporates pedestrian-scale streets, parks, and other public spaces. These aspects of the project design would result in a project development that is in general visually organized, with architectural interest and unity, and unifying street landscaping and other visual amenity. Nevertheless, since the proposed project would change the existing visual character of the site and its surroundings by resulting in the development of one of the last remaining waterfront open space areas in the City, a **significant and unavoidable (visual) impact** would result.

**Impact 4-3: Project Light and Glare Impacts.** Project development would introduce light and glare to the project site and vicinity. The project applications have not requested a change to the historical-styled lighting program established in the adopted WDMP (section 3.8.2.5--Street Lighting and Furnishings). The project would therefore be required to comply with the lighting program in place in the Central Neighborhood and adjacent historic area of Bay Street, Pinole Street, and Talley Way. The project-proposed ground-floor retail and office uses, although consistent with the overall mixed-use requirement of the adopted WDMP, might potentially produce excessive nighttime lighting and glare for residents living above or near these commercial uses, especially if any of these uses have insufficient exterior light source shielding and operate into late-night hours. The project would also be expected to include security lighting for parking areas, which, with insufficient exterior light source shielding and other measures, might potentially impact nearby residences. These anticipated project effects represent a **potentially significant impact** (see criterion [c] in subsection 4.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation 4-3.** The project applicant shall be required to prepare a lighting plan as part of the project architectural and landscape plans, for City Community Development Department review and approval prior to issuance of building permits. As an existing standard City condition of project design approval, the lighting plan shall be required to demonstrate definitively how lighting spillover and glare would be minimized to City satisfaction. Implementation of this measure would reduce the impact to a ***less-than-significant level***.

**Shadow Impacts.** The combination of the project's maximum building heights (2 to 8 stories), and the substantial separation of any buildings over 4 stories from the nearest surrounding residential structures, would ensure that the project would have a **less-than-significant** shadow impact on adjacent land uses. In addition, no existing public open space areas would be affected (i.e., would be subject to introduced shade and shadow) by the project.

**Mitigation.** No significant impact has been identified; no mitigation is required.