

This section describes the existing visual resources of the City of Chico, summarizes its landscape characteristics, and discusses the impacts associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan Update. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics and potential visual resource impacts in the city. Key issues addressed in this section include alteration of existing scenic resources (potential degradation of scenic resources or views of scenic resources), visual character, and urban lighting characteristics (increased nighttime light and daytime glare). Information for this section comes from city staff, field observations, and other public documents.

4.13.1 EXISTING SETTING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Chico is located within the northern reaches of the Sacramento Valley. Chico lies at the transition between the foothills to the east and the agricultural lands to the west. State Route (SR) 99 generally marks the edge of the flat agricultural landscape and the point where elevation begins to rise to the east. This location at the interface of two distinct and productive landscapes has contributed to the economic well-being of the city, which has benefited from a legacy of timber-related businesses as well as agriculture.

Overall Community Structure

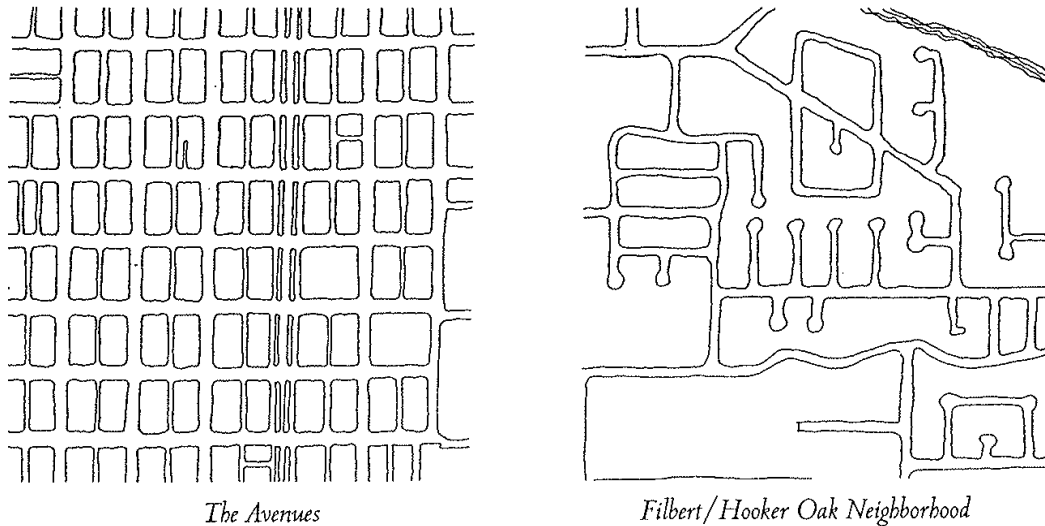
The original grid of the city consisted of a compact square focused around the City Plaza. Over time the city expanded incrementally, initially adjacent to the Main Street/Broadway area. The Downtown developed in the current Main Street/Broadway area as a mixed-use center, containing a variety of uses, services, and building types. By 1912, a second grid had been added to the north of the Downtown that took on a more residential character with its longer blocks and alleys. This area is now known as the Avenues. From the Main Street/Broadway area, Chico has expanded outward, mostly to the north, east, and south. California State University, Chico (CSUC), originally the Northern Branch State Normal School of California, is built in 1887 on land donated by John Bidwell and is the second oldest campus in the CSU system. The South Campus Historic District was constructed between 1862 and 1930 and illustrates the range of uses found in proximity to one another in neighborhoods developed in the years following Chico's inception. Developments to the west of the railroad are industries, scattered service commercial uses, multi-family housing predominantly occupied by university students, and some single-family subdivisions along West Sacramento Avenue.

The initial series of grid developments in Chico were laid out in slightly different alignments, originally oriented to Big Chico and Little Chico creeks and on a northwest/southeast alignment.

The Chapmantown area (an unincorporated community surrounded by incorporated city land) was a notable exception in that it oriented to the meridian (north/south). Within the framework of the original grid and its extensions, Chico grew by the 1950s to a population of 12,000 residents. By 1970, SR 99 had been developed at the eastern edge of the city, prompting development further in the direction of the foothills. The patchwork pattern of grids on rotated alignments, which have been penetrated by north-south transportation corridors, creates a strong organizational structure for the portion of Chico west of State Route 99. To the east of SR 99, a more fragmented pattern of incomplete and meandering streets creates a different suburban character.

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FIGURE 4.13-1
CITY STREET AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

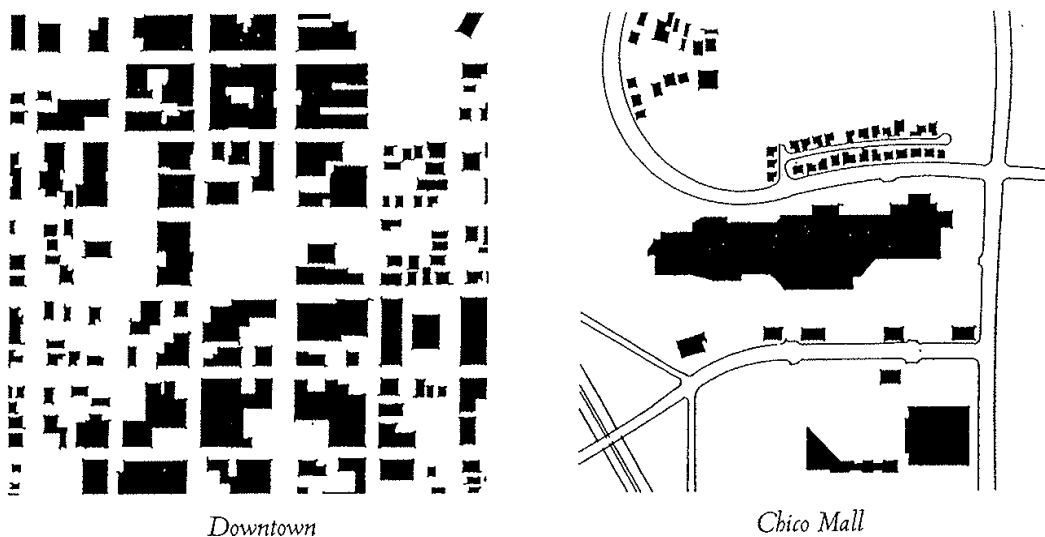


Source: City of Chico, Community Character Assessment, 1993

Comparing and contrasting old and new Chico is instructive in understanding how the community has changed over time. For instance, the plan for the Avenues illustrates the continuity and accessibility of the residential grid pattern (see **Figure 4.13-1**). In contrast, the Filbert Avenue/Hooker Oak area, built in the 1960s, is marked by discontinuous and fragmented streets and tenuous connections between neighborhoods (see **Figure 4.13-1**).

In the case of commercial centers, one can compare the historic downtown area to the Chico Mall (see **Figure 4.13-2**). In the downtown area, individual buildings are organized along streets and focus on the City Plaza, whereas at the Chico Mall, there is a greater internalization of commercial space within a single building reflecting 1987 cultural preferences.

FIGURE 4.13-2
CITY COMMERCIAL CENTER DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Source: City of Chico, Community Character Assessment, 1993

The traditional downtown has changed since it was originally established in the late 1800s as the center of a grid-pattern community oriented to the rail and organized around the City Plaza. Densities have generally decreased as taller buildings (of approximately four to five stories in height) were replaced by single-story buildings and a more homogeneous mix of uses. The Downtown still remains the heart of the community and a focus of community activities. The commercial areas along Park Avenue, Mangrove Avenue, and Cohasset are characterized by a mix of uses with parcels that range in scale and orientation to the street. These districts reflect an increasing scale and auto orientation compared to the downtown area.

FIGURE 4.13-3
CHICO CITY PLAZA



Adding to the attraction and vitality of the downtown core is the CSUC campus, located along Big Chico Creek next to the Bidwell Mansion. CSUC's unique architecture and location within the city make CSUC one of the key contributors to Chico's community design and sense of place. CSUC was founded in the 1860s and is one of the few residential campuses in the state system adjacent to a historic downtown.

In nearly every U.S. city since World War II, there has been a tremendous suburbanized expansion and associated reduction in overall density. Like other places, Chico has expanded with larger-lot residential development and has extended into the surrounding landscape

with parcels of an increasingly larger size and lower density. Modern single-family residences on ½-acre to 2½-acre parcels are being built in unincorporated lands adjacent to the city. This development is particularly focused to the north of the city along Hicks Lane and Keefer Road in Butte County. In this area, ranchettes have been built along existing roads and transportation routes.

One of Chico's most unique qualities is that it lies at the transition between two landscapes, the Sierra Nevada foothills to the east and the expansive Central Valley to the west. Although the contrast between the landscapes can clearly be seen from overhead, the transition is not abrupt. Rather, the valley floor gradually inclines into the foothills and a series of ridges and buttes form intermediary break points in the terrain to the east. Chico's urbanized boundary is difficult to define from a visual perspective. It seldom corresponds with clear natural or physical edges nor heightens the contrast between the city and the landscape. Over the past several years, attempts have been made to establish a clearer definition of the boundaries at the edge of the city through the encouragement of intensification and infill development of available and developable land within the city as opposed to at its margins.

The shifts in elevation are significant in defining and describing community character as development in the foothill areas east of the city becomes more visible from the valley floor and from development in areas of increasing topography. The orchards and agricultural lands along the western side of the city also contribute to the identity of Chico.

There are four traditional city entrances to the western side of Chico. Chico River Road, Dayton Road, Midway, and State Route 32 connect Chico to other agricultural communities, such as

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Colusa, Dayton, Durham, and Orland. To the east of the city, State Route 32 connects Chico to foothill and mountain communities, such as Forest Ranch and Butte Meadows, in Butte County and continues into eastern Tehama County. State Route 99 provides entrance to Chico from several agricultural communities in the northern Central Valley to the north and south of Chico, such as Vina to the north and Biggs and Gridley to the south.

Existing uses on lands outside the boundaries of the city are primarily agricultural and rural residential. Lands northeast and east of the city are used for seasonal grazing of livestock. The area north of the city, east of SR 99, and south of Rock Creek is developed for rural residential land uses interspersed with orchards, field crops, and grazing land.

Streets and creeks are the two most essential elements providing linkage and access within the Chico community. Besides acting as movement corridors, streets and creeks also operate as open spaces, providing important views that affect the image and identity of the city. The Esplanade is an attractive and gracious boulevard with five rows of street trees separating frontage roads and center medians. Woodland Avenue, adjacent to Bidwell Park, is an example of a residential street designed to complement the adjoining open space. Other examples, such as Francis Willard and East Sacramento avenues, as well as some of the older unimproved streets recently annexed from Butte County, have established an attractive character through street trees and relatively narrow pavement areas.

Residential Neighborhoods

The City of Chico has many distinct and unique neighborhoods that help to define the urban form and character of the city. The most notable of these can be seen in the architecture, urban form, and urban forest of Chico's older neighborhood areas.

Specifically, the historical ties to the grid street pattern, craftsman and bungalow architecture, and full mature tree canopy can be seen in the Avenues neighborhoods and the Barber Neighborhood. Additionally, older areas of the city located adjacent to Bidwell Park display the characteristics of a primarily rectilinear street orientation and a thick urban forest canopy. While the architecture of the Filbert and Palmetto avenues areas is typical of a post World War II ranch style of development, these areas substantially maintain the urban structure of the historic neighborhoods of the city.

In contrast, this pattern and style is a significant diversion from the urban form of some of Chico's newer residential development areas, including areas in north and east Chico. These areas can be characterized as having a less mature vegetative cover, a street pattern that is less reliant on a rectilinear orientation and more reliant on natural features, terrain, and discontinuous streets, and having a mixture of architectural feels ranging from larger acreage ranch houses, small-lot urban infill dwellings, and low-density single-family dwellings often constructed utilizing stucco and/or panel exteriors.

Nonresidential Corridors

The same divergence of style, form, and architecture can be used to describe the nonresidential corridors and nodes of the city. Within the historic and extended downtown areas, the primary orientation of nonresidential uses is based on the grid street pattern. The form and architecture of the historic core area can be described as having higher densities (multi-story buildings versus single-level structures) with limited street setbacks and oriented to a grid street pattern. Moving away from the historic downtown area, the commercial areas of the city take two general forms, the first being a linear form typified by the nonresidential uses located

along Manzanita and Park avenues, and the second being the commercial node form typified by the Chico Mall and North Valley Plaza developments. In both the linear and node forms, the form of the commercial uses exhibits an orientation having larger visual fields of parking and a more homogenous design and feel, often resulting from a shift in building techniques away from historical brick and mortar construction and trending more toward modern prefabricated panel construction or large-volume warehouse-style construction.

Natural Visual Features

Chico is unique in that it is located in an area that is both a part of the Great Central Valley with its agricultural uses and also close to the foothills. The agricultural landscape provides a large-scale grid pattern of fields and orchards and a rural atmosphere on traditional entry roads into the city through remnant orchard plantings. The foothills create a contrast to the verdant agricultural lands, with volcanic landforms consisting of canyons and buttes. Rising elevations to the east of Chico create a perceptible edge and highly visible backdrop to the city.



**FIGURE 4.13-4
FIVE MILE RECREATION AREA**

Bisecting the city is a series of creeks that drain westward to the Sacramento River. Several major creeks are found within the Planning Area, including Mud Creek, Sycamore Creek, Lindo Channel (Sandy Gulch), Big Chico Creek, Little Chico Creek, Butte Creek, Dead Horse Slough, and Comanche Creek. These waterways penetrate the urban fabric and frequently form boundaries to neighborhoods and districts within the city. Very often, the overall character or mix of uses does not change from one side of a creek to the other, but one grid pattern may

**FIGURE 4.13-5
NORTH RIM, UPPER BIDWELL PARK**



stop and another begin with a somewhat different orientation or scale. Furthermore, creek crossings are limited, particularly east of the freeway. Thus, the creeks tend to break up the city into smaller districts and neighborhoods.

Bidwell Park stretches over 10 miles along Big Chico Creek from the Sierra Nevada foothills to the valley floor and serves as an important biological corridor linking the habitats of the mountains to those of the Sacramento River. Bidwell Park is home to a variety of important and sensitive natural resources, including native plant communities as well as plant and wildlife species. Bidwell Park can be

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seen from several vantage points. A network of trails, bike paths, and roads within and alongside the park provide visual access to the park. Upper Bidwell Park includes South Rim Trail and Humboldt Trail, which run along the south ridgeline. On the north side, the North Rim Trail provides views of the canyon, while Lower Trail and Yahi Trail provide access to views of the sloping terrain and Big Chico Creek.

Viewpoints in Lower Bidwell Park are more constrained, due to the flatter terrain and the increased presence of structures and vegetation. At the same time, the quality of Lower Bidwell Park's viewshed is unique by virtue of its riparian vegetation characterized by mature trees and thick understory. Lower Bidwell Park is also frequented by many more people due to its proximity to the urban core of Chico. Many viewpoints exist along Manzanita Avenue, Vallombrosa Avenue, East 8th Street, North Park Drive, and South Park Drive, which parallel the park and offer views of Big Chico Creek. In addition, there are numerous pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trails in Lower Bidwell Park.

Nighttime Lighting Conditions

Lighting conditions of the developed (city) portion of the Planning Area consists of typical urban light conditions found in urban areas (e.g., roadway lighting, commercial buildings, and headlights from motor vehicles). These conditions contrast with the very low ambient nighttime lighting and illumination of agricultural and rural uses of the Planning Area surrounding the city.

Sources of daytime glare include direct beam sunlight and reflections from windows, architectural coatings, glass, and other shiny reflective surfaces. Nighttime light illumination and associated glare can be divided into stationary and mobile sources. Stationary sources of nighttime light include structure illumination, decorative landscape lighting, lighted signs, sports field lighting, and streetlights. The primary source of mobile nighttime light is headlights of motor vehicles. During winter nighttime hours, the ambient light in the Planning Area can be accentuated during periods of low cloudiness or fog, which reflects light, resulting in intensification of the amount of light.

4.13.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

STATE

State Scenic Highway Program

In 1963, the California legislature created the Scenic Highway Program to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to state highways. The state regulations and guidance governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq. A highway may be designated scenic depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. A scenic corridor is the land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway and is identified using a motorist's line of vision. A reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to the distant horizon.

There are no state scenic highways in the Planning Area. The status of a scenic highway changes from "eligible" to "officially designated" when the local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for scenic highway approval, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as a scenic highway (Caltrans, 2007).

Nighttime Sky – Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards

The California legislature passed a bill in 2001 requiring the California Energy Commission (CEC) to adopt energy efficiency standards for outdoor lighting for both the public and private sector. In November 2003, CEC adopted changes to the Title 24, parts 1 and 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards. These standards became effective on October 1, 2005, and included changes to the requirements for outdoor lighting for residential and nonresidential development. The new standards will likely improve the quality of outdoor lighting and help to reduce the impacts of light pollution, light trespass, and glare. The standards regulate lighting characteristics such as maximum power and brightness, shielding, and sensor controls to turn lighting on and off. Different lighting standards are set by classifying areas by lighting zone. The classification is based on population figures of the 2000 Census. Areas can be designated as LZ1 (dark), LZ2 (rural), or LZ3 (urban).

LOCAL

City of Chico Municipal Code Chapter 19.18

Chapter 19.18 of the Municipal Code provides a design review process for development in the city intended to promote a visual environment of high aesthetic quality. The Chico Architectural Review Board promotes responsible architectural design which is consistent with Chico's character by enforcing the design guidelines as set forth in Chapter 19.18 of the Chico Municipal Code. The Architectural Review Board reviews architectural drawings or renderings which are required to be submitted with an application for a building permit. In order to fully illustrate these guidelines, the City Design Manual contains graphic examples and explanations of the architectural review process. The design process focuses on three major areas: site design, building design, and landscape design.

City of Chico Municipal Code Section 19.60.050

Section 19.60.050 of the Municipal Code requires that exterior lighting be architecturally integrated with the character of all structures, energy-efficient, and shielded or recessed so that direct glare and reflections are confined, to the maximum extent feasible, within the boundaries of the site. Exterior lighting is to be directed downward and away from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. Shielded means that the light rays are directed onto the site, and the light source, whether bulb or tube, is not visible from an adjacent property. This section of the Municipal Code does not apply to sign illumination, traffic safety lighting, or public street lighting. Permanently installed lighting cannot blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness. All lighting fixtures must be appropriate in scale, intensity, and height to the use they are serving.

City of Chico Municipal Code Chapter 19.66

Chapter 19.66 of the Municipal Code provides for development standards for development within the city's foothill areas at elevations in excess of 250 feet to preserve and enhance natural topographic features and reduce grading and environmental degradation.

Landmark District Overlay Zone

The Landmark overlay zone is intended to identify landmarks and historic sites in compliance with the General Plan, so that development and new land uses are designed and operated in a manner compatible with the preservation of these historic resources. Any land use normally

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allowed in the primary zoning district may be allowed within the Landmark overlay zone, in compliance with certificate of appropriateness requirements.

4.13.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

An aesthetic or visual resource impact is considered significant if implementation of the project would result in any of the following:

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

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource analysis is based on field review of the Planning Area and review of topographic conditions, as well as anticipated changes within the Planning Area from implementation of the proposed Land Use Diagram and other anticipated development in the Planning Area.

The following proposed General Plan Update policies and actions address visual quality and urban design:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>Policy LU-1.2</i> | <i>(Growth Boundaries/Limits) – Maintain long-term boundaries between urban and agricultural uses in the west and between urban uses and the foothills in the east, and limit expansion north and south to produce a more compact urban form.</i> |
| <i>Action LU-1.2.1</i> | <i>(Greenline) – Retain the Greenline.</i> |
| <i>Action LU-1.2.2</i> | <i>(Foothill Development) – Apply the City's Foothill Development Standards to projects in foothill areas.</i> |
| <i>Policy LU-2.4</i> | <i>(Land Use Compatibility) – Promote land use compatibility through use restrictions, development standards, and special design considerations.</i> |
| <i>Action LU-2.4.1</i> | <i>(Update Zoning Code) – Establish zoning districts, use regulations, development standards, and performance requirements in the Municipal Code consistent with the General Plan.</i> |
| <i>Action LU-2.4.4</i> | <i>(Design Guidelines) – Maintain and update, as necessary, the City's Design Guidelines Manual.</i> |

- Policy LU-2.5 (Open Space and Resource Conservation) – Protect open space areas with known sensitive resources.
- Policy LU-2.6 (Agricultural Buffers) – Require buffering for new urban uses along the City's Sphere of Influence adjacent to commercial crop production. Landscaping, trails, gardens, solar arrays, and open space uses are permitted within the buffer. Design criteria for buffers are as follows:
- A minimum 100-foot-wide physical separation, which may include roadways and creeks, between the agricultural use and any habitable structure.
 - Incorporate vegetation, as may be needed to provide a visual, noise, and air quality buffer.
- Policy LU-3.3 (Neighborhood Services) – Recognize existing neighborhoods and continue to facilitate the development of neighborhood plans in partnership with residents and property owners to preserve and enhance neighborhood character, identity, and livability.
- Action LU-4.2.1 (Residential Infill Guidelines) – Amend the Design Guidelines Manual to include residential infill guidelines that address compatibility between new and existing development such as visual intrusion and massing within a transition zone.
- Action LU-4.2.2 (Emphasis on Neighborhood Compatibility) – For residential infill projects outside of Opportunity Sites and Special Planning Areas, maintaining neighborhood character may take precedence over meeting density goals. It may be necessary to limit project density to ensure compatibility.
- Action LU-6.2.2 (Bell Muir SPA Planning) – Plan the Bell Muir SPA with primarily low density housing compatible with existing residential development and ongoing agricultural uses in the area. Subsequent planning will:
- Identify locations for community gardens or small-scale farms, and develop design guidelines and buffering requirements to address potential incompatibilities.
 - Address infrastructure needs with particular attention to storm drainage and circulation, including north-south connections to East Avenue and improved access to State Route 32.
 - Develop special lighting and street standards appropriate for the rural character of the area.
- Action LU-6.2.4 (Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA Planning) – Plan the Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA with a broad range of housing types and densities

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integrated with significant open space and recreational areas, supporting commercial services, and public facilities. Subsequent planning will:

- *Address circulation with primary connections to the site via Skyway and E. 20th Street.*
- *Incorporate significant accessible open space on the eastern portion of the SPA, a community park, as well as neighborhood and pocket parks.*
- *Maintain open space by clustering development and providing open space buffers on the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the SPA.*
- *Include visual simulations to ensure that development is not visually intrusive as viewed from lower elevations.*
- *Incorporate special lighting standards to reduce impacts on the nighttime sky.*

Policy CD-1.1 (Natural Features and Cultural Resources) – Reinforce the City's positive and distinctive image by recognizing and enhancing the natural features of the City and protecting cultural and historic resources.

Action CD-2.1.4 (Creek Views and Access) – As part of the design review of development and capital projects, improve visual and recreational access to creekside corridors.

Policy CD-2.4 (Context Sensitive Foothill Development) – Minimize disruption of viewsheds from foothill development, through the careful location of roads, buildings, and other infrastructure.

Action CD-2.4.1 (Foothill Development) – Blend foothill development with the surrounding landscape and topography to diminish its visual prominence from the valley floor.

Action CD-2.4.2 (Foothill Streets) – In order to minimize cut and fill grading operations in foothill areas, design new streets at the minimum dimension necessary for access and parking.

Action CD-2.4.3 (Contours of Natural Slope) – Limit the extent and amount of grading in foothill areas, and where grading occurs, emulate the contours of the natural slope.

Action CD-2.4.4 (Foothill Viewshed) – Minimize the development of highly visible or intrusive structures that impact foothill viewsheds.

Policy CD-3.1 (Lasting Design and Materials) – Promote architectural design that exhibits timeless character and is constructed with high quality materials.

- Policy CD-4.1 (Distinctive Character) – Reinforce the distinctive character of neighborhoods with design elements reflected in the streetscape, landmarks, public art, and natural amenities.
- Action CD-4.1.1 (Neighborhood Design Details) – Develop and implement neighborhood plans that identify design qualities and elements for specific areas.
- Action PPFs-2.1.1 (Greenway Acquisition) – Continue the City's greenway purchase program to acquire properties located along creeks as they become available in order to expand habitat protection, trail creation, and recreation opportunities.
- Action PPFs-2.1.2 (Creekside Design) – Continue to use Chico's Design Guidelines Manual for proposed development adjacent to creeks to address setbacks, building orientation, security measures, and lighting designed to promote the City's creeks and amenities without detracting from the natural setting.
- Action PPFs-2.1.3 (Pathway and Trail Planning) – Design pedestrian and bicycle paths and trails adjacent to creeks that protect the riparian environment.
- Action PPFs-2.1.4 (Assess Potential Impacts to Creeks) – Through the development and environmental review processes, including consultation with state and federal agencies, ensure that natural areas and habitats located in and along the City's creeks are protected and enhanced.
- Policy OS-2.4 (Visual Resources) – Preserve the foothills as a natural backdrop to the urban form.
- Action OS-2.4.1 (Visual Simulations) – Require visual simulations for foothill development to assess view shed impacts.
- Policy OS-2.5 (Creeks and Riparian Corridors) – Preserve and enhance Chico's creeks and riparian corridors as open space for their aesthetic, drainage, habitat, flood control, and water quality values.
- Policy OS-5.1 (Urban/Rural Boundary) – Protect agriculture by maintaining the Greenline boundary between urban and rural uses.
- Policy OS-6.1 (Healthy Urban Forest) – Ensure the protection and management of the urban forest.
- Action OS-6.1.1 (Urban Forest Maintenance) – Maintain and expand the urban forest by:
- Maintaining existing trees.
 - Planting new trees to replace those that require removal.

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- *Requiring street and parking lot tree planting in new development.*
- *Implementing the Municipal Code's tree protection regulations.*
- *Utilizing volunteer groups and property owners to care for newly planted trees and maintain young trees and provide information and instructions regarding such care and maintenance.*

The impact analysis provided below utilizes these proposed policies and actions to determine whether implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would result in significant visual resource impacts. The analyses identify and describe how specific policies and actions as well as other City regulations and standards provide enforceable requirements and/or performance standards that protect visual resources effects and avoid or minimize significant impacts.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista (Standard of Significance 1)

Impact 4.13.1 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update could have a substantial effect on a scenic vista. However, implementation of proposed General Plan Update policy provisions and continued implementation of the city's Municipal Code would ensure that no adverse impact to a scenic vista would occur. Therefore, this impact is considered to be **less than significant**.

The City of Chico Planning Area is characterized by scenic views including flat to hilly topography with agricultural areas, foothills, bluffs, ravines, and creeks. Many areas are still undeveloped and feature oak savanna and riparian areas, but have received approvals for development (e.g., Meriam Park). As discussed in the Existing Setting section above, scenic resources in the Planning Area, and thus scenic vistas that could be adversely affected by implementation of the General Plan Update, include views of the transition between landscapes (Sierra Nevada foothills to the east and the Central Valley to the west), the agricultural landscape, the foothills and rising elevations to the east of Chico, the major creeks, and of Bidwell Park. In addition, views of the city's neighborhoods could be adversely affected.

The boundaries of the Planning Area remain the same for the proposed General Plan Update as they were for the 1994 General Plan. The proposed General Plan Update includes the Land Use Diagram and associated policy provisions that combine specific land use designations in the Planning Area (see **Figure 3.0-3**). The key differences between the 1994 General Plan and the 2030 General Plan Update are related to new Special Planning Areas (3 of which are outside of the city's current Sphere of Influence), and the inclusion of fifteen Opportunity Sites, or existing areas within the city designated to be the focus of improvement, change, and revitalization over the next 20 years (see **Figure 3.0-3**). The five SPAs are shown on the Land Use Diagram (see **Figure 3.0-3**). The SPA designation identifies areas with significant new growth opportunity and that require more detailed subsequent land use planning. The Opportunity Sites are those areas that have been designated for mixed use, increased residential development potential, or an alternative land use designation better suited to the existing or evolving surrounding uses.

While these Opportunity Sites and Special Planning Areas have the potential to increase development within the Planning Area and therefore impact existing scenic vistas, subsequent development and redevelopment would be subject to proposed General Plan policies, as well

as existing city development and design standards set forth in the city's Municipal Code and Design Guidelines. The General Plan Land Use Element facilitates a compact urban form and provides incentives for infill and redevelopment in existing developed areas. As such, future development in the city would reduce the extent of outward city growth into agricultural and foothill areas, thus preserving the aesthetic quality and character of these resources. The Land Use Element also contains specific policies related to individual SPAs that direct the subsequent master planning efforts to address viewshed, context sensitive design, and nighttime lighting considerations associated with new development. Furthermore, future development and redevelopment projects would be subject to the city's established Design Review process, which is directed by the Municipal Code and city's Design Guidelines Manual. Chapter 19.18 (Site Design and Architectural Review) of the Chico Municipal Code requires that the Planning Commission, Architectural Review Board, and the Planning Services Director to base determinations of development proposals on certain findings that include consistency with adopted design guidelines and development standards. The Manual guides the aesthetic qualities of development in the city via guidelines addressing site design, architecture, exterior lighting, and signage. Compliance with the Manual and Municipal Code development standards would reduce the visual impact of new development and redevelopment in the Planning Area by ensuring that such development would be thoughtfully integrated with existing development and/or the existing natural setting.

The General Plan also includes extensive policies aimed at protecting scenic views of natural areas. For example, the Community Design Element requires development projects to incorporate and highlight natural features into project design (Action CD-1.1.1). The Parks, Public Facilities, and Services Element requires that the city continue to acquire properties located along creeks (Action PPF-2.1.1) and that development adjacent to creeks address setbacks, building orientation, security measures, and lighting in order to promote and protect the creeks (Action PPF-2.1.2). Furthermore, the City Council adopted the Bidwell Park Master Management Plan (BPMMP) in 2008. The BPMMP establishes policies and practices for operation and management of the Park. Decisionmaking for the Park is subject to, and guided by, the BPMMP and the proposed General Plan Update requires the city to utilize the BPMMP. Therefore, implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would not adversely affect the visual quality of Bidwell Park. Another important General Plan action is OS-2.4.1, which requires that visual simulations be prepared for foothill development to assess view shed impacts, which will support project-level environmental review and site design for future foothill projects.

Chico retains a distinct identity because of its relative distance from other urban areas. Traveling into Chico from any direction highlights the contrast of the city and its surrounding landscape and greatly influences one's impressions of the city. In addition, the city entrances provide a sense of structure and orientation to the urban environment. The General Plan Land Use Element requires that the city to maintain the long-term boundaries between urban and agricultural uses in the west and between urban uses and the foothills in the east, thus ensuring that views displaying the contrast of the city and its surrounding landscape will be retained. Furthermore, as discussed above, the compact urban form facilitated by the General Plan would prohibit sprawl from adversely affecting transitional views between landscapes.

As described above, the City of Chico has many distinct and unique neighborhoods that help to define the urban form and character of the city, yet the most notable of these can be seen in the architecture and urban form of Chico's older neighborhood areas. These neighborhoods typically exhibit a strong grid pattern with well-defined limits, landscaped streets, a mix and diversity of lot sizes and housing types, and a clear neighborhood identity. It is the individuality of these older neighborhoods that helps to give Chico its sense of place. Consistent with policies in the Land Use Element, new neighborhoods resulting from implementation of the General Plan

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Update will be designed and developed as complete neighborhoods (Policy LU-3.1), which are intended to emulate Chico's older neighborhoods in creating a sense of place through a mix of housing types, community gathering places, conveniently-located facilities and services, walkability, interconnected street systems, and extensive tree canopy and attractive landscaping. Action LU-4.2.1 directs the City to amend the Design Guidelines Manual to include residential infill guidelines that address compatibility between new and existing development such as visual intrusion and massing within a transition zone. Further, Action LU-4.2.2 directs placing a greater emphasis on neighborhood compatibility over meeting density goals when considering infill project. Additionally, the General Plan requires infill and redevelopment within existing neighborhoods to enhance developed areas consistent with the complete neighborhood concept (Policies LU-4.2 and LU-4.3; Policy CD-5.1). In requiring new development, infill, and redevelopment to recreate or maintain these features of Chico's older neighborhoods, the policy framework of the proposed General Plan Update will result in continuity that reinforces the city's sense of place. In addition, the City of Chico Design Guidelines Manual (discussed above) relies on the sense of place concept for its implementation. As such, implementation of the General Plan Update would not be expected to adversely affect views or the sense of place created by the city's neighborhoods.

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update, as well as existing city development and design standards, would ensure visual compatibility with existing development as well as the preservation of unique natural features and scenic resources in the city. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Substantially Damage Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway (Standard of Significance 2)

Impact 4.13.2 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would not damage any scenic resources within a state scenic highway. Therefore, there is **no impact**.

There are no state scenic highways in the City of Chico or the Planning Area. Therefore, impacts associated with damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway are considered to have **no impact**.

Substantially Degrade the Existing Visual Character, Including the Scenic Quality of the Foothills (Standard of Significance 3)

Impact 4.13.3 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would result in increased development which would alter the existing visual character of the Planning Area. This impact is considered **significant**.

Implementation of proposed General Plan Update would result in increased development in the Planning Area that would change its visual character. The proposed General Plan Update envisions compact and dense development in the Sphere of Influence and provides for infill development in existing developed areas of the city. This approach to the accommodation of future development in the city would reduce the extent of outward growth and the conversion of open land to urban development. As described under Impact 4.13.1, implementation of existing city development and design standards, as well as proposed General Plan Update and policies and actions, would ensure visual compatibility with existing development as well as the preservation of unique natural features and scenic resources.

However, the proposed General Plan Update identifies five areas on the proposed Land Use Diagram designated as Special Planning Areas (SPA) (see **Figure 3.0-3**) that would extend the current urban/development footprint of the city. The SPA designation identifies areas with significant new growth opportunity. Increased development as well as intensification of development would alter visual character by introducing urban uses into previously vacant areas. Additional development results in alteration of the visual character of the Planning Area to more dense land uses. It should be noted that large amounts of undeveloped land which currently provide a visual amenity of open space would be developed as currently approved under previous land use entitlements (e.g., Meriam Park and the Northwest Specific Plan). The aesthetic impacts of urbanization of the city were previously identified in the 1994 General Plan Update EIR and the associated adoption of the 1994 General Plan as a significant and unavoidable impact (see City Resolution No. 81 94-95).

The Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA was not considered a growth area under the 1994 General Plan and is notable due to its location in the lower foothills east of the city. The area is undeveloped and is currently defined by grasslands and blue oaks in valley areas, grasslands with sparse vegetation across gradually sloping ridgelines, and corridors of mixed oak and mixed woodlands along seasonal streams and along more sharply defined ridgelines. Development of this SPA would result in an alteration of the landscape characteristics of this portion of the Planning Area.

The proposed General Plan Update Land Use Element, as well as the Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA Conceptual Land Use Plan, requires that subsequent planning incorporate significant open space areas on the eastern portion of the SPA, as well as along the entire Stilson Canyon rim to the north and along Honey Run Road to the south. These open space areas would visually “buffer” the prominence of new development and would assist in preserving the undeveloped character of the SPA. General Plan Update Action LU-6.2.4 also requires clustered development in the SPA. The concept of clustered housing is to group, or “cluster”, urban development such as residences together on a site while leaving large portions of the site as open space. Clustering development allows for greater contiguous open space preservation than would occur if urban development were to be dispersed throughout a site and open space were parceled out to accommodate individual yards. Therefore, because clustering preserves contiguous open space and promotes development in less visually prominent areas, it allows for the overall allowable density of a site to be realized while preserving the visual character of a less urbanized area. In the case of the Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA, clustering would preserve open space visible to urban areas located on the valley floor. General Plan Update Action LU-6.2.4 also requires future planning efforts to include visual simulations that illustrate the appearance of the proposed development as it would be viewed from lower elevations. Such simulations would allow decision-makers on development proposals to carefully evaluate the visual impacts of a proposed development in the foothill areas. Proposed General Plan Update Community Design Policy CD-2.4 and associated action items also provide for minimal disruption of viewsheds from foothill development via limitations on cut and fill grading operations in foothill areas as well as restrictions on highly visible or intrusive structures. Minimizing grading and intrusive structures would maintain the natural contours of the foothill areas, thus reducing alterations to the landscape characteristics of these areas.

In addition to policies and actions in the proposed General Plan Update, subsequent development in the Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA would be subject to the city's existing regulatory framework addressing the scenic quality of the foothills, including the city's Design Guidelines and Foothill Development Standards (Chapter 19.66 of the Municipal Code). The Design Guidelines direct the use of earth tones and compatibility in foothill development. The Foothill Development Standards are intended to encourage site specific design solutions that preserve and enhance the beauty of hillside landscape by encouraging retention of natural topographic

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features and vegetation. The Standards include requirements for clustered development on more level portions of a site to preserve steeper areas, setbacks between structures and tops of slopes, and grading standards intended to preserve topographic conditions. Environmental and discretionary review of future development projects would analyze project-level compliance with these regulations and would require site-specific mitigation to reduce or eliminate visual impacts.

While the city's proposed and existing policy and regulatory framework would be effective in reducing the visual prominence and aesthetic impact of new development in the foothills as discussed above, any new development in these areas would be in contrast to the existing, undeveloped conditions that provide a natural visual backdrop to the city. The city's approach to protecting and maintaining the scenic qualities of the foothill areas is comprehensive and there are no additional mitigation measures available to offset this alteration of the current landscape characteristics of the Planning Area. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Create a New Source of Substantial Light or Glare (Standard of Significance 4)

Impact 4.13.4 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update could result in an increase of daytime glare and/or nighttime lighting. This increase in daytime glare sources and nighttime lighting levels could have an adverse effect on adjacent areas and land uses. This is considered a **less than significant** impact.

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update may introduce new sources of daytime glare and may change nighttime lighting and illumination levels. Lighting nuisances typically are categorized by the following:

- Glare – Intense light that shines directly or is reflected from a surface into a person's eyes.
- "Skyglow"/Nighttime Illumination – Artificial lighting from urbanized sources that alters the rural landscape in sufficient quantity to cause lighting of the nighttime sky and reduction of visibility of stars and other astronomical features.
- "Spillover" Lighting – Artificial lighting that spills over onto adjacent properties, which could interrupt sleeping patterns or cause other nuisances to neighboring residents.

The main sources of daytime glare in the Planning Area are from sunlight reflecting from structures with reflective surfaces such as windows. Subsequent development under the proposed General Plan Update would include residential, commercial, and office structures and other potential sources of glare. Building materials (e.g., reflective glass and polished surfaces) are the most substantial sources of glare. The amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight, which is more acute at sunrise and sunset because the angle of the sun is lower during these times.

A source of glare during the nighttime hours is artificial light. The sources of new and increased nighttime lighting and illumination include, but are not limited to, new residential development, lighting from nonresidential uses, lights associated with vehicular travel (e.g., car headlights), street lighting, parking lot lights, and security-related lighting for nonresidential uses. Increased nighttime lighting and illumination could result in adverse effects to adjacent land uses through the spilling over of light into these areas and skyglow conditions.

Subsequent development would be subject to existing city development and design standards set forth in the city's Municipal Code. For instance, Section 19.60.050 of the Municipal Code requires that exterior lighting be architecturally integrated with the character of all structures, energy-efficient, and shielded or recessed so that direct glare and reflections are confined, to the maximum extent feasible, within the boundaries of the site. Exterior lighting is to be directed downward and away from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. Shielded means that the light rays are directed onto the site and the light source, whether bulb or tube, is not visible from an adjacent property. Permanently installed lighting cannot blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness. All lighting fixtures must be appropriate in scale, intensity, and height to the use they are serving.

In addition, the Chico Municipal Code requires city decisionmakers to base determinations of development proposals on certain findings that include consistency with adopted design guidelines included in the city's Design Guidelines Manual. The Manual requires that exterior lighting enhance a project's sense of place without impacting offsite uses or night skies. To that effect, the Manual requires that exterior lighting be incorporated at the minimum intensity necessary and that lamp types enhancing architecture and minimizing glare be prioritized.

Furthermore, General Plan Update Action LU-6.2.2 requires that subsequent planning for the Bell Muir SPA develop special lighting standards appropriate for the rural character of the area and General Plan Update Action LU-6.2.4 requires that subsequent planning for the Doe Mill/Honey Run SPA incorporate special lighting standards to reduce impacts on the nighttime sky. Therefore, new development in these areas would be subject to additional lighting standards that would minimize potential lighting and glare impacts.

It should also be noted that there are approved development projects in the city that have adopted conditions of approval and mitigation measures for approved developments that include provisions regarding architectural design and lighting standards. Similarly, the potential for increased daytime glare and/or nighttime lighting associated with future development projects would be addressed as part of subsequent project-level environmental review and if significant impacts were identified, additional mitigation measures would be incorporated into the project to reduce impacts.

Implementation of existing city standards, use of the city's Design Guidelines, and adherence to Municipal Code Section 19.60.050 identified above would reduce the impacts to daytime glare and nighttime lighting by requiring design guidelines and standards to limit lighting leakage and glare. Therefore, this impact is considered **less than significant**.

4.13.2 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting condition includes the unincorporated rural communities surrounding the City of Chico, as well as the larger Butte County region, including the cities of Biggs, Chico, Gridley, and Oroville, the Town of Paradise, and the County of Butte. The cumulative setting also includes the proposed and approved large-scale development projects listed in **Table 4.0-4**. Development in the Planning Area as well as in Butte County would alter the scenic resources and visual character of the region.

The cumulative impact analysis herein focuses on whether the project's contribution to regional visual resource impacts would result in a cumulatively considerable environmental impact. The project's impact would be cumulatively considerable if, when considered with other existing,

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approved, proposed, and reasonably foreseeable development in the region, it would result in substantial alteration of the visual character of the region, significant impacts to scenic vistas, or substantial increases in daytime glare and nighttime lighting.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Impacts to Scenic Vista, Scenic Resources, Existing Visual Character, and Light and Glare (Standards of Significance 1, 3, and 4)

Impact 4.13.5 Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update, in combination with other reasonably foreseeable development projects within Butte County, would contribute to the alteration of the visual character of the region, impacts to scenic vistas, and increased glare/lighting. This is considered a **cumulatively considerable** impact.

The Butte County region is anticipated to experience growth in association with new and infill development, which would result in cumulatively considerable changes in the visual character and scenic views of the region, as well as increases in the amount of light and glare in the region. As undeveloped areas transition from a rural to an urban character, existing viewsheds within the county and incorporated cities would be affected, existing views of rural uses and open spaces would be changed to urban uses, and views of the foothills may be altered and/or obstructed. Important visual resources such as mature trees, rock outcroppings, and rural structures would be lost. Development under the proposed General Plan Update would contribute to this trend in alteration of the visual character of the area by converting open space and rural uses to urban development. While a good portion of the Planning Area is devoted to land use designations such as Primary Open Space that would retain natural areas, trees, and the like, the overall urban/development footprint of the city would increase. This would also contribute to changes in nighttime lighting and illumination levels in the region.

As discussed under Impacts 4.13.1 through 4.13.4, the city's proposed and existing policy and regulatory framework (General Plan, Municipal Code, Design Guidelines Manual) provides a comprehensive approach to reducing the visual prominence of new development, adverse impacts to existing scenic vistas, and substantial increases in light and glare in the Planning Area. Even so, new development and redevelopment in the Planning Area would contribute to other similar impacts resulting from development in the larger Butte County region. Even with incorporation of smart growth principles and other mitigation, the proposed General Plan Update would still contribute to significant cumulative impacts associated with alteration of the visual character of the region, impacts to scenic vistas, and increased glare/lighting in the region. No additional mitigation measures are available to offset these impacts. Therefore, this impact is considered **cumulatively considerable** and **significant and unavoidable**.

REFERENCES

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