# III.A. AESTHETICS

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is located within the northwestern portion of the San Fernando Valley within the City of Los Angeles community of Chatsworth-Porter Ranch. The San Fernando Valley is relatively flat and is bounded by the Santa Susana Mountains to the north, the Simi Hills to the west, the Santa Monica Mountains to the south and the Verdugo Mountains to the east and the San Gabriel Mountains further east and to the northeast. The vast majority of the San Fernando Valley is developed with urban land uses. The regional landscape of the project area is therefore urbanized and consists of light industrial, commercial, residential, and open space (parks). The views of the project area are typical of urbanized settings and due to the lack of topographic variation are limited. However, some background vistas of the adjacent mountains are available along roadways in the area. There are no designated scenic highways in the project area. **Figures III.A-1** through **III.A-4** show typical views in the project area.

On and adjacent to the project site there are no natural features, structures of architectural or historic significance or visual prominence, and no heritage oaks or other trees or plants protected by the City of Los Angeles (se **Section III.C Biological Resources**). The project area includes one to seven story commercial and light industrial buildings with perimeter and limited interior ornamental plantings. Commercial and industrial development in the area is largely modern in style and/or recently constructed, with heights varying from one to seven stories, and minimal architectural detail. The urbanized nature of the project area and lack of topographic variation provide for restricted panoramic views. Available panoramic views are largely from local roadways such as Winnetka Boulevard, and along the adjacent Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way, and are of the distant mountains.

There is limited shade on the project site from the existing former LA Times printing facility and existing landscape trees located along the western, northern, and southern portions of the project site. There are no on- or adjacent off-site uses (e.g., parks, schools, convalescent homes, restaurants, solar collectors), which are sensitive to shade.

Nighttime lighting sources on-site include security lighting of the surface parking lots including light fixtures mounted on poles throughout the extensive surface parking areas. Off-site nighttime lighting sources include street lighting and security lighting (including extensive lighting of surface parking lots). There is also some lighting of structures and landscape lighting.

### Viewshed

A viewshed is the area visible from a given viewpoint or series of viewpoints. For analytical purposes, it is the view from an observer's viewpoint and is generally limited by the screening or obstruction effects of vegetation and structures.

As described in **Table III.A-1**, a total of four viewpoints were identified for the project that represent the range of available views in the project area and include commercial, railroad right-of-way, light-industrial, and residential land uses located in the vicinity of the project site.

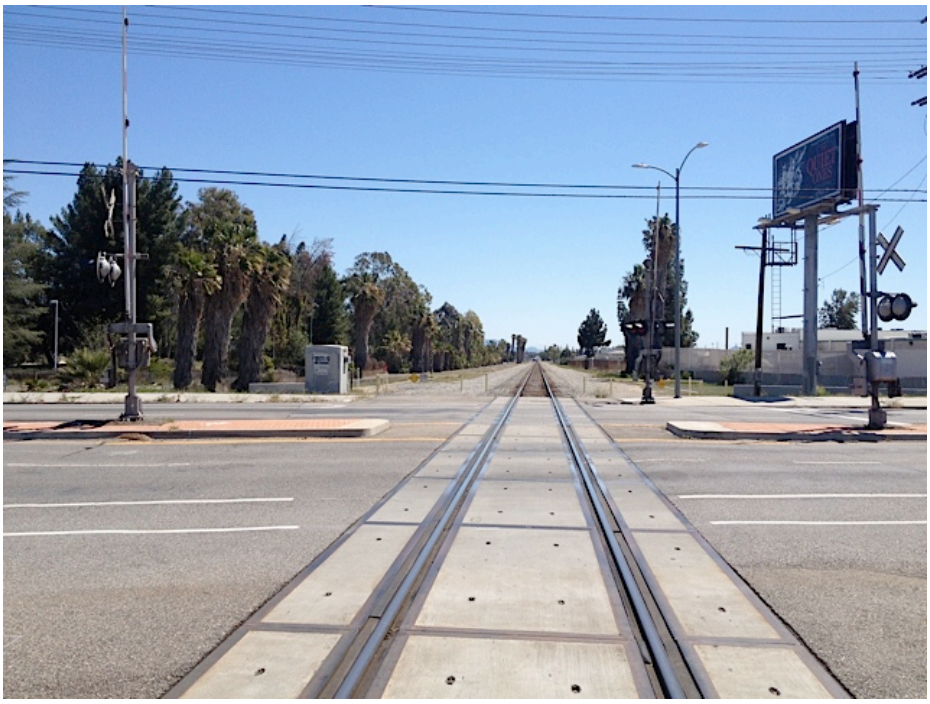

**Figure III.A-1:**
View Southeast along Southern Pacific Railroad Right-of-Way along the Southern Boundary of the Project Site


**Figure III.A-2:**
View of Commercial Land Uses West across Winnetka Avenue from Project Site

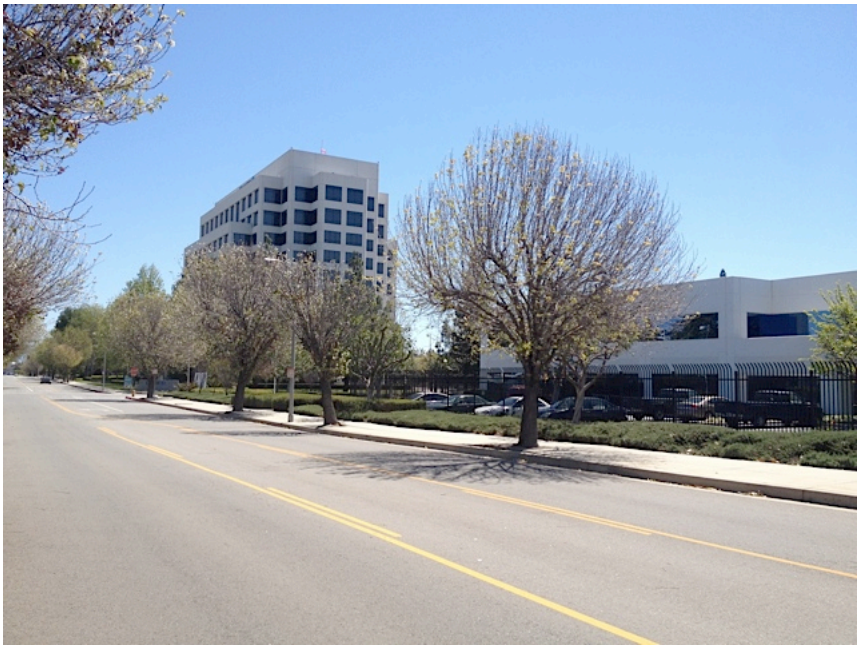

**Figure III.A-3:**
View along Prairie Street of Light Industrial Uses Located East of Project Site

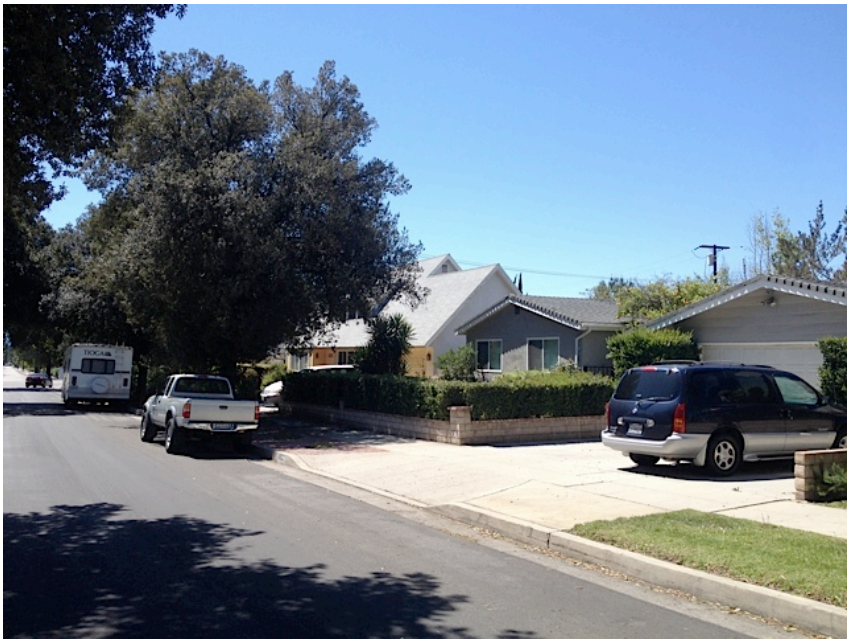

**Figure III.A-4:**
Residential Land Uses One Block North of Project Site (Oakdale Avenue/Plummer Street)

| TABLE III.A-1<br>SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE UNITS | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Viewpoints** | **Description** | |
| Commercial Land Uses to the West | Image Types | Restaurants, retail shopping, commercial uses |
| | Viewer Groups | Commercial employees, motorists, and residents |
| | Visual Resources | Low-scale commercial developments with interior and perimeter landscaping |
| | **Overall Visual Character** | **Established commercial uses** |
| Railroad Right-of-Way along the southern boundary | Image Types | Railroad and tracks |
| | Viewer Groups | Light industrial employees, motorists and rail passengers. |
| | Visual Resources | Expansive uninterrupted linear views |
| | **Overall Visual Character** | **Established railroad uses** |
| Light Industrial Land Uses to the north (and east) | Image Types | Warehouse and office buildings |
| | Viewer Groups | Light industrial employees, motorist, and residents |
| | Visual Resources | Light industrial developments with perimeter landscaping |
| | **Overall Visual Character** | **Established light industrial uses** |
| Residential Land Uses further north | Image Types | Single-family residences |
| | Viewer Groups | Residents and motorists |
| | Visual Resources | Single-family residential neighborhoods with landscaping |
| | **Overall Visual Character** | **Established residential uses** |
| SOURCE: Environmental Planning Associates, 2014 | | |

These four viewpoints are representative of available views in the project vicinity and are shown in further evaluated in the Impact discussion.

### Viewer Groups

Viewer groups are groups of people that would see the project. Viewer groups for the project include motorists and rail passengers, employees and customers of the commercial and office/light industrial uses along Winnetka Avenue and Prairie Street. Residents are located about one block north of the project site. Residents are generally more sensitive to changes, than motorists, employees or visitors.

## REGULATORY SETTING

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes that it is the policy of the state to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state "with…enjoyment of *aesthetic*, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities" (California Public Resources Code Section 21001[b]). The City of Los Angeles has also adopted policies and regulations that regulate development to ensure that public views and aesthetics are considered for all discretionary actions. These are contained in various documents including the General Plan, City of Los Angeles CEQA Threshold Guidelines, Los Angeles Municipal Code, and various ordinances.

See Section III.F Land Use for further discussion of General Plan policies and applicable land use regulations with respect to visual quality and character.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

*THRESHOLD OF SIGNIFICANCE*

In accordance with Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*, a project is considered to have a significant aesthetic impact if it would result in the following:

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

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* provides more specific guidance to determine, not just the potential for significance, but to establish thresholds by which a potential aesthetic impact can be measured. By way of background, the *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* observes that aesthetic impact assessment generally deals with the issue of visual contrast occurring among the components of form, line, color and texture, or the degree to which elements of the environment differ visually. The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* further notes that adverse visual effects can include the loss of natural features or areas, the removal of urban features with aesthetic value, or the introduction of contrasting urban features into natural areas or urban settings.

The following is noted in the *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide*:[1]

> "There is an extraordinary range of aesthetic characteristics and contrasts with the City of Los Angeles, including suburban neighborhoods, dense urban areas, and hillside residential areas. Given the size and diversity of the city, there are no aesthetic standards that apply to all areas… General aesthetic requirements that apply to individual zoning districts or types of land uses are provided in the Municipal Code [and in applicable community and specific plans]…While certain screening and significance thresholds can be identified for this issue, a degree of discretionary judgment may be required to determine the 'value' of the aesthetic resource or potential project impacts."

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* recognizes the subjectivity brought to such an analysis and states that a determination of significance is to be made on a case-by-case basis based on the following considerations:[2]

[1] City of Los Angeles, L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide, May 1998.
[2] Ibid.

**Aesthetics/Visual Quality**

- The amount or relative proportion of existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area, which would be removed, altered, or demolished;
- The amount of natural open space to be graded or developed;
- The degree to which proposed structures in natural open space areas would be effectively integrated into the aesthetics of the site, through appropriate design, etc;
- The degree of contrast between proposed features and existing features that represent the area's valued aesthetic image;
- The degree to which a project would contribute to the area's aesthetic value; and
- Applicable guidelines and regulations.

Based on these factors, the proposed project would have a significant impact if it were to have the potential to substantially alter, degrade, or eliminate the existing visual character of an area, including valued existing features or resources; or if a project were to introduce elements that substantially detract from the visual character of an area.

**Public Views**

- The nature and quality of recognized or valued views (such as natural topography, settings, manmade or natural features of visual interest, and resources such as mountains or the ocean);
- Whether a project affects views from a designated scenic highway, corridor, or parkway;
- The extent of obstruction (e.g., total blockage, partial interruption, or minor diminishment); and
- The extent to which a project affects recognized views available from a length of a public roadway, bike path, or trail as opposed to a single, fixed vantage point.

Based on these factors, the proposed project would have a potentially significant impact with respect to public views if anticipated development substantially obstructed an existing recognized or valued view.

**Light/Glare**

- The change in ambient nighttime levels as a result of project sources; and
- The extent to which project lighting would spill off the project site and affect adjacent light-sensitive areas.

Based on these criteria, the proposed project would have a significant impact on light aesthetics if lighting substantially altered the character of off-site areas surrounding the project site.

**Shading**

The *City of Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds Guide* states that a Proposed Project would have a significant shading impact if: shadow sensitive uses would be shaded by project-related structures for more than three hours between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM Pacific Standard Time (between early November and early March), or more than four hours between the hours of 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM Pacific Daylight Time (between early March and early November). The *City of Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds* above are used in the following analysis.

*PROJECT IMPACTS*

The existing former LA Times printing facility (255,815 square feet) would be adaptively reused as the MGA Corporate Headquarters. It would include corporate and creative office space. The height of the building (64 feet) would not change although solar panels are being contemplated for the rooftop.

Four new residential structures would be located north, west and south of the MGA headquarters building along the railroad tracks, Winnetka Boulevard and Prairie Street. The four residential buildings (Buildings A through D) would include a total of 700 rental units. Parking would be integrated into the new buildings, with parking generally being wrapped by residential use. Except along the southern boundary of the site, the parking structure would be visible from the railroad tracks.

**Figure III.A-5** shows the viewpoint locations. **Figures III.A-6** through **III.A-13** provide photographs from viewpoints and visual simulations from similar viewpoints. **Table III.A-2** shows the proposed heights and stories of the new on-site buildings.

**TABLE III.A-2**
**PROPOSED NEW BUILDINGS HEIGHTS**

| Building | Number of Residential Units | Square Footage | Height (feet) | Stories |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A[1] | 189 | 245,000 | 65 | 5 |
| B[2] | 124 | 182,000 | 75 | 7 |
| C[3] | 209 | 286,600 | 85 | 7 |
| D | 178 | 240,000 | 75 | 7 |

Notes:
[1] A four story parking structure would be located along southern portion of Building A.
[2] An outdoor campus amphitheater would be located east of Building B (north of Building A)
[3] Structure would include 14,000 square feet of retail/restaurant at Winnetka Avenue/Prairie Street also parking in the middle center of the structure.
SOURCE: Killefer Flamang Architects

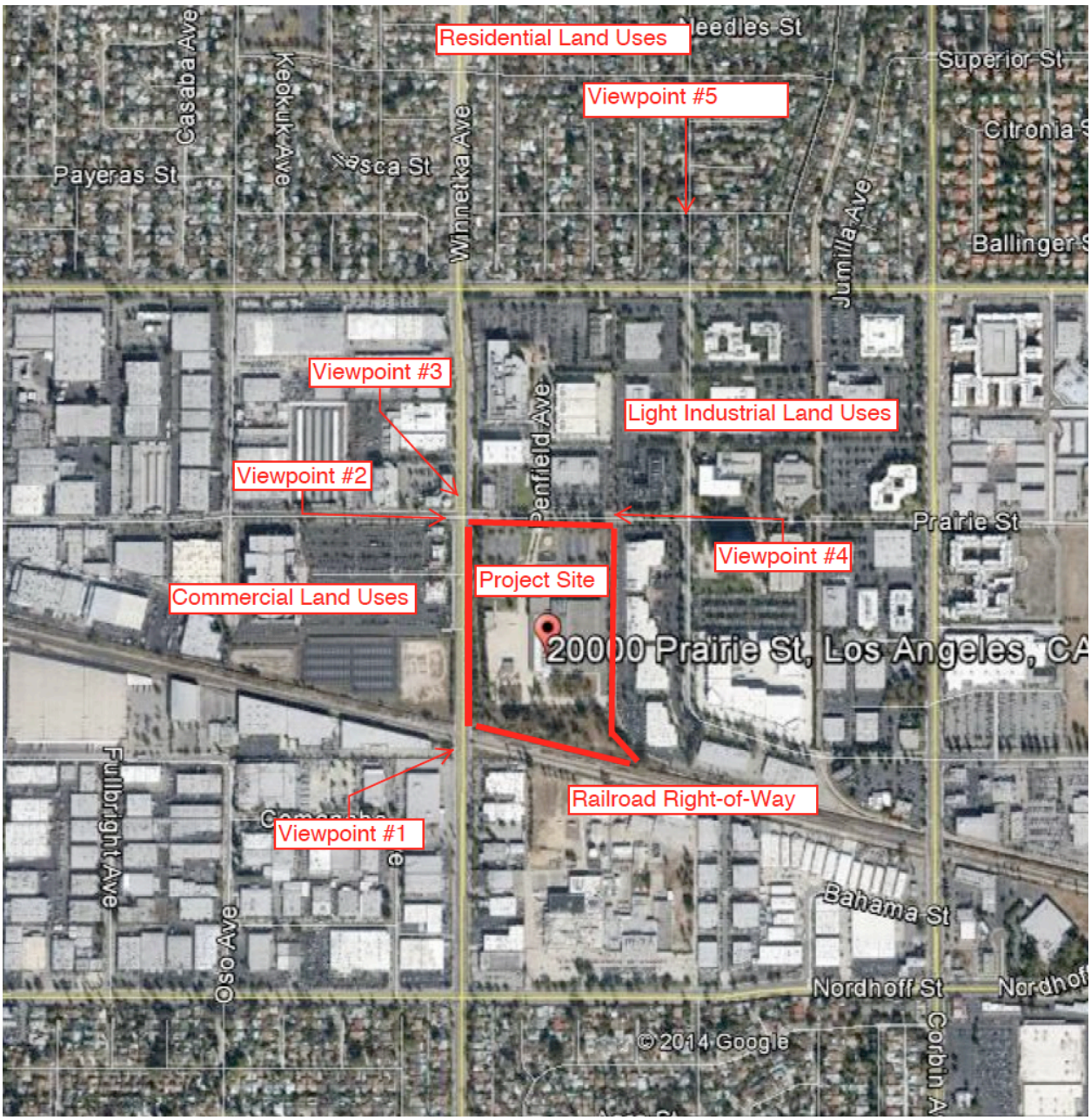


**Figure III.A-5:**
Key Viewpoints

The proposed project would include a Zone Change from MR2-1 (Restricted Light Industrial Zone) and P-1 (Automobile Parking Zone) to a Commercial Manufacturing (CM-1) designation to allow a mix of uses including light industrial, residential, and neighborhood serving retail and restaurant. Development of the project would result in greater densification of the project site, with nearly a million square feet of added residential area and structured parking for 1,467 cars.

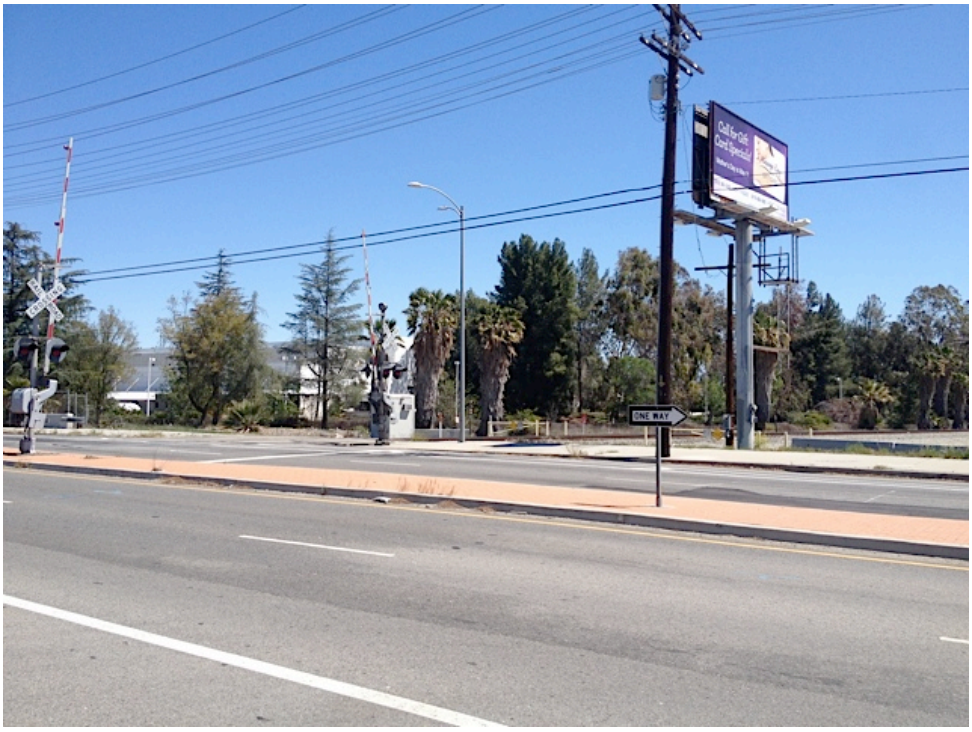


**Figure III.A-6:**
Existing Conditions Viewpoint # 1 - View Northeast across Winnetka Avenue and the Railroad Tracks (View of the Southwest Corner of the Project Site)


**Figure III.A-7:**
Visual Simulation 1 -- View North along Winnetka Avenue (View of the Southwest Corner of the Project)

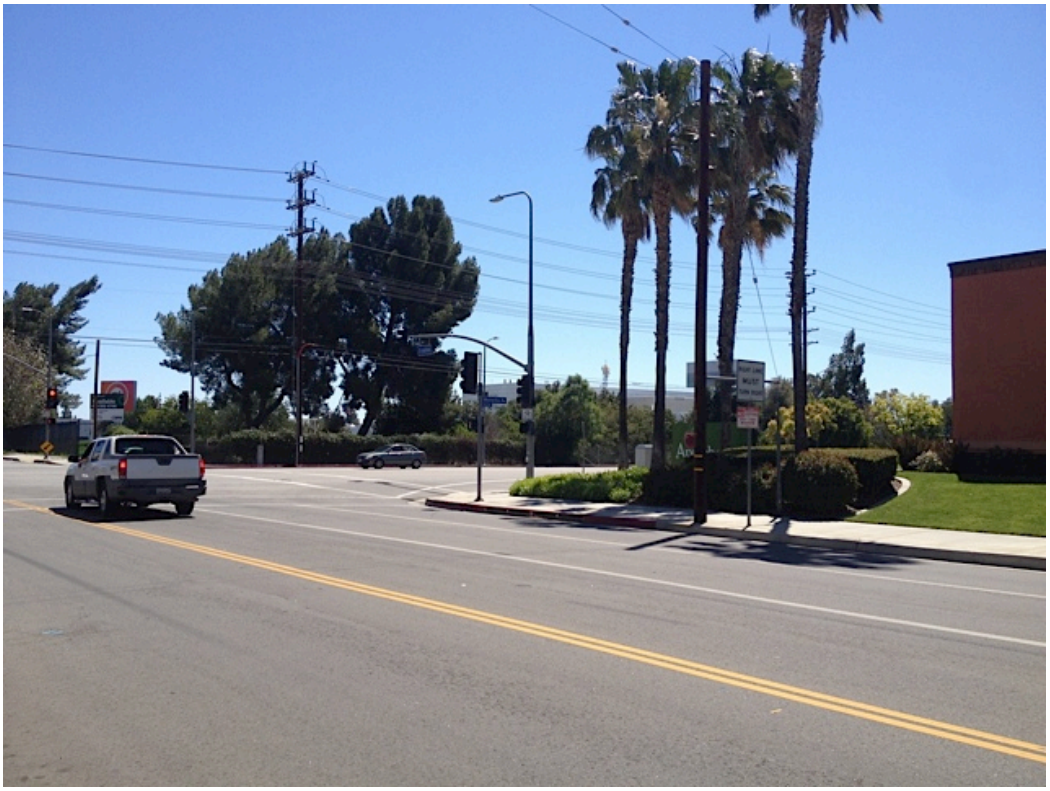

**Figure III.A-8:**
Existing Conditions Viewpoint # 2 - View looking East along Prairie Street (View of the Northwest Corner of the Project Site)

**Figure III.A-9:**
Visual Simulation 2 -- View looking East along Prairie Street (View of the Northwest Corner of the Project)

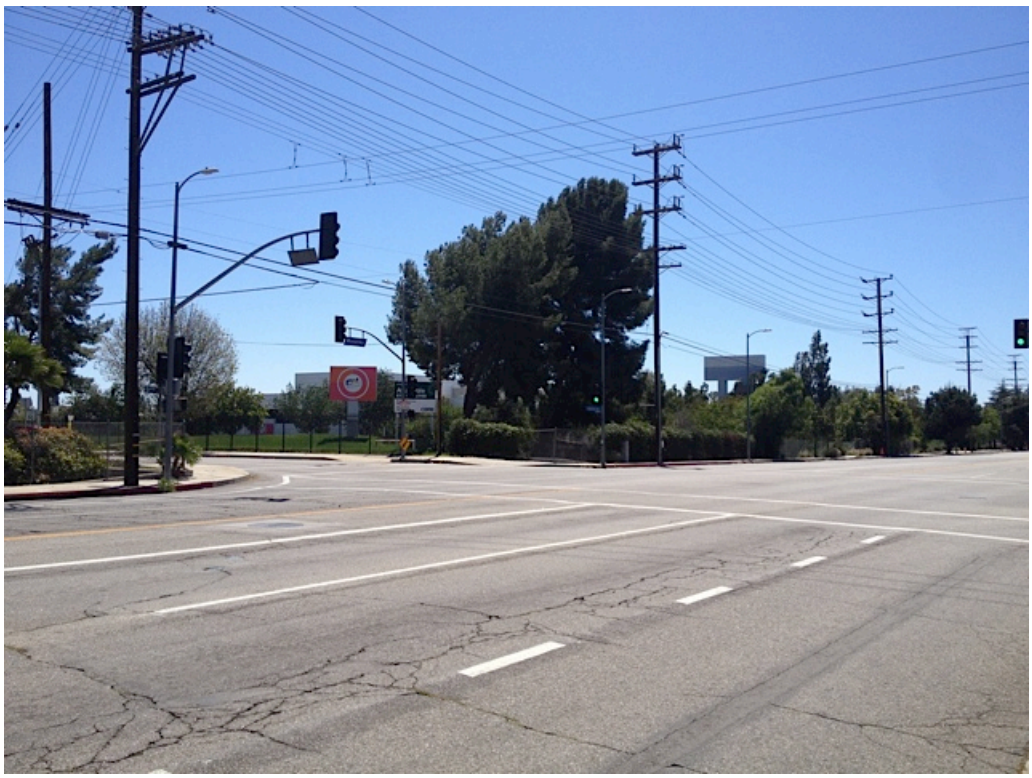

**Figure III.A-10:**
Existing Conditions Viewpoint # 3 - View looking South along Winnetka Avenue (View of the Northwest Corner of the Project Site)

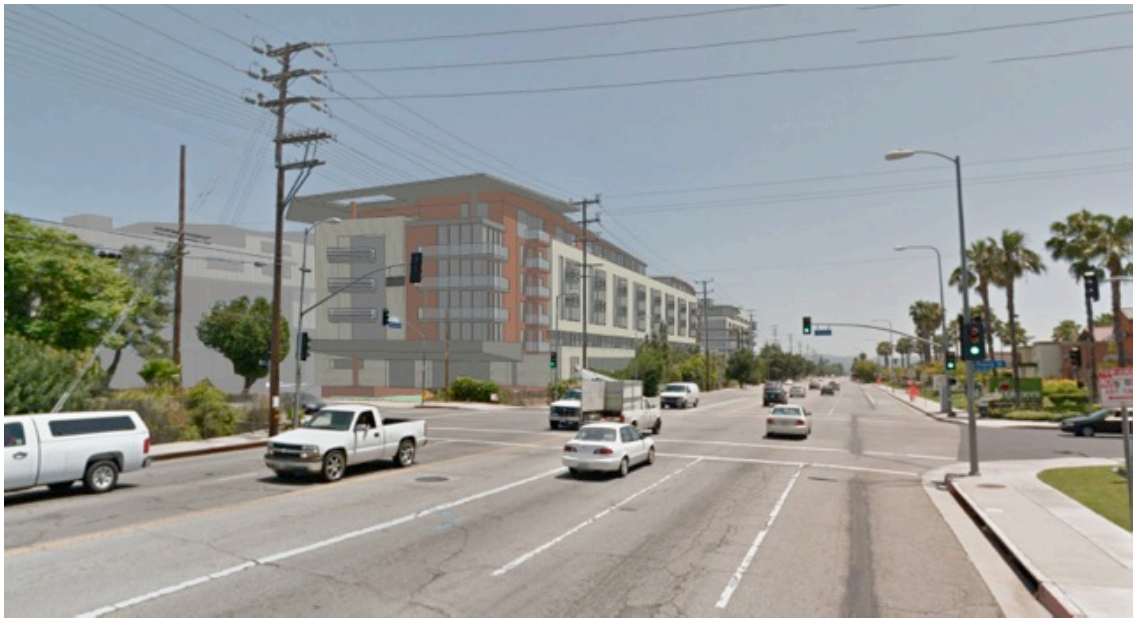

**Figure III.A-11:**
Visual Simulation 3 – View looking South along Winnetka Avenue (View of the Northwest corner of the Project)

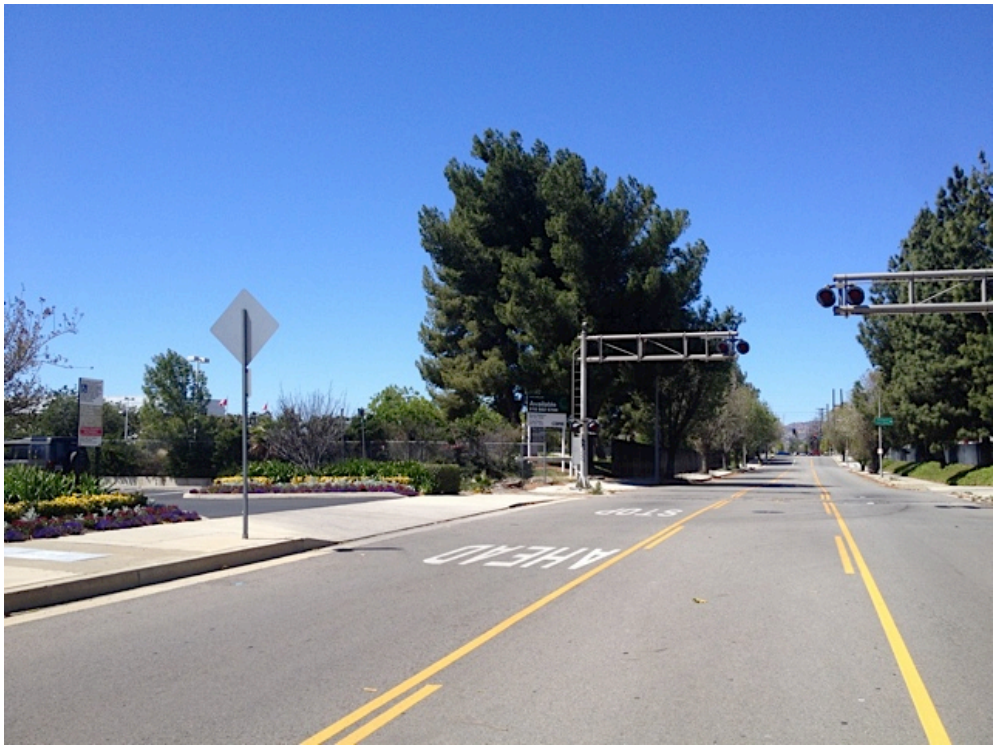


**Figure III.A-12:**
Existing Conditions Viewpoint # 4 - View looking West along Prairie Street (View of the Northern Project Site Boundary)

**Figure III.A-13:**
Visual Simulation 4 -- View looking West along Prairie Street (View of the Northern Boundary of the Project)

**Visual Quality for Viewpoints**

Viewpoint # 1 – View Looking North along Winnetka Avenue from Southern Pacific Railroad Right-of-Way

The existing view from this viewpoint (see **Figure III.A-6**) is limited to pedestrians and motorists traveling along Winnetka Avenue and some employees from the adjacent light industrial businesses located to the south. The existing landscaping largely blocks views into the project site with only brief glimpses of the one-story building and surface parking lot available to viewers. The proposed project (see **Figure III.A-7**) would introduce larger (5 to 7-story buildings) and more prominent visual features associated with Buildings A and B. The ground and possibly first floor of these buildings would be partially screened by the existing and proposed landscaping. The buildings would be prominently visible to motorists and employees in the surrounding buildings. Building colors, textures, and materials would be similar to those found within the adjacent light industrial and commercial land uses. Building massing would be more substantial than adjacent development and would be closer to the roadways.

Viewpoint # 2 – View Looking East along Prairie Street

The existing views (see **Figure III.A-8**) are limited to pedestrians and motorists (traveling along Prairie Street), employees and patrons of the commercial and retail uses located within the adjacent shopping center, as well as adjacent office and industrial buildings. The existing landscaping and the building setback from the roadway currently provide only brief views of the existing on-site structure to these viewers. Buildings C and D (see **Figure III.A-9**) would be 7-stories in height. These new buildings would be prominently visible to motorists, employees and patrons of the nearby shopping center and office and industrial buildings. The scale and massing of Buildings C and would be more substantial than the adjacent one- to two story commercial and light industrial buildings. Colors, textures and materials would be similar to those used by the adjacent uses.

Viewpoint #3 – View Looking South along Winnetka Avenue

The existing view (see **Figure III.A-10**) from this viewpoint is limited to pedestrians and motorists traveling along Winnetka Avenue and employees and patrons of the adjacent light industrial and commercial areas. Existing landscaping and building setbacks limit views of the project site with only intermittent and brief views available. Buildings C and D (see **Figure III.A-11**) would be located on the east side of Winnetka Avenue and would be 7-stories in height. The ground and first floors of the new buildings would be partially screened from viewers travelling along Winnetka Avenue by existing and proposed landscaping. Employees and patrons of the shopping center across Winnetka and office buildings would have prominent views of the new structures. The scale and massing of the new buildings would be more substantial than the adjacent one- and two story commercial and office buildings. Colors, textures, and materials would be similar to those used by the adjacent uses.

Viewpoint #4 – View Looking West along Prairie Avenue

The existing view (see **Figure III.A-12**) from this viewpoint is limited to pedestrians and motorists travelling along Prairie Street and employees of the adjacent light industrial uses. The existing landscaping and building setback limit views of the existing structure. Building D (see **Figure III.A-13**) would be 7 stories in height. The ground and first floor of the new structures

would be partially screened by landscaping from viewers travelling along Prairie Street and from employees of the adjacent light industrial uses by existing and proposed landscaping. Although the majority of buildings in this viewpoint area are one- to two story, there is a 7-story building located at Oakdale Avenue and Prairie Street, which is similar in massing and scale to the proposed residential buildings. The presence of this building would assist in reducing the contrast in scale and massing of project buildings. The colors, textures, and materials of on-site buildings would also be similar to those used by the adjacent uses.

Viewpoint #5 – View Looking South along Oakdale Avenue towards Plummer Street

The closest single-family residential neighborhood does not have views of the project site (see **Figure III.A-14** due to its location (over one-quarter mile to the north) and intervening roadways and buildings. Buildings A, B, C, and D would not be visible to residents or motorists from this location.

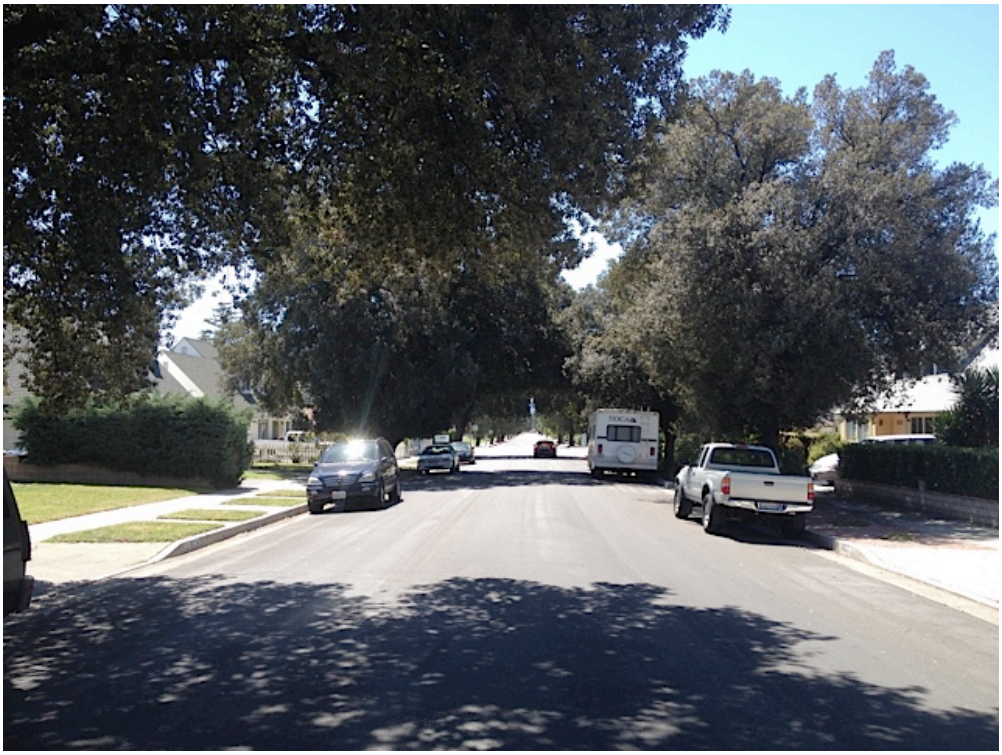

**Figure III.A-14:**
Existing and Future Conditions Viewpoint 5 – Residential View -- View Looking South along Oakdale Avenue towards Plummer Street

Conclusion -- Views

The proposed project would not grade or remove open space or natural lands and would not introduce contrasting built features. The project site is in an urbanized area of the San Fernando Valley. As discussed above, valued views (i.e., of the mountains) are available along area roadways; these views would remain. The project site is located immediately to the east of Winnetka Avenue which provides the prominent north/south view of the mountains to the north and south. Views of these mountains by motorists and area residents would not be obstructed

by the proposed project since the site is east of the roadway and on-site landscaping presently screens the site and views across the site.

The proposed new structures would contrast with most of the surrounding development in terms of height and bulk, however, the change in views of the site would not substantially degrade visual quality. Residential views would not be affected and no view corridors would be impacted. Therefore, the project would have a less than significant impact on views.

**Visual Character**

All development would occur within the existing 23.6-acre project site, which is already urbanized although vacant and somewhat dilapidated. There are no existing features that would be removed that contribute to the valued aesthetic character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area. The proposed project would contrast in terms of massing and scale with surrounding development. However, the proposed structures would provide visual interest and ample landscaping to enhance visual character. The proposed project would comply with all applicable building design regulations, including setbacks, density, and signage.

The majority of buildings within the immediate area consist of one to seven-story commercial and light industrial structures. The proposed project would include the construction of four buildings ranging in height from five to seven stories. Although the proposed buildings would be taller and larger in scale and massing than most of the surrounding structures, they would not be incompatible with the adjacent commercial uses because the project would provide visual interest and high-quality development to the predominantly light industrial and commercial area. Due to the wide surrounding streets, the proposed structures would contrast with but not dominate the adjacent lower-density visual environment. In addition, the project would provide a campus environment that would include complementary uses and visual amenities including on-site open space and landscaping. A similar structure (7-stories) of simple blocky massing, is located within one block (650 feet) to the east and includes the Chase building on Prairie Street and Oakdale Avenue.

Based upon the analysis provided above, the proposed project would result in less than significant impacts related to visual character and therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

**Shadows**

The proposed project includes the construction of four buildings that would range in height from 65 to 85 feet (5 to 7 stories). While these structures would create shadows, there are no sensitive uses in the immediate area that would be potentially affected and as such, no further analysis is required.

Based upon the analysis provided above, the proposed project would result in less than significant impacts related to shadows and therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

**Nighttime Illumination and Glare**

Nighttime lighting would be provided for both decorative and safety purposes and would be installed to ensure that spillover light would not significantly impact off-site uses. There are no light sensitive uses located adjacent to the proposed project. Rather, neighboring uses are largely commercial and light industrial, such as the shopping center across Winnetka Boulevard

and the light industrial uses immediately east and south of the project site. Glare impacts are not anticipated since the proposed project would be required to comply with applicable ordinances related to low-reflective glass and parking would be provided in structures, not on surface lots. Solar panels on the roof of the MGA Headquarters building would not be visible from street level and would therefore not result in glare impacts to the surrounding area. Building materials would generally be of low reflectivity including muted colors and glass of low reflectivity.

Based upon the analysis provided above, the proposed project would result in less than significant impacts related to nighttime illumination and glare and therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

**REGULATORY COMPLIANCE MEASURE**

There are no regulatory compliance measures.

**MITIGATION MEASURES**

No mitigation measures are required.

**LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION**

No mitigation measures related to aesthetics are required; impacts would be less than significant.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The San Fernando Valley is highly urbanized and views are limited to urbanized settings due to lack of topographic variation. As noted previously, views of distant mountains are limited to area roadways, railroad rights-of-way, or open space areas (parks). The related projects within the study area reflect infill or repurposing of sites (similar to the proposed project) that are currently light industrial, retail and commercial to multi-family residential or increased densification of retail uses. Similar to the proposed project, related projects are located within areas that have no existing views of scenic resources. Similar to the project, the scale and massing is anticipated to contrast with adjacent land uses but to result in visual interest, new landscaping and other features that would enhance the visual character of the area. New buildings are subject to City of Los Angeles administrative review including zoning and general plan consistency requirements. Buildings over 50,000 square feet are subject to discretionary review including consideration of aesthetic impacts. Therefore, the project would not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant aesthetic impact.