
4.1 - Aesthetics, Light, and Glare

4.1.1 - Introduction

This section describes the existing aesthetics, light, and glare and potential effects from project implementation on the site and its surrounding area. Descriptions and analysis in this section are based on site reconnaissance performed by MBA and project renderings and conceptual design details prepared for the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks.

As explained in Section 1, Introduction, this DEIR, where applicable, incorporates by reference information and analysis contained in the City of Los Angeles General Plan EIR and related General Plan guidelines (i.e., General Plan Framework adopted August of 2001). The park is also within the Westlake Community Plan area adopted by the City Council in February of 1991.

4.1.2 - Environmental Setting

Visual Setting

The project vicinity is comprised of a mixture of urban commercial and residential uses. The park itself provides tremendous visual relief for this portion of the Westlake area, with extensive areas of landscaping, turf areas, the lake and surrounding areas, rolling terrain with mature trees and shrubs, a mixture of historic and more modern buildings, and hundreds of stately palm trees distributed throughout the park grounds. Existing views of the park and surrounding areas are provided in the previous Exhibits 3.4a through 3.4g in Section 3, Project Description.

Views

Views are described in terms of what can be seen from the project site (i.e., the park), as well as from locations from which the site can be seen. Views from the project site are very important, and in a way represent a significant community resource. The project will involve various improvements to the existing park that may be visible from nearby residences, businesses, public places, and to park users within the park itself. Exhibits 3-5 and 3-6 in Section 3, Project Description, show various views of the proposed park improvements. The park is visible from taller buildings to the east, including buildings above 10 stories in the downtown area, if their views are not blocked by intervening buildings.

Light and Glare

The neighborhoods surrounding the park contain intensive urban commercial and residential uses. The buildings fronting the perimeter streets around the park have glass windows that can produce glare, and lighting for security that also contributes to glare at night. The perimeter roads and Wilshire Boulevard have street lights that allow for vehicular and pedestrian movement in and around the park area. In general, night-time light levels in the area are relatively high given its urban setting and grid system of lighted roads. Light levels within the park are considerably lower than surrounding areas due to large areas of turf and landscaping that are not lighted to urban levels.

4.1.3 - Methodology

The visual character of the areas associated with the Proposed Project were evaluated through field surveys, review of photographs, and review of historical development patterns. The Proposed Project involves improvements to various facilities in different areas of the park. All of these improvements were evaluated relative to any pertinent design goals and policies contained in regulatory documents. The assessment of potential light and glare impacts is based on a field survey of existing conditions at and around the Proposed Project site. The proposed land uses and lighting sources were then evaluated to determine the potential for substantial changes in the amount of light and glare generated by the Proposed Project.

Regulatory Framework

Federal/State

The Proposed Project is not subject to any federal or state regulations or guidelines regarding park facilities with the exception of designated historical structures, which fall under the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). However, the City of Los Angeles became a Certified Local Government under the National Historic Preservation Act in April of 2007, so its local historic preservation processes would take precedence for most improvement projects such as the Proposed Project. This would apply to the Signal Building, which is a designated historic building.

Local

City of Los Angeles Plans and Codes

The Proposed Project is within the Westlake Community Plan area of the City, which is under the City's General Plan (GP) Framework. The Community Plan was last adopted by the City in February of 1991, while the GP Framework was last adopted in August of 2001.

The Proposed Project is also subject to applicable regulations in the City of Los Angeles Zoning Code, which is Chapter 1 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC or Code). While the Code does have regulations that pertain to building lighting, it does not regulate ambient night lighting such as that from lighted sports fields.

Lighting guidelines from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) suggest that lighting be directed away from streets and residences, requires exterior light sources to be designed, located and arranged so as to reflect the light away from any adjacent streets and residences, and limits the amount of exterior light intensity or glare to 0.5 foot candles per square foot at any exterior property line (IDA website, www.darksky.org, 2007).

Redevelopment

One central component of the City's redevelopment plans is to reduce blight and create an attractive and pleasant environment. As such, the Redevelopment Plans typically include policies related to design. The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA) is authorized to establish development and design controls for development within the project area, including design

criteria, signage, and traffic circulation and access. Projects within Redevelopment Plan boundaries should give consideration to good design, open space, and other amenities to enhance the aesthetic quality. The CRA reviews and approves architectural, landscape and site plans for projects within Redevelopment Plan areas to determine conformance with the design guidelines.

4.1.4 - Methodology

MBA personnel conducted site reconnaissance, reviewed aerial and site photographs, and referenced the applicable planning documents for the project site. MBA personnel photographed the project site from multiple short-range and long-range viewpoints. Photographs include views of and from the project site. MBA has used the above information in applying the threshold criteria cited below. The impacts and mitigation measures are also provided below.

4.1.5 - Thresholds of Significance

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* addresses impact to Aesthetics under Section A.1. The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* (page A.1-3) states that a project would normally have a significant aesthetic impact if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway; and
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

As set forth in the *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide*, the determination of significance shall be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- The amount of 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 developed;
- 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 contact between proposed features and existing features that represent the area's valued aesthetic image;
- The degree to which a proposed zone change would result in buildings that would detract from the existing style or image of the area due to density, height, bulk, setbacks, signage, or other physical elements;
- The degree to which the project would contribute to the area's aesthetic value; and
- Applicable guidelines and regulations.

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* addresses impact to Nighttime Illumination under Section A.4 and page A.4-1 states that a project would normally have a significant Nighttime Illumination impact if it would:

- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

As set forth in the *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide*, the determination of significance shall be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

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

4.1.6 - Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section discusses potential impacts associated with the development of the project and provides mitigation measures where appropriate.

Scenic Vistas

Impact AES-1: The Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

Impact Analysis

MacArthur Park, Wilshire Boulevard, and the surrounding areas are not officially designated as scenic resources or vistas in the General Plan or Westlake Community Plan. Therefore, the Proposed Project's impacts on scenic vistas would be less than significant. For additional analysis of impacts of the park project relative to scenic resources, see AES-2 below.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Scenic Resources

Impact AES-2: The project would not substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

Impact Analysis

Summary of Impacts

MacArthur Park does provide significant aesthetic views both within and around the park boundaries, including buildings that front on the perimeter roads and taller buildings further away from the park.

In addition, travelers on the perimeter roadways and this portion of Wilshire Boulevard are provided with substantial views when they are adjacent to the park. The following analysis addresses each of the various planned improvements.

Soccer Field. Reconstruction of the soccer field will involve fine grading and the installation of artificial turf and related improvements (e.g., drainage). The existing field is located northeast of Wilshire Boulevard between Wilshire and 6th Street. The field is currently a mixture of dirt and ragged turf which becomes unsafe and/or unplayable during and after rainstorms. After construction is complete, views of this area would change slightly as a green field resembling natural turf would replace the largely dirt field. Views would be similar after rainstorms as the new field would not be subject to mud or erosion. The color of the field is expected to be similar but not identical to natural turf. As it wears, the color and appearance may soften, and areas of high wear (i.e., in front of the soccer goals) may discolor somewhat. At a distance, these changes will not be readily visible, especially due to the large number of tall trees, bushes, and other landscaping present within the park.

City staff did discuss at length whether this field should have natural or artificial turf. While natural turf would have a more natural appearance, the City ultimately decided to install the artificial turf to allow expanded (i.e., year-round and nighttime) use, especially after periods of rain, and improved longevity of the playing surface and surrounding areas. For these reasons, construction of the soccer field with artificial turf would create **less than significant** visual impacts.

Field and Security Lighting. The City proposes to install up to six (6) light poles with a maximum height of 40 feet. The poles will be at approximately the same height as many of the older palm trees in the surrounding parkland. The City also proposes to install eight (8) security light poles with a maximum height of 30 feet. If these poles and lighting fixtures were to be constructed of grey aluminum or steel, they could produce **potentially significant** visual impacts. Impacts specifically related to night time lighting are addressed in AES-4.

Landscaping and Hardscape Areas. MacArthur Park is a horticultural park designated by the City in 1972 as Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument #100. Some of the existing landscaping will need to be relocated or removed, mainly to allow for reconstruction of the soccer field area. These improvements may include the installation of new landscaping depending on the size and health of the various planting materials that currently surround the field. This work also includes the reconstruction of cracked or damaged walkways and the installation of new walkways, curbs, fencing, lighting, posts, edge treatments, etc. to support reconstruction of the soccer field and improve overall security for the park. Due to its classification as a horticultural park, removal of older, established landscaping could have **potentially significant** impacts on visual resources.

Children's Play Area. The project involves the construction of a new children's play area located northwest of the soccer field. Related improvements include construction of new or improved walkways for pedestrian and stroller access, plus the addition of benches adjacent to the play area for

parents to sit and enjoy watching their children play. These improvements will be at a very low scale, typically less than 6 feet high, except for some of the taller equipment within the play area. The scale and type of equipment and related facilities will be similar to that of the existing children's play areas within the park. Since the equipment will have no garish night lighting or excessively bright paint colors, visual impacts are expected to be **less than significant** from construction of this play area.

Signal Building. This historic building was constructed in 1924 and is in need of physical, mechanical, and electrical upgrades due to age and wear of the building over the years. It is the oldest structure in the park. Improvements to this building could conflict with architectural and/or historical design of the building (e.g., Mediterranean style roof, walls, etc.). Since this is an historic structure, major visual changes to it would be considered a **potentially significant** aesthetic impact as well as an historic impact (see also Section 4.4, Cultural Resources).

Boathouse. The boat house is on the east side of the lake just south of Wilshire Boulevard. The current facility was constructed in 1973 and is in need of extensive physical, mechanical, and electrical upgrades due improve its functionality and keep it in a safe condition. The boathouse is not considered an historic structure because it is only 34 years old; however, the "concept" of a boathouse has been present at the lake since 1890 so the planned improvements to the boathouse could be considered **potentially significant** if they were inconsistent with the historic appearance of the boathouse structure.

NOTE: The planned improvements to the park under this proposed project do not include the historic Band Shell Building. Proposed improvements to the band shell were already examined in a Negative Declaration that was approved by the City in January 2007. However, this EIR will examine the cumulative impacts of those planned improvements as well. The improvements to the band shell are consistent with and will maintain its original appearance (City MND page 3, 2007). Therefore, the MacArthur Park Improvements Project will not have a significant cumulative impact in this regard (i.e., relative to the band shell improvements).

Summary. The Proposed Project has the potential to create significant visual impacts if the improvements are incompatible with the appearance of historic structures or landscaping within the park site. Therefore, mitigation is recommended.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

MM AES-2a Prior to construction of new facilities, City park staff shall coordinate the design of the improvements to the Signal Building with City Cultural Heritage Commission to comply with the Department of the Interior's guidelines for historic buildings, including any additional square footage, exterior improvements, etc.

- MM AES-2b** Prior to construction of new facilities, City park staff shall coordinate the design of the improvements to the Boathouse Building with City Cultural Heritage Commission to be generally consistent with the Department of the Interior's guidelines for historic buildings, as appropriate, including any additional square footage, exterior improvements, etc.
- MM AES-2c** Prior to removal of any mature landscaping (i.e., plants over 10 feet tall or more than 20 years of age), City park staff will identify specific plants or planted areas to be removed or reconstructed as part of this project. City park staff shall coordinate the removal or relocation of mature landscaping with City Office of Historic Resources (OHR) staff prior to the start of construction. The goal of this measure is to minimize the removal of historic landscaping in the park, to relocate rather than replace, to the extent practical. This measure shall be implemented to the satisfaction of the City Parks Director in consultation with the City OHR Director and their staffs. Where practical, the historical landscaping preservation guidelines of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) shall be applied to this project.
- MM AES-2d** New field lighting poles and fixtures installed around the soccer field shall be painted forest green or equivalent to minimize visual intrusion of views toward the field.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Visual Character

Impact AES-3: **Development of the Proposed Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.**

Impact Analysis

As outlined in AES-2, the Proposed Project does have the potential to affect existing visual character of the park and views from surrounding properties and areas. These changes could have significant impacts on the visual character or quality of the site and the surrounding area if the planned improvements are out of scale or grossly inconsistent with the existing views or improvements. Similar to AES-2, this impact is considered potentially significant given the historic importance of this visual resource to the City.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

AES-2a through AES-2d also apply to this potential impact.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Light and Glare

Impact AES-4: The Proposed Project would create new sources of substantial light or glare that may adversely affect day or nighttime views.

Impact Analysis

The Proposed Project would install six (6) new poles with state-of-the-art lighting fixtures with a maximum height of 40 feet. In addition, the Project involves the addition of eight (8) new security lighting fixtures with a maximum pole height of 30 feet. Preliminary photometric data indicates these fixtures will produce light levels well within the City's guidelines to prevent glare and obtrusive lighting impacts away from the park site. The lighting around the soccer field as well as additional security lighting along walkways and buildings for security and safe access to and from the park at night-time. The following evaluates potential light and glare impacts separately.

Light

The new lights for the soccer field would increase the overall ambient light levels around the park, especially along Wilshire Boulevard and Sixth Street adjacent to the park when the field lights were in operation. However, state of the art lighting fixtures can be effectively "tuned" to reduce spillover of light beyond the playfield surface. Lighting associated with the soccer field would be of relatively short duration in early nighttime hours and seasonal in use. The City parks department has indicated that the lights on this field are expected to be used 4 hours and a maximum of 185 days per year (P. Davis, personal communication, December 2007). The City currently expects the lighting plan to include six poles with a maximum height of 40 feet, however, the exact layout of the lighting system has not been finalized. In addition, eight security lighting fixtures on poles approximately 30 feet in height will also be installed to improve visibility and security at night within the park. To err on the side of caution, the visual impact of this new lighting is considered **potentially significant** and should be mitigated.

Glare

Glare can come from two sources, the first is reflection of the sun off of new windows or other reflective surfaces, or automobile windows in parking lots during the day. The Proposed Project may result in the installation of new windows, but the Signal Building and Boathouse Building are generally shielded from views from surrounding properties by the extensive amount of landscaping on the park site. The only direct views of these facilities at the appropriate time of day (i.e., when glare could be created) would be from the boathouse toward second story uses along South Park View Street in the late afternoon, including reflections off of the lake. It is unlikely any changes to the Signal Building would create any glare because views to the west are blocked by extensive tall landscaping. In addition, the sun would not create glare to the east across West Sixth Street because the sun would not fall directly on windows on the east or north sides of the building in this location. However, to err on the side of caution, this impact could be considered to be **potentially significant** unless mitigated by design limitations.

The other source is direct view of stadium-type lighting such as that proposed for the soccer field – these are referred to as lighting “hot spots.” The park site has extensive landscaping that will help screen potential views of the field lights away from the soccer field area. However, the exact layout of the lighting system has not been finalized. To err on the side of caution, this impact is considered **potentially significant** and should be mitigated.

Summary of Impacts

The addition of lighting to the soccer field, and other improvements to buildings on the site, has the potential to create significant impacts related to light and glare.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

MM AES-4a Prior to installation of the lighting system, City park staff will work with the selected lighting consultant to adjust the lighting “footprint” to minimize horizontal spillover of light off the park site, and prevent “hot spot” glare on surrounding properties. If hot spot areas are identified by the lighting plan, City park staff will plan the installation of additional trees to help shield or block this glare onto surrounding properties. The plan shall include detailed information regarding lighting levels by the use of photometrics to indicate the maximum, minimum, and average foot-candle lighting level proposed for this project. The plan shall also identify the number and type of light fixtures and pole heights. The lighting plan shall also demonstrate how the lighting system will comply with City lighting standards.

MM AES-4b City park staff shall develop a lighting plan with light fixtures that direct lighting downward lighting with minimal horizontal travel and minimum levels to provide sufficient safety at night. Use of soccer field lighting shall be limited to scheduled events and times and the schedules posted on the City parks website on a regular basis so the public can be aware of planned times of use.

MM AES-4c Prior to construction of the planned improvements to the Signal and Boathouse buildings, City park staff will review the improvement plans to assure there are no metallic or reflective surfaces in exterior locations that could cause significant glare onto offsite properties.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.