4.1 AESTHETICS

This section analyzes impacts of the proposed project related to aesthetics based on a visual assessment conducted as part of the preparation of this EIR, which includes consideration of photo simulations prepared for the City Planning and Community Development Department by McCann Adams Studio. This section also draws from the City of Santa Cruz *General Plan 2030* EIR (SCH#2009032007), which was certified on June 26, 2012, regarding background information on aesthetics and scenic views. The General Plan EIR is available for review at the City of Santa Cruz Planning and Community Development Department (809 Center Street, Room 107, Santa Cruz, California) during business hours: Monday through Thursday, 8 AM to 12 PM and 1 PM to 5 PM. The General Plan EIR is also available online on the City's website at: http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/departments/planning-and-community-development/general-plan-2030.

Public and agency comments related to visual impacts were received during the public scoping period in response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP). Issues raised in these comments include:

- ❒ Concerns were raised regarding potential impacts of the proposed new height standards along Front Street and to public views along the Riverwalk and adjacent public recreational facilities.
- ❒ The CEQA analysis should include a visual resource analysis that includes visual simulations from all appropriate public vantage points, including from both sides of the Riverwalk, the Soquel Avenue and Laurel Street bridges, and San Lorenzo Park.
- ❒ Story poles should be erected along the river levee to assess visual impacts of the heights of new buildings.
- ❒ The EIR should evaluate alternatives to the proposed new height standards that meet most of the project objectives but also reduce potential aesthetic impacts.

To the extent that issues identified in public comments involve potentially significant effects on the environment according to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or are raised by responsible agencies, they are identified and addressed within this EIR. Public comments received during the public scoping period are included in Appendix B.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

Regulatory Setting

There are no known federal regulations regarding aesthetics or project design review. City regulations and permits related to development and design standards are summarized in the following section.

In 2013, Senate Bill 743 was passed that changed CEQA as codified in California Public Resources Code section 21099, which became effective in January 2014. Under this law, projects located

within one-half mile of a major transit stop or facility are considered "transit-oriented development". Pursuant to section 21099(d)(1), aesthetic and parking impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project on an infill site within a transit priority area shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment. Section 21099(d)(2)(A) further indicates that this subdivision does not affect, change, or modify the authority of a lead agency to consider aesthetic impacts pursuant to local design review ordinances or other discretionary powers provided by other laws or policies. This change does not affect the analysis of the proposed Downtown Plan amendments as the aesthetics issue exemption does not apply to plans, but it could apply to future CEQA analyses of specific development projects.

City Regulations and Permits

Zoning Regulations

Chapter 24.12 of the City of Santa Cruz Zoning Code provides community design standards related to site layout, parking, landscaping, fencing and other design features. The Zoning Code (Municipal Code section 24.22.162) defines building height as the vertical distance from average grade to the average midpoint of the highest pitched roof. Section 24.12.150 of the Zoning Code indicates that the height limitations do not apply to roof structures for the housing of elevators, stairways, tanks, ventilating fans, air conditioning, or similar equipment used solely to operate and maintain a building.

The Central Business District (CBD) zone (Municipal Code Chapter 24.10, Part 24) implements the Land Use Plan, Development Standards and Design Guidelines of the Downtown Recovery Plan (DRP). It supports the purpose of the Plan, in the context of the General Plan, which aims to make downtown the urban center of the city, with the many functions a city center serves. This section of the Zoning Code is also part of the Local Coastal Implementation Plan. Section 24.10.2301, Uses, Development Standards and Design Guidelines, also adopts by reference and includes Chapter 4 of the DRP, as amended, in the CBD zone district. This section indicates that the policies and regulations set forth in Chapter 4 of the DRP shall control all uses in the CBD, Central Business District, and its four subdistricts: Pacific Avenue Retail District; Front Street Riverfront Corridor; Cedar Street Village Corridor; and North Pacific Area.

Chapter 4 of the DRP identifies land uses, development standards and design guidelines for each of the four subdistricts. Elements addressed include:

- ❒ Building heights
- ❒ Building massing and stepbacks
- ❒ Building façade guidelines, including window treatments, roofs, building materials, colors and landscaping
- ❒ Storefront guidelines
- ❒ Pedestrian passages and courtyards

Chapter 4 also allows additional height above the 50-foot base feet under certain conditions with a requirement that a detailed visual analysis of the proposed building be prepared to determine the visual impact of the development. See Figure 3-1 in Section 3, Project Description, which shows the existing areas where additional building height may be allowed.

Required Permits

Design Permit. The City's Zoning Code requires a "design permit" for most new construction in the City of Santa Cruz, including new construction of commercial structures and multiple dwellings containing three or more dwelling units. The purpose of the design permit is to promote the public health, safety and general welfare through the review of architectural and site development proposals and through application of recognized principles of design, planning and aesthetics and qualities typifying the Santa Cruz community. Pursuant to the Design Permit requirements (Zoning Code Section 24.08.430), findings must be made that address 17 identified criteria before the City issues a design permit. Chapter 24.12 of the Zoning Code provides "Community Design Standards" that address general site design standards, parking, advertising and signs, underground utilities, historic preservation, and other provisions for specific uses. The criteria to be addressed in findings for a Design Permit include:

1. Consistency with physical development policies of the General Plan and Local Coastal Program (LCP), if located in the coastal zone.
2. Compatible exterior design and appearance with other existing buildings and structures in neighborhoods which have established architectural character worthy of preservation.
3. Respect design principles in terms of maintaining a balance of scale, form and proportion, using design components which are harmonious, and materials and colors which blend with elements of the site plan and surrounding areas.
4. Site planning that takes into account uses other than that of a proposed project.
5. Orientation and location of buildings, structures, open spaces and other features to maintain natural resources including significant trees, maintain a compatible relationship to and preserve solar access of adjacent properties, and minimize alteration of natural land forms.
6. Protection of views along the ocean and of scenic coastal areas, and where appropriate and feasible, restore and enhance visual quality of visually degraded areas.
7. Site layout to minimize the effect of traffic conditions on abutting streets.
8. Encourage alternatives to travel by automobile where appropriate, through the provision of facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit.
9. Provision of open space and landscaping which complement buildings and structures.
10. Reasonably protect against external and internal noise, vibration and other factors which may tend to make the environment less desirable and respect the need for privacy of adjacent residents.
11. Provision of complementary signs.

12. Structural designs to take advantage of natural elements such as solar radiation, wind, and landscaping for heating, cooling and ventilation.
13. Incorporation of water-conservation features and landscaping.
14. Reuse of heat generated by machinery in industrial zones.
15. Design of buildings in industrial zones to make use of natural lighting wherever possible.
16. Solar heating systems for hot tubs and swimming pools.
17. Compatible siting and design along West Cliff Drive streetscape.

Planned Development Permit

The Planned Development Permit (PD) regulations in the Zoning Code (24.08.720) allow a variation in height not to exceed one story or 20 percent of height limit (in feet) above what is allowed in the district in which the project is located, with approval of a Planned Development Permit. Properties must be 20,000+ square feet in size and meet other requirements for the additional height to be considered. Five findings must be made with the approval of a Planned Development Permit related to consistency with the General Plan, LCP, and other regulations; variations that serve public purposes and are coordinated with surrounding development; and provision of amenities. Overall, the amenity level of the development and the amount of open space shall be greater than what would have been permitted by the underlying district regulations.

Study Area

The project area consists of the area covered by the Downtown Recovery Plan and the Central Business District zone, and specifically the lower downtown area generally between Soquel Avenue and Laurel Street on the north and south, and Cedar Street and the San Lorenzo River on the west and east. (Locations are shown on Figures 1-2 and 2-1 in Section 3, Project Description.) The proposed project includes a General Plan amendment to the land use designation text for the downtown portion of the Regional Visitor Commercial land use designation. The study area includes properties adjacent to the western San Lorenzo River levee.

The study area includes the Santa Cruz Metro Transit Center (Pacific Station) that serves areas within the City and County. This transit center qualifies as a major transit stop when evaluating projects for CEQA purposes per SB743, as codified in Public Resources Code 21099, transit priority projects. All of the properties within the defined study area are located within one-half mile or less from the METRO Pacific Station. The proximity of future development to this transit facility has a direct relationship on the applicability of CEQA with respect to evaluating aesthetic impacts for project-level impact analysis. See Section 4.1.2, Impacts and Mitigation Measures, for further discussion.

Regional Setting

The visual character of the City of Santa Cruz is influenced by a blend of natural features, historic neighborhoods and other development. Santa Cruz is strongly characterized by its coastal location along Monterey Bay, which defines the city's entire southern boundary. Open space areas, including those that make up the City's greenbelt, also are significant contributors to Santa Cruz's natural setting. The Santa Cruz Mountains and its foothills on the north provide a backdrop of open space views and offer panoramic views of the City and ocean (City of Santa Cruz, April 2012, DEIR volume). Key natural and open space features include:

- The coastline and beaches,
- The San Lorenzo River and other watercourses, parks and open space, and
- The background view of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

According to the City's General Plan, varied topography shapes the city's character and creates many public views throughout the community, including views of Monterey Bay and the City as a whole. Arroyos and steep coastal cliffs are identified as providing the greatest variation in the City's topography. Other features include pronounced hills—most notably the coastal terraces of the UCSC campus, Pogonip, the Carbonera area, and DeLaveaga Park; smaller hills—such as Beach Hill and Mission Hill—act as community landmarks; and shallow slopes toward Monterey Bay (City of Santa Cruz, June 2012). Ridgelines along Escalona Drive and Grandview Street mark significant changes of elevation.

Open space areas, including those that make up the City's Greenbelt, are significant contributors to Santa Cruz's natural setting and aesthetic quality. Pogonip, DeLaveaga Park, Arana Gulch, Neary Lagoon, Younger Lagoon, Antonelli Pond, Arroyo Seco Canyon, the Moore Creek Preserve, and the Jessie Street Marsh are identified in the General Plan as being important natural features that provide scenic amenities and contribute to the identity of surrounding residential neighborhoods (City of Santa Cruz, June 2012).

Visual Character of the Project Area

The project area is located within downtown Santa Cruz and is located to the west of the San Lorenzo River. The visual character of downtown is defined by existing development, as well as views of and along the San Lorenzo River at some elevated locations, such as bridges and from the Riverwalk. Downtown is characterized by a mix of primarily commercial buildings, some of which have upper floor office and residential units. The area supports a mix of both pre- and post- Loma Prieta earthquake constructed structures with a variety of architectural styles and building heights. Most of the buildings constructed after the earthquake are located north of Cathcart Street.

Rows of deciduous trees line both sides of Pacific Avenue and create a broad canopy along the street except during the winter months. The streetscape has a varied but uniformed appearance

with a mix of buildings. Front Street is characterized by a mix of older buildings south of Soquel Avenue and has few street trees than Pacific Avenue.

The San Lorenzo River is a prominent natural and visual feature in the City and is prominently visible from numerous locations in the downtown, including the Soquel Avenue and Broadway Bridges. From these vantage points views of the river are the predominant visual feature, which is framed by the Santa Cruz Mountains to the north and Beach Hill to the south. Existing development is mostly visible along the west side of the river levee.

The project area subject to changes in building height is located along Pacific Avenue and Front Street generally between Laurel Street on the south and Cathcart Street on the north, with the west side of Front Street up to Soquel Avenue. The area is characterized by a mix of commercial structures with some upper floor office uses. South of Cathcart, residential uses are limited primarily to the building at 1010 Pacific Avenue. Buildings along Front Street are a mix of mostly older buildings of varying architectural styles, sizes and heights. The older buildings along Front Street are generally one story and approximately 16-20 feet in height. Buildings are a mix of two and three stories along Pacific Avenue and generally one story in height along Front Street. There is less street tree landscaping along lower Front Street. Photos of representative views in the project area and downtown are shown on Figure 4.1-1.

The area along Pacific Avenue north of Cathcart is within the Additional Height Zone A as set forth in the existing DRP, as is the property at 1010 Pacific Avenue. Properties in this zone may be allowed additional building heights to 75 feet over the base height of 50 feet in specified conditions. Most of the buildings downtown are approximately 50 feet in height, which is the base building height required by DRP, except for areas along Cedar Street that have a 35-foot height limit. Some existing older buildings in the project area south of Cathcart are one or two stories and less than 50 feet in height. Rooftop mechanical equipment that often extends the base height limits as permitted by the DRP and City regulations. Buildings that exceed 50 feet in height are summarized on Table 4.1-1, some of which are shown on Figure 4.1-2. The tallest building in the project area is located at 1010 Pacific Avenue, which is 66.5 feet in height (76.5 feet to top of elevator structure).

Scenic Views

Within the City of Santa Cruz, prominent scenic views are primarily those that are oriented toward Monterey Bay and the Pacific Ocean or toward the Santa Cruz Mountains that frame the northern boundary of Santa Cruz (City of Santa Cruz, April 2012, DEIR volume). There are no designated scenic highways or roads within the City. The General Plan 2030 defines a scenic highway or scenic route as “a highway, road, drive, or street that, in addition to its transportation function, provides opportunities for the enjoyment of natural and man- made scenic resources and access or direct views to areas or scenes of exceptional beauty or historic or cultural interest.” None of the streets in the project area meet this definition, with the exception of a portion of Beach Street in the beach area.

TABLE 4.1-1: Buildings in Downtown That Exceed 50 Feet in Height

Building	Building Height in Feet
1547 Pacific - Approved	60 feet-5 stories
1375 Pacific, Rittenhouse Building	• 80 feet – Top of Mechanical Equipment/Elevator • ~ 50 feet – Top of Stepback Parapet
110 Cooper Street at Pacific, Cooper House	• 80 feet – Top of Penthouse Roof • ~ 50 feet – Top of Stepback Parapet
1344 Pacific, Hotel Palomar	92 feet
Front Street/Soquel Parking Garage	58.5 – Top of Tower Elevator
1200 Pacific, Redtree Building	64.5 – Building Height
1124 Pacific, Del Mar Theater	Estimated 60 feet with marquee
1101 Pacific, University Town Center	69.5 – Top of Roof
1010 Pacific	• 76.5 – Top of Elevator Penthouse • 66.5 – Top of 6th Floor • 50.0 – Top of Parapet
725 Front St.	~52 feet, plus elevator equipment room

The Santa Cruz downtown is an area characterized by primarily commercial, but also office and some upper floor residential uses. According to maps developed for the City's *General Plan 2030* and included in the General Plan EIR, the project site is not within a mapped scenic panoramic view (City of Santa Cruz, April 2012, DEIR volume-Figure 4.3-1). Urban views, including those of the downtown project area, are identified along the San Lorenzo levee (Ibid.). The existing LCP identifies Beach Hill as part of an urban skyline with "visually distinctive structures" (City of Santa Cruz, 1994-Map CD-3).

The prominent views along the river levee are those of the river corridor, adjacent riparian vegetation where it exists, and distant mountains to the north. To the south, views of some buildings on Beach Hill are available at some locations from the project area. In locations where views of the downtown area are available, the views are dominated by structural development with some landscaping and significant street tree canopy along Pacific Avenue, especially north of Cathcart.

Scenic Resources

The San Lorenzo River is east of a portion of the downtown study area and is a prominent natural and open space feature in the area. The DRP indicates that the river offers potential as an open space, habitat and a recreational amenity and provides opportunities for creation of linkages to the downtown. The DRP recommends creation of a riverfront connection at the terminus of Cathcart Street and the enhancement of that street as a strong pedestrian and visual linkage between Pacific Avenue and the river. Other pedestrian linkages to the river are suggested opposite from the Metro Center in the vicinity of Elm Street, and across from the existing Maple Street alley.

Landmarks are distinctive built and natural features that are highly visible or that help to define the identity of a particular place. In addition, to historical landmarks as discussed in Section 4.3, Cultural Resources, the General Plan 2030 defines "landmark" as a visually prominent or outstanding structure or natural feature that functions as a point of orientation or identification. The City has approximately 35 City-listed historic landmarks and approximately 600 listed historic structures, some of which may also be considered scenic resources depending on the visual prominence and the character of the building (City of Santa Cruz, April 2012, DEIR volume). In downtown, the Civic Center, Town Clock are identified as visual landmarks in the City's General Plan. The Boardwalk and Santa Cruz Wharf are identified as landmarks in the beach area, and none are identified along Ocean Street.

4.1.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); State CEQA Guidelines (including Appendix G); City of Santa Cruz plans, policies and/or guidelines; and agency and professional standards, a project impact would be considered significant if the project would:

1a Eliminate or substantially adversely affect, modify, or obstruct a visually prominent or significant public scenic vista, public viewing area, or public view corridor, including views of the ocean, to and along the shoreline, and panoramic background mountain views;

1b Eliminate or substantially adversely affect significant scenic resources along a scenic highway or designated scenic roadway, including, but not limited to, visually prominent trees, rock outcrops, or historic buildings, or visually prominent trees or historic-landmark buildings in other locations within the City;

1c Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the surrounding area--i.e., be incompatible with the scale of the surrounding area or substantially detract from the aesthetic character of the neighborhood; or

1d Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views or activities in the area, or pose a nuisance. This includes ambient nighttime illumination levels that would be increased beyond the property line, or use of highly reflective building materials.

As previously indicated, Public Resources Code section 21099, effective January 2014, defines projects located within one-half mile of a major transit stop or facility as considered transit oriented development. Section 21099(d)(1) further indicates that: "Aesthetic and parking impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project on an infill site within a transit priority area shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment." While, this provision does not apply to the proposed Plan amendments, it may be applicable to future development projects as the study area is within one-half mile of the Santa Cruz Metro Transit Center, a major transit facility. State law continues to allow local jurisdictions the ability

to consider design review as part of a discretionary permit project level evaluation, including consideration of aesthetic impacts pursuant to local design review ordinances or other discretionary powers provided by other laws or policies.

Analytical Method

The proposed project consists of amendments to the City's Downtown Recovery Plan, General Plan, Local Coastal Plan and Zoning Code regarding development in the downtown area, Central Business District and in areas designated RVC in the General Plan. The proposed project would not directly result in new development. However, the proposed Downtown Plan amendment would expand areas for potential additional building height that could accommodate intensified redevelopment of existing developed sites. The proposed General Plan amendment would increase FAR in areas within downtown that are designated as RVC in the General Plan. The proposed LCP and Zoning Code amendments would not result in changes that could indirectly lead to intensified development or air emissions. The Zoning Code amendments consist of minor text revisions to the Central Business District zone related to references to the Downtown Plan and outdoor extension areas. The revisions also add a new section on "parklets", which is intended to enhance the pedestrian ambiance of the CBD zone district by creating useable outdoor spaces.

The analysis reviews the potential increased heights and intensified development that could occur as a result of the proposed amendments based site visits to view the study area from different vantage points in the vicinity to characterize the visual setting and visibility of the project area. Six massing studies were prepared for the City Planning and Community Development Department by McCann Adams Studio to show existing and proposed allowable building heights superimposed on photos. Representative views were developed along the San Lorenzo River, Front Street and Pacific Avenue. The EIR evaluates the potential changes to the visual character of the downtown based on both existing conditions and the incremental difference between what is allowed under the existing Downtown Recovery Plan and what would potentially be allowed with the proposed amendments that form the project for CEQA purposes.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The following analysis assesses impacts on scenic views (1a), scenic resources (1b), the visual character of the site and surrounding area (1c), and light and glare (1d).

Impact 4.1-1: **Scenic Views.** Future development accommodated by the proposed plan amendments would not eliminate or substantially adversely affect, modify, or obstruct a visually prominent or significant public scenic vista. Therefore, project would result in a *less-than-significant impact* to scenic views (1a).

Future development in the area as a result of the proposed Downtown Plan amendment could be constructed at taller heights than currently permitted, but taller buildings would not obstruct or remove scenic views in the downtown. There are no mapped panoramic views across or from the downtown area as shown in the City's General Plan 2030 EIR (City of Santa Cruz, April 2012, DEIR volume-Figure 4.3-1). However, taller buildings adjacent to San Lorenzo River would be visible from locations along the levee Riverwalk and from Laurel Street and Soquel Avenue bridges. The buildings would be in locations of existing buildings and would not block views of the river. Effects of new development on the visual character of the area as a result of the proposed Plan amendments is discussed in Impact 4.1-3.

Development along the river would obscure a portion of distant mountain views to the north, which would also occur under the allowed existing heights without the proposed amendments. However, these areas are limited, and most distant mountain views would be maintained. Depending on the actual height and extent of future development, a portion of the distant view Beach Hill could be blocked. However, from the levee or Soquel Avenue bridge, the view of Beach Hill is primarily of the upper canopy and not the older Victorian structures that are identified as "distinctive" in the LCP. Furthermore, it is a minor part of the background view from vantage points in which the river is the primary component of views. Therefore, no significant impacts to scenic views would occur as a result of the proposed project.

The proposed General Plan amendment would revise General Plan text to increase the upper level of permissible floor area ratio (FAR) for the RVC land use designation in the downtown from 3.5 to 5.0. FAR is the gross floor area permitted on a site divided by the total net area of the site. For example, on a site with 10,000 net sq. ft. of land area, a FAR of 1.0 will allow a maximum of 10,000 gross square feet of building floor area to be built. On the same site, a FAR of 3.5 would allow 35,000 sq. ft. of floor area, which is the current limit in the downtown RVC designation. The proposed increase in FAR to 5.0 would allow 50,000 square feet of building, or essentially five floors on the entire site. Future development needs to comply with the Downtown Plan standards for the based height (currently 55 feet along Pacific Avenue and 35 feet along Front Street. If the Additional Height Zones are not amended it might be possible to achieve a larger building along Pacific Avenue, but the Front Street height would not allow a full 5.0 FAR. This increase in FAR without a height increase is similar to what other development has achieved through Planned Developments on some parcels larger than 20,000 square feet in the downtown. As a result, the proposed General Plan amendment would not result in substantially larger buildings based on the existing height limitations and the General Plan amendment would not result in any potential significant impacts to scenic views.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required as a significant impact has not been identified.

Impact 4.1-2: **Scenic Resources.** Future development accommodated by the proposed plan amendments would not result in elimination or a substantial adverse effect to scenic resources, and there would be *no impact* to a scenic resource (1b).

The project areas are not located adjacent to or in proximity to a local or state scenic highway or road. All of the project study area is currently developed and there ae no known scenic resources in the study area, except for the Beach Boardwalk, which is an identified visual landmark. The San Lorenzo River is an important natural feature in the area. While street trees exist in some portions of the study area, no individual tree is visually prominent, and landscaping would be provided with any future development. The proposed project would not affect adjacent natural features of the San Lorenzo River. Neither the proposed project nor subsequent development on the site would have an adverse effect on scenic resources as none are present on the project site. Therefore, the proposed Plan amendments would not indirectly lead to impacts on scenic resources.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required as a significant impact has not been identified.

Impact 4.1-3: **Visual Character of the Surrounding Area.** The proposed project would result in amendments to the DRP and General Plan that would allow increased heights of 20 to 35 feet over existing allowable standards, and future development could result in taller and more massive buildings. With implementation of required development standards for massing, required percentage variation of heights, and upper-level skyline variation, future buildings would be of similar height and scale as the other taller buildings in the downtown area, which already contains several multi-story buildings of varied height, and would not substantially degrade the visual character of the surrounding area (1c). This is considered a *less-than-significant impact*.

The proposed project would extend the zones for Additional Height Zones to three new areas:

- ❒ Additional Height Zone A (up to 75 feet in height) along the west side of Pacific Avenue between Cathcart and Laurel,
- ❒ Additional Height Zone A (up to 85 feet in height) on the west side Front Street and east side of Pacific between Laurel and Soquel, and
- ❒ Additional Height Zone B (up to 70 feet in height) along the east side of Front adjacent to the San Lorenzo River.

The proposed amendments also would increase the base building height from 50 to 55 feet for the Additional Height Zone A areas, but the base height east of Front Street would remain at 50 feet. Under the existing DRP, development along Pacific Avenue must conform to the base height requirements, except where Additional Heights may be applied. The proposed DRP amendment

would decrease the property size eligible for additional height from 20,000 to 15,000 square feet. The maximum height for mechanical equipment would increase from 55 to 65 feet with a reduction in the mechanical equipment setback from 25 to 15 feet.

The combined result of the proposed DRP amendments would be potential development of larger and more massive buildings. However, the proposed DRP amendment includes standards to limit the percentage of coverage of buildings with allowed additional height. For Additional Height Zone B, upper floor stepbacks/setbacks also would be required along the Front/Riverfront Corridor. The proposed amendments modify the Additional Height Zone A upper floor stepback requirements. A stepback is generally an upper floor setback from the edge of the building to help break up building mass. The proposed amendments would change the existing upper level 42 or 52 degree stepback standard to standard that would allow a certain percentage of a site to have heights over a specified limit. According to City staff, this "volumetric approach" is intended to ensure both vertical and horizontal building variation to avoid monolithic structures. In addition to the upper level requirements for Additional Height Zone B and the maximum height percentages in Additional Height Zone A, all of the study area includes a requirement for recessed breaks or horizontal variations to avoid long blank walls. Further description of upper floor coverage and stepbacks with the proposed amendments is provided below.

- For sites that are eligible for additional height in Additional Height Zone A, the footprint of portions of the building at or above 55 feet to a height of 75 feet may comprise up to 60% of the site area. For assembled sites greater than 50,000 square feet, buildings may achieve an 85-foot height for up to 20% of the total area in the area proposed for this additional height allowance. Figure 3-2 in Section 3 of this EIR provides a schematic that shows proposed distribution of building height on different size sites.

  Along Pacific Avenue, portions of buildings that exceed the maximum base height of 55 feet may occupy up to 55% of the length of the property line along the street or 200 feet, whichever is less. Any additional height above the base height must be set back from the building wall by at least 15 feet. An example of the potential distribution of height that is included in the proposed revised Downtown Plan is shown on Figure 3-3 in Section 3.

  Along Front Street, portions of buildings that exceed the maximum base height of 55 feet may occupy up to 60% of the length of the property line along the street or 180 feet, whichever is less with the proposed amendment. Any additional height above the base height must be set back from the building wall by at least 15 feet.

- For the Front Street/Riverfront Corridor, the proposed amendments require a minimum 10-foot stepback from Front Street for development above 50 feet in height and at least 50% of the building frontage along Front Street and Soquel Avenue must have a 10-foot stepback for development above 50 feet. Along the west side of the Riverwalk, a 10-foot setback from the exterior building face would be required for development above 50 feet. The proposed amendments allow up to 25% of the Riverwalk building frontage to encroach into the required 10-foot setpback area to provided massing variation. See Figure 3-4 in Section 3, which depicts heights and stepbacks along Front Street and adjacent to the San Lorenzo River. The proposed amendments also permit top floor

cantilevered portions of the building to encroach over the property line a maximum of 5 feet in order to provide architectural interest to the façade, which shall not exceed 25 percent of the total building frontage along the riverfront.

- ❒ Along Laurel Street, Cathcart Street and Soquel Avenue, portions of buildings that exceed the maximum base height of 55 feet may occupy up to 60% of the length of the property line or 150 feet, whichever is less. Any additional height above the base height must be set back from the building wall by at least 15 feet.
- ❒ Along the Maple Street extension to Front Street, the proposed amendment requires the building frontage to be stepped back by 10 feet above a height of 50 feet. In addition to the 'build to' line, the Maple Street building face shall incorporate at least one recessed break, open to the sky, no less than 25 feet wide and no less than 10 feet in depth from Maple Street .

Figures 4.1-3A through 4.1-3C provide diagrams superimposed on photographs that show outlines of potential building mass with additional heights as seen from the San Lorenzo River, Pacific Avenue and Front Street, respectively. The diagrams do not represent actual projects or architecture as no project applications have been submitted, but they are intended to conceptually represent the upper limits of structural massing that could occur over time. The building mass depicted may or may not occur. Furthermore, achieving the maximum heights illustrated in the diagram can only occur on properties that meet the minimum parcel sizes required by the DRP for additional height; the illustrations assume that parcels have been combined in order to be eligible for additional heights. It is noted that as part of the EIR scoping process, a request was made that story poles be erected along the river levee for the entire comment period for the public to assess the visual impact of the heights of new buildings. However, use of story poles is more typically done at a project level and in certain situations where photosimulations may not be appropriate. The project consists of a series of plan amendments, and there are no specific building locations or designs proposed at this time. To erect story poles on all of the private properties potentially affected by the DRP amendments is not feasible, and furthermore, it would be speculative to try to predict where the tallest portions of the buildings would potentially be located. The photosimulations, while not required under CEQA, provide a scaled, accurate depiction of potential building mass as seen from pedestrian viewpoints, sufficient to inform the public and City decision makers about the hypothetical appearance of full buildout under the DRP amendments.

The purpose of Figures 4.1-3A through 4.1-3C is to illustrate a reasonable worst-case scenario at buildout under the existing and proposal DRP development standards. As can be seen, potential future worst-case development could appear more massive than existing development in all locations compared to existing conditions. However, illustrating the worst-case scenario does not typically reflect actual development pattern over time. The diagrams also show existing height limits that have been in effect since 1991, but very few properties in the downtown are built to the existing additional height limits. Nonetheless, the illustrations show that the additional future buildings could appear more massive than existing development, although this change would be noticeable even with more buildout under the existing 50-foot height limits

generally in the areas south of Cathcart. There is no required presumption under CEQA that taller buildings are necessarily a substantial adverse change in the existing visual environment. Such determinations are made on a case-by-case basis at a lead agency's discretion and in consideration of the relevant environmental setting or context, which here, is a nearly fully developed urban area. Future proposed buildings with additional height would not be considered to be substantially out of scale with other existing buildings in the downtown area. There are about a dozen existing buildings in downtown that exceed 55 feet in height.

Additionally, under the existing Planned Development regulations, a 20% increase in height could be allowed for properties larger than 20,000 square feet with specified findings. Thus, some buildings could reach a height of 60 feet under existing regulations without the proposed project amendments. In addition to the existing Planned Development process, which is an existing procedure that could allow for heights to exceed the underlying base height, the State Density Bonus law allows for a full story or floor to be provided as a possible concession, in exchange for providing a 100 percent affordable housing project. Granting such a concession as mandated under state law could also result in buildings about 10 feet taller than the underlying development standards.

Although, it is not known how future projects will be developed, it is conservatively concluded that the proposed expansion of Additional Height Zones could lead to taller and more massive development. According to the DRP, the intent of the existing additional height standards "is not to create a five-story downtown, but rather to preserve the overall character and scale of the historic core while allowing some intensification and increased height on larger parcels". There is no evidence from the aesthetic analysis that leads to the conclusion that the proposed development standards would promote the development of a uniformly five-story downtown, any more than the existing development standards (particularly along the east of Front Street) have led to the development of a continuous three-story, or 50-foot downtown. Based on the historic development pattern in the City, a varied-height downtown is the most likely result of the DRP amendments.

Both existing and proposed DRP development standards include design guidelines to break up overall building mass, including limits on upper floor coverage where additional heights are achieved and required upper floor stepbacks in some areas. As a result, building mass would be broken up and there would not be full coverage of the additional upper floors where additional heights may be allowed. The proposed Plan amendments also require building recesses, and the existing and revised building and storefront design standards and guidelines in the DRP serve to break up building mass. Other design guidelines call for variation in rooflines along Pacific Avenue. Although maximum height of mechanical equipment would increase with the proposed amendments, the proposed amendments require that rooftop equipment be completely concealed from view and integrated within the architectural design of the building. The use of landscaped roof terraces and gardens is also recommended. In the Front/Riverfront Corridor, the proposed amendments promote skyline variation, the top floor shall not exceed 60% of the floor area below or 60% of the building length as measured along Front Street or the Riverwalk. An

exception may be considered where the project includes a publicly accessible passageway to the Riverwalk. In this area, the DRP requires creative and integrated roof designs.

Thus, existing and proposed design guidelines include design standards that will result in buildings of variable height, massing and architectural treatments, and the extent of allowable additional height is restricted to larger properties, i.e., 15,000 square feet. The design guidelines address many architectural features, including building facades and windows, as well as building materials, colors and lighting. For example, building facades are required to provide visual variation at specified intervals with use of architectural elements, building materials or building planes in order to avoid large expanses of horizontal or vertical wall surface. Furthermore, continued landscaping with street trees along Pacific and Front Street, as well as along on the inland side of the Riverwalk, will further screen building mass in all areas. The dense canopy along Pacific often screens upper floors from a distance softens views of larger buildings and maintains a pedestrian-level scale, as shown on the photos to the right. With implementation of requirements to limit upper floor heights, provision of stepbacks, implementation of design treatments to minimize building mass, and compliance with the Downtown Plan development standards and design guidelines, potential intensified development resulting from additional allowed heights would not significantly alter the visual character of the study area from what might be developed under the allowable standards or taller buildings that have been constructed in the downtown area.

This conclusion also is consistent with state law that will be applicable to future mixed-use projects proposed in the downtown area. As previously indicated, CEQA provides that aesthetic impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project on an infill site within a transit priority area shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment, although design review would still be required pursuant to local City requirements and regulations.

In allowing additional building heights, both the existing DRP and proposed amendments require the City to make findings including that: a) the additional height will contribute to an improved social and economic environment by including new housing; and b) the form of the development promotes the appearance of a grouping of buildings rather than large, monolithic building masses. Furthermore, both the existing Plan and proposed amendment require that development projects provide a visual analysis for the Additional Height Zone A. The

requirement, including three-dimensional perspectives is added as part of the proposed amendment for Additional Height Zone B to determine the visual impact of the views from key locations, including views from Front Street and from the Soquel and Laurel bridges and the levee opposite the project site from a pedestrian level view. Architectural and design features of future proposed projects, as well as compliance with the Downtown Plan development and design standards and guidelines will be further reviewed by City staff as part of the Design Permit process.

The proposed General Plan amendment also would revise General Plan text to increase the upper level of permissible floor area ratio (FAR) for the RVC land use designation in the downtown area from 3.5 to 5.0. As discussed in Impact 4.1-1, future development would need to comply with existing height limits established in Downtown Plan. It is possible that some future development could result in slightly more massive buildings along Pacific Avenue under the existing Downtown Recovery Plan standards than would otherwise be allowed under the existing FAR designation, however, buildings would not be taller or substantially degrade the visual character of these areas.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required as the proposed incremental increase in height regulations of the project would not lead to a substantial degradation of the visual character of the surrounding area.

Impact 4.1-4: **Introduction of Light and Glare.** The proposed project would result in amendments to the DRP and General Plan that would allow increased heights and building coverage, and future development would include exterior and interior lighting typical of residential developments, but would not result in introduction of a major new source of light or glare (1d). Thus, this is considered a *less-than-significant impact*.

Future development accommodated by the proposed project would not result in introduction of a major new source of light or glare, although there will be introduction of windows and exterior building lighting typically associated with commercial development. This type of lighting would be oriented so as to not create offsite light. Windows along Pacific are required to be recessed. Furthermore, the use of reflective or tinted glass is prohibited on ground floors.

Exterior building lighting will be further reviewed as part of the Design Permit review for future site-specific developments, and the project will be conditioned to install lighting such that it is directed downward and does not create light onto adjacent properties. The DRP requires buildings to low-level lighting in the building façade. Therefore, the project would not result in a significant impact related to creation of a new source of substantial light or glare.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required as a significant impact has not been identified.

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Looking North on Pacific Avenue from Front Street

Looking South from Water Street

Looking North From Laurel Street Bridge

Looking South on Pacific - Hotel Palomar

DUDEK

FIGURE 4.1-1

Photos of Downtown and Project Area

City of Santa Cruz Downtown Plan Amendments EIR

1200 Pacific - 64.5 feet tall

1375 Pacific Avenue - 50 feet tall

1010 Pacific - 66.5-76.5 feet tall

1101 Pacific □69.5 feet tall

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FIGURE 4.1-2

Downtown Taller Buildings

City of Santa Cruz Downtown Plan Amendments EIR

VIEW FROM SOQUEL BRIDGE LOOKING SOUTH ALONG THE RIVERWALK

Draft: March 27, 2017

VIEW FROM LAUREL BRIDGE LOOKING NORTH ALONG THE RIVERWALK

Draft: March 27 2017

NOTE: This line diagram visual simulation does not represent actual projects or architecture. The diagram is intended to conceptually represent the upper limits of development mass that could occur over a period of decades. The mass depicted in this diagram may or may not ever be built. For the purposes of evaluating potential environmental impacts, the diagrams are intentionally exaggerated to illustrate a reasonable worst-case scenario at build-out under the existing and proposed regulations. Illustrating the worst-case scenario does not typically reflect actual development pattern over time. The diagram also shows the existing height limits and setback requirements, which have been in effect since 1991. Very few of the existing properties in the downtown are built to these existing limits. Achieving the maximum heights illustrated in this diagram can only occur on properties that meet the minimum parcel sizes required by the Downtown Plan. This illustration assumes that parcels have been combined in order to meet the standards necessary to achieve the maximum build out.

DUDEK

SOURCE: McCann Adams Studio

FIGURE 4.1-3A

Visual Simulation of Proposed Project Along Riverwalk

VIEW FROM LAUREL STREET LOOKING NORTH ALONG FRONT STREET

Draft: March 27, 2017

VIEW FROM SOQUEL STREET LOOKING SOUTH ALONG FRONT STREET

Draft: March 27, 2017

NOTE: This line diagram visual simulation does not represent actual projects or architecture. The diagram is intended to conceptually represent the upper limits of development mass that could occur over a period of decades. The mass depicted in this diagram may or may not ever be built. For the purposes of evaluating potential environmental impacts, the diagrams are intentionally exaggerated to illustrate a reasonable worst-case scenario at build-out under the existing and proposed regulations. Illustrating the worst-case scenario does not typically reflect actual development pattern over time. The diagram also shows the existing height limits and setback requirements, which have been in effect since 1991. Very few of the existing properties in the downtown are built to these existing limits. Achieving the maximum heights illustrated in this diagram can only occur on properties that meet the minimum parcel sizes required by the Downtown Plan. This illustration assumes that parcels have been combined in order to meet the standards necessary to achieve the maximum build out.

DUDEK

SOURCE: McCann Adams Studio

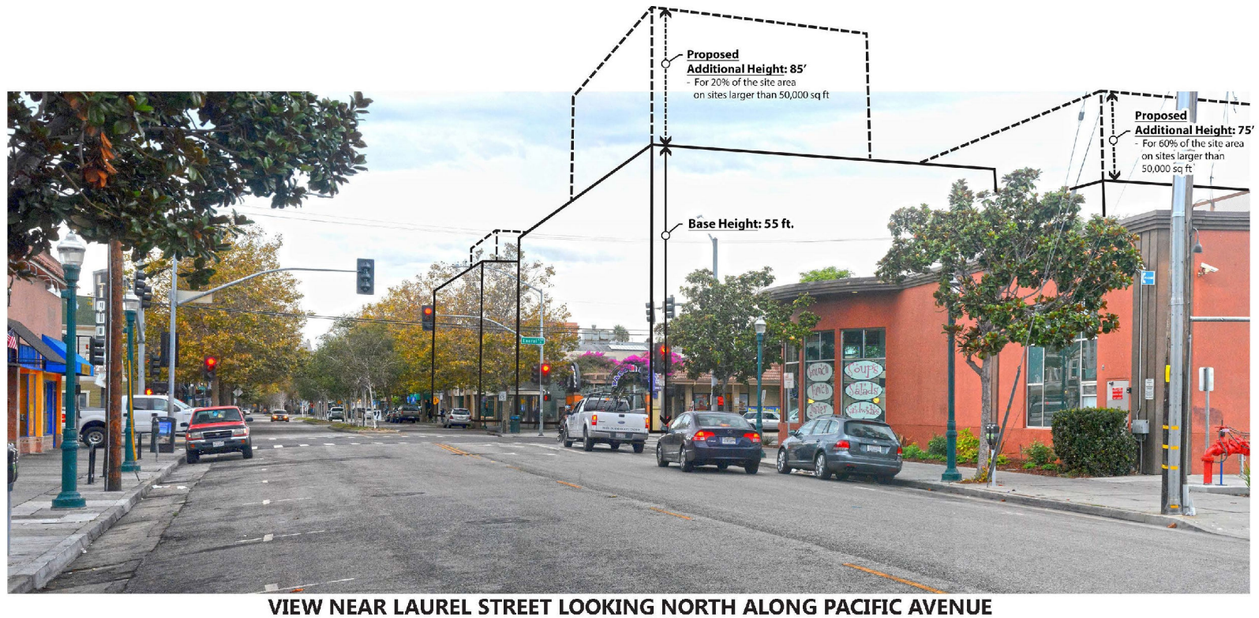
FIGURE 4.1-3B

Visual Simulation of Proposed Project Along Pacific Avenue

City of Santa Cruz Downtown Plan Amendments EIR

VIEW FROM THE NIAC BUILDING LOOKING NORTH ALONG FRONT STREET

Draft: March 27, 2017



VIEW NEAR LAUREL STREET LOOKING NORTH ALONG PACIFIC AVENUE

Draft: March 27, 2017

NOTE: This line diagram visual simulation does not represent actual projects or architecture. The diagram is intended to conceptually represent the upper limits of development mass that could occur over a period of decades. The mass depicted in this diagram may or may not ever be built. For the purposes of evaluating potential environmental impacts, the diagrams are intentionally exaggerated to illustrate a reasonable worst-case scenario at build-out under the existing and proposed regulations. Illustrating the worst-case scenario does not typically reflect actual development pattern over time. The diagram also shows the existing height limits and setback requirements, which have been in effect since 1991. Very few of the existing properties in the downtown are built to these existing limits. Achieving the maximum heights illustrated in this diagram can only occur on properties that meet the minimum parcel sizes required by the Downtown Plan. This illustration assumes that parcels have been combined in order to meet the standards necessary to achieve the maximum build out.

DUDEK

SOURCE: McCann Adams Studio

FIGURE 4.1-3C

Visual Simulation of Proposed Project Along Front Street

City of Santa Cruz Downtown Plan Amendments EIR