# 4.7 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing aesthetic setting of the project site, the regulatory background that applies to the project, and the potential visual impacts on aesthetic resources associated with implementation of the proposed project. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(a), the environmental baseline, as analyzed in this EIR, is the environmental setting as it existed at the time the Notice of Preparation was published, November 16, 2006. Therefore, the following discussion describes the site's aesthetic resources as they were on November 16, 2006. However, it should be noted that the Interstate 80/Sierra College Boulevard Interchange Improvement Project was initiated following release of the Notice of Preparation and extensive grading and excavation work has been initiated along the western and northern portions of the project site to accommodate the interchange project's lane construction and soil borrow requirements. These changes have altered the aesthetic character of the project site's northern and western boundaries.

## 4.7.1 EXISTING SETTING

The following text describes the existing visual character of the project site and surrounding land. The descriptions of existing conditions are accompanied by photographs of representative views taken during a site visit on October 18, 2006. The locations of project site viewpoints are shown in Exhibit 4.7-1.

### VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT SITE

The project site includes rolling terrain with elevations ranging from 320 to 360 feet above mean sea level. The project site and vicinity are predominantly large open spaces historically used for orchard production. The site consists of expansive grasslands and scattered oak woodlands.

The site, and the surrounding area, are located in one of the last major visual open space areas one views as they travel along Interstate 80 from east to west. The area to the east along the interstate continues a pattern of open spaces interspersed with small communities. The area to the west becomes more urbanized as one travels through Rocklin to Roseville and into Sacramento County.

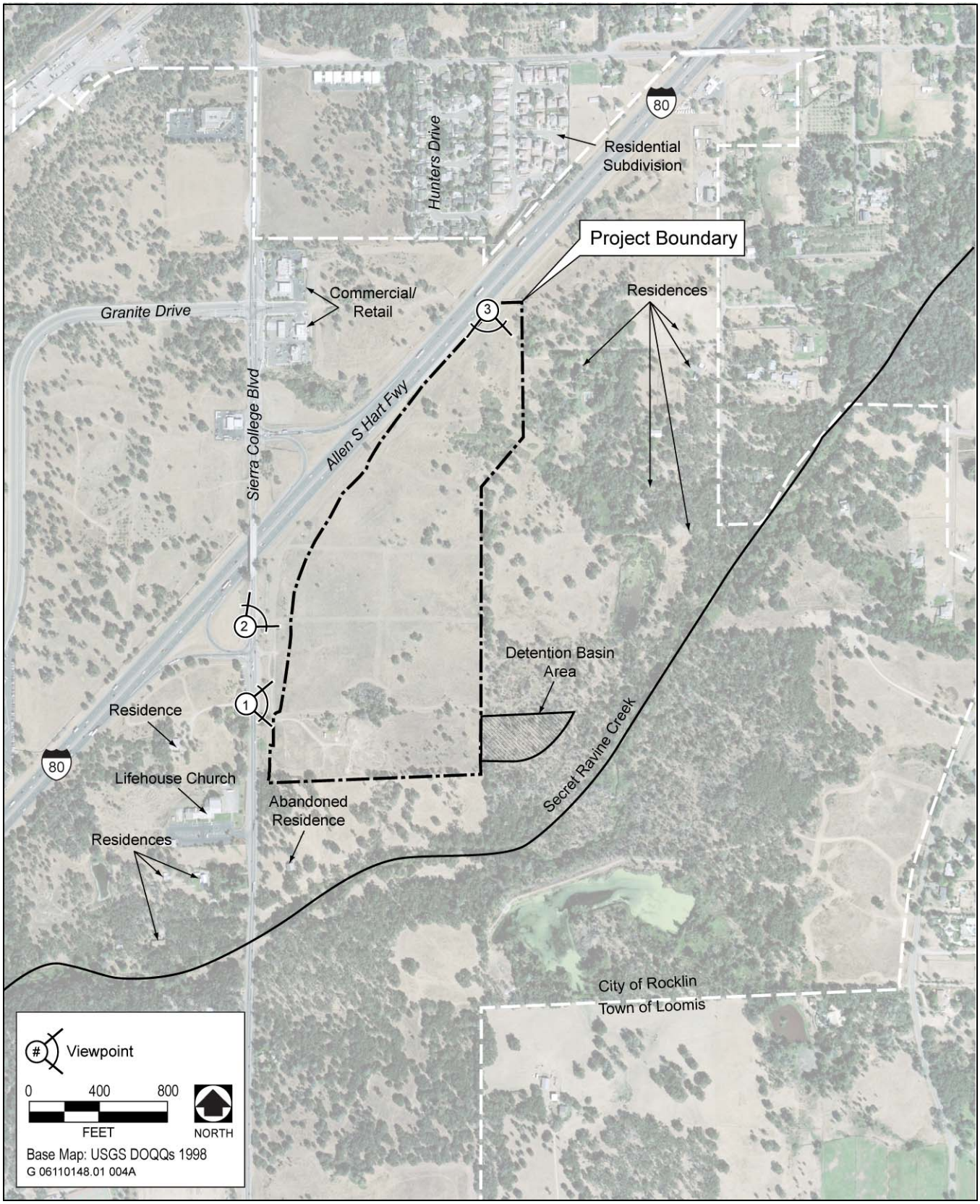
### VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

The land surrounding the project site consists of the Interstate 80 freeway, Sierra College Boulevard, and relatively undeveloped land interspersed with rural residences. Existing retail-commercial and residential land uses exist to the north of the project site across Interstate 80. Areas south, east, and west of the project site consist of large open spaces interspersed with oak woodlands and rural residences. The general character of the surrounding area is described below.

- **North:** Interstate 80, a 6-lane highway, borders the project site to the north. Areas north of Interstate 80 consist of retail-commercial establishments, some with signage directed at travelers along Interstate 80, and a residential subdivision along Hunters Drive (Exhibit 4.7-1). In general, areas north of the project site include pockets of development interspersed within open grasslands and scattered oak woodlands.

- **East:** Areas east of the project site consist of large areas of relatively undeveloped land interspersed with rural residences, oak woodlands and a dense riparian corridor along Secret Ravine. The Sierra Nevada foothills along with groves of oak trees and oak woodlands can be seen in the distant background.

- **South:** Areas south of the project site consist of large areas of open grasslands and dense oak woodlands with Secret Ravine ranging between 400 and 800 feet south of the project site. A small abandoned residence is located approximately 400 feet south of the project site and 100 feet east of Sierra College Boulevard (Exhibit 4.7-1).




Source: EDAW 2007

**Viewpoint Locations**
**Views of the Project Site** **Exhibit 4.7-1**

- **West:** Sierra College Boulevard borders the project site to the west. Areas west of Sierra College Boulevard consist of grasslands and oak woodlands interspersed with rural residences, the Lifehouse Church and Interstate 80 (Exhibit 4.7-1).

Distant views of the site from Interstate 80 are limited by topography, intervening vegetation and the presence of elevated features such as the Interstate 80/Sierra College Boulevard interchange. However, as eastbound and westbound motorists approach the site on Interstate 80, the northern portion of the site is clearly visible. With a peak elevation of 360 feet above mean sea level near the north central portion of the site, it rises slightly above the elevation of the freeway, which increases as traveling eastward from 340 feet at Sierra College Boulevard to 350 feet above mean sea level near the site's northeastern boundary. The highpoint in the north central portion of the site blocks views of the site's southern portion from motorists on Interstate 80. This same topographic screening occurs for the commercial/retail and residential uses to the north of Interstate 80, which gradually decrease in elevation from approximately 340 feet adjacent to the freeway to 320 feet above mean sea level near Taylor Road.

The project site is clearly visible to motorists traveling northbound and southbound on Sierra College Boulevard between Interstate 80 and the southern boundary of the project site. Because of intervening vegetation and existing commercial/retail development north of Interstate 80, the site is only visible for southbound travelers on Sierra College Boulevard north of Interstate 80 for a very short duration. Views from the south of the project site along Sierra College Boulevard are screened by the existing vegetation, including oak trees and oak woodlands, paralleling the east side of Sierra College Boulevard. Views from the east are largely screened by the relatively dense woodland vegetation to the east of the project site.

Three viewpoint locations discussed below were chosen to represent areas that were most sensitive to visual change (Exhibit 4.7-1). The general nature of views of the project site is described from these locations.

### View from Sierra College Boulevard (Viewpoint 1)

This viewpoint is located adjacent to the western boundary of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-1). As can be seen in Exhibit 4.7-2, the foreground is dominated by gently rolling grasslands interspersed with oak trees extending to the east. Rows of oak trees and oak woodland are visible in the mid-distant view, which screen views extending further to the east. Distant background views, where they are available, consist of oak woodlands.

### Views from the Interstate 80/Sierra College Boulevard Interchange (Viewpoint 2)

This viewpoint is located at the northwest corner of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-1). As can be seen in Exhibit 4.7-3, an abandoned road and existing powerlines on the site are the dominant foreground views. The project site's grasslands gradually slope downward toward the freeway, which is only partially visible on the left side of the viewpoint. Mid-distant views from this viewpoint include natural landscape consisting of scattered oak trees and denser oak woodlands. Because of the oak tree and woodland density, views from ground level to areas further to the east are limited. Distant views from this viewpoint are dominated by the Sierra Nevada foothills and oak woodlands.

### Views from Interstate 80 (Viewpoint 3)

This viewpoint is located at the northern edge of the project site (Exhibit 4.7-4). Foreground views are dominated by the freeway shoulder and the elevated grasslands along the site's northern boundary. Mid-distant views consist of scattered oak woodlands. Because of the elevated foreground topography, views from ground level to areas further to the south and east are limited.

View from Sierra College Boulevard south of Interstate 80 looking east

**Representative Photograph (Viewpoint 1)** **Exhibit 4.7-2**

View from Sierra College Boulevard / Interstate 80 interchange looking northeast

**Representative Photograph (Viewpoint 2)** **Exhibit 4.7-3**

View from Interstate 80 westbound east of the Sierra College Boulevard / Interstate 80 interchange looking south

**Representative Photograph (Viewpoint 3)** **Exhibit 4.7-4**

## 4.7.2 REGULATORY SETTING

### CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. No State-designated scenic highways are located in the vicinity of the project site (Caltrans 2006).

### CITY OF ROCKLIN GENERAL PLAN

The Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Element of the City of Rocklin General Plan (1991) includes the following relevant policies related to visual resources.

- **Policy 1.** To encourage the protection of natural resource areas, scenic areas, hilltops, open space areas and parks from encroachment or destruction by incompatible development through the use of conservation easements, buffers, setbacks or other measures. Developments shall be required to provide usable land areas outside of conservation easements or established natural resource buffers.

- **Policy 20.** To consider development projects in terms of their visual qualities and compatibility with surrounding areas, especially those urbanizing areas abutting rural or semi-rural areas.

In addition, the City of Rocklin Municipal Code requires that all projects other than individual residences undergo design review (Municipal Code Section 17.72.020). As part of the design review process, the project applicant is required to provide detailed information regarding the project's architectural design including architectural elevations and renditions of all buildings, signs, light poles, walls and fences, and other structures, including

materials to be used and color schemes. A landscape plan, including the location, type, quantity and size of plant materials to be used needs to be submitted as well as a description of site signage including dimensions, illumination and the lettering style of all signs (Municipal Code, Section 17.72.050).

## 4.7.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This visual impact analysis evaluated the visual changes that would occur at the project site using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. The visual impacts are compared against the thresholds of significance discussed below.

### THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The project would cause a significant impact related to aesthetic resources, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G), 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;
- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

### IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT 4.7-1 Impacts on Scenic Vistas. *Views on or near the project site are not considered scenic vistas. Therefore, development of the project site would not alter or obscure a scenic vista. This impact would be less than significant.*

A scenic vista is generally considered a view of an area that has remarkable scenery or a resource that is indigenous to the area. The project site itself does not include unique aesthetic resources that would be categorized as a scenic vista. The open grasslands and scattered oak trees that make up the project site are consistent with surrounding properties that contain similar visual resources. Although the current land uses provide views of a grassland/oak woodland landscape that is representative of the Sierra foothills region, the project site does not contain resources that are exemplary or unique to the area or the region.

Project buildings could briefly obscure views of the Sierra Nevada foothills for east bound travelers on Interstate 80. However, the project site would be within the view of eastbound travelers for less than 10 seconds and the commercial development on the project site would be consistent with other freeway oriented commercial developments along the length of Interstate 80 within the region. The project buildings could also briefly obscure views of the Sierra Nevada foothills for travelers on Sierra College Boulevard. However, this would be for a relatively short duration and these travelers would generally not be looking to the east while traveling northbound or southbound. For the existing rural residences and the church located west of the project site, views to the east are currently obstructed by existing vegetation. Therefore, development of the project site would not be expected to adversely affect views of scenic vistas from these land uses. The proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista and this impact is considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-1 Impacts on Scenic Vistas

No mitigation measures would be necessary.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

Impacts on scenic vistas would be considered less than significant.

IMPACT 4.7-2 Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway. *The project site is not visible from a State Scenic Highway and would not damage scenic resources. The project would result in* ***no impacts*** *to scenic resources within a scenic highway.*

A scenic resource is generally a resource, landmark, or area that has been noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is thereby protected because of those qualities. A scenic resource within a State Scenic Highway is a resource that is noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is visible from a State-designated Scenic Highway. The project site is not located along nor is it visible from a Scenic Highway segment. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway and **no impact** on scenic resources would occur.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-2 Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway

No mitigation measures would be necessary.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

No impacts would occur to a state scenic highway.

IMPACT 4.7-3 Changes in Visual Character. *The project would convert views of an approximately 50-acre grassland/woodland landscape to urban development. Conversion from an open grassland/oak woodland landscape to urban development would substantially alter the visual character of the project area. This change would result in a* ***significant and unavoidable*** *impact to the visual character of the area.*

The project site consists of an open grassland/oak woodland landscape. Implementation of the project would result in the conversion of this landscape to urban uses (i.e., commercial/retail development). Conversion from an open grassland/oak woodland landscape to urban development would substantially alter the visual character of the project area.

The built character of the proposed buildings would be representative of the Craftsman and Prairie Style architectural influences. These design styles tend to use natural looking materials, low-pitched and gable roof elements, battered pilasters of natural or manufactured stone, and a strong horizontal compositional emphasis. Individual buildings would be grouped into one of two distinct design districts. The Retail Promenade District would be located adjacent to the eastern property line and would contain the largest retail spaces and components of the project. The Retail Village Cluster District would include the areas immediately adjacent to the freeway and/or at the primary entrance into the project. Exhibits 3-4 and 3-5 identify conceptual elevations for the buildings proposed on the site.

The site's landscaping plan includes the identification of specific landscape zone concepts for individual zones within the project site. For the project frontage east of Sierra College Boulevard and south of Interstate 80, the purpose of the landscaping is to soften and create a visual transition between passing vehicle traffic and the project site. For the project frontage along Interstate 80, the landscaping is intended to create view corridors into the site from the freeway and Sierra College Boulevard. For the area directly adjacent to the eastern boundary, the

landscaping is intended to provide a buffer from the proposed residential uses within the proposed Rocklin 60 development. This zone is proposed to be densely planted with evergreen trees to provide a screen between the properties. The interior landscaping is intended to facilitate pedestrian and vehicle traffic patterns, provide a shade canopy, and enhance the visual character of the development.

Following development, the site would have an architecturally consistent, highly landscaped appearance that would sharply contrast with the undeveloped, oak-studded grasslands that are currently present on the site. This transition in visual character would represent a transition from rural to urban in the region. The conversion of the project site to urban uses was anticipated in the Environmental Impact Report prepared for the 1991 City of Rocklin General Plan (City of Rocklin 1991). The General Plan EIR stated that the conversion of open grasslands and hill areas to mixed urban development with implementation of the General Plan land uses would result in a significant and unavoidable visual impact. The project would extend this ongoing visual conversion of the Interstate 80 corridor.

In addition to the travelers on Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard, the single resident living directly to the west and the several residents living to the east of the project site on Makabe and Dias Lanes would be directly affected by the changes in the project's visual character. Although existing vegetation surrounding these homes would generally screen their views of the site, views from these residences would not be completely obscured. Following construction, the residence to the west would have a relatively direct view of the project entrance. Views for residences to the east would primarily consist of the sound wall along the project's eastern boundary and the tops of the commercial buildings that would extend above the sound wall. The buildings would generally range between 24 and 28 feet high and would be set back approximately 60 feet from the sound wall.

If the proposed Rocklin 60 residential development is constructed to the east of the project site, it would introduce some new residents to the area that would be directly affected by the change in the site's visual resources. However, the perceived visual effect on these potential future residents is directly dependent upon whether the Rocklin 60 project is constructed before or after the proposed project. If the proposed project is constructed first, the residents purchasing homes within Rocklin 60 would be fully aware of the visual character of the commercial development to the west prior to their home purchase. If Rocklin 60 is constructed first, the change in the western viewshed from the homes within this development would be substantially altered when the proposed project is constructed. However, only the homes along the western boundary of Rocklin 60, a total of approximately 23 homes, would tend to be affected because these homes would have direct views of the site. For homes located further to the east, the western homes would screen their views of the site.

Views from the Lifehouse Church located to the southwest of the project site on the west side of Sierra College Boulevard would change with the conversion to urban uses. However, relatively dense woodlands located directly east of this church effectively screen large portions of the site. The change would only be noticeable when churchgoers are looking directly to the northeast. Views of the site would generally be obscured for residences located further to the south on the west side of Sierra College Boulevard due to intervening topography and vegetation.

The land uses to the north of Interstate 80 would experience changes in their views of the site. For the commercial uses on Sierra College Boulevard, views of the site are partially screened by the Sierra College Boulevard interchange, the existing freeway, and intervening vegetation. For the residences on Hunters Drive directly to the north, backyard views would generally be screened by existing property fences, the freeway and intervening vegetation. However, the site would likely be clearly visible from second-story windows. Because views from these areas would be looking at the site from across Interstate 80, the change in the visual environment would not be expected to be particularly adverse.

An open grassland/woodland landscape, especially in an urbanizing setting, is valued for its visual relief. Some residents in the vicinity and travelers on Interstate 80 may not perceive this as a substantial degradation of the visual character or quality of the site because one common type of viewshed found in the area (open grasslands)

would be replaced by another common local viewshed (commercial uses). Other area residents and travelers through the area would perceive changes in the visual environment attributable to project development as adverse due to the loss of an aesthetically pleasing view. Based on the visual resource impact conclusions of the General Plan EIR, the visual prominence of the site from Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard, and the potential for motorists and occupants of adjacent land uses to perceive the project changes as a substantial degradation of the existing visual character and/or quality of the site and its surroundings, this impact would be considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-3 Changes in Visual Character

- The project applicant shall comply with the requirements of the City's design review process in order to ensure that development of the site is of a high quality and does not create visual incompatibilities.

- The project applicant shall submit for City review and approval a detailed site landscaping plan that softens views of the site from Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard by creating a visual transition between passing vehicle traffic and the project site and minimizes the scale of the proposed commercial buildings. The landscape plan shall effectively screen parking areas, service zones, trash enclosures and mechanical equipment. The landscape plan shall also ensure that the City's parking lot shade requirements are met.

- The project's landscaping plan includes the planting of trees on the site's eastern perimeter. This planting shall extend along the entire eastern perimeter and shall consist of a continuous row of evergreen trees. This row of trees shall have sufficient density to create a continuous visual screen between the project site and the adjacent rural residential land uses to the east (or the Rocklin 60 residential subdivision, if it is constructed in the future). The trees shall be capable of growing a sufficient height above the project's proposed sound wall (i.e., 20- to 25-foot tall trees) to effectively screen views of the project site from the adjacent land uses.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

The proposed mitigation measures would minimize the project's adverse changes to the site's visual character. In addition, design, architectural, site development, and landscaping standards would be required and reviewed by the City of Rocklin Design Review Board to ensure that urban development on the project site remains within certain aesthetic guidelines. However, there is no mechanism to allow implementation of the project while avoiding the conversion of the local viewshed from open grasslands/woodlands to urban development. Therefore, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

IMPACT 4.7-4 Impacts from Lighting and Reflective Surfaces. *The project would require new lighting throughout the project site and could construct facilities with reflective surfaces that could inadvertently cause light and glare for motorists on Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard, and adjacent land uses under day and nighttime conditions. In addition, the degree of darkness in the City of Rocklin and on the project site would diminish as a result of development, potentially diminishing the visibility of stars and other features of the night sky. This impact is considered* ***significant****.*

Under current conditions the project site does not generate any significant sources of light, glare, or light trespass into the night sky. Development of the project would involve lighting of parking areas, buildings (i.e., store fronts), and other facilities associated with the proposed project. A substantial increase in the amount of nighttime light and glare would result from the development of the project site, potentially diminishing the visibility of stars and other features of the night sky. In addition, nighttime lighting in the parking areas, or the presence of reflective surfaces on buildings in this area (e.g., reflective window glazing), would increase light and glare for adjacent land uses and motorists on Interstate 80 and Sierra College Boulevard during day and nighttime conditions. Because the project would create a substantial new source of light in the project area and could develop facilities with reflective surfaces that would adversely affect day and/or nighttime views in the area, this is considered a **significant** impact.

Mitigation Measure 4.7-4 *Impacts from Lighting and Reflective Surfaces.*

- All exterior lighting fixtures shall be aimed downward and shall include shielding to prevent offsite light spillover.

- The project applicant shall submit a detailed lighting and photometric plan to the City as part of the design review process. This lighting plan shall ensure that proposed exterior lighting prevents unnecessary glare or reflection and that the lighting does not cause any nuisance, inconvenience, or hazard of any kind on adjoining streets or properties.

- The project applicant shall adhere to the Rocklin Crossings General Development Guidelines and all City of Rocklin design review requirements, as applicable, regarding the appropriate use of building materials, lighting, and signage to prevent light and glare from adversely affecting motorists and adjacent land uses.

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

With implementation of these mitigation measures, the project's light and glare impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.