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## **4.1 Aesthetics**

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This section describes the existing aesthetic and visual conditions that could be adversely affected by implementation of the proposed Project, including scenic vistas, scenic resources, and the overall visual quality of the Project site and surrounding areas as seen from sensitive viewing locations or representative viewpoints. The discussion of aesthetics and potential impacts related to visual changes in the physical elements within and surrounding the Project site is subjective by nature.

### **4.1.1 Setting**

Laguna Niguel is in southern Orange County, approximately 50 miles south of downtown Los Angeles and 65 miles north of downtown San Diego. The 14.72-square-mile planned community consists of residential neighborhoods, parks, and supporting commercial businesses with a distinct coastal orientation.

The Project site is in Community Profile Area 8 of the Laguna Niguel General Plan (LNGP), which consists of 1,001.7 acres located in the western portion of Laguna Niguel.

The Project area is comprised primarily of residential uses terraced along the coastal hillsides. The area includes both residential detached and attached dwelling units. The hilly topography limits pedestrian circulation while creating open space opportunities provided by public park sites and private recreation facilities.

### **4.1.2 Existing Conditions**

#### **Visual Character of the Project Site**

The Project site is located along Crown Valley Parkway, which is designated by the City as a landscape corridor as seen in Open Space Component Figure OS-3, in the LNGP. Along the Project frontage the existing landscape corridor on Crown Valley Parkway consists of assorted trees, shrubs, and ground cover next to a public sidewalk on a slight slope. The Project site sits above Crown Valley Parkway along the hillside and has an existing graded slope west to east, terrace drains installed, and dense Acacia species planted for erosion control.

#### **Visual Character of the Surrounding Area**

Residential communities in the Project area tend to hug hilltops and hillsides, while leaving steeper and undevelopable slopes as open space. These more natural elements of the suburban landscape combine with developed open space, low-lying country club, coastal hillsides, and Crown Valley Parkway to form the viewsheds and vistas within the Project area.

The Project site is located within a suburban setting on an east-facing hillside, bound by existing residential neighborhoods including Charter Terrace community to the north, Vista Del Niguel neighborhood and El Niguel Country Club to the east, La Vista condominiums to the south, and an open space slope ascending up to the Paragon at Niguel Summit community to the west.

### **Light, Glare, and Shading Characteristic of the Project Site and Surrounding Area.**

The Project site is surrounded by residential uses and a traffic corridor that emit light from exterior sources (i.e., street lighting, building illumination, security lighting, and landscape lighting), which is common in the area.

## **4.1.3 Related Policies and Regulations**

### **Federal Regulations**

There are no federal regulations regarding aesthetics that are applicable to the proposed Project.

### **State Regulations**

#### California Scenic Highway Program

The California Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that either have already been designated as scenic highways or that are eligible for designation as scenic highways. According to the Department of Transportation's California State Scenic Highway System Map, no state-designated or eligible scenic highways exist within or near the Project site. The nearest highways that are eligible for a state scenic highway designation are Pacific Coast Highway, approximately 1.5 miles southwest of the site, State Route 74 approximately 6.5 miles to the east, and Interstate 5 approximately 2.75 miles to the east.

### **Local Regulations**

The City addresses aesthetic considerations for development in the City in various City documents. Specifically, the Laguna Niguel General Plan (LNGP) contains goals and policies relevant to the visual quality and character of the proposed Project and the Laguna Niguel Zoning Code (LNZC) contains detailed standards and requirements to implement these goals and policies.

#### Laguna Niguel General Plan

##### *Land Use Element*

**Goal 3.** Compatible relationships between land uses in the community.

- **Policy 3.1.** Ensure that effective buffers between residential and non-residential uses are established and maintained.
- **Policy 3.4.** Ensure that residential densities are compatible with the surrounding land uses and buildings are in scale with the neighborhood character.

**Goal 4.** Urban design that provides community gathering areas and other pedestrian spaces.

- **Policy 4.1.** Emphasizes attractive and functional urban design in new development.

- **Policy 4.2.** Enhance the landscape theme throughout public right-of-way and at major City entrance points.
- **Policy 4.4.** Provide, where feasible, pedestrian walkways and linkages between residential, commercial, office, open space/recreation facilities, and other public places.

**Goal 5.** Preservation and enhancement of the natural setting of the City.

- **Policy 5.2.** Ensure that adequate recreational and open space areas are provided.

**Goal 6.** Enhanced community identity for residents, visitors, and commuters.

- **Policy 6.1.** Provide for the development of pedestrian gathering areas to promote social interaction.

#### *Open Space/Parks/Conservation Element*

**Goal 1.** Well-maintained public and private open space.

- **Policy 1.1.** Preserve and protect the scenic and visual quality of areas designated for Open Space areas as a resource of public importance.
- **Policy 1.2.** When siting a proposed development project, locate the project in areas containing less sensitive landforms and preserve the most sensitive landforms and natural resources of the project site as open space.

**Goal 2.** A system of public and private parks and recreation facilities achieved in cooperation with private community associations.

- **Policy 2.1.** Provide park and recreational facilities that meet the needs of senior citizens, young adults, children, disabled individuals, and families.
- **Policy 2.2.** Plan for new high quality recreation facilities and programs.

**Goal 5.** Conservation of natural resource areas of community and regional significance.

- **Policy 5.1.** Conserve sensitive species and plant communities and wildlife habitats to maximum extent feasible through open space dedication and easements, creative site design, and other workable mitigation actions.

**Goal 6.** Carefully review sensitive hillside areas within the community.

- **Policy 6.1.** Provide for the preservation of sensitive hillside and canyon areas in accordance with the City's Hillside Protection Ordinance.
- **Policy 6.2.** Consider significant natural features, including sensitive hillsides and ridgelines as part of the development review process.

### **4.1.4 Thresholds of Significance**

Criteria for determining the significance of impacts related to aesthetics are based on criteria contained in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and the City's CEQA Manual. The proposed Project could have a significant impact on the environment if it would result in any of the following.

***Threshold AES-1 Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?***

**Threshold AES-2** *Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?*

**Threshold AES-3** *In an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?*

**Threshold AES-4** *Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area?*

### **Methodology**

Characterizing aesthetics can be highly subjective; therefore, the evaluation of aesthetic resources in the built environment and natural landscape requires the application of a process that objectively identifies the visual features of the landscape and their importance, and the sensitivity of receptors that view them.

### **4.1.5 Project Design Features and Standard Conditions of Approval**

**PDF AES-1** The Project is to be subdivided into two lots, Lot 1 and Lot “A”. Lot 1 includes the 2-acre residential area and Lot “A” includes the 2.2-acre area of open space, which consists of the previous remediated landslide area and includes the 30-foot earthen “buttress” (a design feature previously approved for geotechnical assurance of future landslide), planted erosion control, and installed storm drain system. Since Lot A is a lettered lot on the tentative tract map and no residential development is allowed on lettered lots, no residential development would occur on the remediated hillside.

**PDF AES-2** The Project will include architectural design elements indicative of Spanish architecture such as simple asymmetrical forms, arched entries, predominantly stucco wall finishes, and shallow gabled ‘S’ tile roofs that work together to showcase the building elevations. Similarly, grouping of accent windows and vertical forms of openings will reinforce this characteristic. Additional design elements including material blending of slump stone, simulated wood corbels, shutters, shaped wood trims and posts, decorative metal railings and downspouts were specifically chosen to enhance the overall design character on every side of each building. A representative architectural rendering of the Project is presented in Figure 4.1.A – Architectural Rendering, and a sample building elevation is presented in Figure 4.1.B – Building Elevation-Duplex and Figure 4.1.B – Building Elevation-Triplex.

**PDF AES-3** Vegetation to be planted within Lot 1 will implement a landscape plan themed with drought tolerant grasses, shrubs and trees. The resulting pallet of vegetation will blend in with the existing vegetation planted in Lot “A,” and help to soften



the hardscape design elements of the Project buildings. The landscape plan is presented in Figure 4.1.D Landscape Plan.

- PDF AES-4** The Project Lighting Plan has been designed to provide adequate, safe nighttime lighting for residents and guests while minimizing spillover lighting onto adjacent properties. A conceptual lighting plan is presented in Figure 4.1.E Lighting Plan and the final lighting plan shall be approved by the Staff in conformance with City standards.

#### 4.1.6 Environmental Impact Evaluation

The following potential impacts were determined to be less than significant. In each of the following issues, either no impact would occur or adherence to established regulations, standards, and policies would reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level. In either instance, no mitigation would be required.

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##### *Threshold AES-1 Have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vista?*

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**Less than Significant Impact.** A scenic vista possesses visually aesthetic qualities of high value to the community which are natural features or significant structures and buildings. According to the Laguna Niguel CEQA Manual, scenic vistas in the City are viewsheds which include scenic resources such as steep hillsides, ridgelines, and waterways.

The Project site consists of a relatively flat approximately 2 acres pad in the eastern portion of the site and an ascending acacia-covered hillside slope, which was repaired following the landslide in 1998 with the construction of structural elements and grading of the site. Specifically, repair work involved installation of a caisson wall (64 caissons) with 414 tieback anchors and walers, removal of the 41 Crowne Cove condominium buildings and associated structures, partial removal of the landslide mass, re-compacting and re-contouring the slope, installation of subdrains, and construction of a compacted fill buttress. During the remediation, manufactured slopes were created on the Property, at the City's direction, which altered and graded the Property's topography and terrain in the western portion of the site. Therefore, the elements of the Project site do not constitute a scenic vista, nor does the project site have any elements typical of a scenic vista, such as unique rock formations. Additionally, no scenic vistas occur within the vicinity of the Project site that could be blocked by development on the Project site. Scenic vistas are viewsheds that include scenic resources. The open space currently existing on the Project site does not constitute a scenic vista and views of the Project site from private residences are not protected.

In accordance with **PDF AES-1**, the proposed condominiums would be constructed in the eastern, generally level portion of the site within proposed Lot 1. This design allows Lot "A" on the tentative tract map to remain as open space. The open space Lot "A" would be seen from Crown Valley Parkway and other vicinity roadways and properties, providing views of open space.

Although views of this open space are not specifically protected, it would add to the open space in the Project vicinity and provide an aesthetic benefit to the community. No significant impact would occur, and no mitigation is required.

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***Threshold AES-2 Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?***

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**No Impact.** The proposed Project is not adjacent to a State scenic highway. Furthermore, the Project site does not contain any scenic resources. The site was previously developed with 41 condominiums and, following the landslide in 1998, the landslide was repaired between 1998 and 2000 with the construction of structural elements and grading of the site, which altered and graded the Property's topography and terrain. No scenic resources such as significant trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings occur on the Project site.

The Project site is adjacent to Crown Valley Parkway, which is designated in the General Plan as a local Landscape Corridor. The proposed project includes a setback along Crown Valley Parkway to accommodate enhanced landscaping consistent with the Landscape Corridor designation. No significant impacts would occur and no mitigation is required.

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***Threshold AES-3 In an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?***

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**Less than Significant Impact.** The Project would be constructed in accordance with existing, applicable, development standards of the LNZN. In accordance with **PDF AES-1**, the proposed condominiums would be limited to the eastern, generally level portion of the site within Lot 1 and Lot "A" would remain open space. As noted previously in the response to Threshold B, the open space would be seen from Crown Valley Parkway and other vicinity roadways and properties. The open space would provide Project consistency with the open space policies enumerated in the General Plan, compatible with scenic enhancement and preservation, including Land Use Element Goals 5 and 6 and Open Space/Parks/Conservation Element Goals 1, 2, 5, and 6. A less than significant impact would occur and no mitigation is required.

From a distance, the proposed Project would generally be integrated into the landform. The appearance of the overall development from middle-range and distant viewpoints would not contrast with existing development in the area and would be compatible with the aesthetic setting of the surrounding uses. Viewers from adjacent properties would experience a change in the visual character of a portion of the Project site from open space to developed condition. Since the area surrounding the Project site is currently developed with residential uses, and the site has been historically developed with residential structures, the change in visual character of the Project site does not constitute degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site or its surroundings. Further, private views are not protected. In the context of the existing setting, the

site is currently disturbed, has paved streets and infrastructure, contains a graded/remediated hillside slope, and has other attributes that can be characterized as a tarnished visual condition and not as scenic resources. Although the proposed Project would change the visual setting at the Project site as noted in **PDF AES-2** (see Figure 4.1.A - Architectural Rendering and Figure 4.1.B and Figure 4.1.C-Building Elevations) and **PDF AES-3** (see Figure 4.1.D - Landscape Concept Plan), it would not significantly degrade the visual character or quality of the site or its surroundings. Therefore, impacts related to the visual quality of the Project site and its surroundings would be less than significant and no mitigation is required.

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***Threshold AES-4*** *Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area?*

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**Less than Significant Impact.** The Project is located in a suburban setting surrounded by a developed environment with fixed and mobile sources of exterior light and glare. Fixed sources of light and glare include exterior building-mounted and freestanding light fixtures, illuminated signage on existing land uses, and street lighting along Crown Valley Parkway and local streets near the Project. Additionally, mobile sources of light and glare originate from vehicles along Crown Valley Parkway. These existing light sources contribute to moderate levels of nighttime lighting.

The proposed Project would involve installation of nighttime lighting for roadway visibility and safety in accordance with **PDF AES-4** as presented previously in Figure 4.1.E, Lighting Concept Plan. The Plan depicts the lighting intensity of the proposed fixtures measured in footcandle in compliance with City photometric analysis requirements. However, as described above, the surrounding area is largely developed with existing nighttime lighting, and local roadways include mobile light sources. The Project would be required to comply with the LNZN Section 9-1-35.15 residential lighting standards requiring that light sources be designed and located to minimize spillover of light or glare onto neighboring properties. The proposed Project would not otherwise produce substantial new sources of fixed or mobile sources of lighting and therefore would not adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area. Furthermore, street lighting improvements would be required to comply with the design standards outlined in LNZN Section 9-1-279, Street Lighting, which requires street lighting along and at the intersections of all arterial highways and local streets in accordance with the illumination levels specified in the standard plans. Lastly, the presence of intervening vegetation, structures, and hillside topography would diminish or block direct sightlines to the Project site and reduce glare in some locations. With implementation of **PDF AES-4**, impacts related to the creation of new sources of substantial light or glare would be less than significant and no mitigation is required.

#### 4.1.7 Cumulative Impacts

**Less Than Significant Impact.** As discussed previously, no significant scenic resources have been identified on the Project site or within the area surrounding the Project site. In addition, the cumulative projects identified in Section 1.4, Table 1-2, and Figure 1.C, would contribute to development that is consistent with planned uses in the Project area. The closest cumulative project is the City Center Mixed-Use Project, approximately a quarter mile northwest, which would not result in cumulative impacts because it is not visible from the Project site or the immediately surrounding area. Compliance with the LNGP goals and the LNZC standards would ensure that the proposed Project in combination with other projects in the area would be compatible with scenic enhancement and preservation and would not result in significant impacts upon scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual character. Past, present, and future projects will be required to develop according to land use plans and regulations, which would help to ensure consistency with surrounding land uses resulting in a less than significant cumulative impact. Because the Project would not result in any significant aesthetic impacts and cumulative aesthetic impacts would be less than significant, the Project's incremental contribution would not be cumulatively considerable and no mitigation is required.

Additional lighting would be produced by the proposed Project and future development. The proposed Project and cumulative lighting-related impacts would not cause a significant cumulative environmental impact through compliance with applicable City lighting standards. Therefore, a less than significant cumulative lighting impact would result from implementation of the proposed Project and cumulative projects and no mitigation is required.

#### 4.1.8 Summary of Mitigation Measures

No impacts related to aesthetics have been found to be potentially significant, therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

#### 4.1.9 Significant Environmental Impacts

The analysis above indicates that the Project will not exceed significance criteria for aesthetic impacts. Therefore, all aesthetic impacts are **less than significant**, and no mitigation measures are required.

#### 4.1.10 References

- 14 CCR 15000–15387 and Appendix A–L. Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act, as amended.
- California State Scenic Highway System Map. Department of Transportation. 2018. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>. (Accessed June 20, 2021.)
- City of Laguna Niguel. February 2022. City of Laguna Niguel CEQA Manual.

- City of Laguna Niguel. 1992. General Plan for the City of Laguna Niguel. Available: <http://cityoflagunaniguel.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/1886>. (Accessed: June 20, 2021.)
- City of Laguna Niguel. 2021. City of Laguna Niguel 2021–2029 Housing Element. Available: <https://www.cityoflagunaniguel.org/1352/Housing-Element-Update>. Last revised: October 2021. (Accessed February 22, 2022).
- City of Laguna Niguel, Laguna Niguel Municipal Code Title 9, Planning and Zoning. [https://library.municode.com/ca/laguna\\_niguel/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=TIT9PLZO](https://library.municode.com/ca/laguna_niguel/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT9PLZO). (Accessed June 20, 2021.)

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Source: CVP (11/2021).

**Figure 4.1.A Architectural Rendering**

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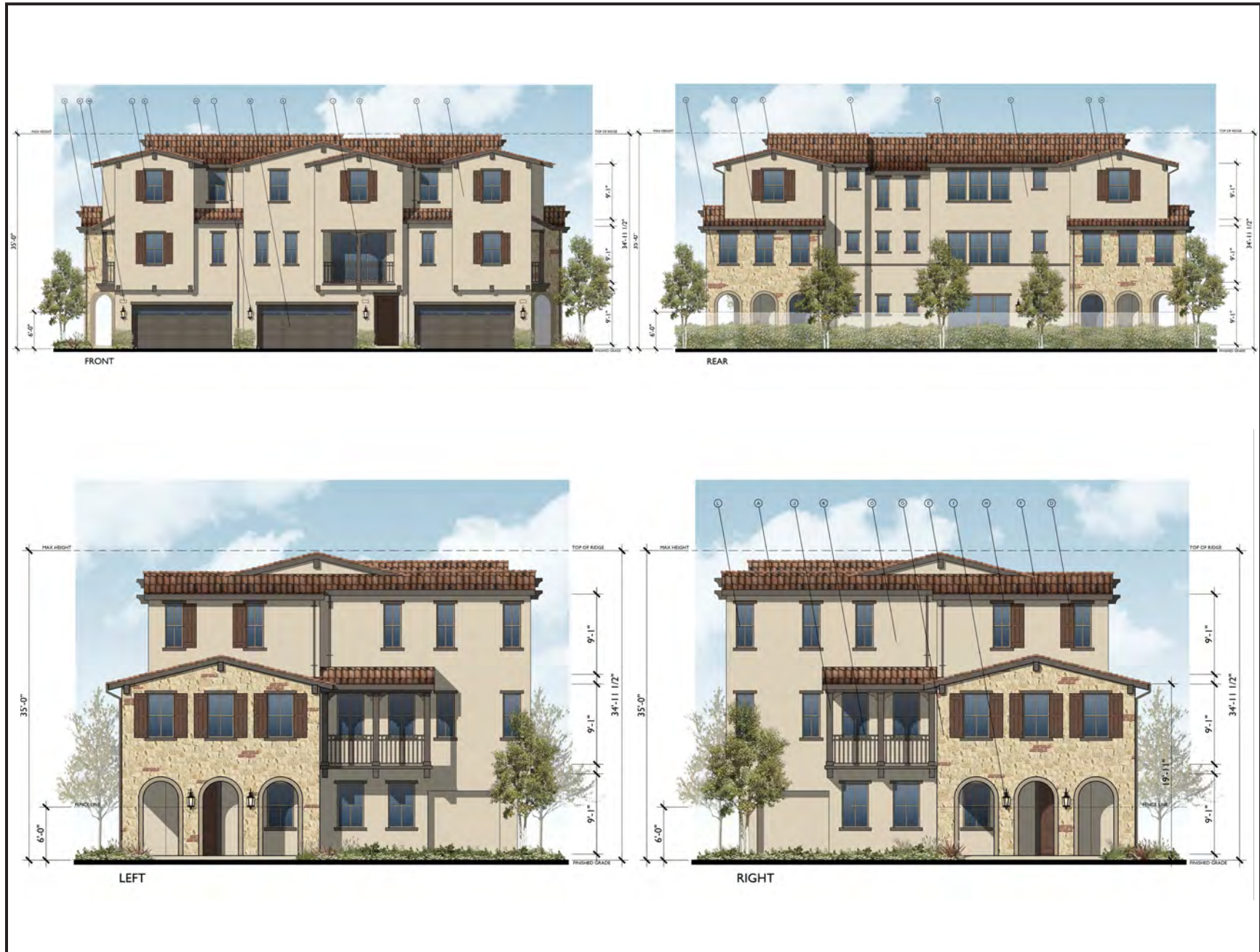




Source: Bassenian/Lagoni (8/26/2021).

**Figure 4.1.B Building Elevations- Duplex**

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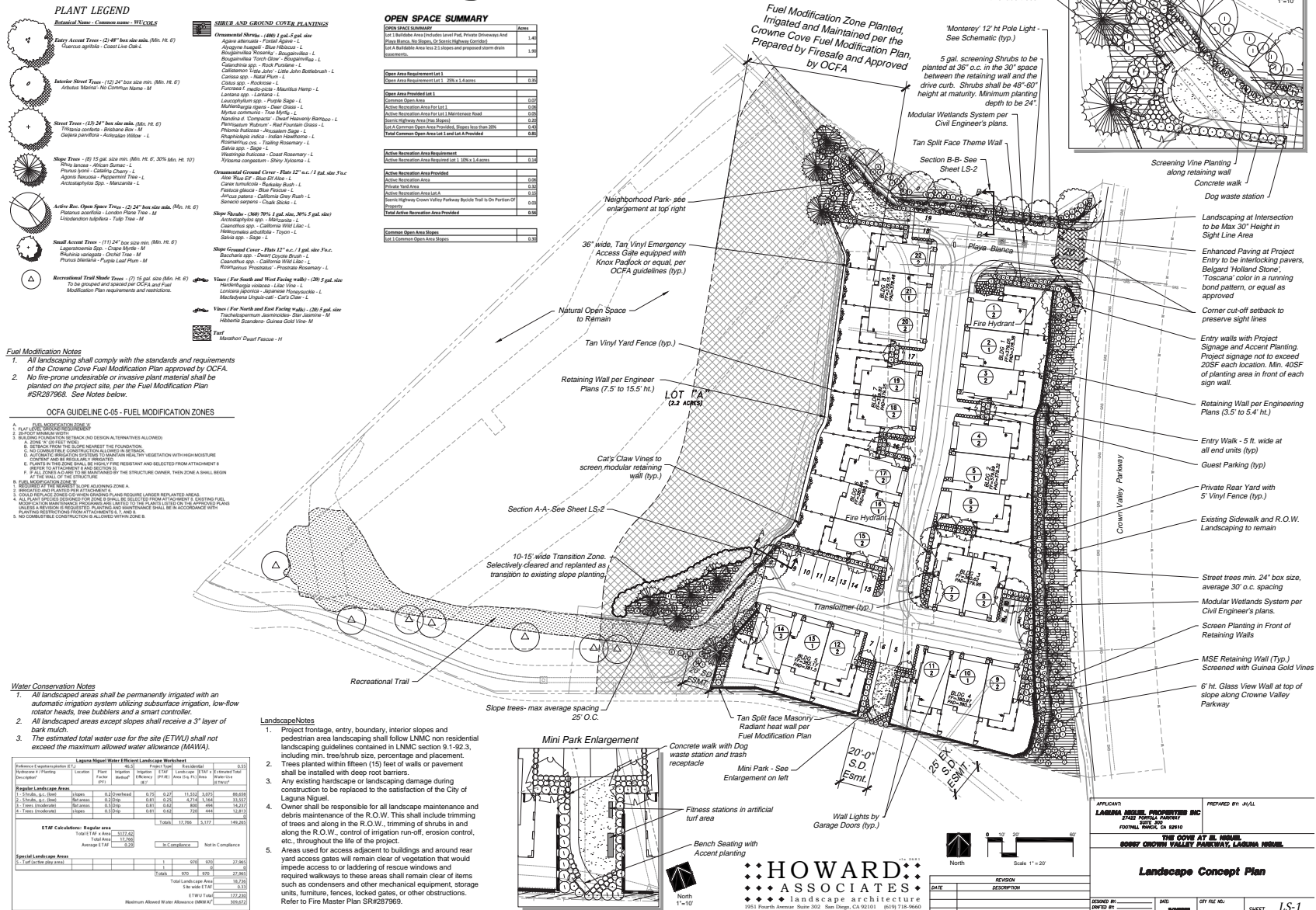
Source: Bassenian/Lagoni (8/26/2021).

**Figure 4.1.C Building Elevations-Triplex**

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# The Cove at El Niguel Landscape Concept Plan



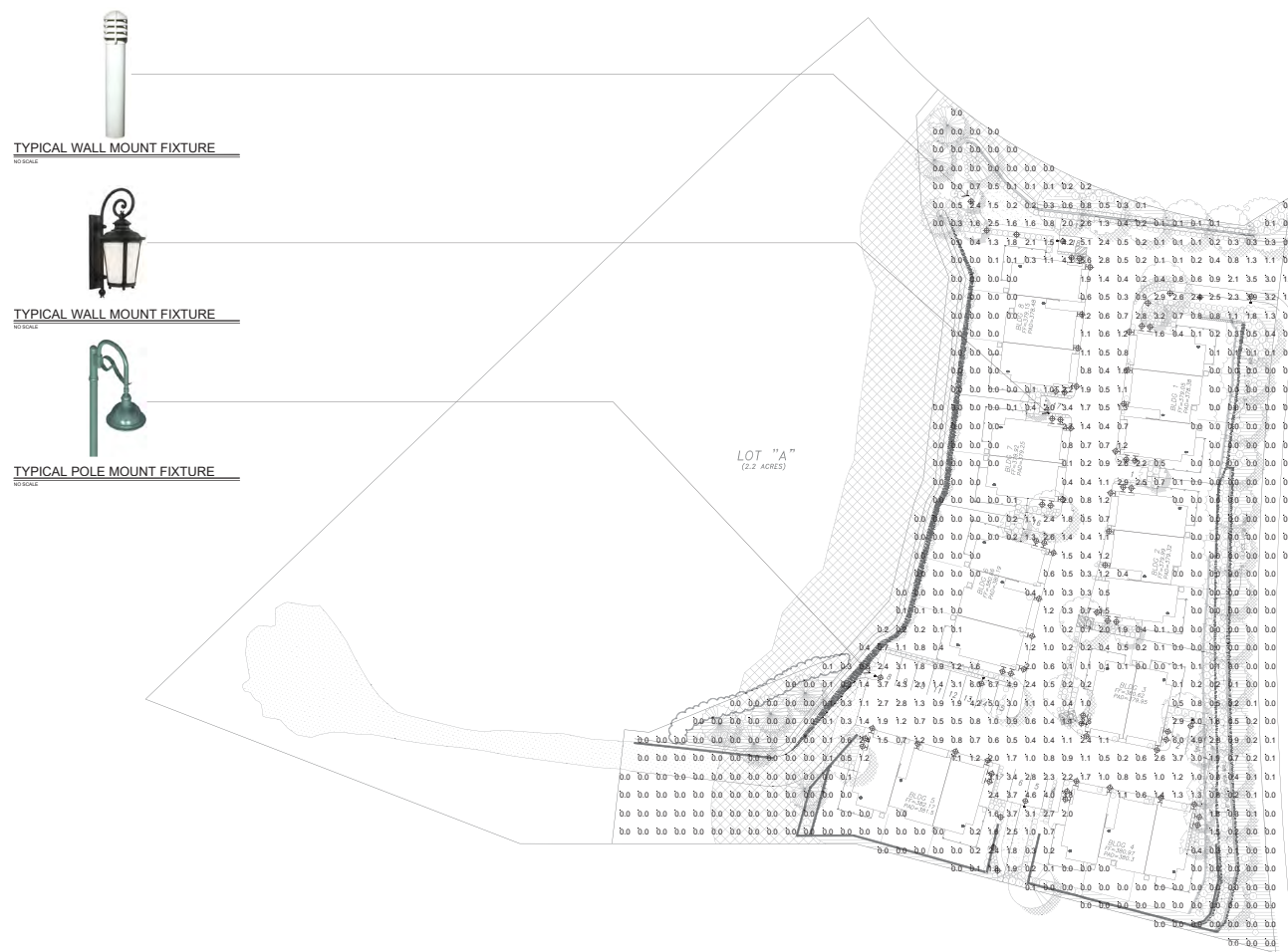
Source: Howard Associates Landscape Architect (3/01/2022).

The Cove at El Niguel  
Admin Draft EIR – April 2022

Figure 4.1.D Landscape Plan

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# The Cove At El Niguel *Lighting Concept Plan*



1 of 1

Source: Howard Associates Landscape Architect (12/20/2020).

**Figure 4.1.E Lighting Concept Plan**

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