4.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL QUALITY

4.1.1 Introduction

This section discusses existing visual resources and analyzes the potential for development under the proposed 2014 LRDP to affect those resources. The physical characteristics of the project site and surrounding areas are discussed briefly. For a more detailed description of land uses, refer to Section 4.9, Land Use and Planning.

Public and agency NOP comments related to aesthetics and visual quality are summarized below:

- The EIR should analyze the effects of additional human activity on the shoreline's aesthetics;
- The EIR should analyze the aesthetic effects of new buildings on this lightly developed shoreline area.

4.1.2 Environmental Setting

The approximately 134-acre RBC site is at 1301 South 46th Street in the City of Richmond South Shoreline area, approximately 5 miles northwest of the UC Berkeley campus and the LBNL site in Berkeley. The City of Richmond is on land that projects into San Pablo Bay, San Pablo Strait, and San Francisco Bay. The San Pablo Potrero Hills rise to 400 feet above sea level along the Richmond shoreline in a northwest direction, abruptly ending just southwest of the Richmond Inner Harbor at Brooks Island. In contrast to the dramatic San Pablo Potrero Hills, most of the Richmond shoreline (including the proposed project site) is in the coastal lowlands.

The project site is bounded on the west by a PG&E service station, Bio-Rad Laboratories, and Meeker Slough; on the north/northwest by Regatta Boulevard; on the northeast by Meade Street; on the east by South 46th Street; and on the south by the San Francisco Bay Trail. I-580 runs parallel to Meade Street along the northeastern site boundary. The RBC site generally consists of upland areas developed with buildings used for academic, research, and privately leased activities; a north-south oriented grove of mature eucalyptus trees in the central portion of the site; coastal grassland areas; a tidal salt marsh (known as the Western Stege Marsh); and a transition zone between the upland areas and marsh. Grasslands occur in a number of meadows and comprise about 14 acres of the RBC site. The Bay Trail is south of the site.

The site is currently developed with 1,050,000 gsf of facilities, including more than 500,000 square feet of research space, the NRLF, and the EPA. The existing upland parcels are currently developed with approximately 80 one- and two-story buildings, roadways, parking lots, and landscaped areas. The majority of the existing buildings are 45 years old or older. The uplands area also contains previously disturbed, currently undeveloped open space. Land uses surrounding the RBC site include industrial and office uses, a major interstate freeway, and low-to-medium-density residential neighborhoods. Regatta Boulevard, along the northern boundary, is adjacent to a railroad spur and a business complex developed with one- to two-story buildings. Bio-Rad Laboratories, a private research equipment manufacturing company, is immediately west of the RBC site. The adjacent property to the east is the location of former chemical production operations previously owned by several entities, including Stauffer and Zeneca, and is currently owned by Cherokee Simeon Venture I, LLC. The Marina Bay residential neighborhood, across Meeker Slough and southwest of the RBC site, consists of a mix of multi- and single-family residences. Low- and medium-density residential uses are also located across I-580, north of the Meade Street boundary.

4.1.3 Regulatory Considerations

Federal

There are no specific federal regulations pertaining to land use consistency or compatibility that would apply to the evaluation of visual resources.

State

California Scenic Highway Program: Section IV of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Guidelines for the Official Designation of Scenic Highways defines a Scenic Corridor as the area of land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway. No California Scenic Highways exist in the project viewshed, so no state regulations pertaining to scenic resources are applicable.

Local

The RBC site is University-owned property where work within the University's mission is performed on land owned or controlled by The Regents. As a state entity, the University is exempt under the state constitution from compliance with local land use regulations, including general plans and zoning. The University seeks to cooperate with local jurisdictions to, the extent feasible, to reduce any physical consequences of potential land use conflicts. The following sections summarize provisions in the Richmond Municipal Code and policies from the City of Richmond General Plan as they relate to visual resources (City of Richmond 2011).

City of Richmond Municipal Code

The Richmond Municipal Code development standards guide City development practices and protect valued scenic corridors and views. The municipal code guidelines aim to create standards encouraging development of new and innovative structures while maintaining established natural and man-made views important to the City of Richmond. Article 15 of the City of Richmond Municipal Code establishes the zoning land use, design guidelines, and development protocols.

City of Richmond General Plan

The City of Richmond General Plan 2030 Land Use and Urban Design Element contains the following policies related to visual quality (City of Richmond 2011):

LU5.3 Land Use Compatibility: Require sufficient visual open space or landscaped screening between industrial operations and adjacent to residential or recreational activities to create adequate buffers.

LU5.B Design Guidelines: Develop design guidelines and standards for all land uses and development prototypes. The guidelines would build on zoning codes to promote high-quality design. Guidelines should also address compatibility between new and existing historic structures and districts, residential and adjacent non-residential uses and urban and natural areas.

LU5.C Industrial Use Buffers: New industrial uses established adjacent to existing residential or commercial uses shall incorporate measures to minimize impacts to residential uses such as enclosure of industrial activities in buildings, use of screening for visually unattractive uses, site design, soundproofing and landscaping.

The 2030 General Plan EIR determined that the effects on aesthetics and visual resources from future development pursuant to the General Plan would be significant and unavoidable. Although development could improve aesthetic quality at a local level, views and scenic vistas could be substantially impacted. No mitigation is available for this impact. New sources of light and glare would be introduced. Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce light and glare

impacts, but the impacts would remain significant and unavoidable. Cumulative impacts would also be significant and unavoidable.

4.1.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Standards of Significance

The impacts on aesthetics and visual resources from the implementation of the 2014 LRDP would be considered significant if they would exceed the following Standards of Significance, in accordance with Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines* and the UC CEQA Handbook:

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

CEQA Checklist Items Adequately Addressed in the Initial Study

The NOP Initial Study analysis concluded that further analysis of the following issues was not required in the EIR:

- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

The Initial Study determined that the RBC site does not contain scenic resources and is not on or near a state scenic highway. Regional access to the site is by I-80 and I-580. Portions of I-580 are designated as scenic—from its junction with State Route 24 to the San Leandro city limit, and a portion in eastern Alameda County away from the project area. Therefore, no impact would occur to scenic resources within a state scenic highway. The remaining checklist items are analyzed below.

Analytical Methods

Applicable planning documents (including City of Richmond documents) were reviewed to identify the types of land uses intended for the area, along with the guidelines for visual resources protection or preservation. Consideration was given to the existing visual setting in the project viewshed (defined as the geographical area in which the project can be seen). The project's potential visual changes were assessed to determine impact significance, following the CEQA Guidelines checklist questions listed above. Potential project impacts were evaluated using a public viewpoint analysis, among other tools and information sources. Viewpoints representing the most sensitive locations from which the project would be seen were analyzed and simulated. Visual simulations of the proposed development are on Figures 4-1 to 4-7. Once all potential impacts were examined, impact significance was determined based on CEQA standards, and appropriate mitigation measures were identified. Under CEQA, any required mitigation must be feasible and specific to an identified impact. Because perception of aesthetic impacts is inherently subjective to individual observers, a conservative interpretation of the analysis is used in this EIR.

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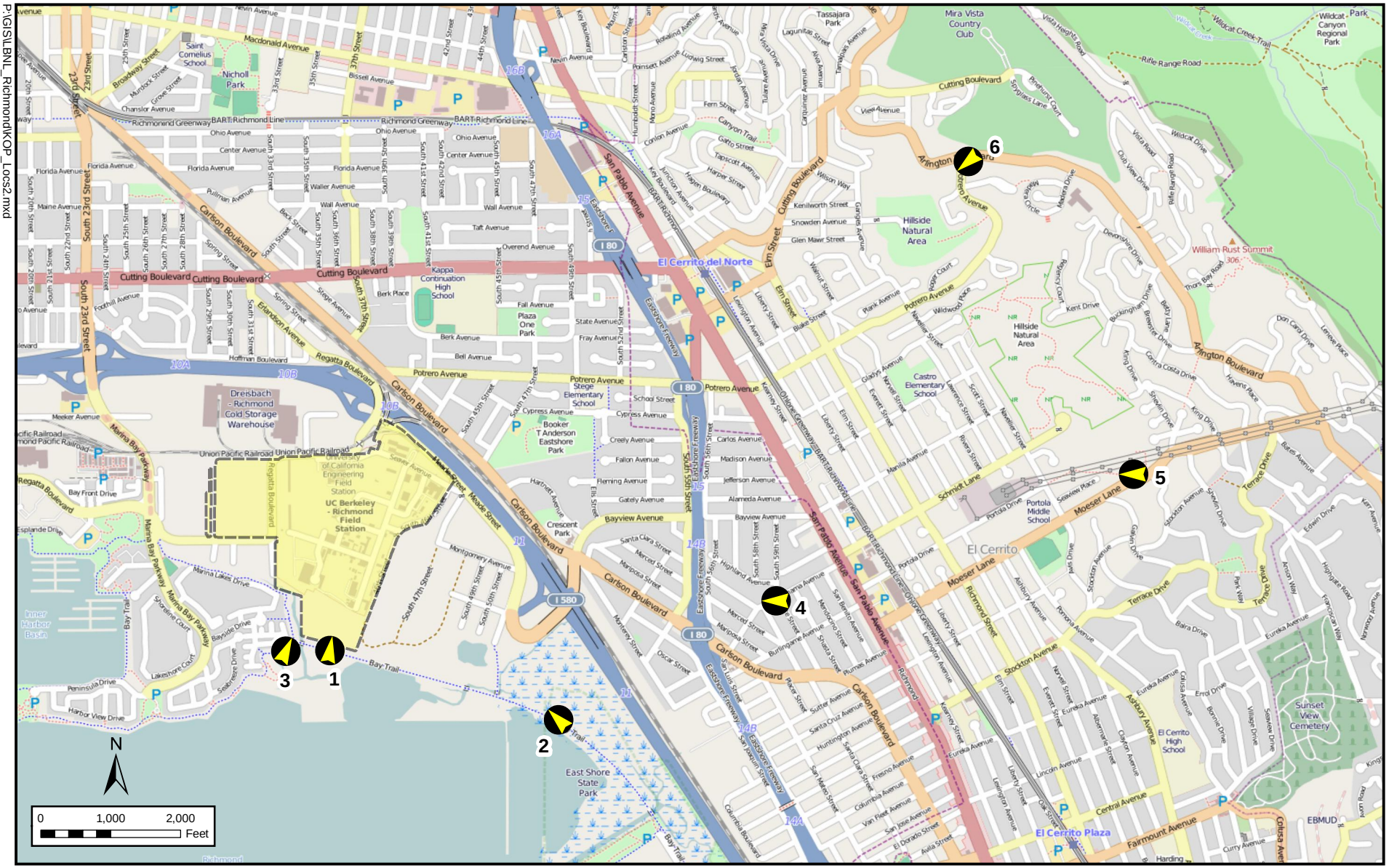

Key Observation Point Locations

Richmond, California

Figure 4-1

TETRA TECH

Source: ArcGIS Online, OpenStreetMap and contributors.

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Northward view from key observation point 1.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Northward view from key observation point 1.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 1 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-2

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Northwestward view from key observation point 2.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Northwestward view from key observation point 2.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 2 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-3

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Northeastern view from key observation point 3.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Northeastern view from key observation point 3.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 3 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-4

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Westward view from key observation point 4.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Westward view from key observation point 4.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 4 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-5

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Westward view from key observation point 5.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Westward view from key observation point 5.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 5 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-6

RBC Site, 2013 existing conditions. Southwestward view from key observation point 6.
(Photograph taken 2/9/2013).

RBC Site, 2050 Illustrative Development Scenario conditions.
Southwestward view from key observation point 6.
(Conceptual simulation does not depict building articulation or details).

Key Observation Point 6 Visual Simulation

TETRA TECH

Richmond, California

Figure 4-7

RBC 2014 LRDP Policies

The RBC 2014 LRDP policies related to aesthetics and visual quality resources include the following:

- LU5 – Land Use Policy on Community: The Richmond Bay Campus will be an asset to residents of local East Bay communities.
    - Provide programs and facilities on site that can be used for education and outreach to the local community including an arts program that helps to establish the campus as a visitor destination.
    - Support integration of the campus into the Richmond South Shoreline Area; remove peripheral fencing as adequate population is achieved; and consider adjacent uses in decisions on building siting and design.
    - Allow convenient multi-mode access to the campus and promote public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian transportation modes.
    - Identify Lark Drive and Regatta Boulevard as urban streets where the public realm will be designed to support a pedestrian environment with retail and other amenities to integrate with the neighboring community fabric.
- LU4 – Land Use Policy on Growth: Ensure that the campus grows in a logical and cost-effective manner.
    - Retain existing uses on campus for as long as possible and evaluate opportunities to retain or relocate uses on -site for the long term.
    - Concentrate development to preserve future capacity while maintaining natural areas.
    - Create complete collections of buildings and open spaces as development progresses.
    - Phase growth to create the critical mass of activities and population needed to support amenities.
    - Plan and develop infrastructure to allow logical and cost effective extensions to support future development.
    - Implement LRDP provisions for development undertaken by the private sector for synergistic uses by public or private entities.
- S3 – Sustainability Policy on Site Development: Embody environmental stewardship and respect the unique character of the Richmond Bay Campus in site development.
    - Draw on the neighborhood context and prominently feature the natural assets including climate, wetlands, and proximity to the San Francisco Bay and the Bay Trail.
    - Actively promote sustainability as a core value at the campus and provide practical opportunities for innovation and education in sustainable design.
    - Manage soil contamination as a component of each construction project.

LRDP Impacts and Mitigation Measures

LRDP Impact AES-1: Development under the 2014 LRDP could substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of the RBC site and its surroundings. (*Potentially Significant; Less than Significant with Mitigation*)

The RBC site has retained its historical industrial character. With the proposed project, existing development would be gradually replaced by a mixture of buildings and facilities with greater massing and density. RBC 2014 LRDP implementation would result in visual and aesthetic changes that could alter the site's character as visible from certain public vantage points. Such viewpoints include those from Regatta Boulevard, South 46th Street, and San Francisco Bay Trail. Changes would be associated with (1) demolition of specific existing buildings, (2) development of new buildings, (3) proposed landscaping and other on-site improvements, and (4) the pattern of clustered development. Implementation of any major new campus development would likely result in the construction of buildings and increased traffic in the area.

Any major new campus projects would be reviewed at each stage of design by the UC Berkeley Design Review Committee. The project provisions would be guided by the RBC 2014 LRDP, the Physical Design Framework for the RBC, and neighborhood concept plans or project specific design guidelines prepared for each such project. They would also be subject to design review and approval by The UC Regents or their designee.

Each neighborhood would have a central space around which concentrations of active uses—dining, meeting rooms, recreation or building lobbies—would be focused. According to the RBC 2014 LRDP, these central spaces might also have an iconic element such as a vertical marker of substantial height, sculpture, fountain, or other landscape element to act as a place-making and orienting device. These spaces would be designed to create a more collegial environment that encourages and facilitates interaction among employees and guests. The specific configuration and design of new development within these neighborhoods would be guided by the Physical Design Framework and concept plans cooperatively developed by LBNL and UC Berkeley.

Approximately 25 acres would be designated Natural Open Space to preserve those areas the University plans to protect from development and maintain in their natural condition. Since new buildings would not be permitted to intrude into such preservation areas, and since new development would have a research character somewhat similar to that in surrounding land uses, the visual changes might not appear significant to some observers. However, such changes might be perceived by other observers as intrusive and substantially altering of the site's scenic background elements.

The site's visual character would continue to appear as buildings among grassland, trees and shrubs, and implementation of the LRDP Principles and Policies would be expected to reduce potential effects on visual character. Some new buildings allowable under the LRDP could be more visually intrusive than others, particularly from certain viewpoints. Many current buildings would be replaced by taller, larger, and/or more massive new buildings. Building heights across the RBC are expected to vary, with lower buildings at the Bay-facing edge and taller buildings behind them. Four- and five-story buildings are expected to be common, with heights of 100 feet for a five-story building. Also, for example, potential development would introduce substantial building massing in the mid-ground, behind the Western Stege Marsh and lowland areas, as viewed from the San Francisco Bay Trail. In addition, Regatta Boulevard and South 46th Street views would include new, larger mid-ground buildings even as the overall visual site character may appear relatively unchanged. As a result, it is anticipated that some observers might perceive

a substantial adverse change in the on-site visual character from construction of the campus or from construction of individual buildings. Because perception of aesthetic impacts is inherently subjective to individual observers, a conservative interpretation of the analysis is used in this EIR: the RBC 2014 LRDP development could alter the site's visual quality and character in a potentially significant manner.

Construction and demolition activities would also create temporary visual changes related to the presence of construction equipment, materials, and workforce, as well as debris and dust.

However, as noted, the site's visual character is of a historically industrial and currently research-institutional nature. Under LRDP development, older industrial and institutional buildings would be replaced by modern buildings of a somewhat similar nature, but the site's overall scale and density would increase over decades of RBC development. It is these latter elements that could potentially be aesthetically objectionable to some off-site viewers. Nevertheless, this project would not be constructed in a single phase or time period, but gradually over several decades. Therefore, the scale of change would not be so sudden as depicted in the "before" and "after" visual simulations in this chapter but would rather occur piecemeal, a single building or a few buildings at a time, over a very long (from a viewer's point of view) period. Even a viewer who spent decades in the site vicinity would be unlikely to experience campus development as a dramatic change, but rather as a series of small changes as older buildings were removed and new buildings were constructed. In addition, LRDP Mitigation Measure AES-1 would ensure that the existing visual character and quality of the RBC site would not be substantially degraded by a project under the LRDP or by development under the LRDP at full implementation. With implementation of LRDP Principles and Policies as well as mitigation measure LRDP MM AES-1, operational and construction-related impacts on visual character and quality would be less than significant.

LRDP MM AES-1: The University shall develop and implement a Physical Design Framework that protects the visual quality of both the on- and off-campus environments through provisions that address building scale, materials, and color schemes. The Physical Design Framework shall include best management practices and procedures for avoiding or minimizing aesthetic nuisances in demolition, construction, and operational phases of the project. Design review processes for planning of new buildings and development shall be clearly articulated and followed throughout the life of the project.

Increased RBC scale and density would be addressed in a number of ways through the Physical Design Framework and subsequent plans: buildings would be restricted in height and height zones would further restrict heights in certain locations. Building facades would be broken up by architectural and design features so as to minimize the appearance of mass and bulk. Reflective material would be restricted, which, would minimize the appearance of the new buildings particularly at greater distances. Trees and other landscaping features would be used to further break up, obscure, or minimize RBC development. Aesthetically objectionable appurtenances such as stacks, machinery, tanks, and HVAC systems on top of buildings would be sheltered from view wherever practical. Demolition debris and long-term construction supplies and equipment would be stored such that – to the extent practicable – they would not be visually intrusive from off-site viewpoints.

LRDP Impact AES-2: Development under the 2014 LRDP would not adversely affect any scenic vistas at the RBC site and its vicinity. (*Less than Significant*)

Views of the RBC site from public viewing points to the north are limited due to the presence of on- and off-site trees and the visual buffer of I-580. The most readily available public viewpoints are from the San Francisco Bay Trail and South 46th Street. Under the 2014 LRDP project, views from the San Francisco Bay Trail observation points would change, but not substantially. Foreground views would continue to comprise the marsh and lowland areas transitioning gently to the developed upland portion of the RBC site. In mid-ground views, anticipated project buildings would be visible; some of these new buildings would be built adjacent to existing structures, while others would replace existing structures. Due to the setback between the Bay Trail and the proposed site, views available to trail users are not expected to change significantly.

The RBC site has natural areas on and near it, such as the San Francisco Bay, Western Stege Marsh, and coastal grasslands. Because the area topography is relatively flat, panoramic views from the RBC site of San Francisco Bay, the Bay Bridge, and the San Pablo Potrero Hills are available in the background, while views of marsh and coastal grasslands are available in the foreground and mid-ground. With implementation of the RBC LRDP, on-site views will remain available from open spaces and plazas, as well as from buildings. Scenic vistas from viewpoints in the hills surrounding the RBC site would remain after campus development. Buildings may be tall enough to be visible, but are expected to alter a very small portion of scenic vistas of the Bay and other natural areas as viewed from these areas. Views would not be obstructed by campus development. Implementation of the RBC LRDP would have a less than significant impact on the view of scenic vistas, and no mitigation would be required.

Mitigation Measure: No mitigation measure is required.

LRDP Impact AES-3: Development under the 2014 LRDP would create new sources of light and glare that would not adversely affect regional day or nighttime views. (*Less than Significant*)

With the inclusion of new buildings and facilities, RBC development could create new sources of light and glare visible from off-site viewpoints. The proposed campus buildings would require on-site nighttime lighting for safety and security. Such new light sources would include exterior building illumination; lighted facilities; parking lots or structures; vehicle headlights; and glare from reflective building, pavement, and vehicle surfaces. Because project lighting would be designed to limit off-site light spill and because the project site is relatively far from residential areas, there is expected to be no appreciable effect on ambient light and glare conditions in sensitive surrounding areas. To the extent that light and glare associated with the project would be visible from off-site, they would be seen in the context of the extensive nighttime lighting that already characterizes the area. Project structures constructed pursuant to the 2014 LRDP would not include large areas of highly reflective material that would produce glare, so the proposed LRDP would not affect the amount of daytime glare in the area. The project site would be in an area planned for research and development with existing similar uses in the vicinity. For these reasons, projects under the RBC 2014 LRDP do not have the potential to create new sources of substantial light or glare that could have adverse impacts on day- or nighttime views.

In the event that nighttime construction activities take place, illumination that meets state and federal worker safety regulations would be required. The majority of nighttime construction work, if any, is anticipated for building interior work following the completion of exterior walls.

Task-specific lighting would be used to the extent practical while complying with worker safety regulations.

LRDP ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PRACTICES AES-3a, AES-3b, and AES-3c are not required but could be implemented to further reduce the magnitude of these less than significant effects.

LRDP ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PRACTICE AES-3a:

Lighting for new development projects could be designed to include shields and cut-offs that minimize light spill onto unintended surfaces and minimize atmospheric light pollution.

LRDP ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PRACTICE AES-3b:

To reduce off-site lighting impacts, lighting at the campus could be restricted to areas where it would be required for safety, security, and operation. Exterior lights could be hooded, and lights could be directed on-site so significant light or glare would be minimized. For areas where lighting is not required for normal operation, safety, or security, switched lighting circuits could be provided, allowing these areas to remain dark at most times, minimizing the amount of lighting potentially visible off-site. In parking lots, lights could be equipped with motion sensors that reduce the lights to half of their brightness when no motion is detected.

LRDP ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PRACTICE AES-3c:

As part of the design review procedures, light and glare could be given specific consideration, and measures could be incorporated into the project design to minimize both. In general, exterior surfaces would not be reflective; architectural screens and shading devices are preferable to reflective glass.

Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures

LRDP Cumulative Impact AES-1: Development under the 2014 LRDP together with regional cumulative development would not result in cumulatively considerable impacts on the area's visual quality and scenic viewshed. (*Less than Significant*)

The RBC site area is designated as a "Change Area" in the City of Richmond General Plan 2030 (City of Richmond 2011). The area is identified as "CA-3 – Ford Peninsula in Marina Bay" in the General Plan. Currently, large industrial and office buildings characterize the Ford Peninsula area. The eastern section of the Ford Peninsula area, about 2 miles from the project site, is envisioned as a mixed-use waterfront district around the marina that takes advantage of the easy access to regional freeways, waterfront location, dramatic views, and nearby employment. A new ferry terminal is proposed in this area. Development of a transit-oriented, high-intensity urban center supporting a ferry terminal within a few miles from the RBC site might contribute to a substantial cumulative aesthetic impact in that area. Views of the high intensity residential, commercial and entertainment uses after the development of the ferry terminal area would be experienced by two sensitive receptors, the San Francisco Bay Trail users and private property owners in the hills. These ferry terminal area improvements would be sufficiently distant so as not to be part of the same viewshed as the proposed RBC project.

Enhancements to the San Francisco Bay Trail are identified in the City of Richmond General Plan 2030 (City of Richmond 2011). Currently, several improvements are being considered along the

shoreline and marina to create a distinctive waterfront promenade. Shoreline development would incorporate a variety of open spaces including parks and plazas accented with native and drought tolerant landscaping. These enhancements would add to the viewshed of the nearby sensitive receptors of the proposed RBC site and would contribute to a beneficial cumulative impact.

Areas to the north and west of the site are largely built out. No substantial new development is proposed in those areas, and much of the surrounding area would remain industrial without much forecasted change. Because other development associated with Marina Bay is not expected to coincide with the RBC LRDP timeframe and is not part of the same viewshed, the cumulative aesthetic effects of the proposed project would be less than significant.

LRDP Cumulative Impact AES-2: Development under the 2014 LRDP together with cumulative development in the region would create new sources of light and glare that would not result in cumulatively considerable impacts on regional day or nighttime views. (*Less than Significant*)

Development of the RBC would add to the existing sources of light and glare in the project site. Exterior and interior lighting associated with buildings, parking lots, and other facilities, combined with illumination of roadways and walkways, would add to the sources of nighttime illumination and glare. As discussed above, these new sources of light and glare would not be substantial and would be mitigated through design measures; they would also be distant from sensitive receptors. They would often not be in the same viewshed as other cumulative light and glare sources in the region. Because of that and because the RBC site is included in the area envisioned to change in the City of Richmond General Plan 2030 (City of Richmond 2011), the project's contribution to this cumulative impact would not be considerable.

4.1.5 References

City of Richmond. 2011. *Richmond General Plan 2030.* August 2011.

University of California. 2013. Richmond Bay Campus Long Range Development Plan, Community Draft. August 12, 2013.