

## CHAPTER 3.2 AESTHETICS

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### 3.2 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing aesthetic character, urban landscape, and visual setting of the Olive Pit mine site and vicinity. Aesthetic and visual resources encompass the natural and cultural features of the environment that can be seen by the public and influence the aesthetic appeal an area may have for viewers. Aesthetic resource impacts are normally associated with the visual contrast between human-made facilities and the natural elements of the surrounding landscape, or in more urban settings, with contrasting and complimentary characteristics relative to the existing built environment.

The analysis of the potential effects on aesthetics identifies the range and type of impacts to the landscape and aesthetic character of the project site that could result from implementation of the Proposed Project. The analysis evaluates regulatory compliance of the Proposed Project with applicable local laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards. This chapter includes mitigation measures (where necessary), followed by the residual impacts after application of the mitigation program, as well as, a discussion of cumulative impacts. This evaluation is based on review of project materials and site reconnaissance.

#### 3.2.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

##### **Regional**

The Olive Pit mine site (Proposed Project site) is located in an urbanized area of the greater Los Angeles region, within the City of Irwindale. The Proposed Project site location lies below the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains and the Angeles National Forest. The site is situated in the San Gabriel alluvial fan, formed by the San Gabriel River, which has historically supported more than 32 separate mining operations in the past 125 years. The San Gabriel alluvial fan has been one of the most productive aggregate mining regions in the southwest and has played an important role in the development of urban Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley region.

##### **Local**

The topography of the City of Irwindale area is a result of the historical alluvial fan. With the exception of the large mines in the City, the Irwindale area slopes approximately 50 feet every mile towards the south. The land surface has been bisected by a braided stream network with local relief of a few feet to tens of feet. This was most evident along the San Gabriel River prior to the construction of levees to control flooding. These land patterns represent significant topographic relief features within the City and surrounding areas.

The City encompasses approximately 9.5 square miles and is located 20 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Elevation within the City ranges from approximately 625 feet above mean sea level (MSL) in the northern part of the City to about 310 feet above MSL in the southern part of the City. The City's motto is "*Jardin de Roca*," Spanish for "*Garden of Rocks*" referring to the high

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quality rock and gravel found in the City and the prominence of mining in the City's history. As of 2008, mining operations occupied over 39 percent of the City's total land surface area. Presently, Irwindale has six active aggregate mining operations (*General Plan Update, Resource Management Element, 2008*).

### **Olive Pit Mine Site**

The entire Olive Pit mine site contains evidence of intense disturbance from previous mining activities. Mining at the Olive Pit began in 1925 and ceased in 1973. The site remains inactive and is in the same configuration that existed when mining ceased. Evidence of ongoing anthropogenic disturbance from trespass, off-highway vehicle activity, illegal dumping, littering, and other physical disturbance was noted throughout the site (during biological reconnaissance). Due to its adjacency with intense urban uses, the site is subject to regular noise, lighting, invasion by non-native exotic species, and other spillover effects. Sign of domestic pets was also observed.

Natural disturbance to the site includes erosion on the steep perimeter slopes and loose gravelly soils, in addition to occasional flooding and inundation within the lower elevations of the site. As shown in the following photographs, there is existing fencing surround the entire site. Non native vegetation exists around the perimeter of the site, including the side slopes and some native vegetation exists in the bottom of the mining pit. Topography of the site is generally characterized by a deep depression with steep slopes on all sides. The perimeter of the site remains at street level where surface elevations range from a high of 430 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) at the northeast corner of the site, to a low of 400 feet AMSL at the southwest corner. The past mining activities left steep slopes that descend into the pit up to 100 feet. The toe of the mined slopes surrounding the pit ranges from a high of 320 feet AMSL in the northeast corner, to a low of 250 feet AMSL on the western edge of the pit. The bottom of the pit is uneven and represents the extraction patterns of the previous mining activities. Thus, there are several depressions and random undulating slopes. The low elevation of the pit bottom is 228 feet AMSL and the high of 300 feet AMSL is in the northeast corner. Refer to **Figure 3.3-1 Site Photographs** and **Figure 3.3-2 Existing Conditions**.

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**Figure 3.2-1 Site Photographs**



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### 3.2.2 REGULATORY SETTING

#### **California Environmental Quality Act**

CEQA requires assessment of potential impacts to aesthetic resources, including impacts on scenic vistas, impacts on designated scenic highways, visual character of the project area in general, and potential for a project to emit light or glare that could adversely affect nighttime views.

#### **California Scenic Highway Program**

This program was created by the California Legislature to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of land adjacent to those highways. When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. These ordinances make up the scenic corridor protection program. Scenic corridor protection programs and policies are intended to preserve the scenic qualities of the highway corridor, including regulation of land use and density of development, detailed land and site planning, control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards), careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment (California Streets and Highways Code Section 260-284). The site is not located along a State Scenic Highway, nor do the surface roadways surrounding the project site qualify for special scenic status; therefore, these regulations do not apply to the project site and vicinity.

#### **City of Irwindale General Plan Update**

The City's General Plan Update, adopted by the City Council in 2008, provides the guidance for development projects within the City. The General Plan is considered a living document intended to change and evolve with the dynamics of the changing community. As with all development proposals, the City's Planning Department staff reviews design plans for consistency with these design guidelines, after which, the Planning Commission and City Council approve or deny the project proposal.

The Proposed Project will be designed or conditioned to comply with the General Plan, and as the City deems appropriate. The General Plan policies pertaining to aesthetics/visual resources and which apply to the Proposed Project include the following list of policies. (*Of note:* The City's General Plan refers to the "Olive Pit" (as it is now called) as the "CalMat Baldwin Park Pit."

#### **Resource Management Element**

*Resource Management Element Policy 2.* The City of Irwindale will require that ongoing mining activities adhere to any pertinent regulatory controls as a means to protect the public's safety and health.

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*Resource Management Element Policy 3.* The City of Irwindale will work with the quarry owners and/or operators and regulatory agencies to help facilitate their timely reclamation.

*Resource Management Element Policy 12.* The City recognizes the mineral information classified by the California State Geologist and incorporated by the State Mining and Geology Board into the State Mining and Geology Board Reclamation Regulations, at Section 3550.5 for Sectors D and E. Through measures in this Element, City will encourage the conservation and development of identified mineral deposits, subject to environmental considerations and the City's discretionary authority over land use entitlements.

*Resource Management Element Policy 13.* The City will encourage environmental considerations and the City's discretionary authority over land use entitlements, the conservation and possible future extraction of areas classified by the State Geologist and designated by the State Mining and Geology Board Reclamation Regulations as regionally significant mineral deposits through designation of such areas under the City's Quarry Zone overlay or "Q Zone" and attendant standards and regulations.

*Issue Area – Mining and Reclamation.* The following policies focus on those City policy actions that can be taken to improve environmental compliance, reclamation planning, and long-term economic improvement of the mines and quarries (inactive, active, and reclaimed) in Irwindale.

*Resource Management Element Policy 16.* The City will revise the zoning code to specify post-mining land use designations, with a quarry overlay zone to establish uniform mine operation and reclamation standards.

*Resource Management Element Policy 17.* The City will implement improved reclamation planning at targeted sites to ensure post-mining land uses consistent with the City's long-term planning and economic development goals.

*Resource Management Element Policy 18.* The City should implement all available measures to update and improve reclamation planning for new entitlements, and to address inadequacies in current reclamation plans. These actions may include more vigorous requirements for identifying end uses and detailed standards for related slope, vegetation, and infrastructure actions for reclamation, and more accurate determination of financial assurances.

### **City of Irwindale Municipal Code**

The Proposed Project will be required to comply with the City's Municipal Code for guidelines regarding aesthetics. These include but are not limited to:

#### **Chapter 17.63 - Surface Mining and Reclamation Plans**

##### **17.63.010 Purpose and Intent**

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- A. The city council recognizes that the extraction of minerals is essential to the continued economic well-being of the city and to the needs of society. The city council also recognizes that the reclamation of mined lands is necessary to prevent or minimize adverse effects on the environment and to protect the public health and safety, and that surface mining takes place in diverse areas where the geologic, topographic, climatic, biological, and social conditions are significantly different, causing reclamation operations and reclamation specifications to vary accordingly.
- B. The purpose and intent of this chapter is to ensure the continued availability of important mineral resources, while regulating surface mining operations as required by California's Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (Public Resources Code Sections 2710 et seq.), as amended, hereinafter referred to as "SMARA," and State Mining and Geology Board regulations (hereinafter referred to as "state regulations") for surface mining and reclamation practices (California Code of Regulations [CCR] Title 14, Division [2](#), [Chapter 8](#), Subchapter 1, Sections 3500 et seq.), to ensure that:
1. Adverse environmental effects are prevented or minimized and mined lands are reclaimed to a usable condition and are readily adaptable for alternative land uses.
  2. The production and conservation of minerals are encouraged, while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed wildlife, range and forage, aesthetics and enjoyment.
  3. Residual hazards to the public health and safety are eliminated.

Chapter 17.60 contains standards for fences, walls, and landscaping.

### **Chapter 17.60 - Q Quarry Zone**

This Chapter contains standards for fences, slopes, walls, and landscaping.

The purpose of these City regulations is to ensure that every land use in the Quarry Zone is constructed, operated, and maintained at all times in accordance with the regulations set forth in this chapter. When combined with Chapter 17.63 requirements, these City codes comprehensively regulate the appearance and operations of mining and reclamation sites to ensure they are consistent with the community character.

### **3.2.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS AND MITIGATION**

The analysis of potential aesthetic impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Project assesses the degree to which the Project's mining and site reclamation activities would change the existing visual quality and characteristics of the area.

Post-reclamation future land development at the Olive Pit mine site would not occur until mining and reclamation activities are completed, which is planned to happen several decades into the future. At this time, any potential impacts from development of the reclaimed property would be

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speculative. Furthermore, it is recognized that all future post-reclamation phases of development will be subject to subsequent discretionary approvals; and therefore, would be subject to independent review to satisfy requirements of CEQA.

### **Methodology**

The analysis of aesthetic impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Project assesses the degree to which the Project's short-term and long-term operations would change the existing visual quality and characteristics of the area. Impacts to aesthetics and visual resources have been evaluated through site visits, field observations, literature review, and research, and aerial photo interpretation, review of the site plans and Reclamation Plan. Several site visits occurred during the months of May and June 2014.

### **Threshold of Significance**

The significance thresholds for potential aesthetic impacts were determined based upon the State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G and other relevant considerations including the City of Irwindale's policies and requirements. Using these criteria, the Proposed Project would be considered to have a significant adverse aesthetic impact if it were to:

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

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### THRESHOLD AES-1

*Would the Proposed Project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?*

#### **No Impact**

The project site consists of a vacant, open-pit mine secured by perimeter fencing. The mine site remains inactive and is in the same configuration that existed when mining ceased in the 1970s. The perimeter of the site currently is at street level where surface elevations range from a high of 430 feet AMSL at the northeast corner of the site, to a low of 400 feet AMSL at the southwest corner. Refer to Figure 3.3-2 Existing Conditions.

The proposed project involves long-term mining and reclamation activities to create a street-level building pad approximately 32-acres in size. The remaining portion of the 190-acre site would be reclaimed for the potential use as flood control, storm water retention and/or a ground water recharge basin, and/or open space recreational land uses. The project does not include the development of any buildings or structures.

According to the City's General Plan, there are no scenic vistas within the project area. However, the San Gabriel Mountains located to the north of the Project site are scenic resources and an important part of the local scenery and contribute to the overall aesthetic setting of the region. Mining and site reclamation activities will be conducted below the ground surface and therefore will not be visible from the surrounding area unless viewed from the site perimeter looking down into the site. No views across the site would be affected because operations would be entirely below the surrounding grade and below adjacent street level with the exception of vehicles entering and exiting the site.

Therefore, no substantial effect on a scenic vista is anticipated with implementation of the mining and reclamation activities of the Proposed Project.

Figure 3.2-2 Existing Conditions



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### THRESHOLD AES-2

*Would the Proposed Project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?*

#### **No Impact**

The open-pit mine site is not visible to motorists on the surrounding Interstates (210, 605, and 10). Further, with the City limits, these Interstates are not State designated scenic highways (California Streets and Highways Code Section 260-284).

The site does not contain scenic resources such as rock outcroppings, trees, or buildings. Therefore, due to the nature of the Project and its location below the surrounding grade, implementation of the Proposed Project would not result in any damages to any onsite or offsite scenic resources and no mitigation is required.

### THRESHOLD AES-3

*Would the Proposed Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings?*

#### **Less than Significant Impact**

The existing perimeter fencing and existing opportunistic vegetation/that has reclaimed the site following the cessation of active mining operations would be retained at the site during the extended operational activities. Pursuant to applicable plans and zoning requirements, the Conditions of Approval for the Conditional Use Permit will include enhanced landscaping on the west and north sides of the site. The site is secured from trespassing with an existing chain link fence. The proposed on-site access road would be gated and secured throughout the life of the project.

Construction of the on-site access road and the two operational phases for mining and reclamation would result in physical and visual modification of the project site. The extent of surface disturbance will be limited to vertical dimensions, not horizontal. Increased depth of the Olive Pit site would have no effect on the baseline visual qualities, because mining below the current grade is not visible from public view points. Therefore, mining and reclamation operations would not expand beyond current disturbed boundaries.

The project does not involve the development of any structures or features. Existing views in the immediate area would not be significantly modified in relation to what currently exists and what can be expected in an urban setting. Therefore, potential impacts to the existing visual character of the site as a result of project implementation would be considered less than significant and no mitigation is required.

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### THRESHOLD AES-4

*Would the Proposed Project create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?*

#### **Less Than Significant Impact**

The project does not involve the development of any building or structure and therefore, the potential for the project to cause substantial light or glare is non-existent. No substantial lighting needs would be necessary to perform mining or reclamation activities. The proposed actions will occur at the bottom of the pit, whereas the majority of on-site activities will not be viewable to a driver, a pedestrian, or neighbors of surrounding properties.

The project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would significantly impact or affect day or nighttime views in the area; and therefore, no mitigation is required.

**No Mitigation Program pertaining to aesthetics is warranted.**

### **3.2.4 SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION**

No mitigation program is required.

### **3.2.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

A list of all cumulative projects is provided in Chapter 3.0, Environmental Setting, and Impact Analysis, above.

*Would the Proposed Project, combined with other related cumulative projects, have a substantial adverse impact on aesthetics?*

**No**

Based on the cumulative project list, cumulative development may result in development of new residential, commercial, mining, industrial, recreational, and medical facilities in the cities of Irwindale, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Duarte, Glendora, and West Covina.

The project-specific potential impacts to aesthetics are not cumulatively considerable, because there are no cumulative projects in the Proposed Project's viewshed. Impacts of other projects would be unique to each site, and unrelated to this proposed site. No mitigation is required.