4.1 Aesthetic Resources

This section describes the existing visual setting of the Project Site and surroundings and analyzes how the Project would affect the visual quality and visual character of the area, as well as scenic vistas and resources viewed from surrounding public area. This section also addresses potential lighting and glare effects.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

Visual Character of the Project Site and Surroundings

The City of Walnut Creek is located in the Diablo Valley at the foot of Mount Diablo. Mount Diablo and its surrounding ridgelines form a natural backdrop to the City with the Briones Hills and Lafayette Ridge to the northwest, Mount Diablo and the surrounding hills of Acalanes Ridge to the east, Shell Ridge to the southeast, and Las Trampas Ridge to the south. The City is comprised of a variety of urban development with low-density suburban residential development on the perimeter. Adjacent surrounding areas are also primarily suburban residential. The City’s urban development varies from low-rise but densely developed pedestrian retail, to mid-rise commercial office buildings on the periphery of the pedestrian retail zoning district, to low- to mid-rise strip commercial development along North Main Street and Mount Diablo Boulevard.

Project Site

The Project Site is approximately 25 acres located immediately south of the traditional downtown Walnut Creek area. The Project Site comprises ten commercial lots and a public street within the pedestrian-oriented retail core as shown in Figure 3-1, Project Site Location in Chapter 3, Project Description. Buildings within the Project Site are typically one to two-stories in height and are of varying architectural styles, which date from the 1950s to the present. Broadway Plaza has an open-air format with more than two dozen in-line and free-standing buildings of various sizes, with associated parking structures, walkways, and landscaping.

Two creeks flow through the Project Site, mostly within individual closed concrete channels for nearly their entire length through the Project Site.

Scenic Resources

The General Plan identifies views of the surrounding hills and Mount Diablo as “integral to the City’s identity, sense of place and character.” The General Plan identifies Mount Diablo Boulevard, which borders the site on the north, and South Broadway, which borders the site on the east, as scenic corridors. The General Plan also identifies a panoramic view of Mount Diablo looking east along Mount Diablo Boulevard and scenic views of Mount Diablo looking east along Newell Avenue, which borders the south end of the Project Site.
The General Plan identifies prominent physical objects that serve as visual focal points and as City landmarks. There are two City landmarks within the Project Site: the fountains at Broadway Plaza, and the Nordstrom store.

**Light and Glare**

The Project Site and surroundings are located in a built-out urban environment that has existing sources of light and glare associated with land uses typical for an urban setting. Light and glare are also associated with street lights.

### 4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

**Local**

*City of Walnut Creek General Plan*

The City adopted its General Plan on April 4, 2006. Issues addressed in the General Plan relevant to visual quality in or around the Project Site and surroundings include the following: height, scale, and character of development; treatment of city gateways, scenic corridors, and scenic views; and views of Mount Diablo and hillside open space areas. The Project is within the Pedestrian Retail District General Plan land use designation, which is intended to “provide for a range of retail and personal service uses that are accessed by pedestrians,” as specified in the General Plan. The General Plan includes the following Built Environment goals and policies that are applicable to visual resources in the Project Site and surroundings:

In 1985, Walnut Creek residents passed Measure A, the “Building Height Freeze Initiative,” which established height limits on all new development. Measure A froze building height limits for new development based on the applicable zoning ordinance on the date the initiative was approved, and can only be modified with voter approval. Within the Project Site, Parcels, 2, 7, 7A and 8 are limited to a maximum height of 35 feet with a corner of the Project site at the intersection of Newell Avenue and South Broadway limited to a maximum of 25 feet. The remainder of the Project Site is limited to a maximum height of 50 feet. (See Figure 3-2 in Chapter 3, *Project Description*.)

- **Goal 13:** Maintain and enhance high quality building design and urban design.
  - *Policy 13.1:* Maintain urban design and architectural standards for evaluating the scale, appearance, and compatibility of new development proposals.
  - *Policy 13.2:* Regulate building placement and upper-floor stepbacks along important streets in the Core Area.
  - *Policy 13.3:* Coordinate the building heights allowed under the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Measure A.

- **Goal 16:** Maintain and enhance Walnut Creek’s identity and sense of place.
  - *Policy 16.1:* Foster the preservation, restoration, and compatible reuse of architecturally significant structures and sites.
4. Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures

4.1 Aesthetic Resources

- **Goal 18:** Preserve and enhance the visual amenity provided by the open spaces, hills, and creeks.
  - *Policy 18.1:* Preserve and enhance the urban connections to scenic views that are important to residents and visitors.

- **Goal 20:** Reinforce the urban design and character of the Pedestrian Retail District as a gathering place for local residents as well as a regional retail destination.
  - *Policy 20.1:* Strengthen the identity of the Pedestrian Retail District as a pedestrian-oriented shopping destination for local residents and regional shoppers.
  - *Policy 20.2:* Maintain the special “small town” character, fine-grain development (narrow lots, slender buildings, many different uses in proximity), and pedestrian orientation of the Traditional Downtown.

**City of Walnut Creek Zoning Ordinance**

The City of Walnut Creek Zoning Ordinance establishes height and setback criteria for new development that can affect views and urban design related to the Project Site and surroundings. The Project Site is within the Pedestrian-Retail (P-R) zoning district. The P-R zone provides for a concentration of commercial activity that is destination-oriented within the City’s designated Core Area.

**City of Walnut Creek Municipal Code**

Chapter 10 of the City’s Municipal Code addresses public art in public spaces and is intended to implement Goal 12 of Chapter 2 of the City’s General Plan. The ordinance specifies that for the addition of 25,000 square feet or more of floor area to an existing building in the Core Area, a public art fee in an amount not less than one percent of the construction cost of the completed development project shall be paid into the City’s In-Lieu Public Art Fund. The public art ordinance further provides that for any project for which the public art fee to be assessed is $25,000, or more, the developer can choose to either pay the in-lieu fee or place the public art on the project site.

**Design Review Guidelines**

The Walnut Creek Design Review Commission is responsible for approving all projects proposed in the City before the issuance of any building or site development permit. All projects must meet specific standard conditions that are outlined in the City’s Design Review Guidelines (“Guidelines”), under the Design Review Ordinance, listed in Title 10, Chapter 4 of the Walnut Creek Municipal Code. The Guidelines address site planning, architecture, parking, landscaping, lighting, fencing, screening and signage. The Guidelines also address residential and commercial development, with special considerations for the Pedestrian Retail zoning district that includes the Project Site. The design objective in the City’s P-R zone is to “create a high quality, pedestrian scale, and walkable areas with a Traditional Downtown atmosphere.” Emphasis is placed on addressing pedestrian needs and developing creative approaches to improving pedestrian interest, access and enjoyment. For commercial architecture, the Guidelines stress compatible scale, mass, form and height, consistency in detailing of side and rear facades; coordination of actual and
apparent height, especially where buildings are located close to one another; and the incorporation of outdoor spaces like courtyards, patios, plazas, covered walkways, passages and gardens. The Guidelines call for uninterrupted and continuous pedestrian activity, active building frontages, pedestrian open spaces, and outdoor seating and dining.

The Project Applicants are seeking Project-specific design review guidelines as part of the Broadway Plaza Master Plan. These proposed design review guidelines will incorporate or follow many of the City’s existing guidelines, as well as add Project-specific considerations.

4.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Significance Criteria

The Project would have a significant impact on the environment if it were to:

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

Approach to Analysis

Potential impacts resulting from implementation of the Project elements were evaluated based on the General Plan, visual simulations of the Project, and a reconnaissance of the Project Site and vicinity.

Topics Briefly Addressed

Criterion 2 does not apply to the Project because the Project is not visible from State Route 24, the nearest scenic highway. State Route 24 from east portal of the Caldecott Tunnel to Interstate 680 near Walnut Creek is designated a California State Scenic Highway (California DOT, 2011). The Project Site is three quarters of a mile east from the intersection of State Route 24 and Interstate 680, the end of the scenic highway designation. The distance and the intervening terrain and buildings would prevent the Project Site from being visible from that location. Therefore, the Project would not damage scenic resources located within a state or locally designated scenic highway and is not discussed further.

Impacts by Project Scenario

For all significance criteria relating to visual resources, the impacts are the same for the Maximum Commercial Scenario and the Maximum Mixed-Use Scenario. Therefore, both scenarios are discussed under a single Impact Statement for each criterion.
Photographs of the Project Site and conceptual visual simulations of potential massing at the Project Site after buildout are provided in Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-6 below.

The visual simulations shown in the figures above represent the proposed maximum height, massing and bulk of the Project buildings, arranged on site in a reasonably likely scenario designed to provide the reader with a conceptual depiction of potential development and its massing. As they provide no design detail, they are not representative of the details of the change in visual character the Project would entail, or the visual effects façade improvements would have. They also do not reflect full setbacks proposed in the new zoning ordinance, or regulations regarding the amount of roof area the rooftop screen may cover. The description and subsequent analysis of aesthetics focuses on the effect of the proposed expansion on views of existing Project Site elements and views through the Project Site.

Because the General Plan establishes height limits, with which the Project would comply, that protect long-range views, the viewpoints for this analysis were selected to provide close-up simulations of the Project.

Also, it should be noted that Figure 4.1-2 depicts Bing Crosby’s restaurant on a parcel immediately adjacent to the Project Site. Since the base photographs were taken, Bing Crosby’s vacated the building, which is, as of the baseline date of May 2012, expected to be occupied by Le Boulange and another retail business. The visual change to that building is not, however, significant and the change does not substantially affect the visual analysis.

Impacts

Scenic Public Vistas

The Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic public vistas (Criterion 1). (Less than Significant)

The General Plan identifies the view of Mount Diablo and associated hillsides as scenic resources and seeks to preserve the urban connection to scenic views which are important to residents and visitors. The Project elements would not be expected to block or otherwise adversely affect scenic views because the Project Site is flat and the maximum heights of the proposed buildings is relatively low, consistent with other similar use buildings nearby. As described above, the visual simulations depicting maximum proposed building heights would not result in substantial changes in views surrounding the Project Site and would not result in the loss of significant scenic public vistas.

Further, the proposed General Plan amendment and zoning reclassification would require the Project to conform to the height limits currently specified in the General Plan (see Section 4.9, Land Use and Planning). The height limits in the General Plan were adopted to ensure that scenic views would not be obstructed by new development. Although new structures may be added that would change the view at street level, views across the Project Site from scenic corridors and public open space would be maintained and would remain substantially similar to existing
Figure 4.1-1
Viewpoint Map for Project Massing Visual Simulations

SOURCE: Macerich Northwestern
Figure 4.1-2
Project Massing Visual Simulation – Viewpoint 1 Looking East from South Main Street

A - Existing

B - Project  Note: The 12-foot screen shields rooftop mechanical equipment from street view.

SOURCE: Square One Productions
Figure 4.1-3
Project Massing Visual Simulation – Viewpoint 2 Looking East from Olympic Boulevard

Note: The 12-foot screen shields rooftop mechanical equipment from street view.
Figure 4.1-4
Project Massing Visual Simulation – Viewpoint 3 Looking South from Broadway Plaza Street

Source: Square One Productions

Note: The 12-foot screen shields rooftop mechanical equipment from street view.
Figure 4.1-5
Project Massing Visual Simulation – Viewpoint 4 Looking West from South Broadway

SOURCE: Square One Productions

Note: The 12-foot screen shields rooftop mechanical equipment from street view.
Figure 4.1-6
Project Massing Visual Simulation – Viewpoint 5 Looking West from Newell Avenue

A - Existing

B - Project  Note: The 12-foot screen shields rooftop mechanical equipment from street view.

SOURCE: Square One Productions
conditions. Therefore, the Project would have a less-than-significant impact on scenic public vistas.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**The Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings (Criterion 3). (Less than Significant)**

The General Plan identifies two local landmarks within the Project Site: the fountain at Broadway Plaza (Parcel 9) and the Nordstrom store (Parcel 3). The Project would change the public access to the fountain, but does not propose to change the fountain itself. Any changes to the landmarked Nordstrom store or the fountain would require Design Review to ensure that any exterior architectural change would be in line with the goals of the General Plan.

As stated in the Project Objectives in Chapter 3, Project Description, the objective of the Project is to enhance the attractiveness and character of the City’s urban design and quality of the Core Area and its subareas, as well as to enhance and improve the vitality of Broadway Plaza. The Project would accomplish this objective by adding commercial and/or mixed-use development, making the entire Project Site pedestrian-friendly, and adding accessory uses such as health facilities, interactive play space, several plazas and common open spaces and a gathering space large enough to accommodate summer concert events and winter events.

As noted above, while the visual simulations (see Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-6) represent the conceptual height and massing of the expansion proposed by the Project, the images present conceptual massing but do not depict final design details. Once complete, the Project buildings would include retail signage, fenestration, articulation, awnings and ornamental detailing, and would be subject to the new, proposed design guidelines. The pedestrian environment, much like the existing conditions, proposes to include landscaping, landscape trees, and public seating.

The new construction would be in keeping with the General Plan’s Built Environmental Goal 13 to maintain and enhance high-quality building design and urban design which includes functional design attributes that are state of the industry for commercial and restaurant uses and incorporation of open space and pedestrian friendly features. In addition, the design would be consistent with the green efficiency standards established under the California Building Code.

The Project would be required to undergo Design Review to ensure it meets the objectives of the General Plan, and the Project’s proposed design guidelines. Consequently, development of the Project would improve the Project Site and would not degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. The impact would be less than significant.

**Mitigation:** None required.
The Project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area (Criterion 4). (Less than Significant)

The Project may create new sources of light or glare, but these new sources would be consistent with the existing light and glare conditions in the area. The Project Site and surroundings are already an urbanized environment with associated light and glare. Individual new structures within the Project Site would not be expected to change or affect day or nighttime views as a result of increased light or glare to a significant extent. The Project would be required to undergo Design Review to ensure it meets the objectives of the General Plan, and the Project’s proposed design guidelines.

Mitigation: None required.

Cumulative Impacts

Geographic Context

The cumulative geographic context includes the physical environment and viewsheds visible within and across the Project Site and surroundings.

Impacts

The Project, when combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future development in the vicinity, would not result in a cumulative visual resources impact. (Less than Significant)

The geographic context for analysis of cumulative impacts to aesthetic resources encompasses a 0.25-mile radius from the Project Site, which is a practical distance with regard to visual resources, as other cumulative development projects located beyond this distance are not visible to and from the Project Site, and would not have visible impacts that would combine with those of the Project. Within this cumulative context, the approved but not yet constructed projects include three mixed-use projects, two residential projects, and one retail project. The cumulative effect of the other nearby approved projects and existing development in and around the Project Site would not result in a significant cumulative adverse impact on visual resources.

Much of the recently developed areas are consistent with the City’s adopted plans. Reasonably foreseeable development will have to be consistent with adopted plans and the overall vision for the City. Additionally, the Project and other reasonably foreseeable projects would be subject to design review. Present and reasonably foreseeable cumulative development, in addition to activities including rehabilitation projects and façade improvement programs, could improve or remove past development that may create adverse visual conditions. Therefore, although the effect of cumulative development may change the overall visual character of the Project Site and surroundings, it would not be expected to be adverse or result in significant cumulative impacts. The impact would be less than significant.
Mitigation: None required.

4.1.4 References
