

9. Scenic and Visual Resources

This chapter of the Local Coastal Land Use Plan (LUP) provides policies for protection and enhancement of Half Moon Bay's scenic and visual resources.

Land Use Plan Framework

The City of Half Moon Bay has scenic resources of substantial importance to the satisfaction of its residents, the pleasure afforded visitors, and the economy of the city. The city's visual identity as a coastal retreat is bolstered by sweeping views from the foothills to beaches and bluffs, open lands and agricultural fields, historic buildings, and a charming downtown, providing for a memorable visual experience.

The Land Use Plan reflects Coastal Act priorities of preserving and enhancing scenic and visual resources. The Coastal Act considers the scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas to be a resource of public importance and provides for the protection of these qualities through requirements on siting and design and visual compatibility of new development, minimizing the alteration of natural landforms, and restoration and enhancement of visual quality. Coastal Act Section 30251, presented below, is directly relevant to the protection, preservation, and enhancement of scenic and visual resources. Part (e) of Section 30253 requires protection of special communities and neighborhoods with unique characteristics, which may include scenic and visual resources valued by both the local community and visitors. Additional Coastal Act policies, such as those that emphasize visitor serving uses, coastal access, and the preservation of natural and manmade coastal resources also pertain to scenic and visual resources in Half Moon Bay.

COASTAL ACT POLICIES

The following Coastal Act policies inform the City's scenic and visual resource policies and are incorporated into this LUP.

Article 6: Development

Section 30251 Scenic and visual qualities

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.

Section 30253 Minimization of adverse impacts

New development shall do all of the following:

- (a) Minimize risks to life and property in areas of high geologic, flood, and fire hazard.
- (b) Assure stability and structural integrity, and neither create nor contribute significantly to erosion, geologic instability, or destruction of the site or surrounding area or in any way require the construction of protective devices that would substantially alter natural landforms along bluffs and cliffs.
- (c) Be consistent with requirements imposed by an air pollution control district or the State Air Resources Board as to each particular development.
- (d) Minimize energy consumption and vehicle miles traveled.
- (e) Where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods that, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

In addition to its policies, the findings and declarations made by the State legislature in establishing the Coastal Act state that “the permanent protection of the state's natural and scenic resources is a paramount concern to present and future residents of the state and nation.”¹ Furthermore, the Coastal Act prioritizes protection of views from public places such as trails, parks, vistas, rights-of-way, and areas with public access easements. Views from private property are not a Coastal Act policy concern.

Visual Attributes and Conditions

The visual character of Half Moon Bay is defined by its setting on the marine terrace between an exceptional coastline and the scenic foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, its agricultural heritage, and its small-scale downtown, residential neighborhoods, and public roads that provide sweeping views of open space and habitat areas. Although the availability of views in and around the Planning Area is varied and dependent on a number of factors such as topography, intervening development, viewing distance and duration, and atmospheric conditions, each area of the City provides some level of a high-quality viewing experience.

Comprehensive review of the visual qualities and character of the Planning Area helps identify locations and resources with scenic value that should be protected or that would benefit from restoration and enhancement. To make this assessment, this section describes positive and negative visual attributes and conditions evident throughout categorized areas of the City. Such attributes and conditions generally describe scenic and visual characteristics to be protected, development encroachments on public views and scenic areas, and visual clutter to be improved.

Coastal Bluffs and Beaches

The Planning Area is defined on its western edge by approximately 6 miles of sandy beaches, coastal bluffs, and coves, the majority of which are accessible to the public. Because of the crescent-shaped curve of the coastline, views from these beachfront areas often include sweeping panoramas from Pillar Point to the Santa Cruz Mountains. Looking east from these areas, the coastal foothills can be seen rising up as a scenic backdrop to the city. Several city streets provide direct access to these areas,

¹ California Coastal Act, Section 30001.

sometimes leading all the way to the blufftops themselves. High quality views are readily available from the bluffs and beaches.

Coastal Bluffs and Beaches Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Ocean views • Pillar Point and Pillar Point Harbor • Bluffs, sandy beaches and shoreline • Riparian corridors • Recreational uses including the California Coastal Trail • Tideland rocky shore edges • Dunes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development adjacent to blufftops • Recreational vehicles at certain locations • Parking lots • Overhead utilities in certain locations • Degraded drainages

Highway Corridors

Highways 1 and 92 are the primary access points to and through Half Moon Bay, and as a result provide many travelers with their first visual impressions of the city. There are eight gateways along the highways that provide a sense of arrival, community identity, and wayfinding at major intersections and city limits: five along Highway 1, two along Highway 92, and one at the intersection of Highway 1 and 92.

This LUP update includes implementation policies for the Town Boulevard. As envisioned, the Town Boulevard includes Highways 1 and 92 within the city limits. There are many objectives for the Town Boulevard including safety, traffic flow, and community character. Anticipated outcomes include reduction of unnecessary pavement area, improved lighting that provides pedestrian safety while protecting dark night skies, established landscaping that frames or enhances views, and safe and efficient crossings and parallel facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. The Town Boulevard should establish a sense of place and community identity. On Highway 92, it is especially important to improve the pedestrian environment. Examples of useful upgrades include landscape buffering (i.e. street trees or parkway strips between the curb and sidewalk), removal of encroachments (i.e. utility boxes, poorly placed signage on sidewalks, overgrown landscaping), and reduction in visual clutter (i.e. excessive signage, and large minimally-landscaped parking, loading, and service areas on commercial properties). Build-to lines would provide for a required building façade setback line, resulting in improved pedestrian orientation and framing of the visual corridor.

Highway 1

Highway 1 is the primary north-south transportation route through the Planning Area. As a result, a large share of the visual impression of the city is experienced from this corridor. Highway 1 provides an overview of the city and surrounding area’s visual character and scenic resources. Views along

Highway 1 include agricultural uses and open space, mixed with residential neighborhoods and a few roadside businesses. There are five gateways along Highway 1:

- Northern Gateway: The northernmost gateway at Mirada Road, where southbound Highway 1 enters the city limits;
- North Town Center Gateway: The northern entrance into the Town Center, where Highway 1 meets North Main Street;
- Beach-Downtown Gateway: The central gateway linking downtown to the beaches, where Highway 1 meets Kelly Avenue;
- South Town Center Gateway: The southern entrance into the Town Center, where Highway 1 meets South Main Street by Higgins Canyon Road; and
- Southern Gateway: The southernmost gateway, where northbound Highway 1 enters the southern city limits.

Highway 1 Visual Attributes and Conditions	
<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Ocean views • Wetlands and riparian corridors • Historic and coastal compatible buildings • Pillar Point Harbor and Marina • Pillar Point • Johnston House • Mature tree stands • Wildlife/birds • Open spaces • Undeveloped properties • Median landscaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad expanses of pavement • Broad expanses of gravel/dirt abutting sidewalks • Parking areas without landscaping • Congested vehicular traffic • Scale of intersections of Highway 1/92 and Highway 1/North Main Street • Overhead utilities • Excessive signage • Featureless commercial development

Highway 92

Highway 92 serves as the eastern gateway to the city at its intersection with Main Street. As the highway winds down from the hills, the curving alignment and groves of mature roadside trees just east of town tend to limit longer-range views. Continuing west however, the highway straightens out, revealing a brief vista of Half Moon Bay and the ocean beyond. This spatial dynamic along westbound Highway 92 contributes to a sense of arrival from an agricultural perspective (roadside farms, farm stands and displays) to a coastside community enclave. Three gateways are located along Highway 92:

- Eastern Gateway: The easternmost gateway, where westbound Highway 92 enters city limits;
- Highway 92-Downtown Gateway: Where Highway 92 meets Main Street, providing direct access into downtown; and

- Highway 1-92 Gateway: Where Highway 92 meets Highway 1, the city’s largest intersection.

Highway 92 Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Brief ocean views • Riparian corridors • Mature tree stands • Historic cemetery • Median landscaping • Wildlife/birds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad expanses of pavement • Parking areas without landscaping • Poor streetscape design • Vehicular and commercial truck traffic • Utility boxes, pylons • Overhead utilities • Excessive signage • Development disconnected from streetscape • Featureless commercial development • Visual disconnect from downtown

Local Streets

Because of the grid layout of local roadways, many of the east-west oriented streets provide view corridors to the ocean as well as the inland hills. Local streets also serve as public viewpoints to the surrounding areas. For example, Kelly Avenue provides views of the Half Moon Bay State Beach and the agricultural field to the north; Venice and Young Avenues provide views of the adjacent open fields and ocean (Venice Beach PD, Surf Beach/Dunes Beach PD); and North Main Street provides views over open fields (Podesta PD).

Local Streets Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater visual access to scenic resources • View corridors to the ocean and hills • Modest scale development (one and two stories) • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Ocean views • Riparian corridors • Mature tree stands • Wildlife/birds • Open spaces • Undeveloped properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhead utilities • Vehicular traffic • Excessive signage • Featureless/unimproved streetscapes • Inconsistent landscaping • Broad expanses of pavement (wide streets and/or lack of pedestrian pathways) • Excessive lighting • Development blocking or partially blocking view corridors

Agriculture and Maritime Uses

Agricultural heritage and character are evidenced by the fields, greenhouses, and nurseries seen throughout the Planning Area. This is particularly noticeable along Highway 1 where greenhouses and nursery operations line the roadway and agricultural fields separate neighborhood developments, as well as along Highway 92 where horticulture and other agricultural-oriented retail businesses greet the highway traveler. These agricultural uses create visual connections to the local and regional history and contribute significantly to the small-town setting and visual character of Half Moon Bay. The generally pastoral qualities of the surrounding open space and agricultural lands have an inherent scenic benefit which increases the city’s visual quality and are highly valued by visitors and residents alike. While not a designated visual resource area, agricultural lands are very important to the scenic quality, culture, and economy of Half Moon Bay and are protected through the policies of Chapter 4. Agriculture.

The maritime and fishing industries and recreational activities contribute greatly to the visual character of the Planning Area. The Half Moon Bay city limits encompass the southernmost portion of the Pillar Point Harbor frontage and include dramatic views of the Harbor and Pillar Point to the northeast. Views of these natural landforms and working harbor are memorable and have a substantial positive effect on visual quality.

Agriculture and Maritime Uses Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Ocean views including fishing boats and other maritime activities • Pillar Point and Pillar Point Harbor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhead utilities • Increased traffic and parked cars (marina area) • Litter • Nighttime glow from greenhouses • Poor streetscape design

Recreational Areas

Recreational opportunities in Half Moon Bay are plentiful and include the beaches, the California Coastal Trail, golf courses, and City parks. These recreational areas generally allow for increased exposure to the surrounding highly scenic environment of the beach and coastal areas, and recreational enjoyment is enhanced by the views. Many of these recreational areas provide scenic value themselves in terms of open space, topography, and native vegetation or other landscaping. Views are also available from the lateral or vertical accessways to recreational areas, particularly beach accessways including Mirada Road, Roosevelt Boulevard, Young Avenue, Venice Boulevard, Wave Avenue, Kelly Avenue, Poplar Street, Wavecrest Road, Redondo Beach Road, and Miramontes Point Road.

Recreational Areas Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View corridors to the ocean and hills • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development adjacent to bluffs • Blocked views of hillsides • Recreational vehicles at certain locations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Ocean views • Views of Half Moon Bay State Beach • Pillar Point and Pillar Point Harbor • Bluffs, sandy beaches, dunes and shoreline • Riparian corridors and wetlands • Increased visual access to scenic resources • Bicycle, pedestrian, and horse trails • Bicycle and pedestrian bridges • Wildlife/birds • Native habitat areas and tree stands • Undeveloped properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking lots with excessive paving/without landscaping • Excessive signage • Half Moon Bay landfill • Litter • Degraded trails and fences • Overhead utilities
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Town Center

Overall, the Town Center, especially Heritage Downtown centered around Main Street, enjoys a high degree of visual quality. The combination of its quaint and compact walkable scale, historic and older-appearing buildings, hillside views, and nearby creek corridors presents a varied and high-quality visual character. Views of the hillsides are prevalent throughout the Town Center and can be enjoyed from the public right-of-way along nearly every block. Heritage Downtown provides a desirable visual experience of a traditional small town enhanced significantly by its coastal setting, agricultural heritage, and historic context.

Town Center Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main Street bridge • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Pilarcitos Creek riparian corridor and tributaries • Historic buildings and older heritage buildings including the Jail, San Benito House, Odd Fellows building, and other notable structures • Parks and public gathering spaces • Pedestrian-scaled buildings and streetscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate right-of-way and streetscape design with gaps in amenities such as street trees • Overhead utilities on the southern end of Main Street and side streets • Generic architectural styles associated with newer buildings • Dilapidated historic buildings • Taller buildings obstructing views of hillsides • Excessive, inappropriately-designed signage, especially overly large free-standing signs • Tall “cobra”-style street and highway lights • Excessive commercial lighting

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utility boxes and poorly placed street furniture and signage (e.g. parking signs, newspaper boxes, waste receptacles) • Trash/clutter |
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Residential Neighborhoods

Most of the city’s neighborhoods are well-established and have mature landscaping. Although much of the area is composed of single-family residential subdivisions, they are intermixed with other types of development such as nurseries, mobile home and recreational vehicle parks, hotels, golf courses, and larger-lot residences. Many neighborhoods are surrounded by undeveloped open space or agricultural fields on either side and provide views across these areas from their outer streets and sidewalks. A common visual characteristic is that almost all of the residential areas have some sort of views to the inland hillsides. In addition, glimpses of the ocean are often available where streets create an open view corridor to the west.

Residential Neighborhoods Visual Attributes and Conditions

<i>Positive visual attributes and conditions</i>	<i>Negative visual attributes and conditions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views of hillsides and ridgelines of coastal mountains • Agricultural fields, operations, and greenhouses • Small-scale residential farms and gardens • Eclectic, pedestrian-scale streetscapes • Ocean views • Riparian corridors • Mature roadside and neighborhood trees • Views of the bluffs, beaches, harbor, and Pillar Point from certain areas • Wildlife/birds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhead utilities • Blocked views of coastline • Featureless/unimproved streetscapes • Broad expanses of pavement (wide streets and/or lack of pedestrian pathways) • Excessive lighting • Litter and other pollutants

Visual Attributes and Conditions Photos

Surf/Dunes Beach PD: Example of undeveloped PD that provides a broad ocean view from Highway 1.



Rocket Farms: Example of view of greenhouses and hillsides from Coastal Trail by Venice Beach.



Highway 92: Example of clusters of utility boxes and signage at a highly visible corner with sidewalk encroachments.



Highway 92: Example of broad expanses of pavement, no pedestrian buffer from street, limited landscaping, sense of arrival and wayfinding for beach or Downtown not evident.



Main Street Bridge and Downtown: Example of historic structure and streetscape.



California Coastal Trail: Example of views of ocean, beaches, bluffs, hillsides, and coastal terrace prairie from recreation area.



Downtown: Example of excessive overhead utilities.



Poplar Beach Parking Lot: Example of excessive signage and visual clutter.



Johnston House: Example of views of historic resource and agricultural land from Highway 1.



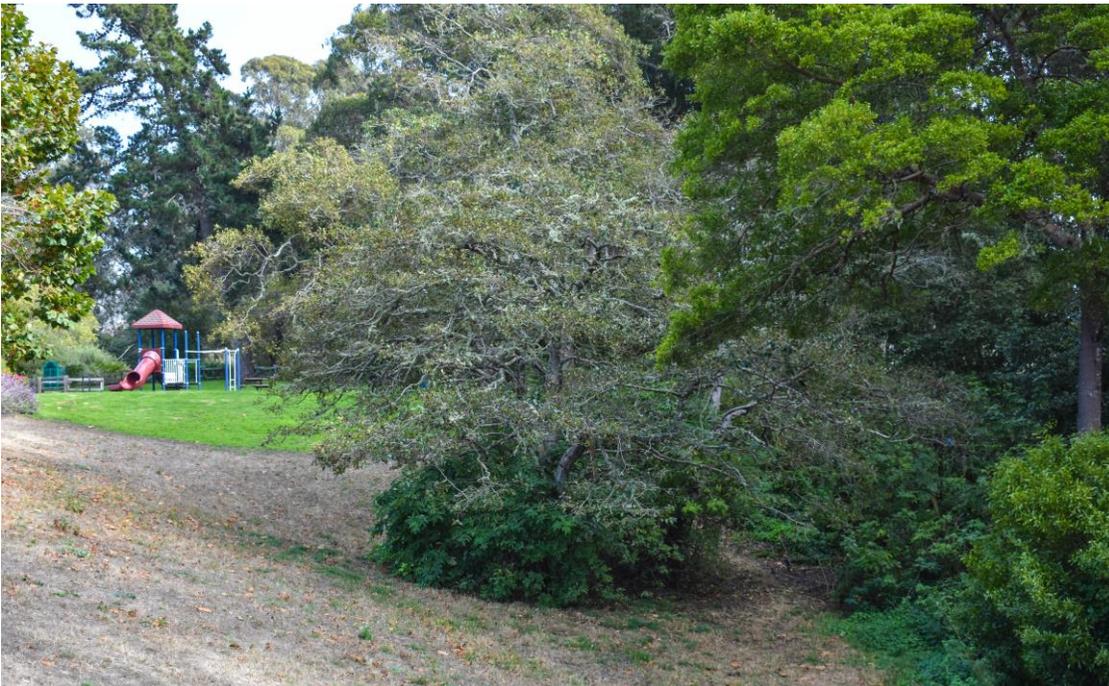
Historic Jail and Johnston Barn: Example of views of historic resources and hillsides from Downtown.



Roosevelt Boulevard: Example of a scenic coastal access route.



Frenchmans Creek: Example of a neighborhood park and riparian corridor.



Scenic and Visual Resource Areas

The assessment in the previous section identified positive and negative aspects of the visual environment throughout Half Moon Bay. From that assessment, the following categories of scenic corridors, natural resources, and built environment resources are designated scenic and visual resource areas determined to have scenic value that should be protected or that would benefit from restoration and enhancement. Designated scenic and visual resource areas are shown in Figure 9-1.

Scenic Corridors

Town Boulevard Corridor. The Town Boulevard is envisioned to include Highway 1 and Highway 92 within city limits. Highway 1 provides a unique experience of travelling through a small coastal town. Sweeping views of the ocean, upland slopes, open spaces, and agricultural areas that make Half Moon Bay so distinctive and picturesque can all be seen from different segments of Highway 1. Significant views of the James Johnston House are available at the southern end of the city, offering a historic visual context to the landscape. Highway 92 offers a sweeping view of the ocean and town upon entering city limits. Along the two highways, eight gateway areas provide major points of access within and to the city. Future improvements to establish the Town Boulevard may include wayfinding at the gateways, restoring the negative visual attributes identified in this chapter, and opportunities for protecting and enhancing views of the ocean, upland slopes, and other scenic areas.

Scenic Coastal Access Routes. Scenic coastal access routes are public roadways associated with coastal access points where breaks in vegetation and development allow for uninterrupted views west towards the ocean from Highway 1. From the perspective of scenic and visual resources, these routes and access locations provide an arrival sequence from the built environment to the dramatic expanse of Half Moon Bay's beaches. Scenic coastal access routes are shown on Figure 9-1. Primary scenic coastal access routes include Young Avenue, Venice Boulevard, Kelly Avenue, Poplar Street, Wavecrest Road, and Miramontes Point Road. Secondary scenic coastal access routes include Mirada Road, Roosevelt Boulevard, Wave Avenue, and Redondo Beach Road.

Broad Ocean Views. Public views of the Pacific Ocean are a fundamental character-defining visual element for the Planning Area as well as for the California coastline. Although not visible from all locations within the Planning Area, where the ocean can be seen, it substantially adds to the visual interest and quality of the view. Several segments of Highway 1 provide broad ocean views; namely across Surfer's Beach, between the paper street Knewing Avenue and Frenchmans Creek, between Venice Boulevard and Wave Avenue, and between Seymour Street and Wavecrest Road. Other broad, public ocean views are available from Naples Avenue, Wave Avenue, Railroad Avenue, Highway 92, the James Johnston House, the Pacific Ridge Trail, and the future Vista Trail.

California Coastal Trail. The California Coastal Trail is an essential Half Moon Bay scenic resource. The multimodal Class 1 trail contributes to the city's bicycle and pedestrian network and offers recreational opportunities. From the perspective of scenic and visual resources, traversing any segment of the trail within the city is a fulfilling experience. Throughout its extents the trail provides expansive views of the ocean, beaches, bluffs, foothills, coastal recreation activities, Pillar Point, the harbor and marina, and even historic resources. Along the blufftops, the trail also offers elevated viewing opportunities of the coastline and much of the inland hills.

Natural Resources

Beaches and Shoreline. Where visible, the beaches and shoreline are primary contributors to the visual composition of the coastal setting. Views of the beaches and shoreline are mostly visible from locations along the westernmost portion of the Planning Area. Vantages from the beach and shoreline are primarily of natural settings including the bluffs, dunes, native vegetation, and ocean. Residents and visitors alike treasure these views and the sense of an underdeveloped, natural coastline. As such a highly scenic area, it is important to protect public views to and from the beach and shoreline area. New development along the bluffs and shoreline may need to incorporate height limits, setbacks, or other design standards to achieve this.

Significant Plant Communities. Significant plant communities that contribute to the scenic quality of the Planning Area include Monterey cypress and Monterey pine stands or rows, riparian vegetation along stream corridors, and mature roadside trees. Both canopies and understories can have visual quality as well as important habitat for listed and protected wildlife and bird species. Similar to historic buildings, healthy stands of vegetation connect the viewer to the story of the land and the community. Although the Monterey cypress and Monterey pine are not native to Half Moon Bay, their presence is visually significant. Riparian corridors often serve to visually frame the surrounding scenery in addition to providing local landmarks and place-identifiers. Trees of large stature located along roadsides can create a sense of spatial definition, along with a general increase in vegetative character. It takes many years, if not decades, for trees to mature such that they contribute in a significant manner to the visual quality of the environment and will diminish absent preemptive planting programs. Invasive tree species such as eucalyptus are generally excluded from these protections, except where they support special status species.

Open Space Conservation Areas. Open space conservation areas can be seen throughout the Planning Area and can be contiguous with and supportive of environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHAs) and protected species. These areas include a range of habitat types such as coastal prairie, coastal scrub, central dune scrub, central coast riparian scrub, non-native grasslands, and wetlands, and can primarily be viewed from the Coastal Trail, Highway 1, and the edges of residential neighborhoods. Such conservation areas contribute to the sense of openness and the natural habitats of the City.

Upland Slopes. As seen from the majority of the Planning Area, the upland slopes to the east create a scenic backdrop that contributes greatly to the overall visual quality. Long-standing policy has effectively kept development below the 160-foot contour line. Therefore, these mostly undeveloped upland slopes, including the hillsides and ridgelines, underscore the rural and natural character seen in the Planning Area and throughout much of the surroundings. These upland slopes provide context and visually frame many of the other scenic resources in the area.

Built Environment

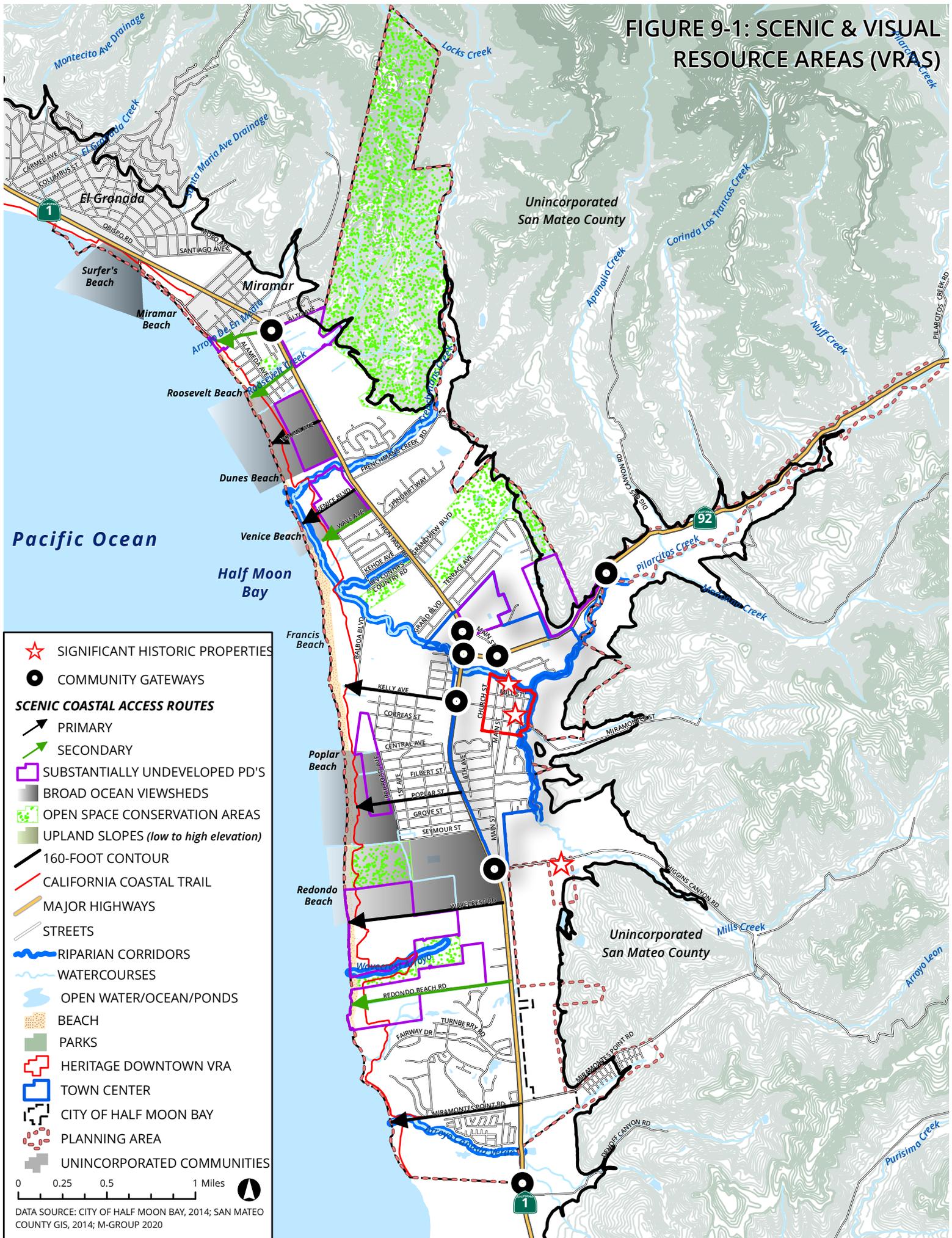
Heritage Downtown. Heritage Downtown is the city's most significant neighborhood from a visual resource perspective. Historic properties and structures within Heritage Downtown contribute to the community's cultural and historic character and are important visual resources. While historic properties can be found in other areas of the city, Heritage Downtown contains the concentration. Of note is the Main Street Bridge which, built in 1900, is a visual resource in terms of its aged character and its prominence on Main Street at a primary gateway to the city. The historic vintage of the Main Street Bridge is evident in its narrow scale as well as its architectural and engineering design. The

historic jail on Johnston Street is another visually significant structure with its scenic backdrop of the foothills. As a whole, much of the visual quality of Heritage Downtown is a result of the scale of its buildings and streets, the close layout of the central retail zone along the traditional Main Street, and the human-scale amenities at the sidewalk and storefront level. These characteristics, combined with the historic character, hillside views, and proximity to Arroyo Leon and Pilarcitos Creek are primary contributors to the scenic quality and significant visitor destination attractions of the downtown area. For the purposes of visual resource protection, the Heritage Downtown scenic and visual resource area is bound by Church Street on the west, Main Street Bridge on the north, Arroyo Leon on the east, and Correas Street on the south.

Substantially Undeveloped Planned Developments. Several of the City's substantially undeveloped Planned Developments (PDs) are located along major coastal accessways or the shoreline, or both, and provide sweeping views of the ocean and upland slopes across the site as seen from Highway 1 and the Coastal Trail. Other scenic views of Pillar Point, native vegetation and habitat areas, and agricultural operations are provided by substantially undeveloped PDs. For PDs that have not been substantially developed, visual resource assessments are required as part of the master planning process and must include siting and design guidelines for the long-term protection of the scenic quality and visual resources of these areas. Upon substantial buildout, a PD is no longer considered a visual resource area but must maintain the visual resource protections established by the approved master plan and the LCP.

Parks. Parks in the Planning Area include small parks and plazas, passive areas along creeks, and active recreation areas such as Smith Field Park and the State Beach uses along the shore. These parks have a variety of individual characteristics and provide scenic value in different ways. They all, however, are aesthetically pleasing areas, which adds to the overall visual quality of the setting. They also create increased opportunities and exposure for the public enjoyment of the surrounding visual environment. The City frequently plans for park improvements, including those that will enhance the scenic aspects of these facilities.

FIGURE 9-1: SCENIC & VISUAL RESOURCE AREAS (VRAS)



- ★ SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC PROPERTIES
- COMMUNITY GATEWAYS
- SCENIC COASTAL ACCESS ROUTES**
- ➔ PRIMARY
- ➔ SECONDARY
- SUBSTANTIALLY UNDEVELOPED PD'S
- BROAD OCEAN VIEWSHEDS
- OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AREAS
- UPLAND SLOPES (low to high elevation)
- 160-FOOT CONTOUR
- CALIFORNIA COASTAL TRAIL
- MAJOR HIGHWAYS
- STREETS
- RIPARIAN CORRIDORS
- WATERCOURSES
- OPEN WATER/OCEAN/PONDS
- BEACH
- PARKS
- HERITAGE DOWNTOWN VRA
- TOWN CENTER
- CITY OF HALF MOON BAY
- PLANNING AREA
- UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles ▲

DATA SOURCE: CITY OF HALF MOON BAY, 2014; SAN MATEO COUNTY GIS, 2014; M-GROUP 2020

Policies – Scenic and Visual Resources

The LUP provides for the protection and enhancement of scenic and visual resources pursuant to the Coastal Act. LUP policies identify scenic and visual resource areas as the scenic corridors, natural resources, and built environment resources designated on Figure 9-1 and include requirements to protect such areas through review of new development proposals. Policies require development to minimize visual impacts, including by protecting views to and along the ocean, minimizing the alteration of natural landforms, ensuring compatibility with the surrounding setting, and restoring visually degraded areas where feasible. Policies also establish citywide development standards for design review and measures to minimize visual impacts from grading and land divisions.

Scenic corridor policies require protection of significant views available along Highways 1 and 92, scenic coastal access routes between Highway 1 and the beach, and the California Coastal Trail. Additional policies address the need to enhance community gateways on Highway 1 and 92, and ensure that improvements to highways, roads, and streetscapes minimize visual impacts.

LUP policies protect the scenic quality of Half Moon Bay's natural resources by requiring setbacks for new blufftop and shoreline development, emphasizing preservation of upland slope and ridgeline views, and ensuring visual compatibility with surrounding landforms and development. The LUP retains long-standing policies to keep development below the 160-foot contour line on hillsides, and requires lower-scale building heights along major roads, view corridors, and other public viewing areas to maintain the quality of broad views of the ocean and upland slopes. The LUP contains measures to promote vegetation preservation and plan for long-term conservation of significant tree stands. New development is required to minimize the removal of vegetation and to revegetate and maintain disturbed areas with native plants.

Policies for built environment visual resource areas require new development in Heritage Downtown to be compatible with the surrounding scale and architecture, protect visual resources through master planning of substantially undeveloped Planned Developments, and address new development in parks and recreation areas.

Policies further seek to minimize visual impacts from lighting, signs, and utilities. Policies protect dark night skies by limiting light pollution through design requirements for exterior lighting. The intent of the dark night sky policies is to preserve dark views of the night sky and improve the visibility of stars above the city. Dark night sky policies also benefit wildlife by reducing exposure of sensitive species to artificial light. Additional policies require that signs be designed to be compatible with their surroundings, prohibit billboards, require undergrounding utilities, and address the siting of utility boxes, right-of-way signage, and telecommunications facilities.

Policies – General

- 9-1. Scenic and Visual Resource Areas.** Identify and protect scenic and visual resource areas in Half Moon Bay, including but not limited to the scenic corridors, natural resource areas, and built environment resources as defined in this chapter and designated on Figure 9-1.
- 9-2. Scenic Resource Protection.** New development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean, to minimize the alteration of natural land form, to be visually compatible with the character of its setting, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas.

- 9-3. Visual Quality.** Preserve and enhance the unique visual quality that contributes to Half Moon Bay's coastal and small-town character, including its open, expansive views from the coastal terrace to the beaches, bluffs, ocean, and upland slopes.
- 9-4. Negative Visual Attributes.** Where feasible, improve the negative visual attributes and conditions identified in this chapter through new public and private development and redevelopment projects.
- 9-5. Visual Impact Evaluation.** Where any development is proposed within a scenic and visual resource area, including as designated on Figure 9-1, a site-specific visual impact evaluation shall be required and may include visual simulations, story poles, and/or other means of visual assessment as appropriate based on the type and location of development.

Policies – Development Standards

- 9-6. Site Planning and Design for New Development.** Require new development to be subject to design review to ensure it is sited and designed to protect public views of scenic and visual resource areas and to be visually compatible with the character of the surrounding area. Measures to be considered may include, but are not limited to the following:
- a. Siting development in the least visible portion of the site;
 - b. Breaking up the mass of new structures;
 - c. Designing structures to blend into the surrounding natural landscape;
 - d. Restricting building maximum size and height;
 - e. Clustering or distributing development;
 - f. Incorporating landscape elements and screening; and
 - g. Conformance with any adopted design guidelines.
- 9-7. Alteration of Landforms.** Require that all new development be sited and designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms through the following measures:
- a. Conform to the natural topography of the site;
 - b. Minimize substantial grading or reconfiguration of the project site;
 - c. Prohibit flat building pads on slopes and requiring building pads on sloping sites to utilize split-level or stepped-pad designs;
 - d. Require that man-made contours mimic the natural contours of the site;
 - e. Ensure that graded slopes blend with the existing terrain of the site and surrounding area;
 - f. Minimize grading permitted outside of the building footprint;
 - g. Cluster structures to minimize site disturbance and development area;
 - h. Avoid landscaping that blocks public ocean views;
 - i. Minimize the height and length of cut and fill slopes;
 - j. Minimize the height and length of retaining walls; and
 - k. Allow the balancing of cut and fill operations on site only where the grading does not substantially alter the existing topography, where it blends with the surrounding area when viewed from public locations, and where it conforms to all applicable LCP policies

for hazard avoidance and habitat protection. Export of cut material may be required to preserve natural topography.

- 9-8. Land Divisions.** Require land divisions, including lot line adjustments, to be designed in a manner that minimizes impacts to visual resources. Measures for minimizing visual impacts include the following:
- a. Clustering the building sites to minimize site disturbance and maximize open space;
 - b. Prohibiting land divisions and adjustments that would create lots with insufficient space for development, including to avoid the need for fuel modification, without impacting visual resources;
 - c. Requiring new land divisions to provide sufficient park and open space areas;
 - d. Prohibiting creation of new building sites above the 160-foot contour line within City limits;
 - e. Minimizing the length and impermeability of access roads and driveways;
 - f. Using shared or abutting driveways to access development on adjacent lots, where appropriate;
 - g. Reducing the maximum allowable density in steeply sloping and visually sensitive areas; and
 - h. Revegetating graded building pad areas, if any, with native plants.
- 9-9. Streetscapes.** Streetscape improvements, whether they are required as a condition of new development or implemented as a City project, shall be designed and maintained with street trees, vegetation, and landscaping to enhance the visual experience of the streetscape without obstructing scenic views upon maturity.
- 9-10. Fences, Walls, and Landscaping.** Ensure that fences, walls, and landscaping shall not block public views of or from scenic and visual resource areas including along scenic corridors, at parks and beaches, and other scenic public viewing areas through height restrictions and required landscape maintenance.
- 9-11. Landscape Screening.** Prioritize avoidance of development impacts to scenic and visual resource areas through site planning and design alternatives over landscape screening. Landscape screening as mitigation of visual impacts shall not substitute for project alternatives including re-siting or reducing the height or bulk of structures, but may be used where appropriate to soften any unavoidable visual impacts of new development. Where permitted, landscape screening shall be comprised of native and drought tolerant species and shall be maintained such that scenic views are not blocked at maturity.

Policies - Scenic Corridors

- 9-12. Town Boulevard Scenic Corridor.** Require that new development in close proximity to or easily visible from the Town Boulevard scenic corridor, including Highways 1 and 92:
- a. Protects views of visual resource areas as seen from the Town Boulevard, including views to the ocean, upland slopes (i.e. minimizes intrusions into the ridgeline), and the historic Johnston House;
 - b. Incorporates design standards such as screening of commercial parking areas and landscaping provisions; and

- c. Is visually compatible with the surrounding land and development.

Update the IP with additional standards for new development along the Town Boulevard based on additional study of the scenic corridor. Assessment should, at a minimum, consider views of visual resource areas from the perspective of existing and potential development along the Town Boulevard and identify scenic segments along Highway 1 and 92, including views of the ridgelines and other visual resource areas. Development standards should address, at a minimum, appropriate building heights and setbacks, longest wall lines, minimum space between buildings, and streetscape design.

- 9-13. Highway 1 and 92 Frontages.** Improve the appearance of the Highway 1 and 92 frontages as properties redevelop through the following means:
 - a. Establish build-to lines to frame and define the transportation corridors.
 - b. Reduce visual clutter by consolidating utilities, phasing out monument signs, and requiring permanent maintenance of frontage landscaping.
- 9-14. Highway Improvements.** Coordinate with Caltrans to ensure that future improvements and changes to the highways such as new traffic signals, road width modifications, and implementation of the Town Boulevard consider context-sensitive design and preserve or enhance the visual experience of traveling through a coastal community with small town character.
- 9-15. Scenic Coastal Access Routes.** Require that new development on designated scenic coastal access routes from Highway 1 to the beach, including roadway improvements and development proposed in close proximity to the road, protects the scenic quality of the corridor and avoids obstruction or significant degradation of public ocean views such as through provision of sufficient setbacks from the public right-of-way, low building heights, and landscaping that establishes and/or maintains a scenic gateway.
- 9-16. Broad Ocean Views.** Ensure that areas providing broad, public ocean views, including as designated on Figure 9-1, are preserved and enhanced in association with new development projects. In such areas, structures shall be sited and designed to avoid obstruction of broad, public ocean views, shall not exceed 15 feet in height unless an increase in height would not obstruct public views to the ocean or would facilitate clustering of development so as to result in greater view protection, and shall ensure that any proposed landscaping, when mature, will not obstruct public views to the ocean.
- 9-17. California Coastal Trail Views.** Ensure that views of the ocean, bluffs, upland slopes, and ridgelines from the California Coastal Trail are protected, particularly in areas adjacent to substantially undeveloped Planned Developments including Surf Beach/Dunes Beach, Venice Beach, West of Railroad, and North Wavecrest. Require sufficient setbacks, height limits, and other design standards for any new development permitted near the trail to minimize impacts to visual resources.
- 9-18. Gateways Enhancement.** For City right-of-way projects and public or private development near the eight gateways along Highway 92 and Highway 1 identified on Figure 9-1, require enhancements to improve community identity and provide wayfinding.

Policies – Natural Resources

- 9-19. Blufftop and Beachfront Development.** Require new development along the beaches and blufftops to incorporate a height limit, setback, and design treatment that minimizes its

visibility from the beach and ocean below. The beach or blufftop setback necessary to protect visual resources may be in excess of the setback necessary to ensure that risk from shoreline hazards are minimized for the anticipated life of the structure, as required in the Environmental Hazards chapter of the LUP.

- 9-20. Significant Plant Communities.** Preserve the scenic quality of significant plant communities including but not limited to Monterey cypress and Monterey pine stands or rows, riparian vegetation along stream corridors, and non-invasive mature roadside trees to the extent feasible. Preservation may be achieved through siting and design of new development, compliance with habitat buffers required pursuant to Chapter 6. Natural Resources, minimizing significant alteration and removal, vegetation maintenance and restoration, and replanting as mitigation for removed vegetation where approved.
- 9-21. Preemptive Tree Replacement.** Allow for preparation and implementation of preemptive tree replacement plans for significant stands of trees and large landscapes (e.g. golf courses) in order to maintain long-term canopy health and scenic quality.
- 9-22. Open Space Conservation Areas.** Ensure that any development permitted within or adjacent to open space conservation areas is sited and designed to minimize impacts to public views of the conservation areas and to be visually compatible with the surrounding natural environment.
- 9-23. Upland Slopes and Ridgelines.** Protect broad views of upland slopes, prominent ridgelines and other intervening ridgelines as viewed from scenic corridors and the beach and shoreline through the following means:
- a. Prohibiting new development above the 160-foot contour line and on slopes greater than 30 percent, including grading and subdivisions but excluding public trails and critical facilities or public infrastructure that cannot be located elsewhere;
 - b. Ensuring new development below the 160-foot contour line is sited and designed to minimize intrusions into the ridgeline through the application of appropriate height and setback restrictions; and
 - c. Establishing standards for the Town Boulevard, other streetscapes, and large-scale landscaping projects to highlight and frame, but not block, views of visual resource areas.
- 9-24. New Development on Slopes.** On sloped building sites below the 160-foot contour line, locate building pads and new development on flatter portions of the project site as consistent with the grading restrictions and hazard avoidance policies of this LCP, except where there is an alternative location that would be more protective of scenic resources or ESHA.

Policies – Built Environment

- 9-25. Heritage Downtown.** Preserve and enhance the architecture, landscape, scale and ambience of the Heritage Downtown visual resource area through design review of new development, redevelopment, and streetscape improvements. Design review shall consider:
- a. Compatibility with scale and style of predominant older structures;
 - b. Continuity in building lines maintained along Main Street;
 - c. Maintaining key architectural features in proposed alterations to existing older buildings; and

- d. Avoiding demolition of existing older buildings that contribute significantly to the character of the area.
- 9-26. Historic Buildings Maintenance.** Allow the maintenance and restoration of historic buildings and properties to preserve their scenic and visual qualities.
- 9-27. Significant Historic Properties.** Maintain the scenic quality and public views of significant historic structures and properties including the Main Street Bridge, the historic Jail and San Mateo County Garage on Johnston Street, and the James Johnston House.
- 9-28. Substantially Undeveloped Planned Developments.** Require projects proposed in substantially undeveloped Planned Developments (PDs) to assess visual resources and provide a visual impact evaluation as part of the master planning process for developing the PD in accordance with Chapter 2. Development. PDs shall be planned to protect public views of visual resource areas (e.g. broad ocean views, scenic coastal access routes, upland slopes, significant plant communities) and minimize adverse visual impacts as consistent with all applicable policies of this chapter. Following master planning and substantial development, the PD as a whole is no longer considered a visual resource area. The approved master plan shall continue to designate and protect other visual resource areas in Figure 9-1 (e.g. broad ocean views) through siting and design of new development and redevelopment projects.
- 9-29. Parks and Recreation Areas.** New development in parks and recreation areas shall be sited and designed to be compatible with the surrounding area, to minimize alteration of natural landforms, and to improve any associated negative visual attributes such as excessive signs, waste receptacles, and paved areas.

Policies – Lighting, Signs and Utilities

- 9-30. Dark Night Skies.** Protect dark night skies as part of Half Moon Bay’s scenic and visual character by preventing light pollution from development. Avoid impacts from exterior lighting on dark night skies, sensitive habitat areas, and agricultural operations by:
 - a. Limiting exterior lighting to low-intensity fixtures that are shielded, down-cast, and concealed so that the light source is not directly visible from public viewing areas, with the exception of traffic lights, navigational lights, and other similar safety lighting;
 - b. Limiting installation and use of high-intensity perimeter lighting and lighting for sports fields, other private recreational facilities, or public facilities in scenic areas, with the exception of safety lighting provided that any high-intensity lighting is down-cast, shielded, and minimizes spillover; and
 - c. Reducing light pollution from greenhouses as a condition of approval for new development through shielding and other practices that minimize light spillover.
- 9-31. Lighting Plan Review.** Require submittal of lighting plans with applications for new development, including subdivisions, for review of lighting characteristics.
- 9-32. Street Lighting.** Street lighting design and fixtures shall abide by the following criteria:
 - a. Provide enough lighting to meet safety standards;
 - b. Utilize lower light poles as feasible;
 - c. Ensure that fixtures direct light down with no spillover beyond the roadway area they intend to illuminate; and

- d. Retrofit existing street lights that do not meet these standards.
- 9-33. Lighting Inspection.** Where new lighting associated with residential or commercial developments will face the public right-of-way, ESHA, ESHA buffer areas, or agricultural operations, require design review during the construction phase to ensure compliance with any required lighting criteria.
- 9-34. Signs.** Ensure that signs are designed and located to minimize impacts to visual resource areas. Signs approved as part of commercial development shall be incorporated into the design of the project and shall be subject to height, width, and lighting limitations and design standards to ensure that signs are visually compatible with surrounding areas and protect views to and from visual resource areas. Prohibit placement of signs, excluding traffic or public safety signs, which obstruct views to the ocean or beaches from public viewing areas or public roads.
- 9-35. Billboards.** Prohibit the construction of new off-site commercial signs, including billboards.
- 9-36. Public Access Signage.** Locate public access signage so as to not encroach into any pedestrian path or sidewalk. Encourage use of consistent highway, directional, and parking signage, and require removal or consolidation of excess signage where feasible.
- 9-37. Utility Boxes.** Locate utilities including traffic control boxes, transformers, meters, backflow prevention devices, and others in underground vaults where feasible; or if above finished grade, in discrete locations outside of any pedestrian path or sidewalk.
- 9-38. Utilities in New Development.** Require applications for new development to include preliminary utilities plans to ensure that undergrounding and minimizing the negative visual impacts of utilities are considered during the earliest phases of project design. For all new development and new subdivisions, utilities shall be underground unless infeasible, such as in locations subject to erosion or with especially high water tables, or unless otherwise permitted on a case-by-case basis such as where no protected public views would be impacted (e.g. a pump house for an agricultural operation). For such cases, require utilities to be designed and sited in a manner to minimize impacts to coastal resources, and require the development to contribute in-lieu fees to support undergrounding utilities in other locations.
- 9-39. Telecommunications Facilities.** Require all telecommunications facilities to place support facilities underground where feasible. New communication transmission lines shall be sited and designed to be located underground, except where doing so would result in a hazardous condition. Existing communication transmission lines should be relocated underground when they are replaced or when funding for undergrounding is available. Where undergrounding is not feasible, require new facilities including small cell and other wireless communication facilities to be sited and designed in a manner that minimizes impacts to visual resources by co-locating facilities, utilizing a constructed disguise, or ensuring compatibility with surrounding development or natural character.