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Description:	This section discusses the existing landscape (built and natural) surrounding the Project facility, and the potential visual impacts associated with its construction and operation.
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4.13 Visual Resources

This section discusses the existing landscape (built and natural) surrounding the Project facility, and the potential visual impacts associated with its construction and operation.

For the purposes of this analysis, visual resources refer to the natural and cultural landscape features that compose the landscape surrounding the Project and their qualities and contribution to landscape character. Natural landscape features include landforms, water features, and vegetation. Cultural landscape features include buildings, roadways, structures, and artificial lighting related to human land uses. The quality of the visual environment has a value to individuals, society, and the economy of a region, particularly in an area where scenic landscapes provide the backdrop for tourism and recreation activities.

Consistent with the California Energy Commission's Updates to Appendix B – Application Requirements (see 20 Cal. Code Regs. Div. 2, Ch. 5, App. B, (g)(6) Visual Resources), this section evaluates whether the Project would conflict applicable zoning and other local regulations governing scenic quality. This section was prepared in accordance with California Energy Commission (CEC) guidelines for preparing visual impact assessments for Opt-In Certification Applications. The analysis also conforms with the documentation requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.).

Section 4.13.2 describes existing visual quality in the Project area. Section 4.13.3 documents the methods used to prepare this visual assessment, as well as potential environmental effects as they relate to visual resources. Section 4.13.4 discusses the potential cumulative impacts of this and other projects in the area. Section 4.13.5 summarizes the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed to address potential Project impacts on visual resources. Section 4.13.6 describes the applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards relevant to visual resources. Section 4.13.7 lists agencies involved and agency contacts. Section 4.13.8 discusses permits related to visual resources and Section 4.13.9 lists the references used in preparation of this section.

4.13.1 Affected Environment

4.13.1.1 Regional Setting

The Project site is located in the northern portion of the City, adjacent to Camino Capistrano with Interstate (I) 5 located to the east. The Project site is currently used for low intensive church activities and is adjacent to the Saddleback Church Rancho Capistrano to the north, Oso Creek to the south and east, Union Pacific Railroad and I-5 to the east, and open space and residences outside of the City limits over the bluff to the west. The San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) Trabuco to Capistrano 138-kilovolt transmission line is located approximately 500 feet to the east and runs alongside the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. A steep hillside lies to the immediate of west of the Project site, and terrain to the east slopes more gradually and encompasses development including roads, I-5, and residences and urbanized land uses on the east side of the I-5. Vegetation/land covers in the immediate area included developed/disturbed (associated with the on-site nursery and adjacent developed field/turf area to the north), grasses, and coastal sage scrub habitats (primarily on the hillsides to the west and southwest).

Immediately east of the Project study area lies Oso Creek, the Union Pacific Railroad, SDG&E transmission lines, and the I-5 freeway (a 14-lane freeway). Land uses to the east of I-5 include single-family residential neighborhoods with narrow corridors of intervening open space, a commercial office, and a high school (Capistrano Valley High School is located to the northeast of the Project site). Southeast of the Project study area, there are limited single-

family residential uses that are bound by the Union Pacific Railroad track to the west and Camino Capistrano to the east, small agricultural operations, a small winery/event space, the Putuidem Village, a dog park, and undeveloped open space extending over to I-5. Beyond the crest of the hillsides to the west lies the City of Laguna Niguel, where the predominant land use is Single Family Residential (multifamily residential, public parks, schools, neighborhood shopping centers, and open space are also present). Open Space, Public/Institutional, and Single-Family Residential designations within the City of Laguna Niguel are located to the north of the Project study area. These areas include a partially developed hillside, an automobile dealership, and a single-family residential neighborhood.

No eligible or designated scenic highways occur within 2 miles of the Project site. The closest eligible scenic highway is Highway 74 from I-5 in San Juan Capistrano to State Route 111 in Palm Springs. Due to intervening development, vegetation, and terrain, the Project would not be visible from Highway 74. There are no officially designated state scenic highways in south Orange County.

The local area includes an existing 138-kilovolt transmission line (i.e., SDG&E's Trabuco to Capistrano line) that parallels the nearby Union Pacific Railroad corridor. As proposed, the Project would tie into this line, which is located approximately 500 feet to the east. In addition, the existing SDG&E Trabuco Substation is bound by the railroad corridor on the west and I-5 on the east, approximately 1.9 miles to the north, and the existing SDG&E Capistrano Substation is adjacent to Camino Capistrano, approximately 1.6 miles to the southeast.

This area is designated in the City's General Plan and in local zoning as Planned Community, and is currently authorized 80% institutional use and 20% assisted living use development. (City of San Juan Capistrano 2002). No designated public scenic vistas are identified in the City's General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999a) and no recognized public scenic vistas in the surrounding area are known. A bluff trail is located atop the steep hillside to the west of the Project site; however, this trail is not identified by the City as a designated scenic vista and functions as a de facto private trail due to its primary access points being located in established residential neighborhoods and off residential neighborhood cul-de-sacs. While the General Plan Final Program Environmental Impact Report places aesthetic value on the City's extensive open spaces, natural environment, and local ridgelines (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999b), the Project site does not encompass Open Space designated or zoned lands and therefore, the Project site is not considered a scenic resource by the City.

The landscape surrounding the Project includes hillside open space, and narrow and relatively flat valley terrain zoned for planned community and limited agricultural land use. Several recreational trails are located in the Project vicinity; however, the trails are located on private land to which the public lacks legal and physical right of access. While the local open space environment includes no sources of artificial nightime lighting, nighttime viewing conditions are influenced by existing lighting sources from nearby residential, commercial (including at local automotive dealerships), and transportation (e.g., local streets and I-5) land uses. While streetlights are not installed along Camino Capistrano, lights are installed along the northbound travel lanes of I-5. Less frequent and transient, passing Metrolink trains also contribute artificial lighting to the local nighttime environment.

4.13.1.2 Project Site

Terrain underlying the Project site is flat to gently sloping, elevations range from approximately 165 feet above mean sea level on the east to 270 feet above mean sea level on the west. The Project site is currently utilized by the prior owner, Saddleback Church, and supports an active agricultural operation and other low intensity church activities.

As detailed in Section 2, Project Description, a loop-in transmission line would transfer power to and from the proposed SDG&E 138-kilovolt Interconnection Switchyard to the existing SDG&E Trabuco to Capistrano 138-kilovolt

transmission line approximately 500 feet to the east of the Project site. The loop-in transmission line would be supported by up to five pole structures that would fully avoid Oso Creek. These poles consist of two poles on the Project site within the SDG&E switchyard, west of Oso Creek, two poles on the east side of Oso Creek, and two three pole replacements on the east side of Oso Creek (two of which will be replacing existing poles; only one pole on the east side of Oso Creek will be new). The proposed loop-in alignment would extend from the existing railroad corridor, spanning the Oso Creek corridor and disturbed habitat that occurs to the immediate west of the creek corridor.

Views to the Project site are available from nearby Camino Capistrano, local recreational trails, and the Metrolink rail corridor. The Project site has limited visibility from the southbound travel lanes of I-5. The clearest views are potentially available from the I-5 shoulder and adjacent travel lane; however, the view duration from these locations is brief, the Project site is in the peripheral field of passing motorists, and views are partially blocked by the low concrete wall that parallels the interstate shoulder.

The view from publicly accessible ridgeline locations is expansive and include descending slopes, the Oso Creek corridor and adjacent disturbed lands to the west including the Project site, the I-5 corridor, residential neighborhoods and associated landscaping, and mostly undeveloped hills and ridgelines to the west of the I-5 corridor. Views from local hillside trails are narrower in nature, and while similar landscape elements as described above for the ridgeline locations are present, views are local and, in general, are not expansive. Lastly, available views from I-5 and the Metrolink corridor as short in extent (i.e., extend west to the local hillside terrain to the west of the Project site) and generally consist of the Oso Creek corridor, the Project site and nearby previously disturbed lands, and the local hill and canyon terrain.

4.13.1.3 Construction Staging Area

Staging areas would be provided within the footprint of the battery energy storage system (BESS) facility and will be relocated within the footprint as specific phases advance.

4.13.2 Environmental Analysis

4.13.2.1 Analysis Procedure and Methodology

4.13.2.1.1 Regulatory Setting

A review of existing local City and state planning documents was conducted to understand the regulatory context for visual resource management surrounding the Project. This review included CEQA, the California Scenic Highways Program, the San Juan Capistrano General Plan, and the San Juan Capistrano Municipal Code. These are detailed in Section 4.13.6.

4.13.3.1.2 Photographic Survey

A photographic field survey was conducted to obtain on-the-ground familiarity with the local landscape and general visibility of the project site, and to gather photographic images (and related geographic data) that help illustrate the existing visual character and quality of views to the project site. Specifically, photographs of daytime viewing conditions from southbound I-5 and northbound Camino Capistrano to the project site were taken. An additional photographic field survey was conducted by the Applicant in October 2023 to obtain updated photos characterizing views to the project site available from the southbound travel lanes of I-5.

4.13.2.1.3 Viewers and Exposure

The range of potential viewers that may be affected by a proposed Project can be described by the distinct types of viewers and the conditions they experience within the landscape. Understanding the types of viewers and their exposure to potential Project-related visual effects helps to predict sensitivity and response to visual change in the landscape. View exposure describes the degree to which views of the landscape and Project are provided to viewers. Viewer exposure considers viewing distance (proximity of viewers to the Project), frequency (the number of times the Project may be seen), and the duration (the length of time the Project may be seen) of the available view. The primary groups provided views to the Project and description of their exposure are based on definitions provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA 2015).

Two types of viewers were identified in the Project assessment area that will be potentially affected by the Project. These consist of the following:

- Residential viewers: Residential viewers consist of owners or renters of residential properties that are provided views to the Project and surrounding landscape. Compared to other viewer groups, residential viewers generally have a higher sensitivity to visual change and a desire to maintain features of the existing landscape as it contributes to their quality of life (and existing visual experience). There are a handful of ridgeline residents to the west of the Project site that may have views of the Project; however, those views may be partially screened or blocked by intervening private yard landscaping. Also, because residential views are available from private yards/properties, viewing conditions and views from residential properties were not verified during photographic field surveys.
- Motorists: Motorists experience views of the passing landscape from their personal (or shared) vehicles while on the roadway. By necessity, the driver of a motor vehicle focuses less on the view outside the vehicle while passengers are free to view the adjacent landscape. Motorists move at higher speeds than other groups and have temporary and/or intermittent viewing opportunities. Within the Project area, this group includes motorists on local roads, including but not limited to Camino Capistrano and interstate (I-5) motorists passing through the region. Generally, local motorists on Camino Capistrano could experience more frequent) views compared to views provided to interstate travelers, however, those views would be at the same grade as the Project, and the Project would be obscured by the landscaping elements. Also, from the interstate, motorists generally move at high speeds (outside of peak hours where delays may occur), and views to the Project site are partially to fully blocked from most travel lanes by other passing vehicles, the low concrete wall that parallels the southbound travel lane, and the difference in elevation between the interstate surface and Project site (approximately 40 feet).

4.13.2.1.4 View Analysis

The view analysis is based on the potential for the Project to eliminate or obstruct a public view of a scenic vista or scenic resource. As noted in Section 4.13.2.1, no designated public scenic vistas are identified in the City's General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999a) and no recognized public scenic vistas in the surrounding area are known. A bluff trail is located atop the steep hillside to the west of the Project site; however, this trail is not identified by the City as a designated scenic vista and functions as a de facto private trail due to its primary access points being located in established residential neighborhoods and off private residential neighborhood cul-de-sacs. While the General Plan Final Program Environmental Impact Report places aesthetic value on the City's extensive open spaces, natural environment, and local ridgelines (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999b), the Project site does not encompass Open Space designated or zoned lands and therefore, the

Project site is not considered a scenic resource by the City. Therefore, the Project would not eliminate or obstruct a public view of a scenic vista or a scenic resource and as such, impacts to scenic vistas or scenic resources are not discussed further herein.

4.13.2.1.5 Lighting Analysis

The assessment of the existing nighttime visual character is based on the current perceived and actual lighting conditions in the existing landscape. To establish a baseline of pre-Project lighting conditions, existing sources of nighttime lighting were documented during desktop-level review of the landscape and during photographic field investigations. Levels of perceived skyglow are based on understanding of existing light sources in the landscape and primarily, those associated with residential and commercial land uses and transportation corridors located near the Project site. Lighting conditions in the Project landscape were documented qualitatively. No quantitative measurement of light or skyglow levels occurred during preparation of the lighting assessment.

Lighting conditions were evaluated qualitatively and were classified based on definitions and descriptions from established international lighting guidelines, which consist of a set of established environmental lighting zones for classifying exterior light levels (CIE 2017). Environmental lighting zones and related quantitative thresholds are shown in Table 4.13-2, Environmental Lighting Zone Classifications.

Zone	Lighting Environment	Examples of Lighting Conditions
EO	Intrinsically dark	UNESCO Starlight Reserves, IDA Dark Sky Parks, Major optical observatories
E1	Dark	Relatively uninhabited rural areas
E2	Low district brightness	Sparsely inhabited rural areas
E3	Medium district brightness	Well inhabited rural and urban settlements
E4	High District brightness	Town and city centers and other commercial areas

Table 4.13-2. Environmental Lighting Zone Classifications

Source: CIE 2017.

The assessment of Project-related lighting involved a review of available information of the Project lighting. Where limited or no detail regarding Project lighting was available, assumptions concerning general layout and illumination levels required for safe operations were made based on experience with similar BESS and switchyard facilities and related assessments. This information provided an estimate of the potential incremental increase in lighting that may result from the Project and was considered in a qualitative assessment as to whether anticipated light levels with the Project would exceed thresholds for environmental lighting zone classifications and result in the local area being classified as a less restrictive environmental lighting zone. For purposes of this analysis and based on the description of environmental lighting zone classification would signal a noticeable change in the perceived lighting conditions experienced by viewers during the nighttime. Because the Project proposes minimal downward facing lighting with sensor activation, no significant change in the lighting zone classification is anticipated.

4.13.2.1.6 Consistency Analysis

Consistent with CEC guidelines and in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Appendix G Environmental Checklist Form, an analysis of consistency between the Project and applicable General Plan and Municipal Code/Zoning policies and standards is required and presented below in Section 4.13.3.4, Analysis of Policy Consistency.

4.13.2.2 Project Appearance

4.13.2.2.1 Project Structures, Dimensions, and Materials

The primary Project proponents are described in Section 2. Figure 2-1 depicts the site plan and general layout of Project components, including internal fencing and the proposed 20-foot-high screening trellises that would aid in the screening of Project components (primarily BESS enclosures) from users of Camino Capistrano and I-5). Table 4.13-3 identifies the aesthetic characteristics of the primary Project components with emphasis on dimensions, materials, and finishes.

Table 4.13-3. Characteri	istics of Primary P	roject Compo	onents

Table 4.42.2. Characteristics of Drimony Drois at Components

Component	Dimensions/Size	Materials	Finishes
Battery energy storage system (containers/enclosures)	28.87 feet × 9.14 feet × 5.41 feet	Prefabricated metal material	Light gray
Project substation (includes open rack air insulated switch gear, main power transformer, and pole to connect substation to SDG&E switchyard)	Varies: tallest component (dead end structure) would be 44 feet high	Prefabricated metal material	Light to dark gray
SDG&E switchyard (includes open rack air insulated switch gear and transmission control center)	Varies: tallest component (H frame structure) would be 55 feet high	Prefabricated metal material	Light to dark gray
Loop-in transmission line (supported by five poles)	Varies, up to 100 feet high	Tubular steel	Light to dark gray
Perimeter wall	10 feet tall	Prefabricated/precast concrete block decorative wall	Dark gray block
Security fence (internal site) ¹	6 feet tall	Chain-link with three strands of barbed wire	Light gray
Screening trellis (internal to site) ^{1}	20 feet tall	Wood trellis covered with vines	Tan (trellis), green (vines)
Landscaping ²	20-foot-wide buffer area adjacent to perimeter wall	Not applicable	Color varies by species
	Trees: 24-inch to 36-inch box size; 20 to 60 feet tall by 15 to 40 feet wide		

Notes: SDG&E = San Diego Gas & Electric Company.

1 See Figure 2-1 for location of security fencing and screening trellis.

2 The Project Preliminary Landscape Plan is included as Appendix 2B to this Application for Opt-In Certification.

As detailed in Table 4.13-3, finishes for materials and surface treatments will be predominantly flat and nonreflective to minimize the potential for glare. As noted in Table 4.13-3, the proposed facility would be surrounded by a decorative, 10-foot-tall, precast concrete block wall with primary site access via a restricted gate at the northeast corner of the facility (three internal gates would be installed to control access to the BESS facility and the Project interconnection switchyard, and a 6-foot-tall chain-link fence with three strands of barbed wire would be installed to separate the BESS facility from the proposed interconnection switchyard). In addition, 20-foot-high wooden trellises would be installed to the east of the BESS enclosure areas. The trellises would be structurally reinforced to support a dense covering of "climbing" artificial vines. Fencing, gating, and the screening trellises are shown on Figure 2-1. Visual Simulations of the Project appearance from two public vantage points are shown in Figures 4.13 2 and 2a, and 4.13-3 and 3a.

4.13.2.2.2 Construction Staging Area

Staging areas would be provided within the footprint of the BESS facility and will be relocated within the footprint as specific phases advance.

4.13.2.2.3 Lighting

Nighttime construction may be required for certain activities, but most construction work would occur during the hours permitted by the City's Noise Ordinance (7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturdays). When nighttime construction activity is required, all necessary temporary lighting will be directed on work areas and away from sensitive receptors such as nearby residences and habitat.

Permanent motion-sensitive, directional security lights would be installed to provide adequate illumination around the substation area and points of ingress/egress. All lighting will be shielded and directed downward to minimize the potential for glare, spillover onto adjacent properties, and skyglow. Levels of individual lighting sources would comply with recommendations of the Illuminating Engineering Society, CEC, and City of San Juan Capistrano Ordinance No. 676 (Exterior Lighting Standards for Non-Residential Projects) to ensure lighting is no brighter than necessary.

4.13.2.2.4 Perimeter Wall and Landscaping

A 10-foot-tall perimeter wall will be constructed that consists of a prefabricated concrete decorative wall that will be utilize for both visual enhancement and fire protection. This wall will be combined with perimeter landscaping and a 20-foot-tall visual screening fence to minimize or eliminate visual impacts from public views. A detailed Landscape Plan is provided in Appendix 2B.

The Project will incorporate a 20-foot landscape buffer around the perimeter for screening and aesthetic enhancement. The landscape buffer will consist of a mixture of trees, shrubs and groundcover, and vines to create a varied, aesthetically pleasing visual buffer. As proposed, the total landscape area is 110,260 square feet (2.53 acres). Trees within the landscape buffer will include species native to southern California (e.g., Coast Live Oak and Catalina Ironwood), 24-inch box size, with mature heights of 20 to 50 feet and widths of 15 to 50 feet, depending on the tree type. Additional information related to planting sizes, spacing, quantities, and representative tree photographs are included in Appendix 2B. All plantings will require minimal supplemental irrigation once established.

4.13.2.3 Assessment of Impacts to Public Views

This section provides an assessment of visual effects provided for daytime viewing from southbound I-5 and general lighting effects.

4.13.2.3.1 Public Views

As previously identified, two representative public views from southbound I-5 and northbound Camino Capistrano were selected for assessment of anticipated visual impacts resulting from Project operations (see Figure 4.13-1). Visual simulations of the Project are presented in Figures 4.13-2 and 2a and 4.13-3 and 3a Ratings of visual contrast were assigned for the selected views and consider the characteristics of Project components within the existing landscape conditions. A rating of visual impact is presented in Table 4.13-4 is informed by viewer sensitivity and anticipated level of perceptible contrast. In addition, Table 4.13-4 summarize the viewers, contrast, and impact for each selected public view.

View	Viewers	Visual Contrast	Visual Impact
Southbound Interstate 5 (View 1)	 Represents views of passing southbound motorists from slightly elevated vantage point (in comparison to Project site) Within foreground viewing distance of the Project site (approximately 550 feet away) High number of viewers Mostly blocked views to Project site available to motorists 	 Rating: Moderate Form and scale of perimeter wall visible but landscaping/ screening (primarily 20- foot-tall screening trellises) help to soften its introduction into the landscape Limited visibility of boxy battery energy storage enclosures and tan/ paved surface of facility Scale of substation, switchyard, and loop-in features detectable but overall contrast reduced by existing transmission infrastructure in landscape (and by light gray color) 	 Rating: Low Partially blocked view of Project components Low viewer sensitivity due to peripheral view of motorists/passengers and prevailing travel speeds Existing character of site is visibly altered by Project components but Project introduction softened by landscaped screening and by assortment of transmission lines and poles in the landscape
Camino Capistrano (View 2)	 Represents views of passing northbound motorists from slightly elevated vantage point (in comparison to Project site) Within foreground viewing distance of the Project site (approximately 620 feet away) 	 Rating: Moderate- Boxy battery energy storage enclosures, tan/paved surface of facility, and perimeter wall may be partially visible but blocked by proposed landscaping (trees) at grade 	 Rating: Moderate Mostly clear, unimpeded views of Project components Moderate viewer sensitivity due to close proximity of motorists/ passengers and prevalent travel speeds on local surface roads

Table 4.13-4. Visual Impact for Representative Southbound I-5 View

View	Viewers	Visual Contrast	Visual Impact
	 Low to moderate number of viewers Mostly clear and unimpeded views to Project site available to motorists 	 Scale of substation, switchyard, and loop-in features (and number of vertical structures) detectable but overall contrast reduced by existing transmission infrastructure in landscape (and by light gray color and thin form/line of components) 	 Existing character of site is visibly altered by Project components but Project introduction softened by landscaping and backscreening of Project components.

Table 4.13-4. Visual Impact for Representative Southbound I-5 View

From southbound I-5 and northbound Camino Capistrano, the contrast rating is moderate t and the overall impact is moderated by the installation of proposed perimeter landscaping, perimeter walls, and the vine-covered trellises that as experienced from southbound I-5, would block most storage enclosures from view of passing motorists and more generally, soften the introduction of the overall Project into the landscape.

4.13.2.3.2 Lighting Effects

The limited, infrequent nature of nighttime lighting required during Project construction would be temporary and short-term and is not expected to substantially affect nighttime viewing, including nighttime views from ridgeline residences located to the west of the Project site. In addition, the Project site is situated near existing (and regular) sources of nighttime lighting, including I-5 and commercial development along the I-5 corridor (including car dealerships to the north of the Project site). While in less frequent operation, the rail corridor that roughly parallels the interstate is also a source of nighttime lighting in the local landscape.

While lighting required during Project operations would create new sources of light, lighting from the Project during operations would be a minor contributor to light levels and is not anticipated to change the overall nighttime light environment.

4.13.2.4 Analysis of Policy Consistency

Pursuant to CEC Application Requirements and Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, there are two pathways in preparing an assessment of potential impacts to visual resources. Specifically, the CEC Application Requirements and Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines state the following with regard to assessing impacts on visual character:

In nonurbanized areas, [would the project] substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

CEQA defines an "urbanized area" as an incorporated area that has a population of at least 100,000 persons, either by itself or by adding the population of the city with no more than two contiguous incorporated cities. (Pub. Res. Code sec. 21071(a)(1) - (2).). While the 2020 population of the City of San Juan Capistrano was 35,196

persons, the combined 2020 population of San Juan Capistrano and two contiguous incorporated cities (Laguna Niguel (64,355 persons) and Dana Point (33,107 persons)) is 132,658 persons (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). As the City of San Juan Capistrano qualifies as an "urbanized area" under CEQA, the urbanized area threshold requiring an assessment of scenic quality policy and regulation consistence is the appropriate threshold to apply (and is referenced below.

Table 4.13-5 details the Project's conformity with policies and standards governing scenic quality. As demonstrated in Table 4.13-5, below, implementation of the Project by the applicant will not conflict with an applicable regulation governing scenic quality.

Goal/Policy	Project Consistency		
City of San Juan Capistrano General Plan			
Land Use Element			
Goal 4: Preserve major areas of open space and natural features.	Consistent. The Project would be constructed on the flatter areas of the Church Property therefore the slopes to the west would be maintained in their current, natural condition. There are narrow portions of the Church Property along Oso Creek that are zoned and designated as "General Open Space." The Oso Creek Channel runs from the North to the South near the Eastern property line of the Project Site. City maps also show a recreational trail through the Project Site called the North Open Space trail which would be realigned approximately 500 feet to the west as part of the Project. The Project would completely avoid Oso Creek (transmission pole would be sited outside the creek area) and the recreational trail would be maintained.		
Policy 7.1: Preserve and enhance the quality of San Juan Capistrano neighborhoods by avoiding or abating the intrusion of non-conforming buildings and uses.	Consistent. The Project will be located within the larger Church Property and is a substantially similar land use to already permitted interim uses within the Planned Community zone. The Project will also be screened by a landscape buffer and 20-foot-tall screening fence.		
Policy 7.2: Ensure that new development is compatible with the physical characteristics of its site, surrounding land uses, and available public infrastructure. Community Design Element Policy 2.1: Encourage development which complements the City's traditional, historic character through site design, architecture, and landscaping.	Consistent. The Project Site was selected given it location within a high energy demand area and the close proximity of existing SDG&E facilities. The Project Site is one of the few remaining viable areas of undeveloped land in Orange County. The topography is such that significant grading and civil improvements will not be required, and the Project location results in the need for minimal new high-voltage facilities to interconnect into the SDG&E grid with only 500 feet of improvements. The Project Site is also located immediately adjacent to existing roadways that provides readily available access for construction and operations. The site is also located outside of sensitive biological habitat, is outside of the City's historic core/downtown area, and has been mostly previously disturbed.		

Table 4.13-5. Project Conformity with Regulations Governing Scenic Quality

Goal/Policy	Project Consistency
Community Design Element Policy 3.3: Preserve and enhance scenic transportation corridors, including Interstate 5 and the railroad.	Consistent. While the General Plan Final Program Environmental Impact Report places aesthetic value on the City's extensive open spaces, natural environment, and local ridgelines (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999b), the Project site does not encompass Open Space designated or zoned lands and therefore, the Project site is not considered a scenic resource by the City.
	Also, from southbound I-5 and northbound Camino Capistrano, the contrast rating is minor to moderate, and the overall impact is moderated by the presence of the perimeter landscaping and the vine-covered trellises that would block most storage enclosures from view of passing motorists and more generally, soften the introduction of the overall Project into the landscape.

Table 4.13-5. Project Conformity with Regulations Governing Scenic Quality

4.13.3 Cumulative Effects

CEQA Guidelines Section 15355 defines cumulative impacts as "two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts." The assessment of cumulative effects measures and describes the effects of adding the incremental changes from the Project to the effects of past projects and the predicted incremental change of current planned projects and proposed future projects.

The landscape in the region surrounding the Project demonstrates evidence of past and present visible disturbances related to agriculture, transmission and transportation infrastructure, and residential and commercial development. Based on the severity of change depicted in visual simulations, Project effects on existing visual character are not anticipated to substantially degrade existing visual character or quality, and there are no known planned or proposed future projects within the local viewshed that would create cumulative visual impacts in combination with the Project. As a result, the Project will not cause significant cumulative effects to visual resources.

4.13.4 Avoidance and Minimization Measures

The proposed Project would not result in a significant impact to visual resources; therefore, no mitigation is required.

4.13.5 Laws, Ordinances, Regulations, and Standards

4.13.5.1 Federal Policies and Regulations

No federal visual resource-related laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards exist relevant to the Project assessment area.

4.13.5.2 State Policies and Regulations

California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA generally requires state and local government agencies to inform decision makers and the public about the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects and to reduce those environmental impacts to the extent feasible.

The laws and rules governing the CEQA process are contained in the CEQA statute (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.), the CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.), published court decisions interpreting CEQA, and locally adopted CEQA procedures.

California Scenic Highways Program

In 1963, the California Legislature created the Scenic Highway Program to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to the highways. The state regulations and guidelines governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in Section 260 et seq. of the Streets and Highways Code. A highway may be designated as scenic depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the travelers' enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2008). A state route must be included on the list of highways eligible for scenic highway designation in Streets and Highways Code Section 263 for it to be nominated for official designation (eligible state routes are those that have been listed in Section 263 by the state legislature).

As described in Section 4.13.2.1, Regional Setting, no eligible or designated scenic highways occur within 2 miles of the Project site. The closest eligible scenic highway is Highway 74 from I-5 in San Juan Capistrano to State Route 111 in Palm Springs. Due to intervening development, vegetation, and terrain, the Project would not be visible from Highway 74. There are no officially designated state scenic highways in south Orange County. Therefore, the Project is not required to consider the state Scenic Highway Program.

4.13.5.3 Local Policies and Regulations

San Juan Capistrano General Plan

The Land Use Element (City of San Juan Capistrano 2002) and Community Design Element (City of San Juan Capistrano 1999c) of the City's General Plan include goals and policies related to open space, community and neighborhood character, and views including the following:

- Land Use Goal 4: Preserve major areas of open space and natural features.
- Land Use Policy 7.1: Preserve and enhance the quality of San Juan Capistrano neighborhoods by avoiding or abating the intrusion of non-conforming buildings and uses.
- Land Use Policy 7.2: Ensure that new development is compatible with the physical characteristics of its site, surrounding land uses, and available public infrastructure.
- **Community Design Element Policy 2.1:** Encourage development which complements the City's traditional, historic character through site design, architecture, and landscaping.
- **Community Design Element Policy 3.3:** Preserve and enhance scenic transportation corridors, including Interstate 5 and the railroad.

San Juan Capistrano Municipal Code

San Juan Capistrano Municipal Code Section 9-3.614 establishes exterior lighting standards for parking lots within commercial industrial and public institutional districts and more specifically, on all properties located within a commercial (CN, CT, CG, CM, FM, and CO), industrial (MG and MP), and public institutional (IP) district, special districts including Planned Community (PC), Planned Development (PD), and Precise Plan (SP) district. The lighting levels are dictated by level of activity (high, medium, and low).

4.13.6 Agencies and Agency Contacts

No agencies were contacted during preparation of this visual resources evaluation.

4.13.7 Permits and Permit Schedule

There are no permits related to visual resources that are required to construct the Project. CEC will work with the City on review of this application to ensure compliance with City policies and ordinances related to visual resources, as well as potential conditions (e.g., landscaping plan).

4.13.8 References

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- City of San Juan Capistrano. 1999a. "Conservation and Open Space Element." In San Juan Capistrano General *Plan.* December 14, 1999.
- City of San Juan Capistrano. 1999b. Final Program Environmental Impact Report for the San Juan Capistrano General Plan. December 1999.
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- FHWA (Federal Highway Administration). 2015. *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*. January 2015. Accessed November 2023. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_ topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx.
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- Level Spreader
- Maintenance Area
- Offsite Access Road/Emergency Vehicle Access
- // Landscaping
- Transmission Pole (new/replacement)
- Existing Outfall
- Storm Water Lift Station
- = = Transmission Line
- • Underground Stormwater System
- 20' Tall Visual Screening Fence
- 10' Tall Perimeter Wall
- Internal Security Fence
- —— Gate
- ------ Stormwater Discharge Line
- - Relocated Equestrian Trail (preliminary)

DUDEK & 100 200 Feet

= Existing San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) Trabuco to Capistrano 138 kilovolt (kV) transmission

SOURCE: Bing Maps 2023; Sargent & Lundy 2023

FIGURE 4.13-1 Selected Publicly Accessible Vantage Points

Compass Energy Storage Project



View to the southwest from Interstate 5 (Project site located 550 feet away)

DUDEK



View to the southwest from Interstate 5 with Visual Simulation of Project included

FIGURE 4.13-2a View 1: Southbound Interstate 5 Visual Resources Section - Compass Energy Storage Project

DUDEK



View to the northwest from Camino Capistrano (Project site located 620 feet away)

DUDEK



View to the northwest from Camino Capistrano with Visual Simulation of Project included

DUDEK