

4.5 VISUAL QUALITY

The perception of visual quality or aesthetic appeal of an urban environment is influenced by a number of factors. Most prominent among these factors are those attributes of "urban form" and "neighborhood design" that act to confine or limit the extent of what can be seen from a typical viewpoint. "Urban form" consists of the general pattern of building height and development intensity, while "neighborhood design" includes such factors as: the width and layout of streets; prevailing or dominant forms of land use; and age, condition, and architectural style of buildings making up the neighborhood.

Public views commonly available along a typical developed city block are frequently confined to the immediate foregrounds by a solid frontage of what may line the sides of street. Middle-distance or distant views may not be possible unless seen in narrow channels coinciding with the linear directions of the street or, where possible, as viewshed-defining backdrops, visible over the tops of relatively lower foreground buildings. Variations in the design or transportation corridors and in elevations of terrain may either facilitate more expansive views locally or limit them in an urban setting.

Just as important in the perception of visual quality of a city are the prevailing structural elements that define a city and its neighborhood design. Urban structural elements consist of: natural features, transportation corridors, open space, public facilities, as well as activity centers and focal points.

4.5.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Visual Setting

The 3.2-acre site currently contains the Hall of Justice building, which has 14 above-grade floors, one basement level, and a surface parking lot. The Hall of Justice building is approximately 195 feet high from street grade to the mansard roof parapet. The building is currently vacant and surrounded by chain link fencing to prevent access.

The project site is located in a heavily urbanized area. Uses within the downtown Los Angeles Civic Center area predominately include City, County, State, and Federal buildings. In the immediate vicinity of the Hall of Justice, the Federal Courthouse is located to the east across Spring Street, the Criminal Courts building to the south across Temple Street, the County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant to the west across Broadway, and the 101 Freeway is to the north, across Aliso Street. With exception of the two-story County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant, the

project site is surrounded by high-rise structures including the Federal Courthouse and County Criminal Courts building.

Based on a visual reconnaissance of the project area, two types of public views were identified: (1) those observed by motorists and pedestrians traveling along the roadway in the vicinity of the Hall of Justice site; and (2) views as seen from adjacent land uses such as the Federal Courthouse, and County Criminal Courts building. In order to document the existing visual character of the project site and its surroundings, photographs were taken from varying select locations where the public may view the site. **Figure 4.5-1, Photograph Location Sites**, shows the locations where photographs were taken.

Figure 4.5-2, Photograph No.1, presents a view of the project area looking east, down Temple Street, and across from the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. The Cathedral parking area is located on left side on Temple Street in the foreground and Hall of Justice building is visible in the background.

Figure 4.5-3, Photograph No. 2, presents a view of the project area looking east down Temple Street from the southwest corner of the Temple Street and Hill Street intersection. In the foreground and on the right side of the Temple Street are County offices. The County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant is located on the left side of Temple Street in the foreground, and Hall of Justice building in the middle ground.

Figure 4.5-4, Photograph No. 3, presents a view of the project area looking west down Temple Street near Main Street. In the foreground, on the right side of Temple Street, is the Federal Courthouse, which is of the Art Moderne style of the late 1930s. Behind the Federal Courthouse in the middle ground is the Hall of Justice building. On the left side of Temple Street, in the foreground, are the lower levels of the Los Angeles City Hall. The Los Angeles City Hall has a terra cotta façade and was constructed in the late 1920s. Further down Temple Street on the left, and in the middle ground, is the County Criminal Courts building.

Figure 4.5-5, Photograph No. 4, presents a view of the project site looking west from Aliso Street and the Spring Street intersection. The Hall of Justice building and surface parking area, which is the proposed location for the parking garage, are the most visible features in the foreground. Behind the Hall of Justice and surface parking area is the County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant.

Figure 4.5-6, Photograph No. 5, presents a view of the project site looking southwest from the Spring Street and Arcadia Street intersection. Again, the Hall of Justice and surface parking area, located in the middle ground, are the most prominent visible features that can be viewed from this location. Located to the left of the Hall of Justice building and surface parking area is the County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant.

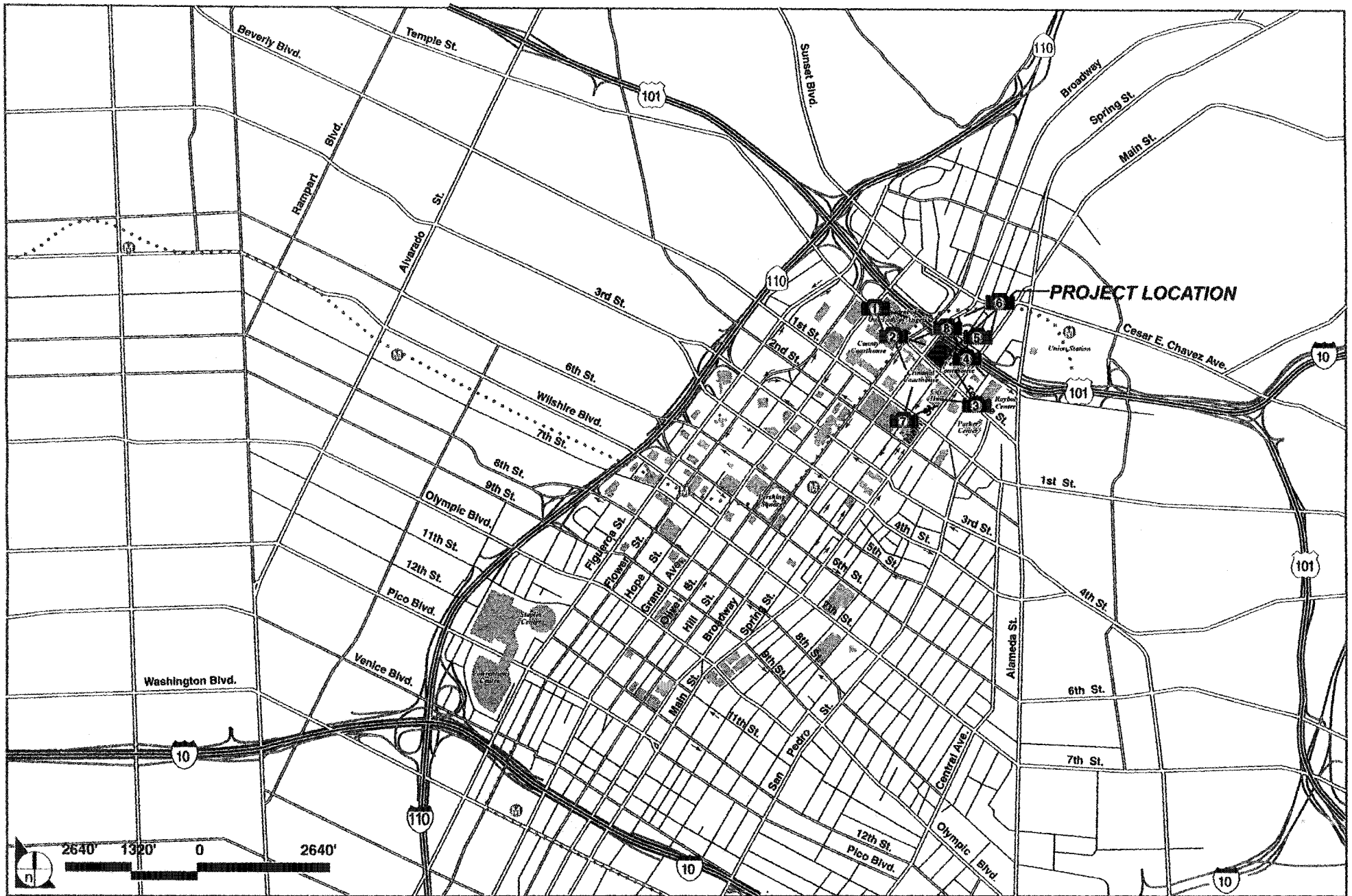


EXHIBIT 4.5-1

Photograph Location Sites



EXHIBIT 4.5-2

Photograph No. 1—View Looking East down Temple Street





EXHIBIT 4.5-3

Photograph No. 2—View Looking East from Southeast Corner of Temple Street and Hill Street Intersection



EXHIBIT 4.5-4

Photograph No. 3—View Looking West down Temple Street





EXHIBIT 4.5-5

Photograph No. 4—View Looking West from Aliso Street and Spring Street Intersection





EXHIBIT 4.5-6

Photograph No. 5—View Looking Southwest from Spring Street and Arcadia Street Intersection

Figure 4.5-7, Photograph No. 6, presents a view looking south, down Spring Street, and near Chinatown at the Hall of Justice building, which is located in the middle ground. Directly behind and visible over the top of the Hall of Justice building is the County Criminal Courts building. Towards the left of the Hall of Justice building is the Los Angeles City Hall.

Figure 4.5-8, Photograph No. 7, presents a view looking north, down Spring Street from 1st Street. In the foreground on the right side of Spring Street is the Los Angeles City Hall, and the Federal Courthouse is located directly behind in the foreground. On the left side of Spring Street are a grassy area in foreground, and the County Criminal Courts building in the background.

Figure 4.5-9, Photograph No. 8, presents a view looking south, down North Broadway from Aliso Street. The County of Los Angeles Central Heating and Refrigeration Plant is located on the right side of North Broadway in the foreground, and County Offices directly behind in the background. On the left side of North Broadway is the existing surface parking area on the project site, and Hall of Justice building is in the middle ground. The County Criminal Courts building can be seen in the background.

Urban Design Plans

The *Los Angeles Civic Center Shared Facilities and Enhancement Plan* (approved by the Civic Center Authority on June 10, 1997) encompasses the Hall of Justice site. The Hall of Justice site is located within the "10-minute diamond" (walk) relative to the Los Angeles City Hall, the organizing element of the Plan.

4.5.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The County of Los Angeles Initial Study (Appendix 1.0) suggests that a project would result in a significant impact to the visual quality of the environment if it would meet any of the following criteria:

- (a) The project site would be substantially visible from or would obstruct views along a scenic highway (as shown on the Scenic Highway Element), or the project site located within a scenic corridor, or the project would otherwise impact the viewshed.
- (b) The project site would be substantially visible from or would obstruct views from a regional riding or hiking trail.
- (c) The project would result in substantial grading or landform alteration of an undeveloped or undisturbed area which contains unique aesthetic features.
- (d) The proposed uses would be out-of-character in comparison to adjacent uses because of height, bulk, or other features.
- (e) The project is likely to substantially obstruct unique views from surrounding residential uses.
- (f) The project is likely to create substantial sun shadow, light or glare problems.

According to the Initial Study, the Hall of Justice is not visible from a scenic highway or corridor; is not in proximity to a regional riding or hiking trail; is within an urbanized area and contains no unique aesthetic feature that would be disturbed due to earth moving activities; would not obstruct unique views from surrounding residential uses; and would not alter the height or scale of the existing Hall of Justice building, though it would include the development of the new parking garage with 3.5 levels above the existing grade. It would not result in the casting of significant shadows. As a result, the following impact analysis will only evaluate the project's potential impacts to visual resources relative to criteria (d) and (f) above as it relates to light and glare.

4.5.3 POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 – No Project Alternative

Under Alternative 1, the Hall of Justice would remain vacant and unsafe for occupancy and would continue to deteriorate physically. Implementation of this alternative, thus, could result in a long-term reduction in the visual quality of the Civic Center area.

Alternative 2 – Repair and Reuse Alternative (Proposed Alternative)

Construction

Overall, the construction period is anticipated to last approximately 30 months. Development of the project would require the demolition/dismantling and removal of the existing asphalt surface parking areas, the digging of subterranean parking garage levels, and the cleaning and rehabilitation of the Hall of Justice building. During this time, equipment such as heavy trucks, and stockpiled cut material may be visible and/or obstruct views of surrounding land uses. This would result in a short-term impact on views from adjacent office uses. The short-term visual effects of grading and construction operations would be unavoidable, since little can be done to improve the aesthetics of a construction area. Short-term visual impacts are considered to be adverse, but less than significant, since the impacts would be temporary. Lighting for construction purposes, if necessary, would be limited to low level lighting for safety and security purposes. Overall, this lighting would be directed towards the ground and shielded, so it is not anticipated to result in significant impacts.

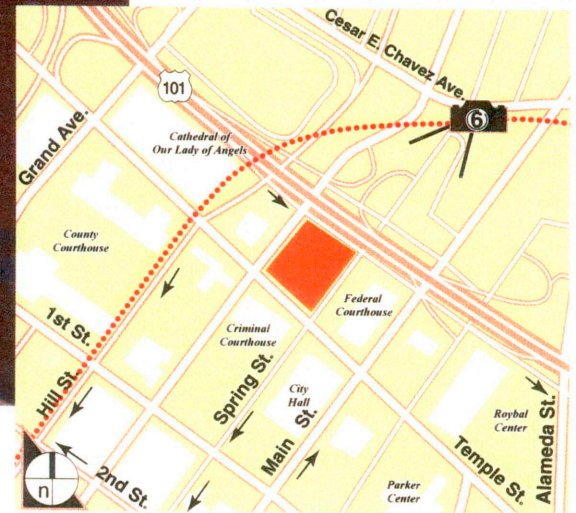


EXHIBIT 4.5-7

Photograph No. 6—View Looking South down Spring Street near Chinatown



EXHIBIT 4.5-8

Photograph No. 7—View Looking North down Spring Street from 1st Street





EXHIBIT 4.5-9

Photograph No. 8—View Looking North down North Broadway from Aliso Street



Operational

Parking Structure Massing and Design

Construction of a new 1000-space parking structure is proposed as part of Alternative 2. **Figure 4.5-10, Photo Simulation of New Parking Garage**, illustrates a rendering of the new parking garage from the intersection of Spring Street and Arcadia Street. The structure would be located on the northern side of the Hall of Justice site, along Aliso Street, significantly screened from the Temple Street view by the Hall of Justice building, and it would replace the existing surface parking lot. The new parking structure would be visible from the Federal Courthouse and upper floors of the City Hall, as well as to motorists on Spring Street, Aliso Street, and North Broadway. The parking structure is planned to include up to 4.5 levels below grade and up to 4.5 levels above grade. This structure would be designed with an exterior skin that is compatible with the surface texture, color and architectural features of the Hall of Justice building. The aboveground height of this proposed structure is to match the 4th floor-line of the Hall of Justice building, where a significant architectural bullnose feature occurs on the Hall of Justice exterior. Overall, the development of the parking structure would provide for in-fill development and would be designed to be compatible with the existing Hall of Justice structure, thus, resulting in less than significant impacts.

Landscaping

In general, the landscape concept is intended to create a distinct landscape character for the entire site while providing a visual cohesiveness, with the surrounding Civic Center area, throughout the streetscapes and internal areas. Plant species and groupings may vary from area to area, but would remain compatible throughout the entire length of the individual streets.

Street trees in the right-of-way of the project site include 7 ficus trees and 1 Japanese zelkova tree along Temple Street; 7 magnolia trees and 4 olive trees along North Broadway; 3 Japanese maple trees along Aliso Street; and 11 Japanese maple trees along Spring Street. The ficus trees and Japanese zelkova tree along Temple Street would be removed due to the root systems causing damage to the sidewalk, curbs, and gutters, and in some instances the location of the trees are planted too close to the building. Both these issues pose a safety problem to persons utilizing the building. New street trees that are compatible with the City urban environment would be provided along Temple Street.

The 7 magnolia trees along North Broadway would be retained. The 4 olive trees along North Broadway would be removed and replaced with new magnolias. In order to compliment the existing magnolias, the new trees to be planted would be of the same species and would be box specimens of equal size.

The 3 Japanese maple trees along Aliso Street would be relocated to Spring Street to compliment the existing row of Japanese maples. Aliso Street would receive new landscaping that is compatible with the parking structure and City urban environment.

Of the 11 Japanese maple trees along Spring Street, 8 would be retained. The 3 trees to be removed are in conflict with the ramp and stairs leading into the new main entrance to the building. Landscaping in the area of the new main building entrance and pedestrian plaza on Spring Street would include various plant species including trees, hedges, lawns, and ground cover plant material. The addition of this landscaping would enhance the project site and surrounding Civic Center area.

Light and Glare

Artificial light may be generated from point sources, focused points of origin representing unshielded light sources, as well as from indirectly illuminated sources of reflected light. The effects of modifications of nighttime light conditions are contextual and depend upon the existing lighting environment, light intensity, and proximity to light sources. Lighting impacts may include: visual prominence, decrease of available views, alterations to the nature of a community or neighborhood character, or illumination of a sensitive land use.

Under this alternative, strategically placed lighting would be provided to highlight architectural elements and building signage. In addition, security and safety lighting would be provided as necessary, and would be limited to building walkway and parking areas. These light sources would be oriented towards the ground and shielded or screened. This would prevent illumination from both spreading into the surrounding areas (which are not considered light sensitive), and interfering with vehicle traffic on surrounding roadways. Consequently, this alternative would not create unusual lighting impacts resulting in less than significant impacts.

The repair of the Hall of Justice building and new parking garage would not include reflective exterior materials, window glass, or architectural materials, which could create glare. Consequently, glare impacts are considered to be less than significant.



SOURCE: Clark Construction, March 2003.

EXHIBIT 4.5-10

Photograph No. 9—Photo Simulation of New Parking Garage from Spring Street and Arcadia Street Intersection Looking South

Alternative 3 – Adaptive Reuse of the Existing Building to Secretary of Interior Standards

Construction

Implementation of this alternative would result in the same construction-related impacts as described under Alternative 2. Impacts are considered to be less than significant.

Operational

Implementation of this alternative would result in same operations-related impacts as described under Alternative 2. Impacts are considered to be less than significant.

4.5.4 MITIGATION MEASURES (ALTERNATIVES 2 AND 3)

No mitigation measures are required for either Alternative 2 or 3.

4.5.5 ADVERSE IMPACTS AFTER MITIGATION (ALTERNATIVES 2 AND 3)

Impacts under either Alternative 2 or 3 would be less than significant.

