

3.11 Visual Resources

3.11.1 Introduction and Methodology

NYSDEC Guidance on Assessing Visual Impacts

This visual assessment has been conducted in accordance with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Program Policy, Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts, DEP-002-2 to evaluate potential impacts on aesthetic resources of the proposed BT Holdings residential development.

A visual assessment is an analytical technique that determines the viewshed of a particular facility, identifies aesthetic resources within the viewshed, determines the potential impact of the facility on aesthetic resources, and identifies strategies to avoid, eliminate or reduce adverse impacts. Such an assessment is appropriate when a proposed facility is potentially located within the *viewshed* of a designated *aesthetic resource*. A viewshed is the geographic area from which a facility may be seen. An aesthetic resource is a formally designated place visited by the public for the purpose of enjoying its beauty. That resource may be designated by a local jurisdiction, a State agency, or a Federal agency. While the NYSDEC guidance explicitly excludes evaluation of locally designated resources, if they are found, they are evaluated here. Additionally, other scenic resources may be considered significant aesthetic resources for the purposes of the visual assessment based on their unique characteristics.

Variables associated with the actual visual experience are often presented in a visual analysis, such as atmospheric perspective (diminishing clarity and contrast of view due to atmospheric interference), and size perspective (reduction of apparent size of objects as distance increases). It is noted that mere visibility of a facility, even startling visibility, does not automatically mean it has an adverse visual or aesthetic impact. Aesthetic impact occurs when there is a demonstrated detrimental effect on the public enjoyment of an aesthetic resource. Visual impact occurs when designed mitigation strategies, or the mitigating effects of perspective, do not adequately reduce the visibility of a facility from an aesthetic resource to an insignificant level.

The visual assessment will often incorporate use of photosimulations to demonstrate potential visibility of the facility from a particular sensitive viewpoint located off the site. The visual assessment presented here employs a photosimulation depicting structures and other components of the development in a photograph of the actual site.

3.11.2 Existing Conditions

Aesthetic Resources

Ridgeline Protection Overlay District

The Town of Chester Code Section 98-26 describes a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District (RPOD) that regulates development in ridgelines within its boundaries. Provisions for development within the District are designed to protect certain lands at higher elevations because of their important visual and aesthetic qualities. The BT Holdings site is not located within the RPOD, yet is located to the south of the RPOD. While no development is proposed within the RPOD for the proposed project, the Talmadge Farm, which abuts the site on the

north, lies within the district. Talmadge Farm complex has been identified as an historic resource, potentially eligible for National Register designation. Views of the proposed project from Talmadge Farm are described and illustrated below. No other aesthetic or cultural resources were identified within the site viewshed that would be sensitive to changes in the visual environment. Most views of the site unavoidably include the Chester Mall in the viewpath.

Visual Character and Views into the Site

Visual Character in the Site Vicinity

The project site is located in a setting of rolling topography and a mix of commercial, industrial, mixed use hamlet, agricultural and residential uses. Former agricultural fields on the southeast facing slopes of the site are visible from locations along Route 17M and several publicly accessible locations in the vicinity. Views of the site from roadways to the north, west and east are generally limited by intervening steep topography, tree cover, and development.

The visual character in the site vicinity along Route 17M and in the vicinity of the access ramps for NYS Route 17 is defined by intensive commercial development. This commercial development includes the Chester Mall that abuts the site and the Castle Family Fun Center just west of the site, and numerous highway and commercial uses to the southwest and south of the site. Development on the north and northeast of the site is general low density, single family residential, with moderately sized older houses. Rolling agricultural fields characterize the landscape to the north. Whispering Hills, a large condominium complex, with clusters of low, neutral colored townhouses, is located in the vicinity, west of Route 17. To the east and southeast of the site are a mixture of uses including industrial, residential neighborhood and mixed use hamlet areas.

Visual Resources Survey

A visual resources survey was conducted in the project area in December 2008. Views from key locations, including those specifically identified in the Scoping Outline, were evaluated. The trees were bare, and therefore maximum visibility could be assessed. During times of year when trees are in leaf, the project site would be less visible from locations with intervening vegetation.

The extent of the survey was initially determined by inspection of US Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps with the aid of 3D viewing computer software (Terrain Navigator Pro), which reveal the potential visibility of the project site based on topography. The survey established the *potential viewshed* of the proposed project and then refined this assessment based on limiting factors of the actual visibility of the site, accounting for topography, vegetation, and buildings, which were identified and evaluated in a field survey.

The potential viewshed west of the site includes roads within the Whispering Hills condominium development, and on the north and east of the site along Ward and Hambletonian Roads, which are characterized by open agricultural fields and sparse residential development. On the south and southwest the potential viewshed extends to NYS Routes 94 and 17M, and it comprises the residential streets in the vicinity of Carpenter Road.

The field survey identified the *actual viewshed* of specific locations in the site vicinity where the site and the proposed project were visible. It included identification of any prominent land forms,

land cover types, and the visual character of the site and local area. The survey also identified natural areas of significant scenic value as described above, structures of significant architectural design in the vicinity of the project, views out from the site, and sites of historic significance in proximity of the project site.

Figure 3.11-1 is a Key Map showing the locations of the viewpoints in the photos in Figures 3.11-2 through 3.11-7, which show existing views of the site from area roads and from Talmadge Farm, as required in the Scoping Outline.

View A: From Route 17M at Castle Family Fun Center

Figure 3.11-2 shows the northwest portion of the site, just north of the Chester Mall. The open agricultural fields and a small area of woods located on the knoll on the project site are shown in the distance. The site is located beyond the evergreen trees shown in the photograph, which are on the commercial property south of the site. A one story concrete car service center and parking lot occupy the midground. The driveways and parking areas for the Castle Family Fun Center are on the left.

View B: From Route 17M at Christine Drive

Christine Drive is a short private access road for a small development of bungalow cottages, directly west of the site's northwesterly frontage on NYS Route 17M. From this location along the road, the sloped agricultural fields are visible to the top of the high point on the subject property, at elevation 596 approximately 135 feet higher than the elevation of the road. (Figure 3.11-3). The terrain on the subject property forms an embankment approximately five feet high at the roadside. Views into the site at are partially obscured at this location by a shallow band of deciduous trees and shrubs along the site frontage. An old fieldstone wall can be seen along the site frontage and along the frontage of the neighboring property to the south. Utility lines are also visible along the site frontage.

View C: From Talmadge Farm

Views of the site from locations on the Talmadge Farm are limited in many locations by the steep topography of the Talmadge Farm fields. Figure 3.11-4 shows the view from the hillside on the southeast portion of the Talmadge Farm property, near the subject property boundary. A row of trees along the property line identify the boundary in the photograph. This southwesterly view takes in the Whispering Hills condominiums, the roof of the Chester Mall in the midground, and distant hills at the horizon.

View D: From Rear of Residential Units on Whispering Hills Drive

Views of the site from the rear of residences on Whispering Hills Drive are generally interrupted by houses within the development to the east. The houses on the east side of the development have open views of the site across the highway. Figure 3.11-5 shows a view of the property in the distance, from a publicly accessible location along Whispering Hills Drive, west of Clubhouse Place. The top of the knoll on the site forms the horizon. The trees along the property line at Talmadge Farm can be seen on the left along the top of the knoll and descending to the frontage in Route 17M along a driveway on the northwest end of subject property.

View E: From Residences on the west side of Hambletonian Avenue

Figure 3.11-6 shows a view from a residential drive west of Hambletonian Avenue towards the subject property. Views of the subject property from publicly accessible locations in this neighborhood on the wooded hillside to the east of the site are obstructed by intervening topography and vegetation. From rear yards of properties abutting the subject property, views into the site may be possible. Based on the aerial view in Figure 3.11-1 dense woods exist between the houses this neighborhood and the northeasterly property boundary of the site, and these woods would be expected to partially obstruct views of the site when the trees are bare and prevent them when in leaf.

View F: From Carpenter Road

As shown in Figure 3.11-7, from Carpenter Road, a short residential road south of the site, the wooded terrain on the southern portion of the site is visible beyond the back yards of the residences. Views to the site are partially obscured by trees along the edges of these properties during winter and would be expected to be more fully obscured when the trees are in leaf.

3.11.3 Potential Visual ImpactsConsistency of Project with Physical and Aesthetic Character of the Community

The site vicinity is currently characterized by a mixture of commercial, industrial, agricultural and residential uses that result in a varied but not a distinctive visual character. The site is bounded on the north by a farm, on the east by single family residential properties and the Nexans manufacturing facility; on the southeast by mixed use hamlet area; on the south by a residential neighborhood; and continued commercial development; and on the southwest and west by mostly commercial development, including the Chester Mall. Most views of the site unavoidably include the Chester Mall in the viewpath. The residential development in the project area includes both high and medium density as well as rural and suburban types. The applicant believes the proposed site design and architecture would be consistent with the character of some older homes in the hamlet areas as well as the newer residential development in the area and would contribute to the visual coherence of the landscape in this mixed use area.

The site frontage on Route 17M is currently rural agricultural in character. At this location the proposed plan includes new landscaping in front of the proposed stormwater basin to create an attractive transitional zone along the road, between the commercial area to the south and the more rural area to the north.

New landscape buffer plantings are proposed along the northwest and west property lines in order to provide screening between properties. On the southern portion of the site, existing vegetation near the property boundary would be retained, where it would create a visual buffer between the proposed residences and existing ones, and integrate the development into the fabric of the Carpenter Road neighborhood. Where the project site abuts the Nexans property existing woods on both sides of the property line would provide a buffer between these uses and maintain the aesthetic character that currently exists in this location. These woods would limit views of the across the boundary when the trees are bare and would be expected to substantially obstruct views when the trees are in leaf.

The proposed residential development would include 358 townhouse residences and 2 three-story senior housing buildings (with 100 senior apartments) associated parking and landscaping arranged along a curvilinear roadway system. Therefore, with respect to scale and density, the project is similar to the Whispering Hills development to the west of the site.

The townhouse community was modeled after the Meadow Glen development in Monroe with its multiple buildings situated along a loop roadway on a rolling site. Building size, layout, and landscaping are all comparable.

Potential Effects on Scenic Views

The subject property is not part of the ridgeline protected in the Town zoning law within the RPOD but as mentioned previously it is adjacent to the Talmadge Farm, a property that is included in the District. The northern portion of the property is currently rolling farmland similar to the Talmadge farm. The southern portions of the property abut the Chester Mall. The views of the property in association with the Talmadge farm from several nearby locations along 17M and from several publicly accessible within the Whispering Hill condominiums may be considered scenic though the Chester Mall is unavoidably visible from most vantage points included in this analysis. The proposed development would change the character of these views from rural to suburban residential.

As described above, the post development views from 17M near Christine Drive and from some locations in Whispering Hills condominiums would include the two proposed residential buildings for seniors on the hillside facing west, and the townhouse buildings arrayed at the top of the knoll. A landscape screen planting including a mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees would separate the residences at the top of the hill from the senior housing farther down, and therefore in time would be expected to limit the view of the residences at the top of the hill when the trees grow above the rooftops. At that point the trees on the site would form the horizon viewed from these westerly locations.

Changes to Visual and Physical Character

Construction of the proposed development would replace much of the fields and woods on the site with buildings, roadways, parking areas, landscaping, stormwater basins and other infrastructure, creating a change to the visual character of the site. Changes to the existing views described above that would result from the project are discussed below. In addition, a photosimulation illustrating the post development conditions as viewed from NYS Route 17M, where the site is visible to the most users is presented in Figure 3.11-8.

Route from 17M at Castle Family Fun Center

Figure 3.11-8 shows a simulated post development view of the site from just north of the Chester Mall on Rte 17M. Proposed residences; landscape plantings to the west, north and east of the senior apartment buildings and along the internal roadways; and preserved trees north of townhouse buildings 4, 5 and 6 would be visible arrayed along the sloping terrain. The mixed evergreen and deciduous tree plantings would be expected to reach heights of approximately 17 to 20 feet within five years after planting, and with the preserved trees, would be expected to substantially soften views of the proposed residences. The conceptual

architecture depicted illustrates the way traditional proportions and neutral colors of the proposed residences would visually integrate the development in its setting.

View from Route 17M at Christine Drive

As shown on the Conceptual Site Plan, after development the foreground of the view from Route 17M near Christine Drive would include the site entrance and the proposed buffer planting of deciduous and evergreen trees along the embankment. The midrise senior apartment buildings and the townhouses proposed to be constructed on the high terrain of the north portion of the property would be visible north of the entrance road. Along the north property line and on the slope behind the two mid rise buildings, an evergreen and deciduous tree buffer planting would also be visible. These landscape buffers would be approximately 12 to 14 feet tall at planting, and approximately 17 to 20 feet five years afterwards.

The boulevard style entry road would be lined with street trees, and the central island would be planted with small flowering trees. Street trees would also be visible along the internal roads. Two clusters of deciduous woods to be preserved would interrupt views of the proposed townhouses along the middle portion of Road "C" on the eastern portion of the site. When the trees are bare, these trees would be expected to partially screen the views beyond them, and prevent views when they are in leaf.

From this location on Route 17M, the view towards the southeast would include the cluster of existing trees to be preserved north of the proposed entrance drive and proposed evergreen and deciduous buffer plantings to the north of the clubhouse and along the west property line. In the distance houses to be constructed on the upper slopes in the central portion of the property would be visible. Views of the south portion of the development would be expected to be obstructed by the landscape buffer planting along the west property line, behind the Chester Mall. In the first years after planting, this landscape buffer may permit views of the some townhouses to be constructed on the more gently sloped terrain on the southern portion of the site; those located closer to the wetland area and stormwater basin would substantially obstruct views of the residences behind them. These partial views would be expected to diminish as the trees mature.

Views from Talmadge Farm

After construction portions of the proposed development to be constructed close to the north property line would be visible from some locations on the lower elevations of Talmadge Farm. Specifically, two proposed mid rise structures, and townhouses to be constructed on the knoll at the north end of the property would be visible beyond proposed and existing vegetation from lower elevations near the buildings on the farm.

From locations at the higher elevations on Talmadge Farm, closer to the proposed development, views of much of the development would be possible soon after the end of construction. However, evergreen and deciduous tree buffers are proposed for the property boundary just north of the proposed mid rise buildings, and between the mid rise buildings and the group of townhouses to be constructed to the east of them. These buffers would be expected to obscure views of the development substantially over time, as the trees grow larger.

In off-leaf conditions, existing trees to be preserved along the easterly portion of the north property line would be expected to partially obscure views of the proposed townhouses on the

highest elevations on the site, along proposed Road C, adjacent to the property boundary. When in leaf, they would be expected to provide fuller screening. The townhouses to be constructed at this location would obstruct views of those to be constructed at lower elevations south of them, viewed from the fields on Talmadge Farm.

View from Rear of Residential Units on Whispering Hills Drive

From the Whispering Hills condominiums and roads within that complex that have views of the project site, after construction, the proposed development on the northern portion of the property would be visible. The terrain at Whispering Hills slopes towards the northwest. Therefore the proposed mid rise buildings and the townhouses to be constructed north of the proposed entrance road, along Road B and the northern portions of Road C on the BT Holdings site would be visible. Associated parking areas, the stormwater basin near the site frontage on Route 17M, and the proposed buffer plantings along the road and between the building areas in this portion of the site would also be visible from these locations.

A landscape screen planting including a mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees would separate the residences at the top of the hill from the senior housing farther down, and therefore in time would be expected to limit views of the residences at the top of the hill when the trees grow above the rooftops. At that point the trees on the site would form the horizon viewed from these westerly locations. Two clusters of deciduous woods to be preserved would interrupt views of the proposed townhouses along the middle portion of Road "C" on the eastern portion of the site. These trees would be expected to partially screen views beyond them when they are bare, and prevent views when they are in leaf.

View from Residences on the west side of Hambletonian Avenue

It is not anticipated that views of the proposed development would be possible from publicly accessible locations near the residences on the west side of Hambletonian Avenue. However, from the rear of the properties abutting the subject property in that location, views of the stormwater basin, residential development and recreational trail would be obscured by a mixed evergreen and deciduous landscape buffer to be planted along the property boundary.

View from Carpenter Road

As shown on the concept plan, an area of existing woods in the southwest corner of the project site, would be preserved, providing a visual buffer between the proposed residential development and the adjacent residential properties on Carpenter Road. These deciduous woods would be expected to prevent views of the proposed development from locations on the western portion of Carpenter Road when the trees are in leaf, and provide partial screening when the trees are bare. An evergreen and deciduous landscape buffer is proposed to provide additional visual screening along the south property boundary. Proposed houses to be constructed along the southern portion of proposed Road A would generally obstruct views of the development farther north.

3.11.4 Proposed Mitigation Measures

Architectural, Landscape Design, and Lighting Standards

The conceptual architecture, landscaping and lighting for the proposed development have been developed to comply with the standards that apply to these in the Village of Chester Code. The Guiding Principles and Standards in Section 98-24 states:

The location and height of buildings, the location, nature and height of walls and fences and the nature and extent of landscaping on the site shall be such that the use will not hinder or discourage the appropriate development and use of adjacent land and buildings or impair the value thereof.

Further, Section 98.23-1 concerning Senior Housing requires "appropriate landscaping, lighting, and sidewalks" and that the "architectural style of the proposed project, exterior materials, finish and color shall be consistent with existing community and neighborhood character."

As described in the following sections, the proposed site design, architecture, lighting, landscape plantings and other features would comply with the specific dimensional requirements, achieve the aesthetic goals stated in these standards and mitigate potential adverse impacts on visual resources from the proposed development.

Thresholds for future site development

The maximum number of dwelling units proposed is 458, and the maximum height of structures is 3 stories. The proposed project would require the disturbance of 24.65 acres of land for the construction of buildings, roads, parking, driveways and walkways. The applicant believes that with the mitigations for potential adverse impacts to visual resources proposed herein, this maximum area of development would be appropriate.

Project Design Plans

Dwelling Unit Design

The concept architecture for the proposed development is depicted in the elevations shown on Figures 2-5, 2-6 and 2-7. The style of all structures would be a contemporary adaptation of traditional Colonial and Federal style architecture. The proposed townhouses would be two- or three-story buildings with garage doors facing front on the ground level. The proposed shingled gable roofs would be steeply pitched. Buildings would be clad with clapboard siding and masonry, and they would include balconies with decoratively detailed posts and railings. Double hung windows with shutters and decorative trims are depicted. The colors of the exterior materials would be neutral and blend with the surroundings.

Similar in style and details to the townhouses, the proposed midrise buildings would be three-story structures approximately 260 feet long. The symmetrical facade would be punctuated by four projecting balconies and the central entrance. The applicant believes that the proposed architectural styles, materials, and details would be compatible with the best examples of the regional architecture and would enhance the visual environment. No other mitigation is proposed.

Landscaping, Buffering and Screening

The proposed Landscape Plan is shown on Figure 2-11, Conceptual Landscape and Lighting Plan. It includes shade trees, understory trees and flowering shrubs to provide an attractive environment for the site users as well as visual buffers between the development and adjacent properties. A significant portion of the plant list consists of plants native to the region, which would contribute to integrating the developed site within its larger setting.

Some clusters of existing vegetation would be retained. Specifically, in the center of the property, east of the wetland area, two areas of existing trees would be preserved on either side of proposed roadway "B." Vegetation within the wetland area, which consists of grasses and other perennial plants and very few shrubs, would also be retained. Woods at the southwest corner of the property near Carpenter Road, and smaller areas along the southeast property line and the east side of the northern boundary would be preserved.

Street trees would be planted along the proposed internal roads, and small flowering trees would be planted in the island in the boulevard entry road. Mixed evergreen and deciduous tree buffers would be provided along much of the property boundary. Within the proposed development mixed evergreen and deciduous buffer plantings would also be used between groups of buildings in the center and northern portions of the site, providing layers of screening that would in time significantly interrupt views of the proposed residences from locations to the west.

The hillside in between the proposed senior housing and the stormwater basin near the site entrance on Route 17M would be seeded with a meadow mix. Various types of wetland vegetation would be planted in the proposed stormwater management basins for an attractive appearance and to enhance the stormwater quality treatment.

Lighting

The Conceptual Lighting and Landscape Plan, shows the overall lighting plan for the proposed development, which would include decorative fixtures appropriate for the residential use and create an efficient lighting pattern while minimizing offsite glare. It would provide adequate illumination on all primary roadways and parking areas to minimum light levels for public safety and security and would include light shields where necessary to minimize glare and stray light. The night lighting proposed would produce levels of illumination that would not create a nuisance to any adjacent property. Examples of pole mounted street light fixtures are shown on the plan. Final selection of the lighting fixtures would be made at the site plan approval phase.

Phasing

According to the proposed Phasing Plan shown on Figure 2-12, the project would be built in five phases. over a period of approximately 3-4 years. Therefore, the physical disturbance of the site and resulting visual impacts due to construction would be limited to only a portion of the site at one time. In the first two phases, the project entrance and internal roadway, north stormwater basin, and senior housing would be completed. Views of the site frontage on Route 17 M after the completion of Phases I and II and during subsequent phases would be of the completed structures and landscaping within these areas. Phase III would include the construction of development proposed for the higher elevations on the northeast portion of the site, so that, prior to the final phases, areas visible from the locations west of the site in the vicinity of Routes 17 and 17M and Whispering Hills condominiums would be completed.



Figure 3-11-1: Key Map of Existing Views
BT Holdings - Chester

Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York

Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse, 2007 Aerial Photograph

Scale: 1" = 460'



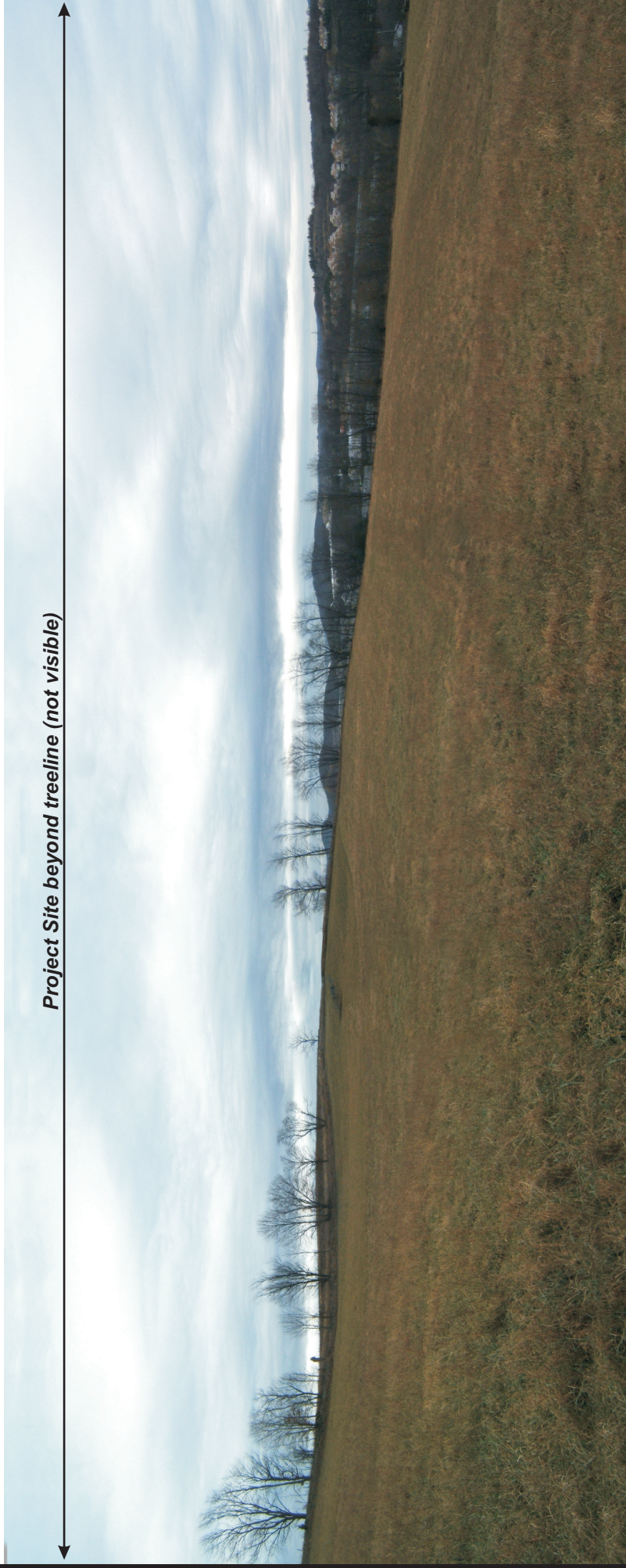


Figure 3.11-2: View A - Existing View from NYS Rte. 17M at Castle Family Fun Center
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008



**Figure 3.11-3: View B - Existing View from NYS Rte. 17M at Christine Drive
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008**

Project Site beyond treeline (not visible)



**Figure 3.11-4: View C - Existing View from Talmadge Farm
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York**
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008



Figure 3.11-5: View D - Existing View from Whispering Hills Drive
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008

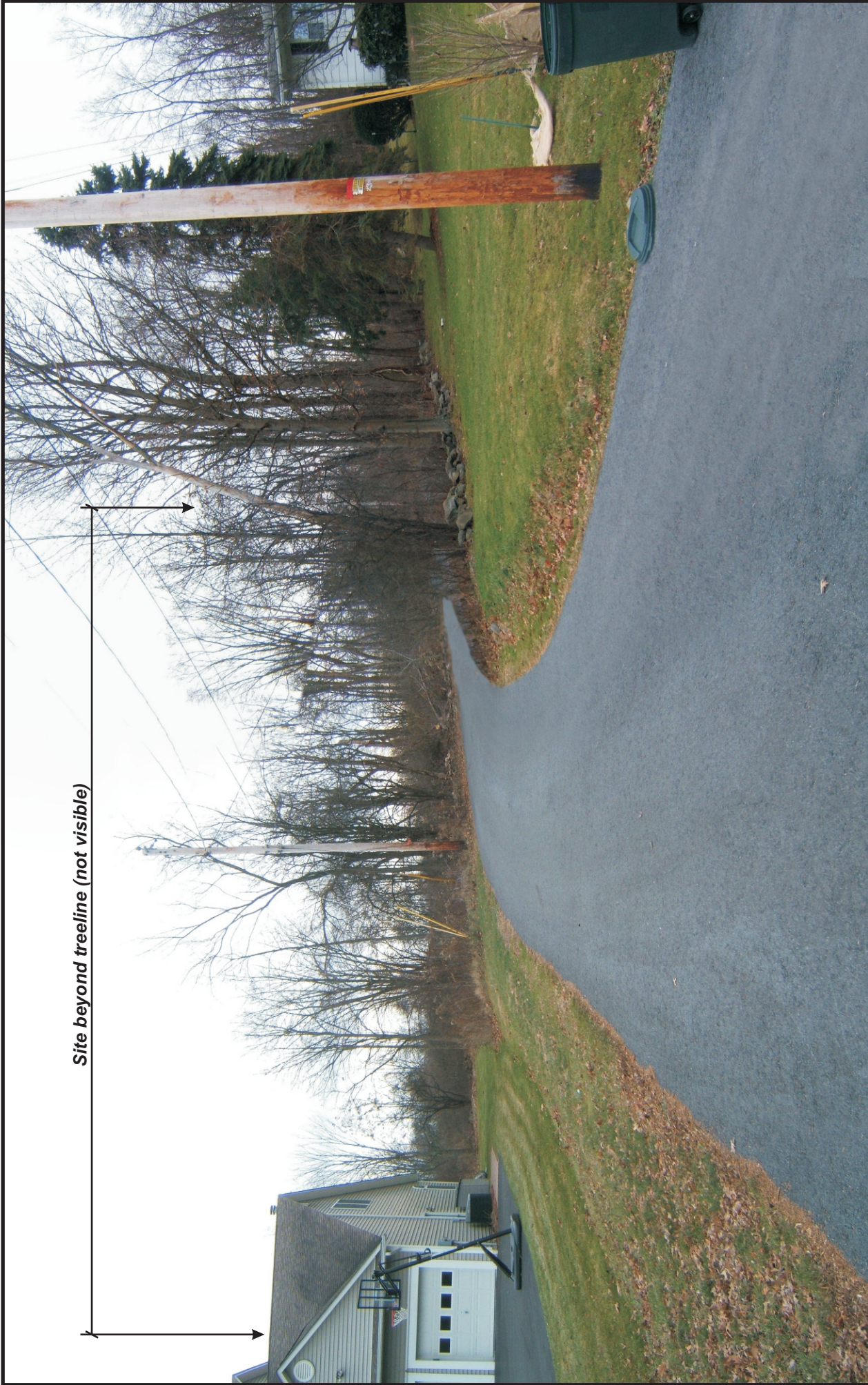


Figure 3.11-6: View E - Existing View from Hambletonian Avenue
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008

Project Site beyond treeline



**Figure 3.11-7: View F - Existing View from Carpenter Road
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York**
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008



Figure 3.11-8 View A - Post-Development View from NYS Rte. 17M at Castle Family Fun Center
BT Holdings - Chester
Village of Chester, Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: TMA Photos, Dec. 09, 2008