

### **3.0 VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**

#### *Field Survey*

A visual survey was conducted in the project area on March 4, 2011 to identify local viewpoints from which the project site is visible, in addition to sensitive visual resources from which changes in the view of the project site may be significant. Photographs taken during the survey are presented in the figures in Appendix B, showing late winter conditions when leaves were off the trees. It was observed that the height of the trees on and around the site reach up to an estimated 45 to 50 feet from the ground.

During the field survey, factors that limit or block views of the site, such as intervening vegetation or buildings, were observed and noted. The survey established the following publicly-accessible locations from the site is readily visible:

- South Pascack Road along a length of road of approximately 1400 feet, including the site frontage
- Nicole Way at the site frontage located at the north end of the road

### **3.1 Existing Conditions**

#### *Existing Visual Character and Views*

South Pascack Road is a two-lane suburban roadway, relatively narrow and gently winding through long-established residential development on both sides. Given the age of the development, large trees occur on the house lots and close to the roadway and their canopies overhang the roadway in many cases. Single family residence lots along South Pascack Road are generally informally landscaped, with many lots containing relatively small lawns and groves of woodland type trees and understory, giving the roadway corridor a woody feel as one travels along the road. The tree cover behind house lots on the east side of the road extends onto adjoining parkland that creates a wooded visual backdrop to views east, while trees around and behind houses on the west side of the road allow glimpses of additional residential development that exists on Nicole Way further to the west. Nicole Way, a newer residential subdivision road, exists at an elevation some 55 feet higher than South Pascack Road in the vicinity of the project site and ends in a hammerhead immediately opposite the west side of the site.

A straight length of South Pascack Road approximately 1400 feet long includes the site frontage from which trees on the subject property are visible as one travels north or south past the site. Views into the developed portion of the subject site from South Pascack Road occur over a shorter length due to the extent of tree cover, which includes large evergreen trees along the southern site property line and another grove of large evergreens on the north side of the site. The winding and wooded nature of South Pascack Road obscures views of the site from further away. There are no long distance views of the project site due to existing tree cover, topography and the alignment of the area road network.

Immediately adjoining the project site are developed residential properties to the north, east, south and west that afford views into the site. The superior position (higher elevation) of the north end of Nicole Way affords a view overlooking the entire project site, although as a cul-de-sac road this view would be experienced only by the residents of the nearby houses. In the existing condition, the visibility of the two houses on the site from Nicole Way is largely obscured by the density of the existing vegetation on the site when leaves are off the trees and

would be substantially or entirely obscured in the summer months. Likewise, the visibility of the two houses and other buildings on the site from South Pascack Road is notably softened by the density of the existing landscape vegetation in winter and would be less visible in the summer months in the existing condition.

Photographs presented in Appendix B illustrate existing conditions in the site vicinity when leaves are off the trees. The pictures illustrate the following conditions: views from Viewpoints 1 through 4 show the streetscape character of South Pascack Road; the view looking into the project site is shown from Viewpoint 3 in front of the site and from further north at Viewpoint 4; views from Viewpoint 5 show the streetscape character of Nicole Way; the view looking into the project site from the north end of Nicole Way is also shown from Viewpoint 5.

### **3.2 Avoidance or Minimization of Potential Impacts**

The project plan calls for removal of the two houses and accessory buildings, trees and vegetative cover within the development area, and regrading the site prior to construction of the site improvements. The site improvements entail a single, low profile building, parking and circulation areas, fencing around the perimeter, and landscaping throughout the disturbed area. The building will cover a little more than one-third acre, will be set back approximately 145 feet from the street line, and is skewed on the parcel effectively reducing its visual presence when viewed from the road. The building will be under 30 feet in height at its peak and its exterior is proposed to include brick, clapboard and stucco finishes and a colored metal roof. The building will be a contemporary architectural style with natural earth tone colors.

The parking is proposed to be laid out in two separate areas of the site to reduce the size of the parking field and provide areas for landscape buffering around them. The site will have a single main entrance drive further affording opportunities for landscape buffering along the site frontage. Additionally black perimeter fencing (which is the international standard for the Brethren Church organization) is proposed that will distinguish the site frontage. A black picket fence that has a classic wrought-iron look (6-foot high aluminum) and gate are proposed as an ornamental feature, along with the landscape planting in front of and behind the fence.

Additionally, the proposed site plan includes lighting of the parking areas for safety after dark. To minimize the nighttime effect, site lighting will be installed with timers and/or light sensors so that the lighting will be used only when the facility is being used at night and will otherwise be turned off.

These proposed changes to the site will result in a change in the visual characteristics of the parcel within the larger context of the developed neighborhood. As viewed from South Pascack Road, the property will appear more open after trees and shrubs are removed (elimination of the tree canopy) for the development. The addition of the ornamental fence and landscaping along the road, with the low profile building visible further back as one passes the site, are designed with the intent to complement the existing streetscape. Existing tree cover is proposed to remain at the rear of the parcel which, due to the elevation change across the property, will continue to be a visual backdrop to the site development as it will appear above the roof line of the proposed building. The Applicant believes this plan will be compatible with the existing neighborhood visual character.

From Nicole Way, the view of the property will change from a wooded residential site to a building site of somewhat different scale than the existing residential buildings. The roof line of the proposed building will be located well below the elevation of a viewer on Nicole Way, and

## **Visual Analysis**

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approximately 375 feet away, buffered by at least 55 feet of existing woods to remain. The selection of building colors, including the roof color, will be important to minimize the visual effect of the project. Additionally, landscape trees planted within the project will soften the visual change over time as the tree canopies grow and spread. The proposed landscape plan includes a mix of deciduous and evergreen tree plantings around the perimeter of the developed area to soften views of the building and parking from offsite.