

3.9 Visual Resources

3.9.1 Existing Conditions

Introduction

A visual resources assessment was conducted to determine whether the proposed facility is potentially within the viewshed of a designated aesthetic resource and whether there are potential significant impacts that require measures to eliminate, mitigate or compensate for an adverse aesthetic effect. This impact assessment has been conducted in accordance with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) policy and guidance memorandum¹ relating to assessing and mitigating visual impacts of facilities that are located in visual proximity to sensitive land uses.

Viewshed is defined as 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. For the purposes of this assessment, that resource may be designated by a local jurisdiction, a State agency, or a Federal agency. Additionally, other scenic and cultural resources may be considered significant aesthetic resources for the purposes of the visual assessment based on their unique characteristics.

Visual Assessment Methodology

The visual assessment is an analytical technique that determines the viewshed of a particular facility or project, identifies aesthetic resources within its viewshed, determines the *potential impact* of the project on aesthetic resources or other important publicly-accessible viewing vantage points, and identifies strategies to avoid, eliminate or reduce adverse impacts. This assessment incorporates the use of photographs and study of area topographic mapping to define the potential viewshed and demonstrate potential visibility of the project from a particular viewpoint located within the viewshed study area. This evaluation is verified through in-field reconnaissance.

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 project, even startling visibility, does not automatically mean it has an adverse visual or aesthetic impact. An impact occurs when there is a demonstrated detrimental effect on the public enjoyment of an aesthetic resource and when designed mitigation strategies, or the mitigating effects of perspective, do not adequately reduce the visibility of the project to an insignificant level.

Existing Visual Character

The project site is located on the east- and west-facing slopes of rolling, largely wooded terrain that falls away from Heiden and Park House roads to the Sheldrake Stream that bisects the

¹ NYSDEC, "Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts", Program Policy DEP-00-2, NYSDEC Division of Environmental Permits, July 2000. The guidance includes definitions of various visual impact assessment terms, describes an analytical technique for assessing visual impact, and defines various mitigative measures available to eliminate or reduce an adverse impact.

property. The project site includes some 3,570 feet of road frontage on Heiden Road, and some 1,300 feet of road frontage on Park House Road. The site is located in a setting of moderately developed rural land that predominantly includes single family house sites, clustered bungalow developments, and undeveloped, wooded land. Most notably, the existing Raleigh Hotel complex on the west-central edge of the property occupies a visually prominent position next to Heiden Road. The site of the former Heiden Hotel (now only a building slab) and its accompanying buildings is also visually prominent from Heiden Road, now appearing as an open meadow. Due to the rolling topography and curving roadway corridors of the local region, the potential for views into local properties is limited by the presence of nearby hills and the vegetative cover. There are no physical features on the subject site, with the possible exception of the six-story Raleigh Hotel building, which would be visible from long distance vantage points.

Aesthetic Resources

An aesthetic resource may be: a property or facility that is listed or eligible for listing on the National or State Register of Historic Places; a Town Park, State Park, Forest Preserve or National Park; or a scenic trail such as the Appalachian Trail, among many other types of features used by the public due to their scenic attraction. In this case, there are no designated aesthetic or scenic resources identified in the viewshed of the project.

Visual Survey

A visual resources survey was conducted by a NYS registered landscape architect for the project area on April 6, 2011, to identify locations in the vicinity where the project site may be visible from roads and properties with public access. At this time of year, maximum visual exposure could be assessed. During times of year when trees are in full leaf, the project site would be less visible, and visible from shorter distances than discussed in this section. The extent of the survey was initially determined by inspection of US Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps, which reveal the potential visibility of the project site based on topography alone. Thus, the in-office survey established the *potential viewshed* of the proposed project, as shown in Figure 3.9-1 at the end of this section. The viewshed *potentially* extends up to 0.5 mile in various directions from the project site, based on landform with no vegetation.

The field survey refined this assessment based on limitations on the actual visibility of the site, accounting for topography, vegetation, and buildings. The field survey identified the *actual viewshed* of the site -- specific publicly-accessible locations in the site vicinity where the site, and potentially the proposed project, would be visible -- and verified that it is smaller than the viewshed area depicted in Figure 3.9-1.

The *actual viewshed* of the project site is limited to the immediate site area viewed at or near the property frontages along Heiden Road and Park House Road, and the eastern end of Kiamesha Lake Road. The presence of intervening vegetation or topography in the area effectively limits views from elsewhere. There are no public parks or other publicly-accessible vantage points nearby from which the site is visible.

Early spring photographs were taken of the site environs. Figure 3.9-1 identifies the photo locations on a topographic map of the local area. Figures 3.9-2 to 3.9-5 show views from four specific view points near the site. Based on the evaluations described above and existing conditions on the ground, three vantage points were selected for further analysis and are described below.

- Heiden Road at the northwest corner of the property (looking southeast)²
- Heiden Road at the southwest corner of the property (looking northeast)
- Park House Road near the northeast corner of the property (looking west)

The potential visual impacts of the proposed development of the site have therefore been based on the analyses of views from these locations.

Heiden Road at the northwest corner of the property (looking southeast)

As previously noted, the greatest visual exposure of the project site under current conditions is from Heiden Road at the northwest corner of the property (identified as Viewpoint 1) where the viewer is situated above the elevation of the property. The sloping open meadow allows a view extending 300 to 400 feet into the property to the tree line. This view is experienced by travelers on Heiden Road for a brief period while passing the site. Figure 3.9-1 shows the existing views looking north and south from the high point in Heiden Road, respectively.

In the site vicinity on Heiden Road north of Kiamesha Lake Road there are two houses that have a view of the northwestern side of the site. No other sensitive receptors were identified near this frontage.

Heiden Road at the southwest corner of the property (looking northeast)

The Raleigh Hotel building dominates the view from Heiden Road at the southwest corner of the property as travelers pass the site, with a perimeter fence and landscape plantings next to the road and vehicle entry, parking and circulation on the site immediately in front of the building. The width and height of the building and existing vegetation preclude any view further into the property along this frontage. The narrow and winding roadway corridor in the immediate site area also virtually obscures visual evidence of the site or hotel building until one is within about 500 feet of the property entrance drive when travelling north. Figure 3.9-4 shows the existing views looking north and south from this location on Heiden Road, respectively.

Kiamesha Lake Road intersects with Heiden Road in this area, providing a direct view of the hotel building and the distant horizon from this vantage point (at the immediate eastern end of Kiamesha Lake Road) however further view into the subject property is obscured by the building itself. The topography and tree cover prevent further view of the property from any point west on Kiamesha Lake Road. Figure 3.9-3 shows the existing views looking east and north from Kiamesha Lake Road, respectively.

In the site vicinity on Heiden Road south of Kiamesha Lake Road there are several houses that have a view of the southwestern edge of the site. No other sensitive receptors were identified near this frontage.

Park House Road near the northeast corner of the property (looking west)

Park House Road is a narrow and winding, rural road surrounded by woodland except where the natural landscape is interrupted by scattered house lots. In the immediate vicinity of the

² Applicant's discussion with the Planning Board identified the northwest corner view point ("Viewpoint 1") for visual assessment.

subject property, the view to the west reveals deciduous woodland. In the early spring survey, it was possible to identify the white Raleigh Hotel building through the trees, however this view would be entirely obscured as soon as leaves are on the trees. Due to the proximity of the trees close to and their canopy overhanging the roadway, no long distance views were identified along the Park House Road frontage. Figure 3.9-5 shows the existing views looking north and south on Park House Road, respectively, at the approximate location of the proposed site access driveway.

Two or three houses exist near the southeast corner of the site (on Park House Road) that have a view of a portion of the site. No other sensitive receptors were identified near this frontage.

3.9.2 Potential Impacts

Heiden Road at the northwest corner of the property (looking southeast)

The project plan calls for removal of several existing buildings on the Heiden Hotel parcel and development of a loop road surrounding a cluster of duplex buildings, including the removal of trees in downslope areas of the parcel. With the layout as proposed, and since the existing topography drops over 40 feet in elevation from Heiden Road toward the rear of the parcel, the row of westerly buildings will be visible from the road but will largely obscure view of the downhill buildings. Figure 3.9-6 illustrates a sight line looking to the east from the high point of Heiden Road (Viewpoint 1) in a post-development east/west profile view. A minimum building setback of some 100 feet from Heiden Road will provide a landscape buffer from the public roadway.

Thus once the development is constructed, the view from Heiden Road at the northwest corner of the property (looking southeast) will include a series of undulating building facades (as opposed to a straight line of buildings) set somewhat lower in elevation than the road itself, and a single project entrance drive located where Heiden Road crests before disappearing from view. Given the configuration of the interior site layout, the front facades of the buildings will face Heiden Road. The change in this view resulting from the removal of trees on the site will also reveal additional long distance view of the wooded hills on the horizon. The visual impact of this project from this section of Heiden Road will entail the change from an open meadow landscape in the foreground to a cluster development stepping down from the public roadway into the woods beyond as the land falls away from the road. The sight line from Heiden Road will occur at the roof line of the new buildings closest to the public road and over the tops of the buildings further east (refer to Figure 3.9-6). Sensitive treatment of the building architecture and landscape buffering along the road would create a view that is complementary to the Heiden Road corridor.

Heiden Road at the southwest corner of the property (looking northeast)

The primary access to the new development east of (behind) the Raleigh Hotel is proposed from Heiden Road at the southwest corner of the property utilizing the existing hotel access drive. With the new development set more than 800 feet from the public road, visibility of the new buildings due to the topography and the existing woods to remain will not be possible from Heiden Road in any season of the year. Therefore there will be no visual impact of this project from this section of Heiden Road.

Park House Road near the northeast corner of the property (looking west)

On the eastern-most portion of the project, access from Park House Road to the proposed development area will necessitate tree clearing for a narrow, curvilinear access drive. The drive will enter the property in the southeast corner and wind down the hill and through the woods some 125 feet from the public road before entering the proposed building area. The new development (buildings and loop road) will be set a minimum of 160 feet from the public road. Given the change in topography and the proposed preservation of existing tree cover on much of this parcel, visibility of the new buildings through the woods to remain will be largely obscured. The visual impact of the project from Park House Road and its environs (including neighboring residential properties) will be limited to the new entrance drive immediately at the public road, and when leaves are off the trees, seasonal visibility of portions of new buildings filtered by the intervening woodland cover that will remain.

Lighting Effects

Evaluation of the effects of night lighting from the new development is called for in the DEIS Scope. However, no street lighting or broad area lighting is proposed in this development. Outside lighting will be limited to low illumination, wall-mounted lights on the residential buildings located at the entry doors and similar wall-mounted lights for safety of pedestrians on the community buildings. While interior and exterior light from the buildings may be visible from the nearby roads, illumination of the site will be well below any level that would cause an impact on the night sky.

3.9.3 Mitigation Measures

Site Design

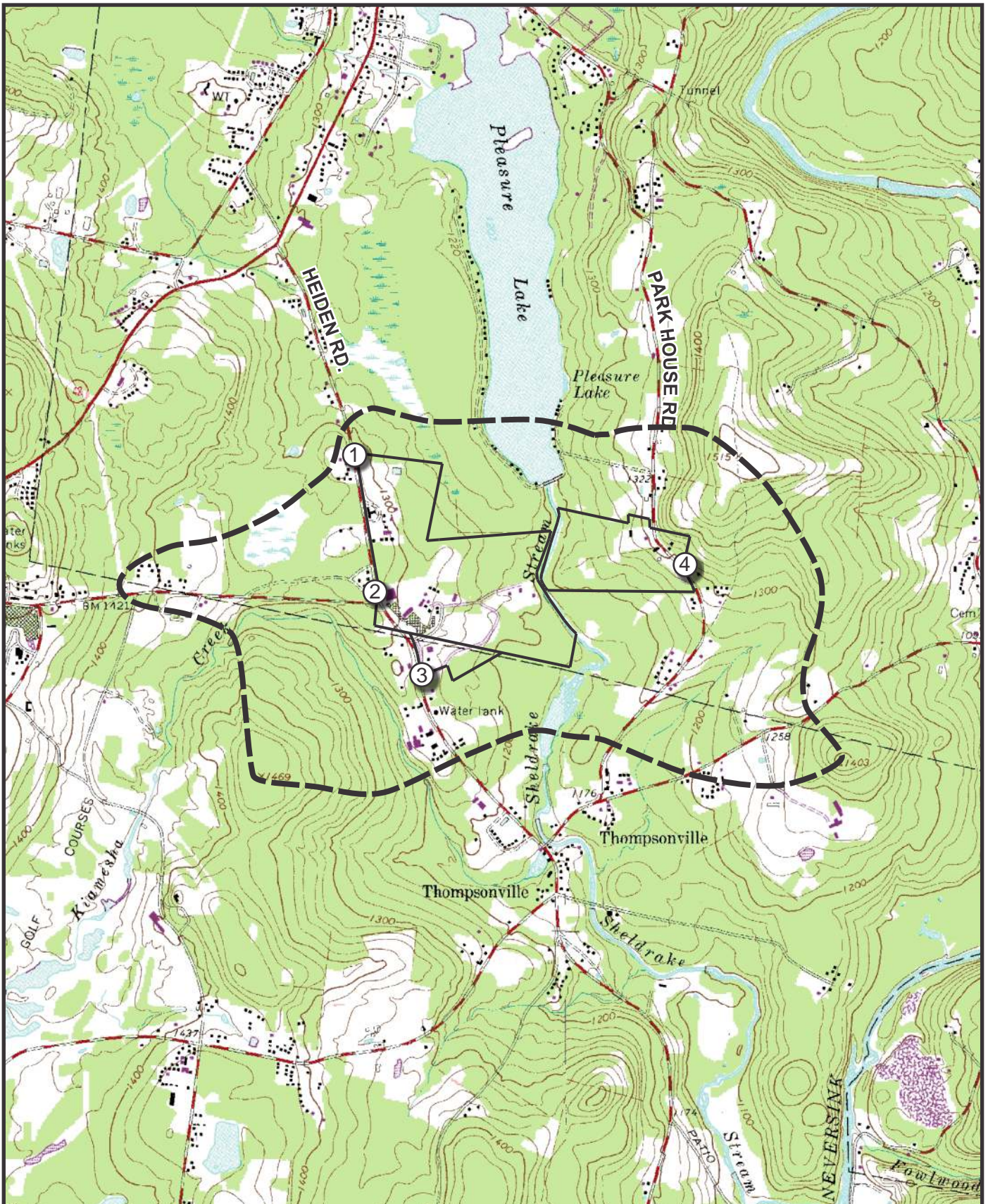
The proposed site design is intended to minimize potential visual impacts of the project. The design lays out the development using curvilinear streets and building clusters that work with the existing land forms and allow for a smooth variation in the appearance of any cluster of buildings as may be seen from any particular vantage point off the site. Further, the natural topography of the project site will allow the buildings and internal roads to descend from the elevation at the public roadway toward the back of the site, thereby minimizing the apparent size of the development. Buildings closer to the public roads will obscure views of homes behind them. Activity areas for residents are concentrated within the building clusters thereby allowing preservation of existing vegetative cover around the perimeter of the developed areas for buffering. The proposed site plan provides a deep building setback from Heiden Road and Park House Road. A proposed landscape plan prepared for the project includes planting a staggered row of trees along the Heiden Road frontage to further buffer the views into the project. These mitigation measures, which are integral to the project design, will result in a development that is harmonious and fitting with the topography and landscape setting.

The project design is anticipated to fit with the moderately developed character of the public roadway corridors from which limited portions of the project may be seen. Preservation of woodland trees on the property in addition to modest landscape treatment of disturbed areas will provide buffers for views from outside the site.

Architecture

Proposed building architecture will consist of modest, low profile residence buildings of a style, materials and colors selected to be harmonious with the existing development in the local area. The project sponsor will work with the Town's Architectural Review Board to design an architectural style for the buildings in the project that will fit with the community.

Any exterior lighting proposed will be appropriately shielded to minimize impact on the night sky.



LEGEND

- Site Property Boundary
- # View Point
- Limit of Potential Viewshed

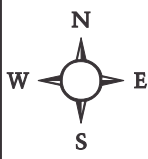


Figure 3.9-1: Visual Assessment Map
 Raleigh and Heiden Properties
 Town of Fallsburg, Sullivan County, New York
 Base: USGS 7.5-minute Topographic Map,
 Monticello Quad, 2000
 Scale: 1" = 2000'



Figure 3.9-2: View Point 1 - Looking North on Heiden Road



Figure 3.9-2: View Point 1 - Looking South on Heiden Road



Figure 3.9-3: View Point 2 - Looking East from Kiamesha Lake Road



Figure 3.9-3: View Point 2 - Looking North from Kiamesha Lake Road



Figure 3.9-4: View Point 3 - Looking North on Heiden Road



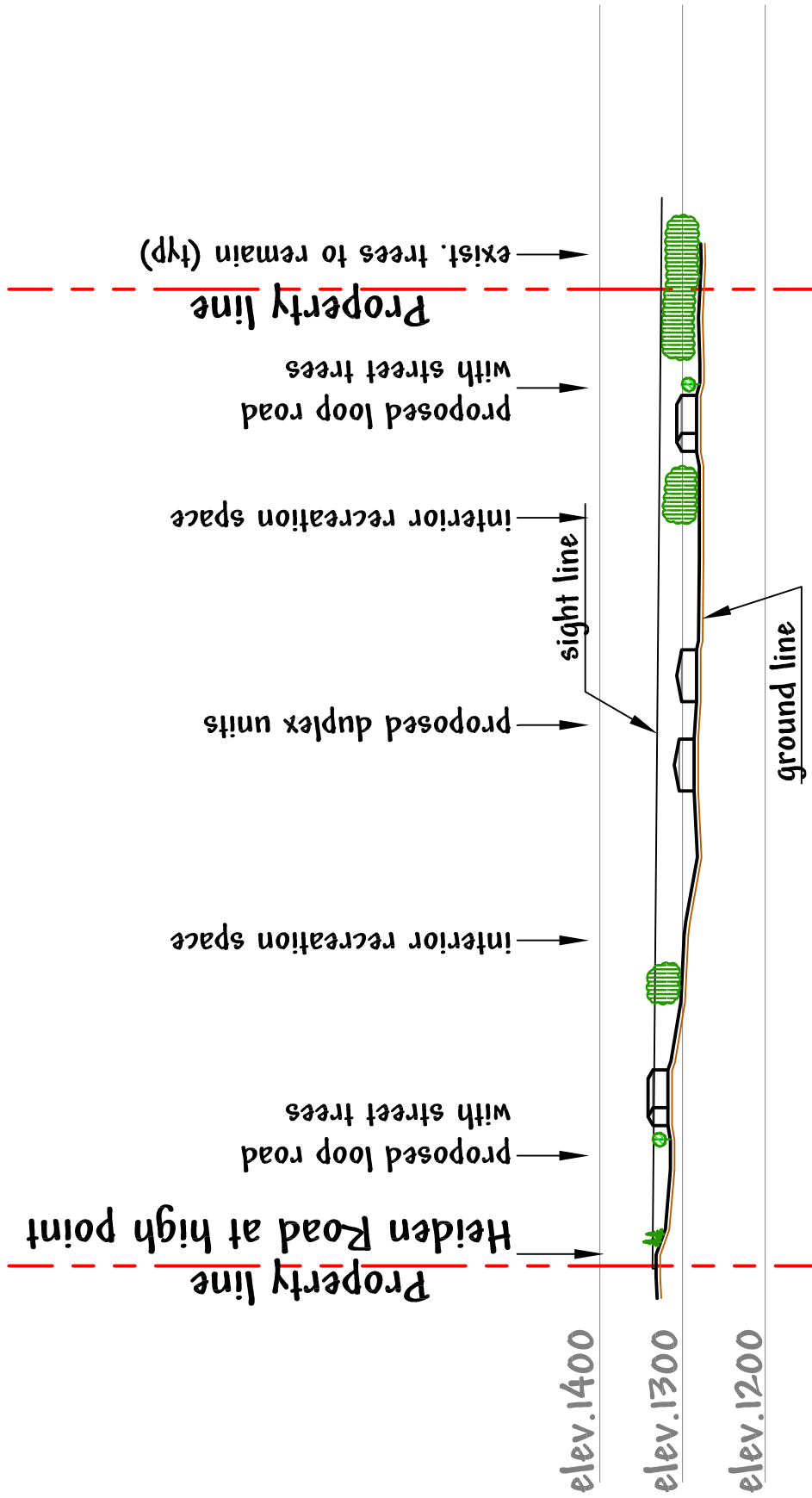
Figure 3.9-4: View Point 3 - Looking South on Heiden Road



Figure 3.9-5: View Point 4 - Looking North on Park House Road



Figure 3.9-5: View Point 4 - Looking South on Park House Road



This Figure depicts a Post-Development E/W Profile View taken through the high point of Heiden Road. Landscape trees are shown approximately 5 years after planting.

9/28/11
Scale: 1" = 200'

TMA 09038 - raleigh\dwgs\visual assess.dwg: view 1

Tim Miller Associates, Inc., 10 North Street, Cold Spring, New York 10516

Figure 3.9-6: Sight Line Profile From Heiden Road
Raleigh and Heiden Properties
Town of Fallsburg, Sullivan County, New York
Source: Site Concept Plan and Grading Plan