CHAPTER 3 - OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Open space provides Vacaville visual distinction from other communities and vital economic support. While all agricultural land is economically vulnerable to urban expansion, the prime soils of the Central Valley are relatively more valuable and support in Vacaville for preserving prime soils is stronger than in California metropolitan communities where agricultural preservation has failed. Plan policies attempt to strike a balance between the need for housing and the need for open space by establishing a specific urban service zone, and prime agricultural lands, hillsides and scenic ridges outside this zone.

State planning law requires an Open Space Element as a mandatory part of a City's General Plan. The General Plan must identify open space lands and establish policies for protecting these lands from the encroachment of urban development. Open space encompasses lands that essentially are unimproved and that have limited development potential due to the physical characteristics of the land, due to the land being restricted to agricultural production, due to the location of the land as a buffer between urban areas, or due to the scenic value of the land and its role in maintaining a community's sense of character or heritage.

Four types of open-space lands are identified in the State requirements for the Open Space Element. These include:

(1) Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources, which includes but is not limited to, areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life or habitat, creekways, streams and watersheds;
(2) Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources, which includes rangelands, agricultural lands and other areas of economic importance for the production of foods, fibers or minerals;
(3) Open Space for Outdoor Recreation, such as areas of scenic, historic or cultural value or lands suited for park and recreation purposes; and
(4) Open Space for Public Health and Safety. This includes lands which, because of certain characteristics, require special regulations or oversight due to safety factors such as high fire risk or geologic instability.

Any action by the City to acquire, dispose of, or regulate the use of open space lands in any of these categories must be consistent with the Open Space Element. Policies for all types of open space are in Section 3.5. Other policies relating to open space space are also included in the Land Use, Parks and Recreation, and Safety Elements. These four categories are discussed in more detail below.

Agricultural lands outside of the urban service area and lands falling into the four categories of open space listed above are mapped on the General Plan Diagram as public open space or as agriculture. These are both categories of open space, though some may be privately held and some may be publicly held, with varying degrees of development potential. It should also be noted that the public open space designation does not necessarily guarantee public access.

By 1999, the City had acquired approximately 1,900 acres of land in the Public Open Space category through acquisition and dedication. Other agencies such as the California Medical Facility and the Nut Tree Airport control additional lands. It is likely that more lands will be acquired in the future. In 1997, the City adopted open space district regulations as a part of the Land Use and Development Code update. This ordinance regulates public access, defines permitted uses, limits grading and construction of structures on ridgelines. Within the urban service area, the term open space refers to public open space. Outside of the urban service area, open space is used primarily in reference to lands which have agricultural uses such as croplands and grazing. Other policies for all types of open space are in Section 3.5. Other policies relating to open space are also included in the Land Use, Parks and Recreation, and Safety Elements.

3.1 OPEN SPACE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

In addition to its value as a visual resource, the Planning Area's open space includes oak woodlands, wildlife habitat, creeks, scenic hillsides, riparian habitat, and productive agricultural acreage. All of these areas qualify for protection as natural resource open space. The Conservation Element includes additional policies on natural resources preservation and management.

By defining specific limits for urban services, the Plan diagram protects open space for preservation of remaining natural resources. Areas designated for conservation of natural resources should not be converted to urban uses unless an overriding public purpose requires such use.

3.2 OPEN SPACE FOR THE MANAGED PRODUCTION OF RESOURCES

Agricultural Land: Agricultural lands in Upper Vaca Valley and east of Leisure Town Road represent open space for the maintenance of agricultural production. The majority of the acreage on the east side of the Planning Area is in the Agricultural Service Area and subject to Williamson Act contracts.

Figure 3-1 shows the classification of important farmland outside the City limits according to the Soil Conservation Service and California Department of Conservation.

Prime farmland offers the best combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops, while farmlands of statewide importance have a good combination of such features, but do not require a minimum rooting depth or certain permeability. They also may hold more water, be more saline or alkaline, and have a moderate

erosion hazard. Unique farmland is other than prime or of statewide importance, with lesser quality soils.

The City is committed to maintaining viable agricultural areas and, accordingly, establishes a specific agricultural service zone, as shown in Figure 2-3.

Mineral Resources: According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the Vacaville Planning Area contains limited mineral resources that are being extracted. Near the southern boundary of the Planning Area in the vicinity of Cement Hill, limestone deposits show evidence of some historic use. Stone quarries in the Vaca Mountains produced dimensioned and ornamental stone. Although the western hills contain sandstone and conglomerates which may be used for sands, gravel, and stone, none of these resources are currently being mined. Commercial extraction is not expected within the planning period, therefore policies and land use designations for mineral resource areas are not included in the General Plan.

3.3 OPEN SPACE FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

The General Plan envisions a system of parks, trails, and open spaces that serve the existing residential need for recreational areas and provide a framework and focal points for future development. The proposed "City Park" and all other neighborhood and community parks are designated on the General Plan Diagram as Parks. Open Space areas along creeks and in the foothills can be utilized for passive recreation, walking, jogging, and hiking.

The section on Parks and Recreation contains policies on park and recreation uses, facilities required, existing and proposed park sites (Figure 4-1), and bicycle, equestrian, and pedestrian paths and multipurpose trails (Figure 4-2 and Table 4-4).

3.4 OPEN SPACE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Safety Element, as well as this element, addresses management policies regarding areas deemed hazardous or potentially hazardous in the Planning Area. Slopes susceptible to landsliding due to steepness or other instability, creek beds and tributary streams with flooding potential, and areas subject to extreme fire hazard are mapped in the Safety Element to illustrate hazardous areas. Where appropriate, these lands that compromise open space for public health and safety have been designated as public open space or hillside agriculture on the General Plan Diagram. The Nut Tree Airport and Travis Air Force Base Land Use Plans also restrict areas to open space for safety reasons. Refer to Figure 6-4, which shows the area influenced by these plans. The actual plans should be consulted for specific land use restrictions.

3.5 OPEN SPACE POLICIES

(See also policies in the Land Use, Parks and Recreation, Conservation and Safety Elements.)

Guiding Policies

3.5-G 1 Maintain open areas needed to retain stormwater and prevent flooding of urban or agricultural land.

3.5-G 2 Retain major ridgelines and hillsides designated on Figure 2-1 as open space. A limited section of the Gibson Canyon/Vine Street Ridgeline, which includes existing residences (Figure 2-1), may be developed with the approval of a planned development permit.

3.5-G 3 Preserve natural creek corridors of significance to the City (See Figure 2.1).

3.5-G 4 Maintain natural woodlands.

Oak woodlands exist west of the City in the foothills of the Vaca Mountains, between Lagoon Valley and California Drive and west of Alamo Drive.

3.5-G 5 Maintain a compact urban form and locate growth areas to minimize loss of agricultural resources.

3.5-G 6 Minimize conflicts between urban and agricultural uses by establishing Agricultural Buffers and community separators.

See also Policy 2.5-I8 on agricultural buffers and Policies 2.2-G1 and 2.1-I2 on establishing an urban service area boundary.

3.5-G 7 Work with neighboring jurisdictions, and regional and state agencies in developing open space programs that will impact Vacaville. Coordinate Vacaville's open space policies with those other agencies whenever possible.

Implementing Policies

3.5-I 1 Maintain agricultural production areas east of Leisure Town Road. In accordance with policies set forth in the 1980 General Plan, maintain agricultural production areas in Upper Lagoon Valley, Bassford Canyon and the Vaca Valley.

3.5-I 2 Ridges and slopes at or exceeding 25 percent shall remain undeveloped in order to maintain agricultural grazing areas, protect the public health and safety, and to provide for community separation and open space.

This policy is designed to minimize destruction of natural land forms, reduce landslide risk, and preserve open space.

3.5-I 3 Require that open space which is designated as a condition of development approval be permanently restricted to open space use by recorded map or deed.

3.5-I 4 Establish standards for the management and maintenance of open space within and adjoining subdivisions.

Regulations should include standards to ensure control of potential hazards and mechanisms for repair of damage.

3.5-I 5 Where possible, minimize cut-and-fill activities and disturbance of natural habitats and vegetation. At the minimum, revegetation of cut-and-fill on slopes should be required.

This policy requires revegetation as a condition of approval of new development. See also policy 2.1-I5. Slopes subject to grading in this area can create landslide hazards, adversely affect stormwater run-off, and detract from the natural environmental quality of the area.

3.5-I 6 Reserve stream-channel setbacks necessary for flood control, preservation of existing habitat and vegetation, multipurpose paths or trails, and maintenance access needs.

3.5-I 8 Require a permanent Agricultural Buffer as part of residential developments on the urban edge. Establish appropriate development standards, density transfer provisions, and use regulations for these buffer areas.

See also Policies 2.1-I4 and 2.5-I8. The General Plan Diagram shows the location of proposed Agricultural Buffers.

3.5-I 9 Avoid pressures for conversion of agricultural land to urban use east of Leisure Town Road by implementing and maintaining the agreement with the Solano Irrigation District to limit urban water service to these areas. In accordance with policies set forth in the 1980 General Plan, avoid pressures for conversion of agricultural land to urban use in Upper Lagoon Valley, Bassford Canyon and the Vaca Valley.

See Policy 2.1-I 4 and 2.2- I 1. Also refer to the Master Water Agreement, dated May 25, 1995, entered into by the City of Vacaville and Solano Irrigation District.

3.5-I 10 Formulate a specific program for implementation of community separators to be coordinated through existing joint powers agreements with the cities of Fairfield and Dixon and Solano County.

The General Plan Diagram shows the general location and width of the community separators.

3.5-I 11 Do not convert Public Open Space lands to developed urban uses unless an overriding public purpose requires such a change. Do not convert Agricultural Buffer lands to developed urban uses except where such a conversion is part of a logical extension of the Urban Service Area and where an adequate Agricultural Buffer can still be maintained.

3.5-I 12 Public Open Space lands and Agricultural Buffers that are converted to developed urban use shall be compensated for by providing equal or better lands for a similar use in another location. All proceeds that the City receives from any sale of Public Open Space lands and Agricultural Buffers shall be used to acquire additional open space lands elsewhere.

Amendments and Corrections to the Open Space Element

October 16, 1990	Resolution No. 1990 - G - 8. Amendments adopted to implement the West Valleys North Referendum.
November 23, 1993	Resolution No. 1993-174. Amendments to policies 3.5-I 11 and 3.5-I 12. Text was changed to distinguish different types of open space as well as change "urban open space" to "public open space."
October 22, 1996	Resolution No. 1996-128. Revised dicta for policy 3.5-I 9. (GP-3-96)
November 9, 1999	Resolution 1999-143; Changes to reflect technical update to the General Plan: text added to update implementation actions taken; policies which have been fully implemented were deleted (3.5-I 7); policies directing continued implementation were amended (3.5-I 9, 3.5-I 10); the term Greenbelt Buffer was changed to Agricultural Buffer (3.5-G 6, 3.5-I 8, 3.5-I 11); General Plan Diagram changed to remove Community Overlay Separator between Lagoon Valley and CMF and Figure 3-1, Important Farmlands Map was updated with correct City limits. (GP-1-99)
January 22, 2002	Resolution 2002-17, Land Use Policy 3.5-G 2 of the Vacaville General Plan regarding major ridgelines and hillsides is amended.

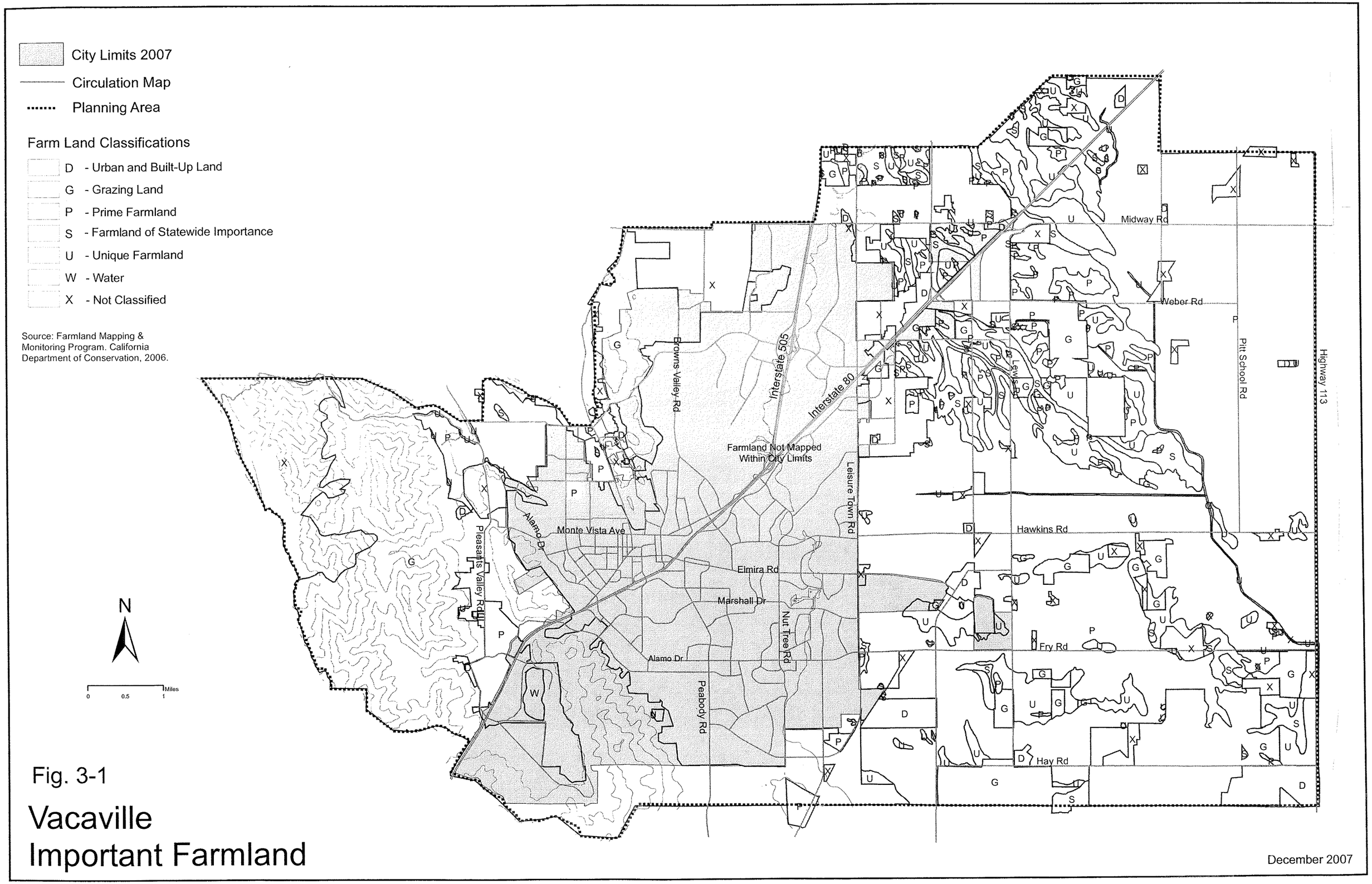

Fig. 3-1

Vacaville Important Farmland

December 2007