

3.2

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section of the Draft EIR analyzes the project's potential impacts of on agricultural resources, focusing on the conversion of the project site to suburban uses, any conflicts with Williamson Act contracts, and other changes that could result in conversion of Important Farmland adjacent to the project site. This evaluation is based on the San Benito County General Plan, the San Benito Zoning Ordinance, the San Benito County Important Farmland Map (2008), the Soil Survey of San Benito County (1988), and the applicant's project description and application materials.

3.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Regional Setting

The project site is located in the northern portion of San Benito County, near the eastern municipal boundaries of the City of Hollister. The County is primarily rural and agricultural in character, with large flatland areas as well as areas of rolling hills. The only urbanized areas within the County are the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, both of which are surrounded by agricultural row crop farming, orchards, vineyards, and lands used for livestock grazing.

Agriculture is a significant economic activity in San Benito County, with a total agricultural commodity value of \$293,090,000 in 2008 (San Benito County Annual Crop Report, 2008). The fertile soils of the area produce orchard and field harvests of grapes, plums, almonds and alfalfa, among others.

Project Site Characteristics

The project site is undeveloped land that is used to cultivate barley. The land is annually disced and periodically grazed by cattle. The project site is designated as “Rural (R)” in the San Benito General Plan Land Use Element; it is also designated by the General Plan as an “Area of Special Study.” The project site is not designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, by either the San Benito County Environmental Constraints Inventory (1994) or the San Benito County Important Farmland Map (Department of Conservation 2008). As described more fully below, the project site does not have a high agricultural value. There are no Williamson Act land conservation contracts in effect on any portion of the project site. There are no trees on the project site and it is not located within an area zoned for forestland, timberland, or Timberland Production.

Surrounding Land Uses

The project site is bound by rural residential uses and grassland along Old Ranch Road to the north, a small, family-owned farm to the southwest, rural residential uses and grassland along Harbern Way to the east, the approved but undeveloped Gavilan College San Benito Campus project to the south, and Fairview Road and the Cielo Vista single-family residential subdivision to the west. The Ridgemark Golf and Country Club, which includes a gated residential community, is located further to the south across Airline Highway. The approved, but undeveloped, 292-acre Santana Ranch project site is located approximately one mile to the north, on Fairview Road. The area located between the approved Santana Ranch project and the project site is identified by the County as the Central Fairview Study Area. The Award Homes residential subdivision, on the west side of Fairview Road, just north of the Cielo Vista subdivision, has been approved by the City of Hollister, but also has not yet been developed.

The majority of surrounding land is not currently used for agricultural purposes, and none of the parcels abutting the project site are designated as Prime or Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Lands west of the project site and Fairview Road are designated and fully developed with residential uses. Lands south of the project site are designated “Rural,” “Single-Family Residential,” “Multi-Family Residential,” “Neighborhood Commercial,” and “Planned Unit Development,” and are either approved for development of a college campus or fully developed with a golf course and residential community. The abutting parcels north and south are designated “Rural” and as “Areas of Special Study.” Parcels abutting the eastern boundary have been developed with low-density “Rural Ranchettes.” Foxhollow Herb Farm, to the southwest of the project site, is a small agricultural operation that cultivates lavender.

Farmland Classifications

Land Capability Classification

The Land Capability Classification (LCC) system is used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to determine a soil's agricultural productivity. The LCC indicates the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops. Crops that require special management are excluded. Groupings are made according to the limitations of the soils when used to grow crops, and the risk of damage to soils when they are used in agriculture. The soils are grouped according to their limitations for field crops, the risk of damage if they are used for crops, and the way they respond to management techniques. Soils are rated from Class I to Class VIII, with soils having the fewest limitations receiving the highest rating (Class I). The "prime" soil classification indicates the absence of soil limitations, which, if present, would require the application of management techniques (e.g., drainage, leveling, special fertilizing practices) to enhance production. Specific subclasses are also utilized to further characterize soils. The land capability classification shows, in a general way, the soils' suitability for most kinds of farming. A general description of soil classifications, as defined by the NRCS, is provided below in Table 4.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 by the State Department of Conservation (DOC) to continue the Important Farmland Mapping efforts begun in 1975 by the NRCS. The intent of the NRCS was to produce agricultural resource maps based on soil quality and land use across the nation. As part of the nationwide agricultural land use mapping effort, the NRCS developed a series of definitions known as Land Inventory and Monitoring (LIM) criteria. The LIM criteria classify the land's suitability for agricultural production; suitability includes both the physical and chemical characteristics of soils and the actual land use. Important Farmland maps are derived from the NRCS soil survey maps using the LIM criteria.

Since 1980, the State of California has assisted the NRCS with completing its mapping in the state. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was created by the California Department of Conservation (DOC) to continue the mapping activity with a greater level of detail by modifying the LIM criteria for use in California. The LIM criteria in California utilize the NRCS and Storie Index Rating systems, but also consider physical conditions such as a dependable water supply for agricultural production, soil temperature range, depth of the groundwater table, flooding potential, rock fragment content, and rooting depth.

Table 4 Land Capability Classification

Class	Definition
I	Soils have few limitations that restrict their use.
II	Soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants, or require special conservation practices.
III	Soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require conservation practices, or both.
IV	Soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require very careful management, or both.
V	Soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations; impractical to remove soils that limit their use largely to pasture or range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VI	Soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and limit their use largely to pasture, or range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VII	Soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuited to cultivation and that restrict their use largely to pasture or range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VIII	Soils and landforms have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plant production and restrict their use to recreation, wildlife habitat or water supply, or to aesthetic purposes.

Sources: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Under the FMMP, pursuant to California Government Code section 65570, the DOC publishes the Important Farmland Series map and a list of soil types that qualify for determination as Important Farmlands. Important Farmlands maps for California are compiled using the modified LIM criteria, as described above, and current land use information. The map does not necessarily reflect the general plan or zoning designations, city limit lines, changing economic or market conditions or other land use policies. The minimum mapping limit is 10 acres unless otherwise specified. Units of land smaller than 10 acres are incorporated into the surrounding classification.

The Important Farmland maps identify five agriculture-related categories plus two non-agriculture listings: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban Land, and Other Land. The San Benito County Important Farmland Map classifies the project site as “Grazing Land,” which is

characterized as “Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock” (Department of Conservation 2008). The FMMP defines Prime Farmland as land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. The land must have been used for production of irrigated crops some time during the four years prior to the mapping date. Farmland of Statewide Importance is land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for agricultural production, having only minor shortcomings, such as less ability to store soil moisture, compared to Prime Farmland. Unique Farmland is farmland of lesser quality soils but used for production of the state’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but can include some non-irrigated orchards or vineyards.

As noted above, the project site is not designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, by either the San Benito County Environmental Constraints Inventory (1994) or the San Benito County Important Farmland Map (Department of Conservation 2008).

Storie Index

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service uses the Storie Index rating system to numerically express (from 0, lowest, to 100, highest) the relative degree of suitability and value of a soil map unit for general intensive farming purposes. The rating is based on soil profile characteristics, texture of the surface horizontal slope, and other conditions, such as high water table, risk of erosion, and high alkalinity.

3.2.2 REGULATORY SETTING

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, otherwise known as the Williamson Act, was enacted by the State Legislature in 1965 as a means of preserving California’s prime agricultural lands from urbanization. Prime Farmland under the Williamson Act includes land that qualifies as Class I and II under the NRCS classification of land. The Williamson Act involves voluntary contracts between landowners and a city or county in which the owners agree to retain their lands in agricultural or other open space uses for a minimum of 10 years. In return for entering into this contract, the landowners receive property tax relief on the lands under contract. This relief is provided through the assessment of lands based on their income-producing value rather than their market value, which may be considerably higher. The contracts have 10-year terms, which are automatically renewed each year on a common anniversary date of January 1st unless they

are cancelled or a notice of non-renewal is given. If either party to a contract gives notice of non-renewal, the non-renewal process begins on the following anniversary with nine years remaining. During the remaining term of the contract after notice of non-renewal has been given, the property taxes increase gradually according to a formula that eventually brings them up to the same level as non-Williamson Act lands.

As noted above, none of the project site is covered by a Williamson Act contract.

San Benito County General Plan

The San Benito County General Plan includes the following policies regarding consideration of agricultural resources:

Land Use Element

Policy 3. [Storie Index] Grade 1 soils as defined in the Soils Survey of San Benito County shall be the highest priority for the protection of soils resources.

Policy 4. Development proposals adjacent to Grade 1 agricultural lands and soils suitable for the production of row crops, flowers, or orchards shall be required to mitigate potential land use conflicts with agricultural operation.

Open Space and Conservation Element

Policy 23: Avoid land use conflicts. The County policy should be to assign compatible land uses adjacent to agricultural lands and selected mineral resource lands to ensure their protection. The County should encourage the use of the Williamson Act, as well as agricultural zoning and other legislative means to preserve large agricultural open space areas.

Policy 25: Legislative methods to protect agricultural and rural identity. It is the County's policy to use the Williamson Act, agricultural zoning and legislative means, where appropriate, to preserve agricultural resources, maintain a rural identity, and to define and shape the urban form. Residential growth should be directed to where services are already provided and to the least productive agricultural lands.

The project site is also designated as an “Area of Special Study,” described in the General Plan Land Use Element, Land Use Plan, as follows:

This designation applies to areas of the County where a combination of the following criteria apply: (1) more concentrated development than is presently allowed may be desirable provided a comprehensive plan for public services and resource conservation is integrated in order of priority into a specific plan, community plan or area plan; (2) as a result of prior, piecemeal subdivisions, a plan for integrated development and coordination of governmental services and/or community facilities is desirable; (3) the County has identified the area as a potential area for commercial, industrial, and/or residential development.

The intent would be to direct development from natural resources and environmentally hazardous areas, to provide for mixed land uses to reduce vehicle emissions, to effectively plan the design, development and financing of services, and to develop open space programs. Increased development density over base density may be awarded based on specified programs. New development will not be allowed within an Area of Special Study until there is full mitigation of public services, infrastructure and facility impacts.

3.2.3 STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following thresholds for measuring a project’s environmental impacts are based on the CEQA Guidelines and other standards of significance recognized by San Benito County. For the purposes of this Draft EIR, impacts are considered significant if the following would result from implementation of the proposed project:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resource Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- Convert [Storie Index] Grade 1 Farmland as defined by the Soil Survey of San Benito County;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use;
- Conflict with a Williamson Act Contract (Because no portion of the project site is covered by a Williamson Act contract, there would be no impact. Therefore, this topic is not

evaluated further in this Draft EIR; see Section 5.0, Other Requirements of CEQA for additional information);

- Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g)). (Because the project site is not zoned for forest land, timberland or Timberland Production, there would be no impact. Therefore, this topic is not evaluated further; see Section 5.0, Other Requirements of CEQA);
- Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. (Because the project site does not contain forest land, there would be no impacts. Therefore, this topic is not evaluated further in this Draft EIR. See Section 5.0, Other Requirements of CEQA);
or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

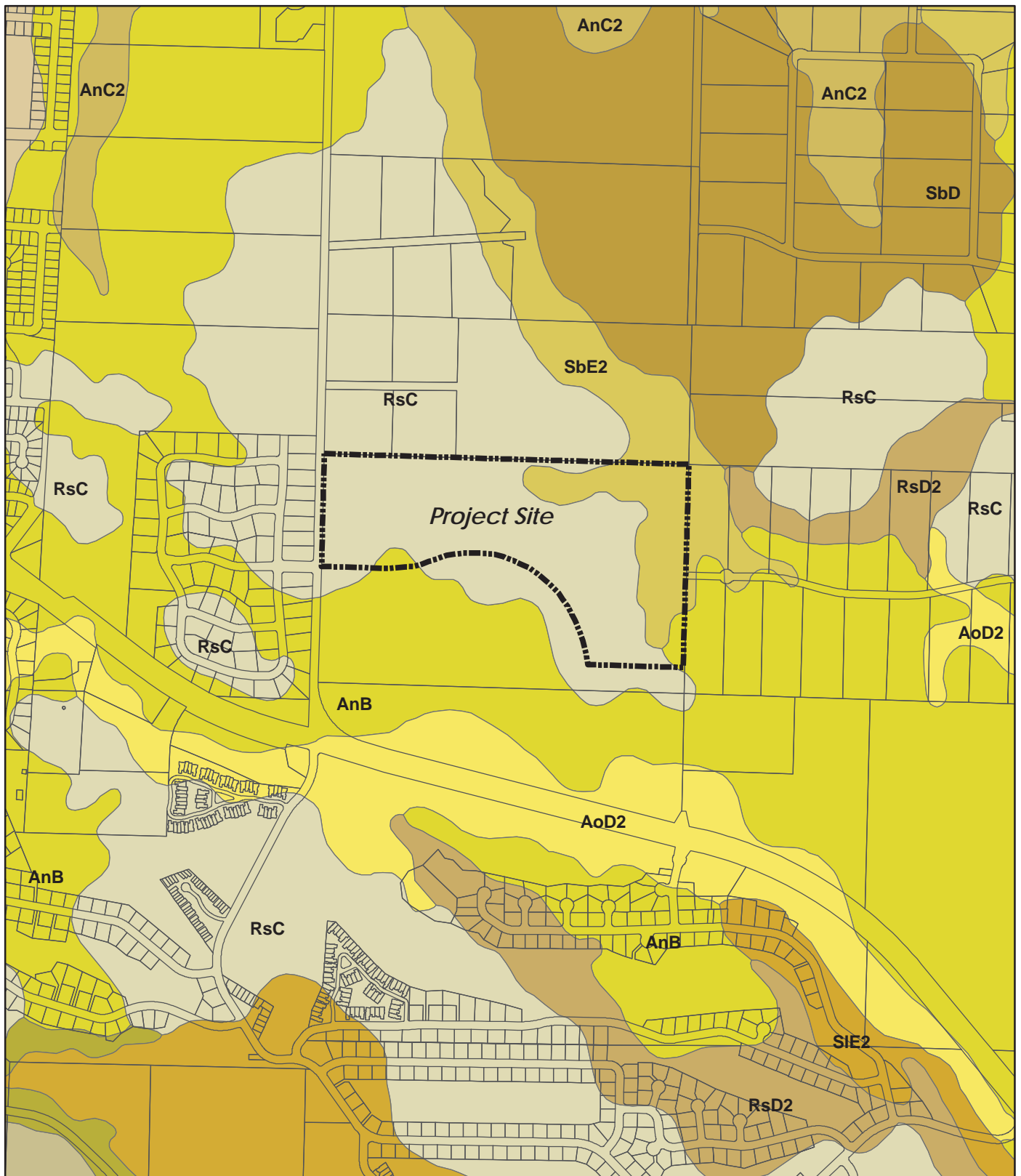
3.2.4 PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Conversion of Farmland

Impact AG-1: Development of the proposed project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Grade 1 farmland to urban uses. Therefore, this would result in **a less than significant** impact.

Mapping

Under the Soil Survey of San Benito County, prepared by the NRCS, soils are classified according to eight broad “Land Capability” classes, with Class I and II soils being the most fertile and well suited for cultivation. The Soil Capacity Survey (SCS) soil mapping indicates there are three soil types on the project site, including Rincon Silty Clay Loam (RsC), Antioch Loam, and San Benito Clay Loam (SbE2). These soil types all have SCS agricultural capability ratings of Class III and Class IV, and thus do not qualify as prime by virtue of being Class I or II soils. The distribution of these soils on the project site and vicinity are presented on [Figure 27, Soil Map](#).



0 1,000 feet



Antioch loam (AnB) 2-5% slope



Rincon silty clay loam (RsC) 9-15% slope



San Benito clay loam (SbE2) 15-30% slope

Source: EMC Planning Group Inc. 2011, SSURGO 2010

Figure 27



Soil Map

Fairview Corners Residential Specific Plan EIR

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Storie Index Ratings

According to the Soil Survey of San Benito County, the on-site soils have Storie Index Ratings ranging from 46 to 73, which are further classified as Storie Index Grades 2 and 3 for agricultural suitability. Since none of the soils have a rating of 80 or greater, they are not Grade 1 or prime soils under the Storie Index. Therefore, the proposed project would not convert [Storie Index] Grade 1 Farmland as defined by the Soil Survey of San Benito County.

Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program

Finally, the project site is characterized as “Grazing Land,” and no portion of the project site contains Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as designated on the San Benito County Important Farmland Map (2008) prepared by the Department of Conservation. Furthermore, while the site supports the cultivation of barley, the on-site lands do not qualify as Important Farmland.

Area of Special Study Designation

As stated in Policy 25 of the San Benito County General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element, important goals of the County include preservation of agricultural resources and the maintenance of rural identity within the County. Conversion of the project site to suburban uses would result in a loss of the project site as an agricultural and rural resource. Policy 25 further states, however, that residential growth should be directed to where services are already provided and to the least productive agricultural lands. As discussed earlier in this section, the project site has been designated as an Area of Special Study, which is a means of implementing Policy 25, by directing growth to areas where services already exist and to less agriculturally productive areas, such as the project site.

The implementation of Policy 25 and the Area of Special Study designation serves to protect the highly productive farmland resources of the County. Because the project is consistent with these policies, it is consistent with the County goals to preserve agricultural resources and rural identity. The proposed project places suburban uses in an area of the County designated for growth, is located in proximity to existing development, and does not create a development “island” amid lands designated for rural and agricultural uses.

For the reasons set forth above, conversion of the project site to suburban uses would result in a **less than significant** impact.

No mitigation is required.

Indirect Conversion of Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

Impact AG-2: The project would not likely place development pressure on abutting parcels zoned as “Rural” to convert to non-agricultural use. However, there could be potential urban-agricultural conflicts that could place pressure on abutting parcels to change agricultural practices. This would be considered a **potentially significant impact**.

Development Pressure to Convert Surrounding Parcels to Suburban Uses and Conflicts Between Land Uses

Development of the project site would result in the extension of utility services and other infrastructure such as roads to the project site. The growth-inducing impacts of the proposed project are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.1. As it pertains to development pressure on abutting parcels, it is important to evaluate whether the extension of infrastructure and services to the project site could lead to development pressure on abutting lands to convert those lands from rural to suburban uses. As noted above, lands west of the project site and Fairview Road are designated “Rural Residential,” and are fully developed as a residential subdivision, making current or future use of these lands for productive farming infeasible. Lands south of the project site are designated “Rural,” “Single-Family Residential,” “Multi-Family Residential,” “Neighborhood Commercial,” and “Planned Unit Development,” and are either approved as a college campus or are fully developed as a golf and country club (including a 36-hole golf course, tennis courts and other recreational amenities, surrounded by a gated residential community), making current or future use of these lands for productive farming infeasible.

The abutting parcels to the northeast and south carry land use designations of “Rural” but are located in the Area of Special Study and are thereby determined suitable for future growth in accordance with the County’s rural and agricultural preservation strategy. There are southeastern parcels to the north of the project site that appear to be in active agricultural uses, including dry farming and grazing. Parcels abutting the boundary of the site are developed with “rural ranchette” low density residential use as well as with the Foxhollow Herb Farm, a small-scale farm that cultivates lavender and other herbs.

The majority of surrounding land is not currently used for agricultural purposes, and none of the parcels abutting the project site are designated as Prime or Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Parcels abutting the project site also are characterized as “Grazing Land” on the San Benito County Important Farmland Map (2008) prepared by the Department of Conservation. According to the SCS, soils on abutting parcels are of the same series found on the project site, and, as discussed previously, these soils are not Grade 1 soils. While the extension of infrastructure and utility services would occur, this would not result in the indirect conversion of Important Farmland as a result of development pressure on abutting parcels caused by the project since most of the surrounding land is already developed or already planned

for future suburban growth. With respect to the Foxhollow Farm, this is in active agricultural use; however, this land is not designated as an Area of Special Study, and is therefore not planned for higher density growth in the future. In addition, as discussed further, below, there would be measures in place, particularly open space buffers, between any of the project's residential uses and the farm that would be developed. These factors would help protect this land from development pressure to convert to suburban uses, and therefore the project would not result in the indirect conversion of Farmland with respect to the Foxhollow Farm. Therefore, this impact is considered **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

Pressure on Adjacent Parcels to Revise Agricultural Practices

Conflicts could occur between the residential uses proposed by the project and abutting vacant parcels to the north as well as the existing small herb farm operation to the southeast. These parcels are zoned "Rural", where agricultural uses are permitted. As noted above, much of this land is not in active agricultural uses and is slated for future development as an Area of Special Study. However, it is possible that existing and any future agricultural uses on these properties could potentially conflict with the planned residential uses on the project site. Typical residential-agricultural land use conflicts include use of pesticides and agricultural equipment along the residential/agricultural interface, which can result in concerns about health hazards and nuisance complaints.

A variety of non-agricultural uses are also permitted within the Rural zoning district including single-family residential uses at minimum densities of one unit per five acres. Parcels abutting the northern boundary are located in the Area of Special Study, and are thereby determined suitable for future higher density growth in accordance with the County's rural and agricultural preservation strategy. Dry farming and grazing agricultural operations abut the northern project boundary, northeast of the project site. None of the parcels abutting the site contain Grade 1 soils, and none are designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Because the soils are not prime, are eligible for residential subdivision under their current zoning designations, and are anticipated for future higher density suburban growth, it is unlikely these parcels will be used for intensive agriculture in the long term. The impacts typically associated with field preparation, application of pesticides and herbicides, and intensive harvesting techniques are therefore unlikely to occur between the project site and northern parcels.

During the NOP scoping process, a concern was raised by the operators of the Foxhollow Herb Farm (farm) to the southeast of the project site. Specifically, concerns were raised that development of the project site with residential uses could expose their farm to urban pollutants such as household pesticides and fertilizer residues. Two of the farm's field crops are located

near the southeast corner of the project site (refer to Figure 4, Aerial Photograph), with the remainder of the farm operations located further south adjacent to the Gavilan College San Benito Campus site.

The proposed project includes several approaches to reducing urban/agricultural conflicts at buildout. As shown on [Figure 13, Open Space Diagram](#), open space area is proposed at the southeast corner and along the eastern boundary of the project site between proposed residential uses and the fields. Also, the proposed residential uses in proximity to the eastern boundary would be low density residential uses, as indicated by the Conceptual Lotting Plans A-C (refer to Figures 10-12, respectively). Further the Specific Plan, Article 5.0, includes the following policies and implementation measures that are designed to address urban pollutants and regulate the application of pesticides within these open space areas.

Policy RM-4.3. Utilize best management practices and low impact development designs to minimize surface water quality degradation from discharge of storm drainage.

3. No chemical pesticides shall be utilized in the maintenance of common landscaped areas, open space areas, or parks. Fertilizers shall be applied sparingly, and shall be derived from natural sources, such as fish emulsion or manure.
4. The master developer shall cooperate with the County to create a public education program for future residents to increase their understanding of water quality protection, which should include but not be limited to:
 - Hazardous material use controls
 - Hazardous material exposure controls
 - Hazardous material disposal and recycling
5. Hazardous materials could consist of cleaning products, paint, oil, fertilizers, weed killers etc. The education materials shall encourage the use of alternative methods, and prohibit the dumping of hazardous materials in open space areas or the storm drain system. Further, the master developer shall require that all storm drain catch basins are labeled to discourage illegal dumping of hazardous materials.
8. To the extent feasible, direct stormwater run-off to percolation swale and basin areas rather than directing stormwater to storm drain pipes.
9. Use biotreatment (natural pollutant filtering) where stormwater runs off paved surfaces onto pervious surfaces.

10. Utilize sediment traps, evaporation basins, flow dissipaters, and other methods to reduce the volume and speed of stormwater run-off and reduce pollutant loads. *[LEED ND GIB Credit 8]*

The following mitigation measure would ensure that the above Specific Plan provisions to reduce the effects of urban pollutants and pesticide use are incorporated into the project:

MM AG-2: Open space buffers shall be maintained along the eastern perimeter of the project site, as generally shown on the Specific Plan Figure 9, Open Space Diagram, incorporated in accordance with Phasing Plan. The required treatment of urban pollutants and application of pesticides on the project site shall be implemented in accordance with all applicable policies within Article 5 (Resource Management) of the Specific Plan, and with the project's Open Space and Parks Master Plan (as may be amended), as well as other applicable standards and requirements.

The proposed project would place suburban uses in proximity to a small agricultural operation and the other land designated as Rural. However, for the reasons set forth above, project impacts associated with the indirect conversion of Important Farmland (including pressure on adjacent parcels to revise agricultural practices) would be considered **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Conflicts with Zoning for Agricultural Use

Impact AG-3: The project site has a zoning designation of "Rural," and is located adjacent to lands zoned as "Rural," "Rural Residential," "Single-Family Residential," "Multi-Family Residential," "Neighborhood Commercial," and "Planned Unit Development." Therefore, the change in the project site's zoning to Fairview Corners Specific Plan (FVC-SP) and its development with suburban uses could result in conflicts with existing zoning, which allows agricultural uses. This is considered a **less than significant** impact.

Project Site

As discussed above, while the proposed project would conflict with the current zoning of the project site as "Rural," the project applicant has applied for a change in the zoning of the project site to allow for residential and other proposed uses as set forth in the Fairview Corners Residential Specific Plan. This proposed change would be consistent with the designation of the project site by San Benito County as an Area of Special Study, which designates the land for higher density residential and other associated uses through approval of a specific plan. Should the proposed zone change be approved, the project would not conflict with the applicable zoning designation.

Surrounding Parcels

As noted previously, the project site is surrounded by rangeland and rural development to the north and east and the approved but undeveloped Gavilan College San Benito Campus project to the south, all with zoning designations of “Rural.” Fairview Road and the Cielo Vista single-family residential subdivision are to the west of the site, with a zoning designation of “Rural Residential.” The Ridgemark Golf and Country Club, which includes a 36-hole golf course, tennis courts and other recreational amenities, surrounded by a gated residential community, is located further to the south across Airline Highway, and is zoned “Single-Family Residential,” “Multi-Family Residential,” “Neighborhood Commercial,” and “Planned Unit Development.” The approved but undeveloped 292-acre Santana Ranch project located approximately one mile to the north, on Fairview Road, is zoned “Santana Ranch-Specific Plan (SR-SP), allowing for residential, commercial and mixed uses, a potential school site, parks and other public infrastructure. The area located between the approved Santana Ranch project and the project site is currently zoned “Rural,” and is designated as an Area of Special Study and therefore deemed appropriate for higher density development. The Award Homes residential subdivision, on the west side of Fairview Road, just north of the Cielo Vista subdivision, has been approved by the City of Hollister, but has not yet been developed.

While agricultural uses are permitted in Rural and Rural Residential zoning districts, future intensive agricultural uses on these properties are not likely to occur since none of the parcels abutting the site contain Grade 1 soils, and none is designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance; and most of them are already approved for development, or have been designated as appropriate for higher density residential and/or commercial development. To the extent agricultural practices occur, the project would not likely result in conflicts given the land plan, which involves open space buffers and low-density residential uses near agricultural areas (such as the Foxhollow Farm).

For the reasons stated above and particularly under the discussion of Impact AG-2 above, the proposed project does not directly or indirectly conflict with zoning that permits agricultural uses on the surrounding parcels. Therefore, the impact would be **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

3.2.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The cumulative scenario includes the project, combined with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable, probable future projects, which could contribute to the cumulative loss of Important Farmland in San Benito County. Current and reasonably foreseeable, probable future projects include:

- **Gavilan College San Benito Campus:** This project involves the construction of a 3,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) student college facility, as well as approximately 285 residential units and 35,000 square feet of retail space, on a 77-acre site south of the project site at the northeast corner of Fairview Road and Airline Highway (State Route 25).
- **Award Homes Project:** This project involves the construction of 595 single-family homes and 100 apartment units have been approved on the west side of Fairview Road, south of St. Benedict's Church and east of Calistoga Drive within the City of Hollister.
- **Santana Ranch Project:** This project involves the construction of a maximum of 1,092 dwelling units, 65,000 square feet of neighborhood commercial uses, up to an additional 41,000 square feet of commercial mixed uses, and related community facilities and project infrastructure on a 292-acre site adjacent to the City of Hollister.

The cumulative projects list (**Section 3.0**) also includes a number of smaller residential projects within the City of Hollister, as well as a number of industrial and warehousing projects in the vicinity of the Hollister Municipal Airport.

Cumulative Conversion of Farmland

Impact AG-4: The project, in combination with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable, probable future projects on adjacent land within the Fairview Road corridor, would not have a cumulatively considerable contribution to the cumulative loss of Important Farmland within San Benito County. This impact is considered a **less than significant** impact.

The project site has been classified as Grazing Land by the San Benito County Important Farmland map. Although the project site is not characterized as having a high agricultural value, its conversion from the cultivation of barley and the provision of periodic grazing lands to suburban uses would result in the loss of this farmland.

While agricultural uses are permitted on lands to the north and east of the project site, it is not anticipated these lands would convert to non-agricultural uses as a result of the proposed project, for the reasons previously described under the discussion of Impacts AG-2 and AG-3. However, it is anticipated that other lands currently used within the County for agricultural purposes may be converted at some point to suburban uses. These lands would include the recently approved Santana Ranch and Gavilan College projects, as well as other lands not currently subject to development applications but which could be approved for suburban uses in the future, particularly those designated as Areas of Special Study.

Accordingly, the project, combined with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable, probable future projects, would contribute to the cumulative loss of farmland within San Benito County. However, as explained more fully above, the project would be consistent with the County's agricultural preservation strategy, and the project site is not characterized as Important Farmland or as a site containing Grade 1 soils. Therefore, the proposed project's contribution to the cumulative loss of Important Farmland in the region would not be cumulatively considerable. This impact would be **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.