

9. OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURE ELEMENT

9

This Open Space and Agriculture Element describes open space and agricultural resources in Hollister today and focuses on policies and actions for the City of Hollister to implement in support of the preservation and enhancement of open space and agriculture. This section presents goals, policies, and actions for the following topics:

9.2.1 Open Space Preservation

9.2.2 Agriculture Preservation

9.1 HOLLISTER TODAY

Preservation of open space and the natural environment has been a priority for Hollister residents for many years. Recognizing the importance of agriculture to the community, the City will protect agricultural lands by maintaining parcels large enough to sustain agricultural production, preventing conversion to nonagricultural uses, and prohibiting uses that are incompatible with long-term agricultural production.

9.1.1 TOPOGRAPHY

The Hollister Planning Area generally slopes upward from north to south, with elevations of approximately 210 feet near the Hollister Municipal Airport, 290 feet near City Hall, and 500 feet near the intersection of Fairview Road and Airline Highway (State Route 25). Although the topography is relatively flat in most areas, the terrain is hilly near the San Benito River, west of the Southern Pacific Railroad line northwest of Hollister and in the eastern portion of the Planning Area.

9.1.2 OPEN SPACE

Open space areas in Hollister include public and privately owned lands used for low-intensity, open space activities such as hiking, walking, or picnicking. Environmentally sensitive areas, such as rivers and creeks, plant and animal habitats, City parks, and recreation facilities are also considered open space.

According to State law, the General Plan must analyze barriers to wildlife movement. To this end, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife identified 61 barriers to wildlife movement in California in its 2022 report entitled *Restoring California's Wildlife Connectivity*. None of these identified barriers are within or adjacent to Hollister; in

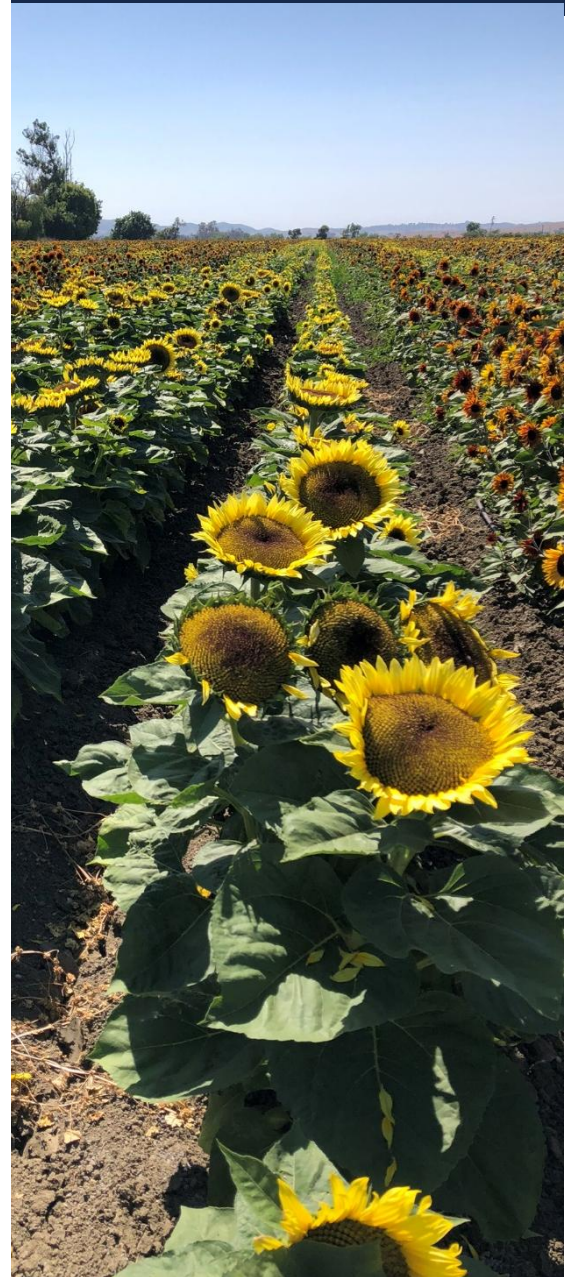


Photo by Sabrina Stark

fact, none were identified in San Benito County. In and around Hollister, large roadways such as State highways could be barriers to wildlife connectivity, but most roads and highways in areas with wildlife habitat are at grade with relatively little traffic at night so it should be possible for wildlife to cross them.



Photo by Sabrina Stark

9.1.3 AGRICULTURAL LAND

When the State of California evaluates agricultural land, areas are designated as Prime Farmland when they are found to have the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for crop production, and have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained yields of crops when treated and managed. Lands identified as Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops in the last three years. Areas designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance represent land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. As in the case of Prime Farmland, these areas must have been used for the production of irrigated crops in the last three years. Lands identified as Unique Farmland consists of lesser-quality soils used for agricultural production.

The San Benito Valley, which includes the City of Hollister, is generally considered a prime agricultural area due to its favorable soil types and climate. There is a significant amount of agricultural land both inside and outside of the General Plan Planning Area. As seen in Figure OS-1, the Planning Area includes Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland, as classified by the State Department of Conservation, and as protected by the California Environmental Quality Act.

The City has an Agriculture land use designation that encompasses lands with continuing commercial agriculture potential. The intent of this category is to retain primary agricultural use to the greatest extent practical. These areas should be kept free of any urban-type development and annexations. Allowed uses include orchards, row crops, nurseries, grazing lands, open space, farm services, and parks.

The most prevalent type of agriculture in San Benito County is vegetable and irrigated row crops, largely spinach, lettuce, wine grapes, broccoli, celery, and tomatoes, which are arranged in rows. Common orchard crops in San Benito County include apples, walnuts, cherries, and apricot trees. Wine grapes are also plentiful and profitable. Standard field crops include grains, hay, nursery plants, and seeds that cover the entire field in which the crops are planted.

Agricultural operations are an important source of local farm-fresh food in San Benito County and are transported throughout the United States and to several other countries on most continents, including South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia.

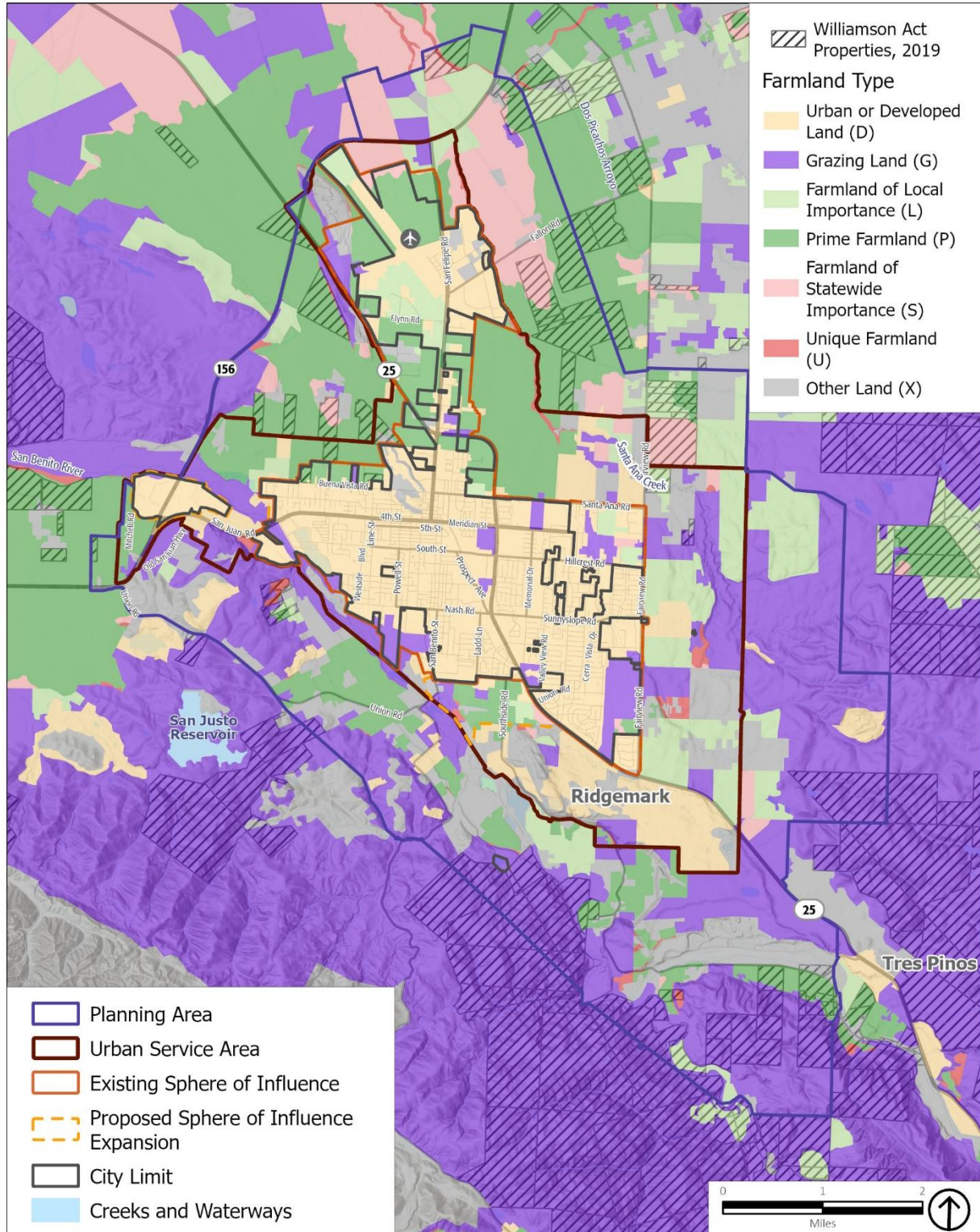
There are three soil associations in the Hollister Planning Area under the classification system of the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

- Soils of the Sorrento-Yolo Mocho association consist of nearly level to sloping soils that formed in very deep alluvium derived from sedimentary rocks and underlie the central and western portions of the Planning Area. The dominant soils in this association are very deep and well drained and include some of the most productive soils in the country.
- Soils of the Rincon-Antioch-Cropley association consist of nearly level to strongly sloping soils on fans and terraces and underlie the southeastern quadrant of the Planning Area. These soils are very well drained, although erosion is a problem on the more sloping soils.
- Soils of the Clear Lake-Pacheco-Willows association consist of nearly level and gently sloping soils that formed in alluvium derived from sedimentary rocks and underlie the northern portion of the Planning Area. For these soils to support agricultural activity, drainage is needed in most areas, and reclamation may be necessary in those areas affected by salts and alkali.



Photo by Nicole Larusso

Figure OS-1: Important Farmland and Williamson Act Contracts



Source: ESRI, 2020; PlaceWorks, 2025; San Benito County, 2020; USGS, 2019; CA Dept. of Agriculture, 2020.

9.2 OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURE ELEMENT GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

The following section provides goals, policies, and actions relating to open space and agriculture in Hollister.

9.2.1 OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

GOAL OS-1 Preserve and protect open space and the natural environment for all to enjoy.

POLICIES

- Policy OS-1.1** **Open Space Preservation.** Retain and protect open space areas through the protection of prime farmlands, the prevention of new development in areas subject to natural and human-caused hazards, that serve as wildlife habitat or as visual assets for the community, and where the development of additional parks and trails is possible. Open space areas can also function as connections between neighborhoods, for example with the creation of pedestrian pathways in environmentally appropriate areas.
- Policy OS-1.2** **Access to Open Space.** Encourage access to open space areas in the design of adjacent development. Secure access paths as part of subdivision approvals and design access paths to avoid or minimize neighborhood and user conflicts with sensitive wildlife habitat areas.
- Policy OS-1.3** **Cluster Development.** Wherever feasible, encourage those proposing development to cluster planned residential development, leaving open space buffers in proposed site plans, particularly on the borders of development facing agricultural uses and State Routes 25 and 156. This will diminish the potential for land use conflicts and improve opportunities for visual harmonization between agricultural and urban activities.
- Policy OS-1.4** **Utilities in Open Space.** Discourage utilities in open space areas. Necessary utilities in open space should be located and designed to minimize harm to the area's environmental and visual quality.



Photo by Jaquelyn Scimeca



Photo by Kent Rossi

Policy OS-1.5 **Open Space Use.** Protect and preserve the natural value of open space and wildlife habitat areas while permitting educational and recreational uses compatible with these resources. Uses of open space areas shall be secondary to open space preservation.

Policy OS-1.6 **Site Planning to Preserve Open Space.** Consider the use of creative site planning in a way that is responsive to open space values. Require those proposing new development to design open spaces to minimize paved areas and to maximize landscaping to reduce outdoor air temperatures around buildings in warm weather.

Policy OS-1.7 **Coordination with Other Jurisdictions.** Coordinate Hollister's open space preservation and enhancement with other County of San Benito, regional, and state open space preservation efforts.

Policy OS-1.8 **Private Open Space Uses.** In designating open space as part of a development project or with the dedication of land for open space, identify limitations to uses in those areas, such as restrictions on ornamental landscaping, structures, and fences.

Policy OS-1.9 **Impacts of Development on Wildlife.** Consider the impacts of new and existing development in creating barriers to wildlife passage and habitat connectivity, and avoid, minimize, or mitigate such impacts and barriers to the extent feasible.

ACTIONS

Action OS-1.1 **Open Space Management Plan(s).** Prepare one or more Open Space Management Plan(s) and zoning amendments that address the following:

- Use and ongoing maintenance of open space areas.
- Appropriate access points, parking areas, public information signage, and trail extensions.
- Restoration of erosion and other degraded areas.
- Guidelines for the location of amenities, such as picnic tables and benches.

- Activities harmful to the open space environment, including illegal camping and campfires and disease control, urban/wildlife interface, recreation, and other uses.
- Vegetation management and protection issues.
- Impacts of development and barriers caused by development to wildlife and habitat connectivity.

This work should be accomplished with guidance by a committee with representatives from neighborhood associations, environmental organizations, user groups, and other stakeholders.

9.2.2 AGRICULTURE PRESERVATION

GOAL OS-2 Preserve viable agricultural activities and lands.

POLICIES

Policy OS-2.1 **Offsets for Loss of Agricultural Land.** Require that all new developments that convert agricultural land to urban uses provide for preservation of the same amount of agricultural land in perpetuity.

Policy OS-2.2 **Agricultural Buffers.** Require that developers of all new developments adjoining agricultural land provide a 200-foot buffer to ensure that agricultural practices will not be adversely affected, and that developers also pay a fee adequate to allow the City to maintain this buffer land.

Policy OS-2.3 **San Benito County Future Development Areas.** Encourage the County of San Benito to focus future development in the areas identified for development in this City of Hollister General Plan, so as to help protect agricultural lands and preserve open space areas in the other portions of the Hollister Planning Area.

Policy OS-2.4 **Coordinate with San Benito County to Preserve Important Farmlands.** Coordinate with the County of San Benito in efforts to maintain prime farmlands, unique farmlands, and farmlands of statewide significance in active agricultural use and in all efforts



Photo by Jenny Knerr



Photo by Sabrina Stark

to maintain the continued economic viability of agriculture in the Hollister Planning Area.

Policy OS-2.5

Residential Development Near Agricultural Areas. Require developers to inform potential buyers of homes near agricultural areas of the possible hazards associated with the application of pesticides/herbicides and nuisances from other cultivation practices. In those cases where the County of San Benito's Right-to-Farm Ordinance applies to the City review of projects, homeowners shall also be informed of this ordinance by developers.

ACTIONS

Action OS-2.1

Offsets for Agricultural Land Conversion. Create and adopt an agricultural preservation program to address the conversion of land classified as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance in the City Limits and Sphere of Influence to nonagricultural uses.

Action OS-2.2

Agricultural Buffer Ordinance. Adopt a zoning program that requires developers of new projects adjoining agricultural land to provide, fund, and maintain a 200-foot buffer to ensure that agricultural practices will not be adversely affected.

The ordinance shall include agricultural buffer guidelines, including but not limited to, the following:

- Buffers shall be on the parcel for which a permit is sought and shall protect the maximum amount of farmable land.
- Buffers shall be physically and biologically designed to avoid conflicts between agriculture and nonagricultural uses.
- Appropriate types of land use for buffers include compatible agriculture, open space, landscaping, and recreational uses, such as parks, industrial uses, and cemeteries.
- The buffer may include spatial separations (e.g., greenbelts, open space setbacks), fencing, and/or berming.

- The City or County will condition the approval of a project on the ongoing maintenance of buffers.
- A homeowner's association, agricultural land trusts, or other appropriate entity shall be required to maintain buffers to control litter, fire hazards, pests, and other maintenance problems.
- Buffer restrictions may be removed if agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels have permanently ceased.

Action OS-2.3 **Urban Growth Boundary.** Work with the County of San Benito and the City of San Juan Bautista to establish and maintain an Urban Growth Boundary that delineates future urbanization from areas in which urbanization will not occur, so as to protect agricultural and open space uses. Lands outside of the Urban Growth Boundary shall only be designated for agriculture, park, open space, public facility, and utility uses. When establishing the Urban Growth Boundary, the following qualities should be taken into consideration: access to infrastructure, public services, transit, healthcare, and commercial uses; preserving farmland; and establishing a buffer between urban and rural uses.

Action OS-2.4 **Agricultural Community Disclosure Ordinance.** Develop, adopt, and enforce an Agricultural Community Disclosure Ordinance (similar to the County of San Benito's Right-to-Farm Ordinance No. 577) that applies to all future subdivisions adjacent to or incorporating agricultural operations.



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