

### 3.3 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section discusses agricultural lands in the project area, defines different types of agricultural lands, and identifies applicable state and local regulations related to agricultural lands. The purpose of this section is to provide the regulatory and environmental setting necessary to identify any potential project impacts on agricultural resources.

#### 3.3.1 Environmental Setting

The approximately 53-acre project site can be divided into two distinct areas. The majority of the site—approximately 41 acres—is disturbed, covered with fill or structures, or compacted due to long-term event-related uses. The remaining 12 acres is undeveloped and used for pasture. This 12-acre area is identified in FMMP mapping as Farmland of Local Importance. The area, which occupies the northwestern corner of the proposed project site, is the only portion of the site with any agricultural potential. The land use designation given to the entire site in the County General plan is Public/Quasi-Public (Section 3.10). This location has never been designated by the County as a site for agricultural use, even though the site has been previously used for both agriculture and grazing.

The soil classification of this acreage is Yolo loam - 2% slopes. This soil type has a capability unit of I-1, meaning that it is appropriate for row crops, orchards, vineyards, and pasture. Historically, this section of the project site supported orchards. For approximately the past 40 years, however, it has been fallow.

#### 3.3.2 Regulatory Setting

##### 3.3.2.1 State

##### *California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)*

Since its enactment in 1965, the California Land Conservation Act (known as the Williamson Act) has been the state's premier land conservation program. The Williamson Act enables counties and cities to designate agricultural preserves that provide preferential taxation to private land owners who execute contracts restricting the use of their land within an Agricultural Preserve to agricultural or open-space uses and certain compatible uses. Agricultural landowners with properties under Williamson Act contracts are assessed taxes on the income-producing value of their property instead of their assessed market value. To qualify for the program, the landowner is required to sign a contract with the county or city agreeing to restrict the use of the land for a minimum 10-year period. The contract is renewed automatically annually unless one of the parties files for nonrenewal or the contract is canceled.

The California Department of Conservation has oversight responsibility for Williamson Act program administration and compliance. However, the local government is authorized to adopt rules governing the administration of agricultural preserves. The County of Sonoma first adopted Rules for Administering Agricultural Preserves in 1967, and which were last amended in 1989.

Two different rules were adopted, one for “Type I” preserves (prime agricultural land), and one for “Type II” preserves (nonprime agricultural land, e.g., grazing or open space).

### *Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program*

The California Department of Conservation administers the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which evaluates the quality of farmlands throughout the State. The suitability of the local soil resources plays a crucial part in the FMMP’s farmland classifications. The FMMP uses the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) soil survey information, land inventory, and monitoring criteria to classify most of the state’s agricultural regions into five agricultural and three nonagricultural land types. Every two years, the FMMP publishes this information in its Important Farmland map series. The five agricultural land classifications are as follows:

- *Prime Farmland* – Lands with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term production of agricultural crops. The land must be cropped and be supported by a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality during the growing season. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
- *Farmland of Statewide Importance* – Lands similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. These lands have the same reliable source of adequate quality irrigation water available during the growing season. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
- *Unique Farmland* – Less quality soils used for production of the State’s leading agricultural crops. These lands are usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones of California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
- *Farmland of Local Importance* – Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county’s board of supervisors and local advisory committees. In Sonoma County, these farmlands include the hay producing areas of the Santa Rosa Plains, Petaluma Valley, and Tubbs Island Naval Reservation. Additional areas also include those lands which are classified as having the capability for producing locally important crops such as grapes, corn, etc., but may not be planted at the present time.
- *Grazing Land* – Lands of at least 40 acres on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

The first three categories (prime, statewide, and unique farmlands) are considered “important farmland” and also meet the definition of agricultural land under CEQA (Section 21060.1).

#### *3.3.2.2 Local*

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) was established as part of the Open Space Element of the Sonoma County General Plan to acquire and administer open space lands. The District is a public agency funded by 0.25 percent sales tax in Sonoma County. However, the District is not a regulatory agency and does not have the power

of eminent domain. The District acquires conservation easements through voluntary transactions with landowners, and also purchases land outright from willing sellers. The District identifies four acquisition categories: Agriculture, Greenbelts, Natural Resources and Recreation. The Agriculture Acquisition Category includes small farms, dairies, livestock ranches, vineyards and other agricultural lands that contribute to the county's agricultural economy and provide valuable open space. The District has protected over 32,000 acres of active agricultural lands in Sonoma County.

### 3.3.3 Impacts and Mitigation

#### *Approach and Methodology*

The analysis in this section focuses on the compatibility of the project with existing agricultural uses and policies within the vicinity of the project site. In addition, the analysis focuses on the compatibility of project with the California Land Conservation Act and the Sonoma County General Plan 2020.

#### *Thresholds of Significance*

The project would have a significant impact if it would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

#### *Less Than Significant Impacts Not Requiring Further Analysis*

The project does not contain any elements that would conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract. The Sonoma County General Plan does not designate the project site for agricultural use but for Public-Quasi Public land use. Further, the project site is zoned for Public Facilities/Scenic Design and Scenic Resources, which do not permit agricultural uses. Therefore, the project would not conflict with General Plan zoning designations. None of the project site is subject to a Williamson Act contract, and there are no conflicts between existing land uses at the site and the adjacent agricultural uses.

No new conflicts are expected as a result of the construction of the Medical Campus or other project components. The vineyard adjacent to the project site will not be affected by the project and will continue in agricultural use. No other changes in the existing environment are proposed that, due to their location or nature could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use.

*Impacts and Mitigation*

**Impact AG-1:** A 12-acre section of the project site is designated as Farmland of Local importance, which would be converted to nonagricultural use as a result of the project.

**Conversion of Farmland to Nonagricultural Uses**

**Significance:** Less than significant

**Discussion:**

A 12-acre section of the project site is identified in FMMP mapping as Farmland of Local Importance. Under CEQA, this designation does not represent a significant impact as it is not labeled as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide importance. The zoning of the project site is not zoned for agricultural use and does not fall under a Williamson Act contract. In addition, the land has not been in agricultural use for a number of years and has lain fallow. Development of this site would not result in farmland outside of the project site to be converted to non agricultural uses. Conversion of this acreage to nonagricultural use would be a less-than-significant impact to local agriculture.

**Mitigation:** No mitigation required

**Impact AG-2:** Implementation of the proposed project could result in a considerable contribution to significant cumulative agricultural resources impacts.

**Cumulative Agricultural Resources Impacts**

**Significance:** Less than significant

**Discussion:**

The Sonoma County General Plan 2020 EIR determined that development in the County would not result in cumulative impacts to agricultural resources because of policies in the plan limiting the extent of development on agricultural lands. The proposed project is consistent with those policies.

The proposed project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance or conflict with current zoning for agricultural use. The County's General Plan does not designate the project site for agricultural use. Thus, there would be no cumulative impacts to agricultural resources.

**Mitigation:** No mitigation required