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### 3. AESTHETICS

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This EIR chapter describes the existing visual environment within and surrounding the Middle Green Valley Specific Plan area (plan area), the anticipated impacts of future Specific Plan-facilitated open space and development characteristics on these conditions, and any additional measures that should be incorporated into the Specific Plan to mitigate potential visual impacts.

During the six public workshops conducted in 2007 by the County for the "Middle Green Valley Special Study Area" (see section 2.2, Specific Plan Background, in chapter 2 of this EIR), participants from the community emphasized the importance of maintaining the unique "rural character" of Middle Green Valley. There apparently was general consensus that the Valley's rural character should be maintained. Much of the public workshop discussion focused on what constituted the Valley's "rural character" and what steps should be taken to protect it.

#### 3.1 SETTING

##### **3.1.1 Countywide Visual Context**

The county's agricultural delta and marshland landscapes, and its oak and grass covered hills and ridgelines offer an abundance of scenic resources and vistas. This countywide scenic context is described in the 2008 General Plan as an important factor in sustaining a high quality of life for county residents. The General Plan also describes how extensive urban growth in recent decades has resulted in the loss or obstruction of county scenic resources. In response, the General Plan includes a set of scenic resources goals, policies and implementation programs intended to protect valued viewsheds and landscape features that remain intact throughout the county, and ensure that new urban or rural development within scenic roadway corridors is developed in a manner that respects and maintains the integrity of the roadway corridor viewsheds.<sup>1</sup>

The County-certified General Plan EIR (GPEIR) states that views of "agricultural landscapes" and "oak- and grass-covered hills are "primary aesthetic resources in Solano County."<sup>2</sup> The GPEIR also states that such aesthetic resources "promote a high quality of life for the County's residents," and specifically cites "the Coast Range extending in a north-south direction north and west of Fairfield" [this would include the Western Hills along the west edge of the plan area] as a "prominent scenic resource."<sup>3</sup> The GPEIR notes that the majority of the ridgelines created by the Coast Range are currently in their natural form and have been identified by County

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<sup>1</sup>2008 Solano County General Plan, Resources Chapter, page RS-36.

<sup>2</sup>EDAW, Draft Environmental Impact Report, Solano County 2008 Draft General Plan, SCH #2007122069, Volume 1: DEIR Text, April 18, 2008; page 4.11-1.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

residents as prominent visual resources that should be protected.<sup>1</sup> The GPEIR also notes that "agricultural lands define much of the County's visual character" and the "County's oak woodlands provide a unique resource...of scenic value."<sup>2</sup>

### **3.1.2 Middle Green Valley Visual Characteristics**

Figure 3.1 provides an aerial photograph of the plan area and vicinity. The General Plan describes Middle Green Valley as "located north of the Fairfield city limits along Green Valley Road... [and] nestled on the edge of the western hills with a mixture of cultivated agricultural land on the valley floor and grazing land in the hills, sandwiched between residential developments in upper Green Valley and the city of Fairfield." The General Plan also states that "The area is valued for its rural character and scenic qualities."

The plan area is comprised of a predominantly rural valley near the hilly western boundary of Solano County, south of Upper Green Valley and the Green Valley Country Club; west of Suisun Valley and the Rockville Hills; north of I-880, Jameson Canyon and the Fairfield's Hidden Meadows subdivision; and northwest of Fairfield's hillside East Ridge subdivision.

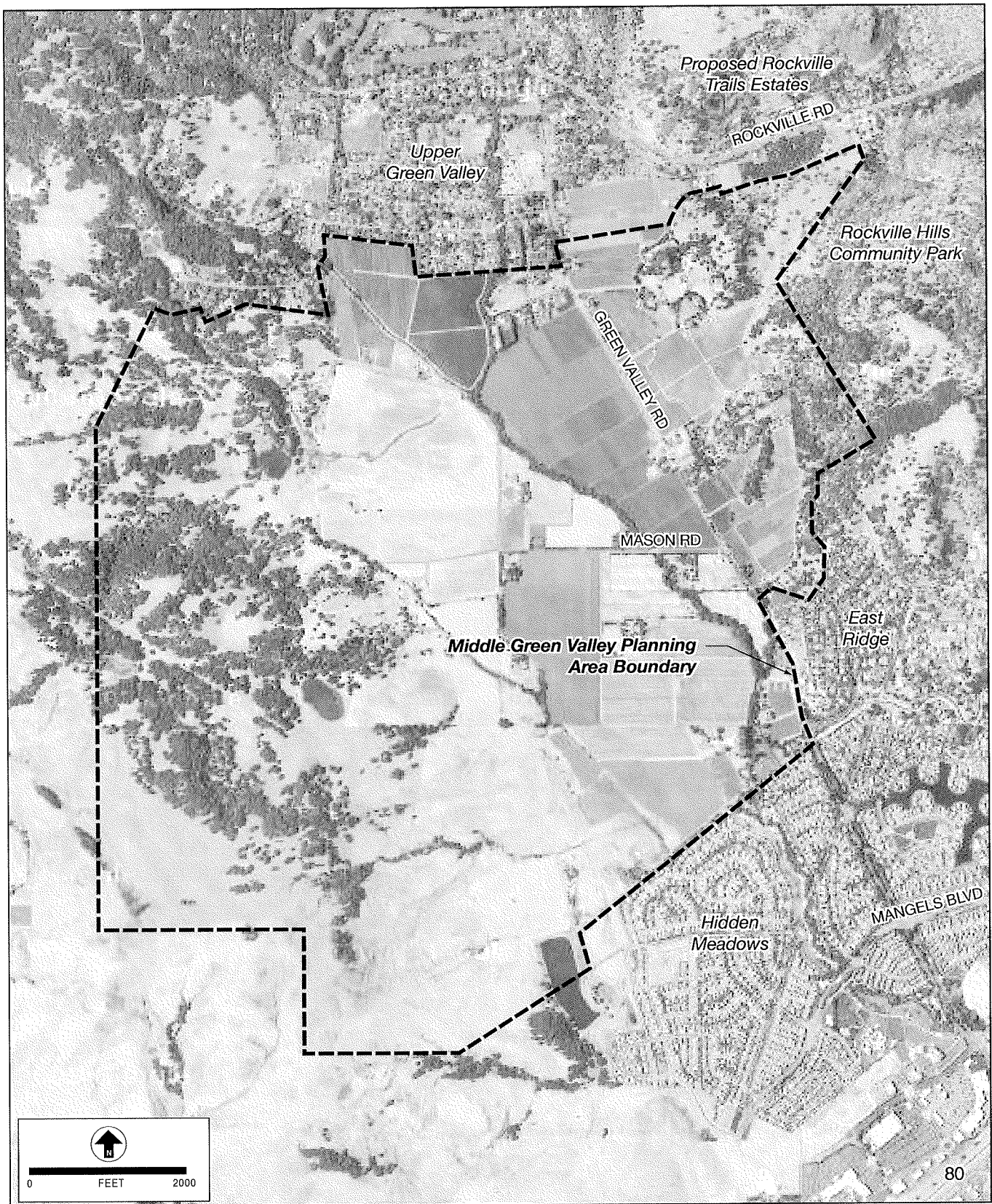
As illustrated by Figure 3.1, a mosaic of cultivated agricultural patterns characterizes most of the existing valley floor landscape in the plan area. The visual character of the plan area has been modified over the past 150 years by agricultural crop cultivation (vineyards, stone fruit, row crops, cover crops, etc.) and livestock grazing. A segment of Hennessey Creek north of Terminal Reservoir Road was realigned and channelized over 75 years ago. The existing inventory of buildings and infrastructure in the plan area landscape includes:

- approximately 55 existing rural residences and associated accessory structures,
- a 10,000-square-foot winery facility (GV Cellars),
- a 5,000-square-foot refrigerated wine storage facility,
- three livestock feed barns,
- over 20 other agricultural barn and shed structures,
- two livestock corrals,
- approximately 20 miles of fencing,
- two cellular telephone towers,
- approximately 6 miles of overhead electrical and telephone distribution lines,
- three stock ponds with earthen dams, and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



SOURCE: Wagstaff and Associates

Figure 3.1

# PLAN AREA AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH

- approximately 10 miles of internal local roads ranging from paved county roads to privately-maintained ranch roads.

As diagrammed on Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, the plan area is visually dominated by the following combination of hillside oak woodland, hillside grassland, hillside woodland scrub, and valley floor "visual units":

- The predominant Green Valley Road viewshed (see Figure 3.2), which includes the Green Valley Creek riparian corridor as a key visual feature in the western foreground. The existing riparian growth along Green Valley Creek and screens the majority of the western valley floor from the roadway view. The background slopes of the Western Hills and Rockville Hills rise above the riparian foreground. These Green Valley Road viewshed riparian and hillside elements are primary contributors to the visual character and identity of Middle Green Valley.
- The pristine and highly scenic eastern slopes of the Western Hills--i.e., the Three Creeks Foothills, Elkhorn Foothills and Nightingale Hills--including oak woodland and grassland hillsides and hilltops rising to high points of approximately 450 to 850 feet above the valley floor along the western boundary of the plan area.
- The west slopes of the Rockville Hills east of Green Valley Road, including oak woodland and scrub covered hillsides and ridgelines rising to high points of approximately 150 to 250 feet above the valley floor, with concentrations of hillside rural residential development visually punctuating the hillside landscape along Vintage Lane and De Leu Drive.
- The rural agricultural landscape of the flat, north-south valley floor, including open pasture, vineyards, and row crops; the serpentine Green Valley Creek riparian corridor; and Green Valley Road itself as defining visual features; and including small, isolated concentrations of rural residential development along Jeni Lane and along the east side of the Green Valley Road approach to Jeni Lane.

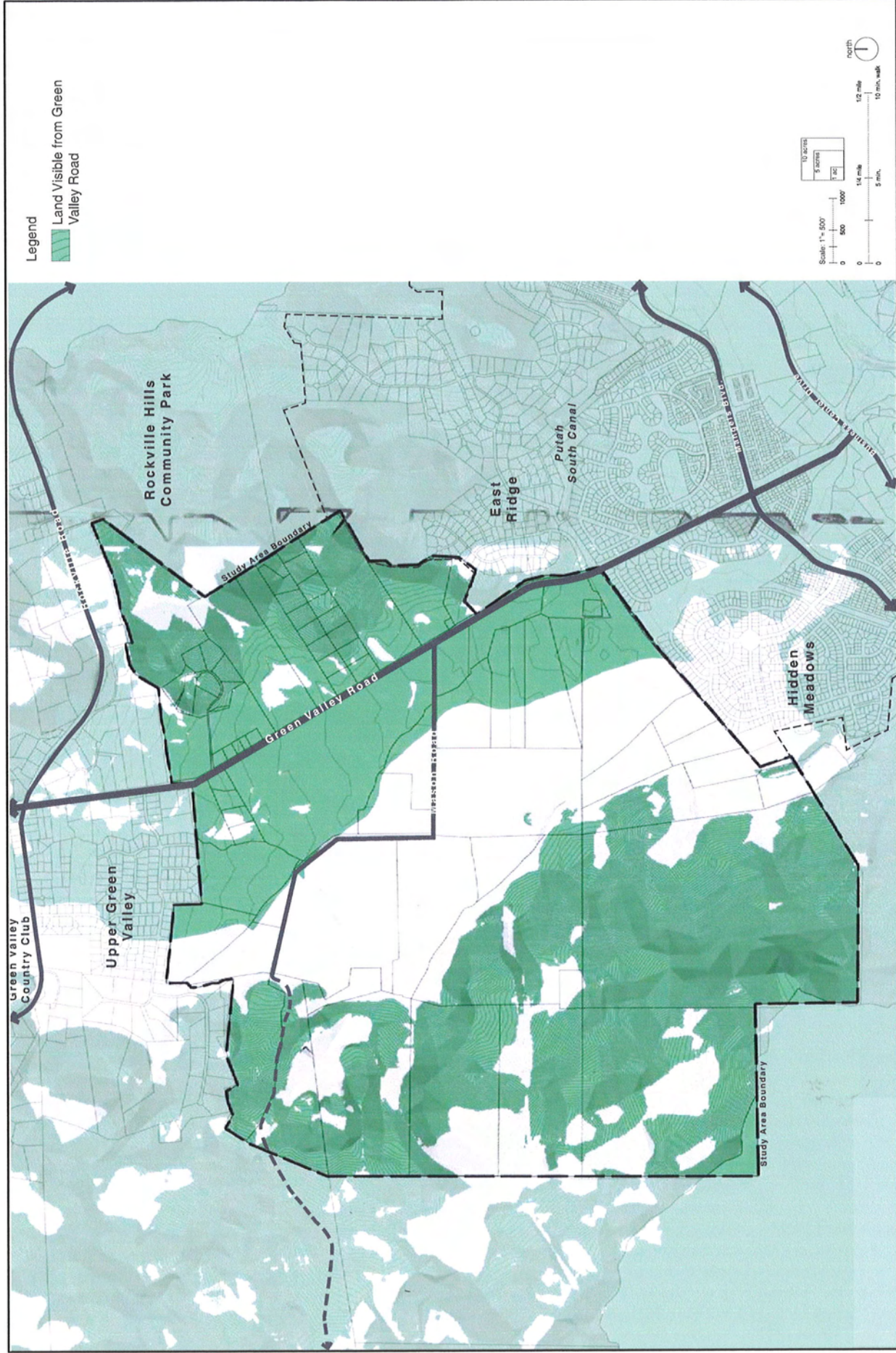
The plan area is highly valued for these rural scenic qualities; however, in recent decades, the agricultural viability that has contributed substantially to these visual values has been in substantial decline throughout the County.

### **3.1.3 Surrounding Viewshed**

The visual image of the plan area is also highly affected by the greater viewshed immediately surrounding the plan area boundary, including:

- views to the west from throughout the plan area of the scenic and pristine slopes and ridges of the Western Hills rising above the plan area boundary towards Elkhorn Peak (elevation: 1,330 feet), including extensive hillside grassland and hillside oak woodland;
- views to the east from throughout the plan area of the lower ridges and western slopes of the Rockville Hills rising above the plan area boundary, including pristine oak woodland and scrub landscapes; and



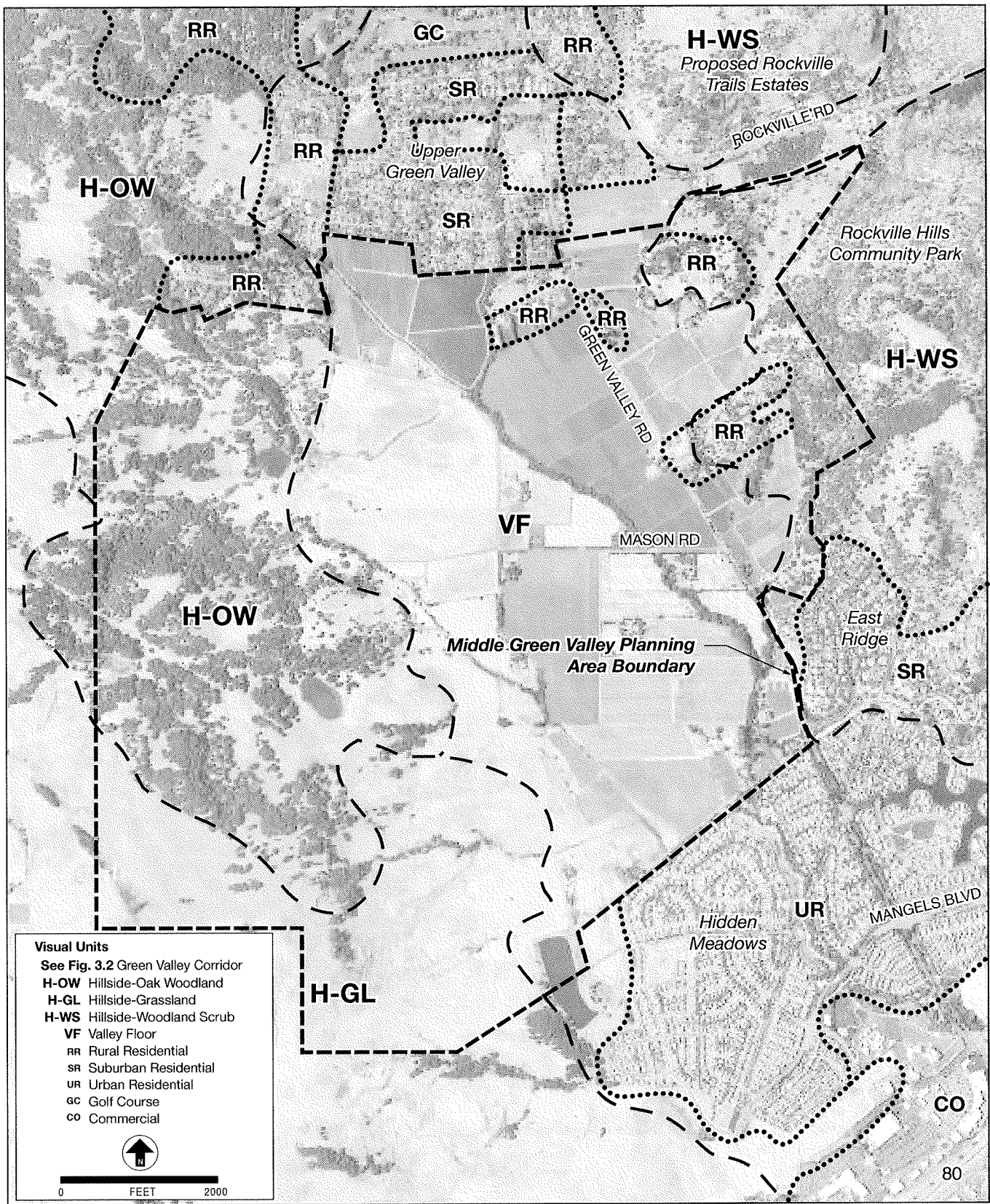


SOURCE: Hart Howerton, Planners and Architects

Figure 3.2

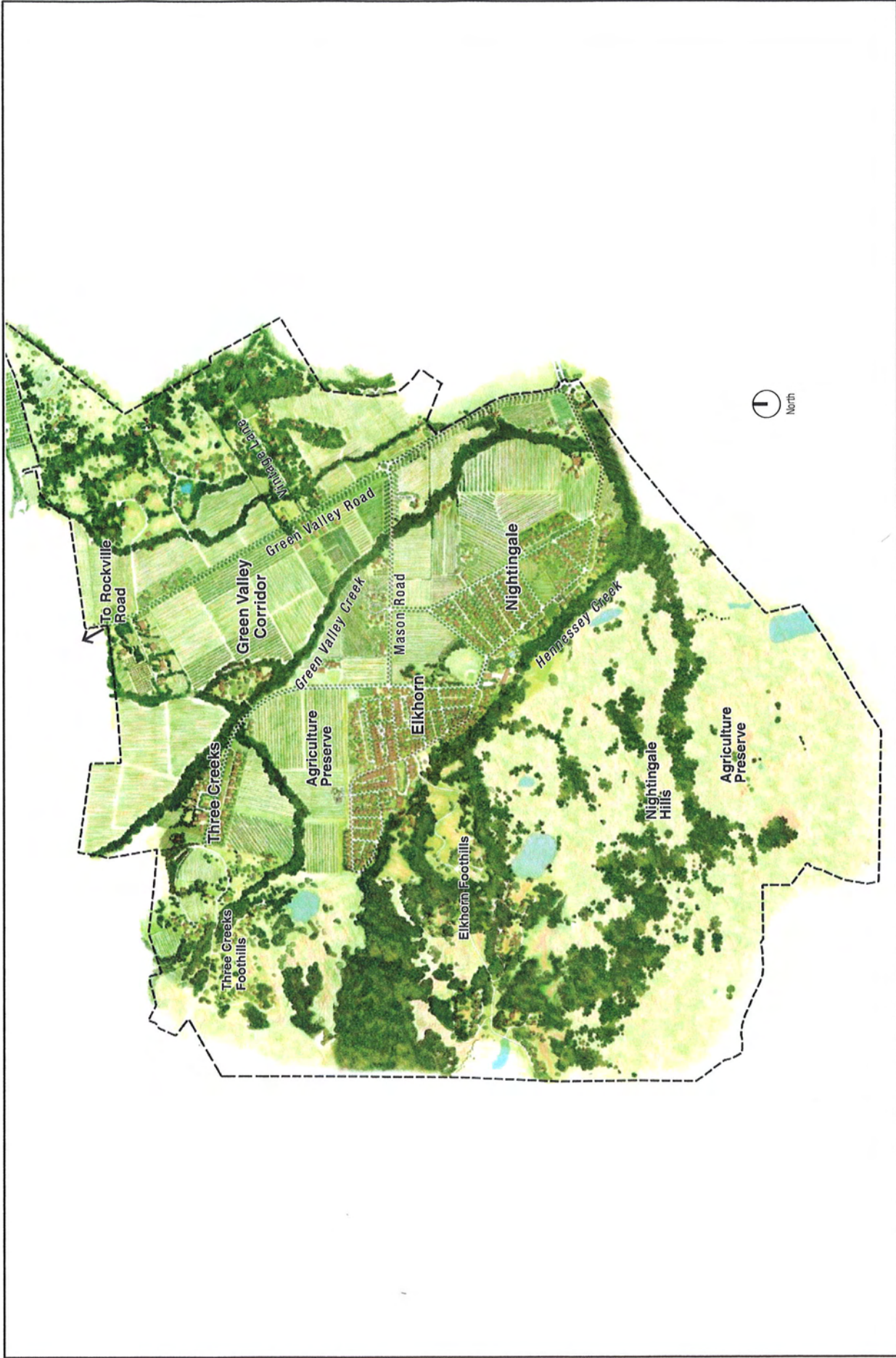
PLAN AREA VISIBILITY FROM GREEN VALLEY ROAD





SOURCE: Wagstaff and Associates

Figure 3.3  
**VISUAL UNITS IN THE  
 PLAN AREA AND VICINITY**



SOURCE: Hart Howerton, Planners and Architects

Figure 3.4

## SPECIFIC PLAN NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK

- views to the south and southeast from the southern portions of the plan area towards the dense urban residential landscape of the Fairfield's Hidden Meadows subdivision and the hillside suburban residential landscape of Fairfield's East Ridge subdivision, which both appear in sharp contrast to, and significantly detract from, the predominantly rural and pastoral visual character of the plan area.

### **3.1.4 Special Scenic Vistas and Features in the Planning Area**

(a) Green Valley Road. As indicated in section 3.1.2 above, the Green Valley Road viewshed represents the predominant visual feature of the plan area. The 2008 Solano County General Plan designates Green Valley Road through the planning area (i.e., between I-80 and Rockville Road) as part of the County's system of Scenic Roadways.<sup>1</sup> The General Plan calls for the preservation of "the visual character of *scenic roadways*...through design review,...limiting grading in the view corridor through the grading ordinance, limiting travel speeds, and providing pullover areas with trash and recycling receptacles" (Policy RS.1-21).

Areas within and adjacent to the plan area that are visible from Green Valley Road are generally indicated on Figure 3.2 (Areas Visible from Green Valley Road). Given its General Plan designation as a *scenic roadway*, the visual character of the plan area and surrounding hillside and ridgeline viewshed as seen from Green Valley Road have warranted special consideration in formulating the Specific Plan.

(b) Other Special Visual Features. Other special visual features in the plan area include heritage trees (separate from the oak woodland units) and the approximately 150-year old Maher Ranch house, a distinctive three-story stone and wood residence and accessory ranch building complex off Green Valley Road on Reservoir Lane. Both contribute to the historic rural character and image of the plan area.

## **3.2 PERTINENT PLANS AND POLICIES**

CEQA requires an EIR to identify the plan and policy setting within which the project is proposed and discuss any inconsistencies between the proposed project and these applicable plans and policies [CEQA Guidelines section 15125(d)]. CEQA also indicates that this plan and policy consistency discussion should be limited to the context of evaluation and review of environmental impacts [CEQA Guidelines section 15124(b)].

### **3.2.1 Solano County General Plan**

Those policies and implementation programs from the 2008 Solano County General Plan that are pertinent to consideration of proposed Specific Plan and its potential visual impacts are listed below. Where any proposed Specific Plan land use policy, development policy standard or design guideline is found in this Draft EIR to be potentially inconsistent with one or more of these County-adopted scenic resource protection goals, policies or implementation programs, a potentially significant environmental impact has been identified, and one or more mitigations has been recommended for incorporation into the Specific Plan to reduce the impact and better

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<sup>1</sup>Solano County General Plan Resources chapter, Figure RS-5, Scenic Roadways.



implement the General Plan. Otherwise, the proposed Specific Plan is considered consistent with the goals, policies and implementation programs listed below.

(a) Land Use Chapter. The primary goal identified by community participants in the series of six County-conducted Middle Green Valley Special Study Area Workshops (see section 2.2, Specific Plan Background, in EIR chapter 2) was to maintain the rural character of Middle Green Valley while allowing some opportunities for compatible residential development. Land use tools such as clustering and transfer of development rights were identified in the Workshops, and are described in the 2008 Solano County General Plan Land Use chapter (General Plan page LU-54) as possible measures to limit the effects of residential development on the rural character of the valley.

The following specific goals, policies and implementation programs included in the General Plan Land Use chapter were formulated based largely on this community vision for Middle Green Valley, and are intended to "provide a framework for implementing the future vision of a rural community with compatible residential development." (General Plan Land Use chapter, page LU-54)

- Preserve and protect the current development pattern of distinct and identifiable cities and communities. (Goal LU.G-1)
- Establish rural residential development in a manner that preserves rural character and scenic qualities and protects sensitive resources including agricultural lands, creeks, native trees, open spaces, and views. (Policy LU.P-14)
- Encourage clustering of residential development when necessary to preserve agricultural lands, natural resource areas and environmental quality, to provide for the efficient delivery of services and utilities, and to mitigate potential health and safety hazards.
- Protect and maintain the rural character of Middle Green Valley while allowing opportunities for compatible residential development to occur. (Goal SS.G-1)
- Maintain the rural character of Middle Green Valley while still allowing development to be guided into areas screened from Green Valley Road because of natural contours in the land, woodland vegetation, and/or riparian vegetation. Locate upland development in areas screened by landforms or vegetation. (Policy SS.P-1)
- Balance the protection of resources in Middle Green Valley (e.g. view sheds, oak woodlands, riparian habitat, sustainable agricultural use) while allowing development to occur. (Policy SS.P-2)
- Provide a variety of incentives and techniques to encourage property owners to preserve natural and visual resources, in addition to the transfer of development rights. (Policy SS.P-4)
- Encourage cluster residential development through incentives to property owners in hillside and valley floor areas that can support residential uses with least affect on resources, steep slopes, or very high wildfire hazard areas. (Policy SS.P-5)

- In accordance with balancing the protection of resources described in these policies, adopt a program that provides residential development credits to property owners who voluntarily forego or limit development on their lands. The transfer of development rights program should focus incentives on land in areas to be preserved. (Policy SS.P-6)
- Adopt a specific plan or master plan to implement these policies for Middle Green Valley. (Policy SS.P-7)
- Create additional methods to assist landowners who choose to continue farming, such as, but not limited to:
  - enforcing the right-to-farm act and educating residents on the act; and
  - investigating mechanisms for providing farmers with economic assistance to ensure agricultural viability. (Policy SS.P-8)
- Adopt a plan (either a specific plan or master plan) to implement these policies for Middle Green Valley. That [The Middle Green Valley Specific Plan] plan should specify:
  - techniques to ensure development is compatible with the rural character of Middle Green Valley and surrounding areas. Such techniques should include design guidelines and development standards;
  - guidelines for cluster development, including minimum and maximum lot sizes, development standards, and density bonus credits for clustered development;
  - the details of a transfer of development rights program (with an implementing ordinance), including: the designation of areas where development is preferred, creating appropriate and equitable re-zoning, clustering of housing, and determining the ratio of credits to property owners who voluntarily forego development;
  - the number of units and/or credits, with or without clustering, that will provide incentives for all landowners in the area to participate in a market driven transfer of development rights program, based on 400 units, subject to further study;
  - the maximum number of units any property owner can develop, with or without clustering;
  - the techniques to be applied voluntarily by property owners that ensure permanent protection and maintenance of resources/views on lands to remain undeveloped; and
  - Property owners shall receive a minimum development credit for the number of primary dwelling units that would be allowed under the land use designations under the 1980 General Plan. For land designated as Agriculture, the number of units/credits would be one per 20 acres and for land designated Rural Residential the number of units/credits would be one per 5 acres. (Policy SS.I-1)

(b) Resources Chapter--Scenic Resources Section. The Resources chapter of the 2008 Solano County General Plan includes a Scenic Resources section that lists the following additional pertinent policies and implementation programs.

- Protect the unique scenic features of Solano County, particularly hills, ridgelines, wetlands, and water bodies. (Policy RS.P-35)
- Support and encourage practices that reduce light pollution and preserve views of the night sky. (Policy RS.P-36)
- Protect the visual character of designated scenic roadways. (Policy RS.P-37)
- Preserve the visual character of scenic roadways as shown in Figure RS-5 through design review, designating alternate routes for faster traffic, regulating off-site advertising, limiting grading in the view corridor through the grading ordinance, limiting travel speeds, and providing pullover areas with trash and recycling receptacles. (Implementation Program RS.I-21)
- In new developments, require the use of fixtures that direct light toward target areas and shield it from spillage. (Implementation Program RS.I-22)

The General Plan also designates Green Valley Road through the planning area (i.e., between I-80 and Rockville Road) as part of the County's system of Scenic Roadways.<sup>1</sup> The General Plan calls for the preservation of "the visual character of *scenic roadways*...through design review,...limiting grading in the view corridor through the grading ordinance, limiting travel speeds, and providing pullover areas with trash and recycling receptacles" (Policy RS.1-21).

### 3.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### 3.3.1 Significance Criteria

Based on the CEQA Guidelines,<sup>2</sup> the proposed Specific Plan would be considered in this EIR to have a significant aesthetic or visual resources impact if it would:

- (a) have a substantial, adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- (b) substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a *state scenic highway*;
- (c) substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- (d) create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. "Glare" is defined in this EIR as the reflection of harsh bright light sufficient to cause physical discomfort or loss in visual performance and visibility.

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<sup>1</sup>Solano County General Plan Resources chapter, Figure RS-5, Scenic Roadways.

<sup>2</sup>2002 CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Items I(a) through (d)



### **3.3.2 Relevant Project Characteristics**

(a) Pertinent Draft Specific Plan Key Policies. The Draft Specific Plan (DSP) includes the following visual resource protection policies for the plan area that, if effectively implemented, would serve to minimize adverse and promote beneficial aesthetic results:

- *SSP-1: Maintain the rural character of Middle Green Valley while allowing development to be guided into areas screened from Green Valley Road because of natural contours in the land, woodland vegetation, and/or riparian vegetation. Locate upland development in areas screened by land farms and vegetation.*
- *SSP-2: Balance the protection of resources in Middle Green Valley (e.g., viewsheds, oak woodlands, riparian habitat, sustainable agricultural use) while allowing development to occur.*

(b) The Green Fabric--"Open Lands." The DSP designates an interconnected network of permanent green space or Open Lands intended to conserve the plan area "natural ecosystem" and provide associated "agricultural benefits." The DSP designates over 78 percent, or approximately 1,490 acres, of the plan area as permanent "Open Lands," "of which at least 440 acres are to be preserved as working agriculture."<sup>1</sup> The plan states that "Under 25 percent of the [plan area], or less than 500 acres, was identified as the least environmentally sensitive and appropriate areas for neighborhood development."<sup>2</sup> These areas are designated for development with "an informal pattern of roads, residences and community buildings that minimize environmental impacts."<sup>3</sup>

(c) Neighborhood Framework. As described earlier in this Draft EIR in section 2.4.3(b), and as illustrated on Figure 3.4 which follows, the DSP calls for a "neighborhood framework" comprised of the following four component land use control areas, located within the 25 percent of the plan area (less than 500 acres) identified by the plan authors as least environmentally sensitive:

- the Green Valley Corridor,
- The Elkhorn Neighborhood (including the Elkhorn Foothills),
- the Three Creeks Neighborhood (including the Three Creeks foothills), and
- the Nightingale Neighborhood.

For each of these DSP-designated neighborhood areas except the Green Valley Road Corridor subarea, which would remain mostly in agricultural use, the "Open Space Patterns" section of the plan (DSP section 5.6) stipulates a minimum Open Land/Recreation acreage requirement.

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<sup>1</sup>DSP page 3-19.

<sup>2</sup>DSP page 3-19.

<sup>3</sup>DSP page 3-19.

(d) The Transect. The DSP also proposes establishment of an environmental progression from most dense at the core of each of the four designated neighborhoods, graduating to least dense in the surrounding rural areas, in order to create a series of visual environments, each with its own "appropriate scale and character."<sup>1</sup>

(e) Green Valley Road. The DSP states that, along Green Valley Road, "Working agricultural lands, Open Lands and the Green Valley Corridor will continue to be the predominant landscape elements that reinforce the agricultural identity of the area as well as the scenic and rural qualities of Green Valley." The plan also states that "Views of the new neighborhoods to the west of Green Valley Creek will be screened from Green Valley Road."<sup>2</sup> Green Valley Road "will remain at its current width and include improved shoulders, restored vegetative swales, an integrated street tree planting treatment and a new multi-use trail (to replace the existing)."<sup>3</sup> The proposed Green Valley Farm Stand and traffic circle along Green Valley Road at Mason Road would represent the most prominent visual change along the route.

In addition Mason Road "will be improved to a Rural Collector standard, and include street tree plantings and multi-use trail that connects to the community path system."<sup>4</sup> In addition, "Appropriate fencing, low wall and/or hedgerow planting treatments will be used along all thoroughfares that adjoin working agricultural lands."<sup>5</sup>

(f) Environmental Stewardship System. The DSP proposes a system of "environmental stewardship" as a means of implementing the plan's visual and agricultural landscape preservation and enhancement goals. The proposed stewardship system would include:

(1) *Green Valley Conservancy:* As described in section 2.4.8(a) of this Draft EIR, the DSP calls for establishment of a Green Valley Conservancy. The Conservancy would be responsible for controlling the Specific Plan-designated "Open Lands," and would be charged with overseeing the management and monitoring of associated conservation easements to be held by a "qualified and accredited" non-profit organization.

In addition to overseeing the preservation of natural resources and management of agricultural and grazing operations in the Open Lands areas, the Conservancy would oversee a Specific Plan-established "comprehensive community design process."<sup>6</sup> In particular, the Conservancy would be responsible for utilizing a Specific Plan-established *Neighborhood Design Code* (described in more detail under item g which follows) that sets forth the criteria and performance standards for plan area development and building activity and the associated "comprehensive design review process."

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<sup>1</sup>DSP page 3-6.

<sup>2</sup>DSP page 3-8.

<sup>3</sup>DSP page 3-8.

<sup>4</sup>DSP page 3-8.

<sup>5</sup>DSP page 3-8.

<sup>6</sup>DSP page 3-32.

The County's standard development review process, which would remain in effect in the plan area, would be supplemented by a DSP-proposed internal Design Review Process and associated project-specific submittal requirements for all future discretionary development applications within the plan area. The internal design review process would be governed by the *Neighborhood Design Code* and a Specific Plan-established Conservancy Design Review Committee (DRC).

(2) *Agricultural Business Plan*: The DSP also calls for preparation by the Conservancy of an *Agricultural Business Plan* that identifies a strategy for "establishing a viable, vital and community-based agriculture operation"--i.e., "Green Valley Farm."

(3) *Resource Management Plan*: The DSP calls for Conservancy formulation of a *Resource Management Plan*, in cooperation with plan area landowners, that would identify a framework of management standards and performance guidelines for ongoing management and protection of Specific Plan-designated "Open Land" areas.

(4) *Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program*: As recommended for the plan area by the County General Plan (see General Plan policies SS.P-4 and SS.P-6 listed in section 3.2 of this DEIR chapter), the DSP calls for establishment of a TDR program as a means of aggregating and preserving natural open space and agricultural lands in the plan area.

(5) *Conservation Easements*: The DSP also calls for use of conservation easements to preserve agricultural and natural open space lands in exchange for development rights.

(g) Neighborhood Design Code. The DSP-proposed *Neighborhood Design Code* (Section 5.0) describes a detailed set of Development Standards and Design Guidelines and associated design review process to achieve the Specific Plan-intended aesthetic vision. These Standards and Guidelines are intended to establish a "form-based" design control framework organized around the following seven basic rural "Building Types"

- Agriculture/Community building forms (agricultural building forms occurring throughout the community);
- Courtyard building forms (zero-lot line buildings occur at the neighborhood cores);
- Bungalow building forms (smaller, detached simple building types within neighborhoods);
- Farmstead building forms (larger, detached building types primarily at the perimeter of neighborhoods);
- Meadow building forms (detached building types in foothill areas primarily at the edges of oak woodlands);
- Compound building forms (collections of connected buildings within larger agricultural and oak woodland landscapes); and
- Secondary Unit and Ancillary Structures (small detached structures next to main living structures).



For each of these Building Types, the Design Code describes a detailed set of building placement (setbacks, allowable encroachments, garage placement, etc.), building form (massing, size, height, frontage, etc.), parking, allowable use, allowable frontage types (stoop, shopfront and awning, etc.), and landscaping and fencing standards. The Design Code also addresses such design aspects as exterior walls, openings (windows, door and shutter), chimneys and roof projections, secondary and ancillary building characteristics, colors and finishes, building materials selection, and landscape concepts and standards.

The Design Code landscape concepts and standards have been formulated to establish two predominant landscape zones, a Valley Zone along the valley floor and a Foothill Zone for the upper oak woodland foothill areas. The two landscape-control zones are intended to maintain a gradual visual transition from the "more civilized and cultivated landscape of the Valley Zone to the more natural oak woodland landscapes in the Foothill Zone. The Design Code also describes a set of design objectives and standards for landscape edges--i.e., fences, walls, shrub screens, hedgerows and/or gates.

### **3.3.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

The potential visual impacts of the Draft Specific Plan have been evaluated by comparing the existing plan area landscape with the anticipated landscape at full buildout under the DSP land use policies, development standards and design guidelines described in section 3.3.2 above.

**Impact 3-1: Impacts on Scenic Vistas.** Prominent views from the plan area of the Western Hills have been identified in the Solano County General Plan as one of the County's important "scenic vistas." The Draft Specific Plan (DSP) neighborhood and open lands framework (DSP section 3.2.1) and associated visual resource protection policies, development standards, and design guidelines (DSP sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.2, 4.4, and 5.1 through 5.9) have been specifically formulated with the intent to ensure that future plan area land use and development under the Specific Plan remains compatible with, benefits from, enhances and protects the rural character and unique scenic features of Middle Green Valley, including views of the Western Hills, as well as views of plan area riparian corridors, meadows and foothills. The DSP calls for establishment of a system of environmental stewardship (section 3.3.4) to implement the plan's visual and agricultural landscape preservation and enhancement goals, to be applied in conjunction with a plan area *Neighborhood Design Code* and associated Design Review Process. The Design Code would identify project-specific design submittal requirements for all future discretionary development. The proposed plan area Design Review Process is intended to supplement the requirements of the standard County development review process with a newly-established Middle Green Valley Conservancy Design Review Committee.

Nevertheless, until individual project-specific applications are submitted with associated detailed design information sufficient to verify to Green Valley

**(continued)**

**Impact 3-1 (continued):**

Conservancy Design Review Committee and County staff satisfaction adequate protection of scenic vistas and adequate visual screening from Green Valley Road, it is assumed that future individual development projects undertaken in accordance with the Specific Plan may disrupt views of the Western Hills and plan area riparian, meadow and foothill features, from Green Valley Road and other important vantage points. In particular, development within the DSP-designated neighborhood areas nearest Green Valley Road would have the potential to alter foreground and middle-ground views from Green Valley Road. This possible Specific Plan effect on scenic vistas represents a ***potentially significant impact*** (see criterion [a] in section 3.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation 3-1:** Prior to County approval of any future plan area subdivision or other discretionary development application, the project applicant/developer shall provide site plan, architectural, landscape and infrastructure design details demonstrating to the satisfaction of the Middle Green Valley Conservancy Design Review Committee, County staff and County Planning Commission that the development design:

- sufficiently protects existing visual access from Green Valley Road and other important plan area vantage points towards foreground and middle-ground rural landscapes and the Western Hills background;
- protects existing intervening landforms and vegetative buffers;
- maintains building rooflines that do not exceed existing intervening landforms and vegetative screening; and
- emphasizes building forms, designs, colors, materials, etc. that are reflective of and conducive to the surrounding rural landscape.

Implementation of this measure would reduce this potential impact to a ***less-than-significant level***.

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**Impacts on Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway.** There are no state-designated scenic highways in the plan area vicinity. The Specific Plan would therefore have ***no impact*** on scenic resources within a state scenic highway (see criterion [b] in section 3.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation:** No impact has been identified; no mitigation is required.

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**Degradation of Plan Area Visual Character.** Implementation of the Draft Specific Plan would alter the visual character of portions of the plan area landscape through conversion of agricultural and open space lands within the four DSP-designated development neighborhoods. However, the DSP would not substantially modify the visual identity of the valley. The DSP would maintain and protect over 78 percent of the plan area as permanent open land. The DSP also includes a land use and open space layout and associated extensive set of land policies, development standards and design guidelines formulated to protect, preserve and enhance the highly-valued plan area agricultural and hillside landscape. In addition, for each designated neighborhood area except the Green Valley Road Corridor, which would remain mostly in agricultural use, the "Open Space Patterns" provisions of the DSP (section 5.6) stipulate a minimum Open Land/Recreation acreage requirement that would serve to further reduce the effects of project-specific development on the rural character of the plan area. Also, the DSP separates the four DSP-designated neighborhoods from existing substantially more intensive suburban development areas to the south, southeast and north. Furthermore, the DSP (section 5.9) calls for establishment of a system of environmental stewardship to implement the plan's visual and agricultural landscape preservation and enhancement goals, to be applied in conjunction with a plan area *Neighborhood Design Code* and associated Design Review Process. The Design Code would identify project-specific design submittal requirements for all future discretionary development. The proposed plan area Design Review Process, which is intended to supplement the standard County development review process, would be implemented by a newly-established Middle Green Valley Conservancy Design Review Committee.

Adoption and implementation of this extensive set of proposed Specific Plan provisions would provide reasonable assurance against substantial degradation of the plan area visual character, reducing this potential impact to a ***less-than-significant level*** (see criterion [c] in section 3.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation:** No significant visual degradation impact has been identified; no additional mitigation is required.

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**Impact 3-2: Increase in Nighttime Lighting and Glare.** The DSP includes a streetscape lighting description (section 5.7.6) that suggests, but does not mandate, "low-level lighting"..."where nighttime events may warrant a lighted trail or path of travel for safety" and "directional and/or facility identification signs" that "may integrate low levels of light for visibility." The DSP also indicates that "All fixtures used in the landscape will be full-cut-off fixtures that will help maintain the dark nighttime sky." (DSP page 5-113). Nevertheless, although the degree of darkness experienced in Middle Green Valley and views of stars and other features in the nighttime sky would not be substantially diminished as a result of Specific Plan implementation, project-specific new development permitted by the Specific Plan in the four designated neighborhoods, as well as the farmstand envisioned along Green Valley Road immediately north of Mason Road, would include new sources of exterior lighting in an otherwise rural setting that could result in localized "light trespass" into the nighttime sky (i.e., new sources of sky-glow) or towards Green Valley Road, Mason Road, or other plan area travel routes. In addition, development of neighborhood facilities such as the anticipated school and firehouse, could include new exterior lighting features with noticeable and potentially adverse light and glare effects. The possible Specific Plan light and glare effects represent a ***potentially significant impact*** (see criterion [d] in section 3.3.1, "Significance Criteria," above).

**Mitigation 3-2:** To minimize glare and "sky glow" from new outdoor area lighting, prior to County approval of any future plan area subdivision or other discretionary development application that includes exterior lighting, the project applicant/ developer shall include in the project application materials lighting design measures that ensure protection of surrounding uses from spillover light and glare, use of low lighting fixtures, use of adequately shielded light sources, use of light sources that provide a natural color rendition, and avoidance of light reflectance off of exterior building walls. Incorporation of these and similar measures by a qualified design professional into the project-specific design would reduce this potential for light and glare impacts to a ***less-than-significant level***.

**Impact 3-3: Project Contribution to General Plan-Identified Countywide Cumulative Impacts on the County Visual Character.** The General Plan EIR has determined that cumulative development of General Plan-permitted urban land uses throughout Solano County would permanently change views, including valued scenic vistas, throughout the County and would substantially alter the visual character of the County through conversion of agricultural and open space lands to developed urban uses. The General Plan EIR notes that, although implementation of General Plan-required project-specific comprehensive design guidelines and architectural standards would reduce project-specific impacts on aesthetic resources, "there is no mechanism to allow implementation of development projects while avoiding the conversion of the local viewsheds from agricultural land uses and open spaces to urban...development." The General Plan EIR has also determined that no feasible mitigation measures or policies are available that could fully preserve existing visual qualities countywide while allowing development of urban uses under the adopted General Plan, and "Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**" (General Plan Draft EIR page 4.11-9).

Existing vegetative screening would block views of Draft Specific Plan-designated neighborhood development from Green Valley Road. The Draft Specific Plan land use and open space framework and associated stringent development standards and design guidelines would also minimize project visual impacts. The Draft Specific Plan would also retain about 78 percent of the plan area in permanent agricultural and open space use. In addition, the Draft Specific Plan includes detailed development standards and form-based design guidelines that would serve to substantially reduce the aesthetic impacts of development within the various Specific Plan-designated neighborhood areas.

Nevertheless, the project contribution to this General Plan-identified cumulative impact would not be "de minimis" (the commonly-used CEQA term for an effect so small or minimal in difference to the status quo that it does not constitute an environmental impact). Therefore, under CEQA, the project contribution to this General Plan-identified significant unavoidable cumulative impact would be **significant**.

**Mitigation 3-3:** No mitigation has been identified which would be sufficient to eliminate the project contribution; therefore the project contribution to this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

