

6.11 AGRICULTURE

6.11.1 INTRODUCTION

This section includes an explanation of the various criteria and methods used to evaluate the significance and quality of agricultural land, a description of the previous and existing agricultural uses of the project site, and an evaluation of the effect the Greenbriar project would have on agricultural resources.

6.11.2 EXISTING SETTING

The Sacramento County General Plan designates the project site as Agricultural Cropland. The majority of the project site is currently in a fallow agricultural condition. The northwestern-most area of the project site, an approximately 115-acre rectangular shape, contains remnants of previous foundations that supported agricultural-related structures and paved areas related to a previous horse training track and roads. Historically, the majority of the site and surrounding vicinity has been used for irrigated row crop rice production for at least the past 35 years; however, at the time of the NOP, no crop cultivation was occurring on the project site. The project site is bordered on the west by an irrigation ditch adjacent to Lone Tree Road, which collects runoff and provides irrigation for crop production and is bordered to the east by SR 70/99 (SR 70/99). I-5 borders the project site to the south and agricultural lands and the approved Metro Air Parkway development project exist to the north and west of the project site. Agricultural lands to the north and west of the project site appear to be in fallow condition or are used for grazing activities rather than growing and harvesting irrigated feed or food crops.

In 2000, Sacramento County was estimated to have 227,931 acres of Important Farmland: 115,389 acres of Prime Farmland, 63,536 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 15,476 acres of Unique Farmland, and 33,530 acres of Farmland of Local Importance (CDC 2004). The project site contains a total of approximately 518 acres of Important Farmland which accounts for approximately 0.2% of Important Farmland in Sacramento County. Over the past decade, the availability of Important Farmland has been consistently declining by small increments from year to year primarily because of conversions to urban and other developed land uses. Table 6.11-1 identifies the acreages of Important Farmland in Sacramento County inventoried by the California Department of Conservation (CDC) from 1994 through 2002. A decline in acreages occurred for Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance over the last decade while acreages for Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance increased.

Important Farmland Category	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Prime Farmland	123,201	123,094	121,974	116,116	111,984
Farmland of Statewide Importance	76,217	74,256	67,713	62,650	60,773
Unique Farmland	11,306	11,332	13,521	15,609	15,834
Farmland of Local Importance	28,259	28,422	33,732	39,745	37,885
Total	238,983	237,104	236,940	234,120	226,476

Source: CDC Farmland Conversion Reports at http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/FMMP/stats_reports/farmland_conv_reports.htm

6.11.3 REGULATORY SETTING

WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS

In 1965, the California Legislature passed the California Land Conservation Act, which is commonly referred to as the Williamson Act. The act is a voluntary land conservation program that is administered by counties and cities, with technical assistance from the California Department of Conservation. The objectives of the act are as follows:

- ▶ To preserve farmland for a secure food supply for the state and nation, and for future generations;
- ▶ To maintain agriculture's contribution to local and state economic health;
- ▶ To provide economic relief to tax-burdened farmers and ranchers;
- ▶ To promote orderly city growth, and discourage leapfrog development and premature loss of farmland; and
- ▶ To preserve open space for its scenic, social, aesthetic, and wildlife values.

Landowners enrolled in the Williamson Act are taxed at a lower rate using a value based on the agricultural use of the land under contract. In turn, landowners commit to restricting the use of their land to agriculture and open space uses for 10 years. The term of the contract is essentially indefinite and it is automatically renewed on the anniversary date of which the contract was entered. To exit the contract, landowners must initiate the non-renewal process, which allows the remainder of the contract term to lapse (the remaining 9 years), thereby rendering the contract null and void at the end of the term. Goal A and Policy 2 of the City of Sacramento General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (discussed below) outlines the City's goals to work with the County of Sacramento regarding the conservation of agricultural resources.

No portions of the project site are subject to Williamson Act contracts. However, adjacent parcels located to the north of the project site are identified as Williamson Act Parcels by the City of Sacramento (Sacramento 2005).

CITY OF SACRAMENTO GENERAL PLAN

The City of Sacramento General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element outlines the City's goals and policies pertaining to agricultural resources. The following list includes the policies relevant to the project. The project's consistency with these policies is evaluated in Chapter 5.0, "Project Consistency with Plans and Policies."

- **Policy 1:** Phase the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses while implementing the policies of the NNCP (North Natomas Community Plan)
- **Policy 2:** Work with Sacramento County to explore the feasibility of an agricultural preservation plan.

LAFCo POLICIES

LAFCo has adopted policies and standards related to agricultural land conversion. The following policies and standards are applicable to the project. The project's consistency with these policies and standards are evaluated in Chapter 5.0, "Project Consistency with Plans and Policies."

- ▶ LAFCo will approve a change of organization or reorganization that will result in the conversion of prime agricultural land in open space use to other uses only if the Commission finds that the proposal will lead to the planned, orderly, and efficient development of an area. For purposes of this standard, a proposal leads to the planned, orderly, and efficient development of an area only if all of the following criteria are met:
 - The land subject to the change of organization or reorganization is contiguous to either lands developed within an urban use or lands that have received all discretionary approvals for urban development.

- The proposed development of the subject lands is consistent with the Spheres of Influence Plan, including the Master Services Element of the affected agency or agencies.
- Development of all or a substantial portion of the subject land is likely to occur within 5 years. In the case of very large developments, annexation should be phased wherever feasible. If the Commission finds phasing infeasible for specific reasons, it may approve annexation if all or a substantial portion of the subject land is likely to develop within a reasonable period of time.
- Insufficient vacant nonprime lands exist within the applicable Spheres of Influence that are planned, accessible, and developable for the same general type of use.
- The proposal will have no significant adverse effect on the physical and economic integrity of other agricultural lands. In making this determination, LAFCo will consider the following factors: (1) the agricultural significance of the subject and adjacent areas relative to other agricultural lands in the region; (2) the use of the subject and adjacent areas; (3) whether public facilities related to the proposal would be sized or situated so as to facilitate the conversion of adjacent or nearby agricultural land, or will be extended through or adjacent to, any other agricultural lands that lie between the project site and existing facilities; (4) whether natural or human-made barriers serve to buffer adjacent or nearby agricultural land from the effects of the proposed development; (5) applicable provisions of the General Plan open space and land use elements, applicable growth-management policies, or other statutory provisions designated to protect agriculture (LAFCo Standards, pgs. IV-5 and IV-6).

6.11.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The environmental analysis in this section is based on a review of the goals and policies contained in the Sacramento County and City of Sacramento general plans; the NNCP; site reconnaissance; and a review of the City of Sacramento General Plan 2025 Technical Background Report. As part of the analysis, this EIR examines three land classifications systems that are used to determine the agricultural significance of the lands within Sacramento County which include the following:

- ▶ Important Farmland Maps of the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP);
- ▶ U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Land Capability Class System and Storie Index Ratings; and
- ▶ California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model.

FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM

The FMMP monitors and documents land use changes that specifically affect California's agricultural land. The program, administered by the California Department of Conservation, produces maps, referred to as Important Farmland Maps, and statistical data that are used for assessing the significance and quality of agricultural lands. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality, based on the NRCS soil survey maps, and irrigation status. Maps are updated every 2 years, with current land use information gathered from aerial photographs, a computer mapping system, public review, and field reconnaissance (California Department of Conservation 2005).

The FMMP land classification system is cited by the State CEQA Guidelines as the preferred information source for determining the agricultural significance of a property (CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G). The California Department of Conservation has characterized Prime Farmland as land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of agricultural crops. Prime Farmland has the soil quality, growing

season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods. Farmland of Statewide Importance is characterized as land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for agricultural use, having only minor shortcomings, such as less ability to store soil moisture, compared to Prime Farmland (California Department of Conservation 2005).

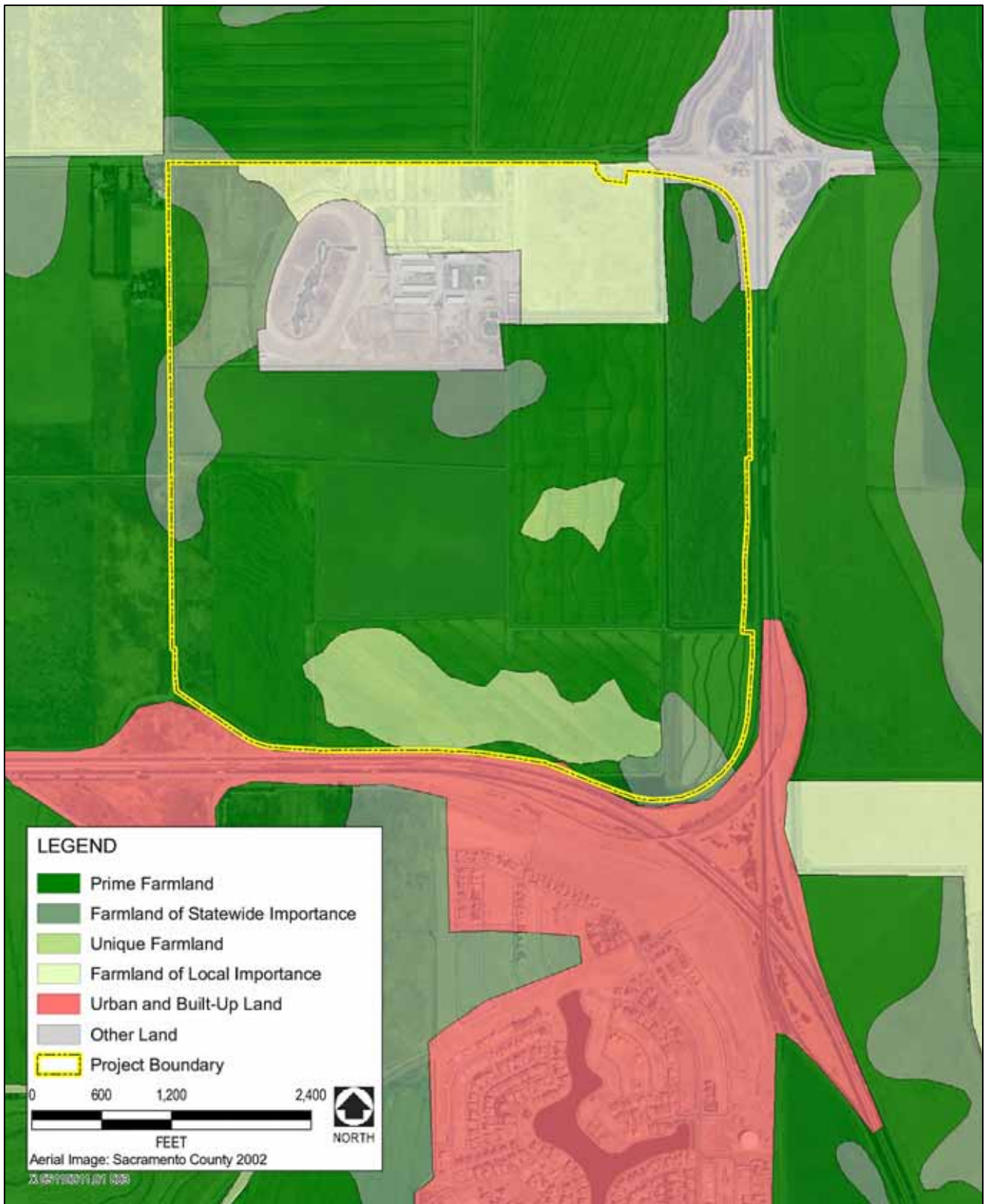
The California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, Sacramento County Important Farmland Map has designated the project site as Prime Farmland (329 acres) interspersed with areas designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance (68 acres), Farmland of Local Importance (68 acres), Unique Farmland (53 acres), and other land (59 acres) (Exhibit 6.11-1). Areas designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance are included under the umbrella definition in CEQA of “Agricultural Land” that is afforded consideration as to its potential significance (see CEQA Section 21060.1 [a]). Thus, the project site contains 518 acres of “Agricultural Land,” as defined by CEQA.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (California Government Code Section 56000 et seq.) defines Prime Agricultural Land according to several criteria, which include the NRCS’s Land Capability Class System and the Storie Index. The NRCS has prepared a soil survey for Sacramento County that includes the project site (Soil Conservation Service 1993). The 1993 NRCS soil survey includes the Land Capability Classification system, which places soils into agricultural suitability categories. The Land Capability Classes reflect the soil’s ability to support common crops and pasture plants without compromising the soil’s quality over the long term. The Land Capability Classification system uses eight Land Capability Classes (I through VIII) to rank soils. Prime farmlands generally correspond to Land Capability ratings of Class I or Class II and soils that are less suitable for farming are assigned to classes with higher numbers.

The 1993 NRCS soil survey identifies the following soil series on the project site: Clear Lake clay, Jacktone clay, Cosumnes silt loam, Durixeralfs, San Joaquin-Durixeralfs complex, and the San Joaquin-Xerarents complex. Among these series, the majority of the project site consists of Clear Lake clay. Table 6.11-2 identifies the soils on the project site based on this survey and provides the Land Capability Class ratings associated with these soils when irrigated and non-irrigated. As shown in Table 6.11-2, all non-irrigated soils in the project area are rated Class III or Class IV. When the soils are irrigated, only Consumnes silt loam and Clear Lake clay are rated Class II and the remaining soils are rated Class III or higher.

The NRCS also assigns Storie Index Ratings, which rank soil characteristics according to their suitability for agriculture from Grade 1 soils (80 to 100 rating), which have few or no limitations for agricultural production, to Grade 6 soils (less than a rating of 10), which are not suitable for agriculture. Under this system, soils identified as less than prime can function as prime soils when limitations such as poor drainage, slopes, or soil nutrient deficiencies are partially or completely removed. Storie Index Ratings for the project site soils are also included in Table 6.11-2. Soils graded class 3 are only fairly well suited to intensively grown irrigated crops. Soils in grades 4 and 5 are generally only used for rangeland. Grade 6 soils are generally unsuited for any agricultural purpose. Soils on the project site generally range from grade 2 to grade 4. Index scores for soils on the project site range from 12 to 68; no scores approach the LAFCo prime soils guideline of 80–100 Storie Index score.



Sources: Berryman 2005, FMMP 2002

Important Farmland Map

Exhibit 6.11-1

Table 6.11-2 Agricultural Ratings of Soils on the Greenbriar Project Site				
Name and Characteristics	Land Capability Class		Storie Index	
	Non-irrigated	Irrigated	Rating	Grade
Clear Lake clay Partially drained, 0 to 2 percent slopes, frequently flooded	III	II	25	4
Cosumnes silt loam Partially drained, 0 to 2 percent slopes	III	II	68	2
Durixeralfs Well drained, 0 to 1 percent slopes	IV	IV	12	5
Jacktone clay Drained, 0 to 2 percent slopes	III	III	20	4
San Joaquin-Durixeralfs complex Moderately well drained, 0 to 1 percent slopes	IV	IV	21	4
San Joaquin-Xerarents complex Leveled, 0 to 1 percent slopes	III	III	31	4

Source: Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS), Soil Survey of Sacramento County, California 1993.

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL LESA MODEL

The California Agricultural LESA Model provides lead agencies with an optional methodology to ensure that potentially significant effects on the environment of agricultural land conversions are quantitatively and consistently considered in the environmental review process. This model evaluates measures of soil resource quality, project size, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands. For a given project, the factors are rated, weighted, and combined, resulting in one Land Evaluation (LE) subscore and one Site Assessment (SA) subscore. The subscores are combined to determine a single numeric score. A project's single numeric score becomes the basis for making a determination of a project's potential significance. Table 6.11-3 provides a breakdown of California LESA model scoring thresholds.

Table 6.11-3 California LESA Model Scoring Thresholds	
Total LESA Score	Scoring Decision
0 to 39 Points	Not Considered Significant
40 to 59 Points	Considered Significant only if LE and SA subscores are each greater than or equal to 20 points
60 to 79 Points	Considered Significant unless either LE or SA subscore is less than 20 points
80 to 100 Points	Considered Significant

Source: California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection 2005.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

An impact to agricultural resources is considered significant based on the State CEQA Guidelines if the proposed project would:

- ▶ Convert Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance) as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to nonagricultural use.

- ▶ Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, Williamson Act contract, or result in conflicts with off-site agricultural areas.
- ▶ Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, to nonagricultural use.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT 6.11-1

Conversion of Important Farmlands. *The project would result in the conversion of 518 acres of important farmlands to urban land uses. Conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural use would be a significant impact.*

Based on the FMMP map for Sacramento County, the project site consists of approximately 329 acres Prime Farmland, 68 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 68 acres of Farmland of Local Importance, and approximately 53 acres Unique Farmland as shown in Exhibit 6.11-1. These acreages are based on the estimated coverage of the six soil mapping units occurring on the project site. The NRCS Soil Candidate Listing for Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland lists the soil mapping units that qualify for these designations based on the criteria outlined in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Land Inventory Monitoring Project. The project site supports six soil mapping units within one of these three designations and, therefore, it supports land considered to be of moderately significant to significant agricultural value.

The project site was also analyzed under the California Agricultural LESA model and Storie Index to determine agricultural significance. The project site was calculated to have an LE subscore of 15.49, a Site Assessment (SA) subscore of 30, and a single numeric LESA score of 45.49. Calculations are shown in Appendix N. Scoring thresholds contained in the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Instruction Manual (Department of Conservation 2005) indicate that with this score the project site consists of agricultural land not considered significant. Further, project site soils result in a Storie Index rating between 12 and 68 (Table 6.11-2), which is less than the rating needed by LAFCo to qualify as prime soil (i.e., 80–100).

Although the project site was determined to consist of agricultural land considered insignificant according to the LESA model and Storie Index, the project site has been in agricultural production in the past and development of urban uses would permanently remove 518 acres of Important Farmland, as defined by CEQA and the FMMP from agricultural production. Further, proposed off-site infrastructure facilities (e.g., Meister Way, water and wastewater pipelines) also could result in the temporary or permanent removal of Important Farmland, increasing this impact by 1–2 acres. Because the project would result in the loss of Important Farmland, this impact would be considered *significant*.

Mitigation Measure 6.11-1:(City of Sacramento)

- a. The project applicant shall implement Mitigation Measure 6.6-2.

LAFCo

- b. Prior to annexation the applicant shall implement Mitigation Measure 6.6-2.

Significance After Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 6.11-1 would substantially lessen significant impacts associated with the conversion of farmland on the project site because LAFCo would only approve the conversion of agricultural land where it is consistent with its conservation policies. Further, the project would conserve open space and habitat lands some of which would be used for agricultural practices at a ratio consistent with the mitigation ratio identified in the City/County Joint Vision Plan MOU. Because the conservation easements are purchased for land exhibiting benefits to wildlife, including a combination of habitat, open space, and agricultural lands, the mitigation would not be applied exclusively to agricultural lands. Therefore, this mitigation would only partially offset conversions of farmland associated with the project impacts. In addition, no new farmland would be made available, and the productivity of existing farmland would not be improved as a result of the HCP mitigation. The City and LAFCo do not have any other adopted policies that address farmland conservation. Therefore, full compensation for losses of farmland would not be achieved. Impact 6.11-1 would remain **significant and unavoidable** after mitigation.

IMPACT 6.11-2

Conflict with Agricultural Zoning and Williamson Act Contracts. *The project site is currently not under a Williamson Act contract but the project site is currently zoned for agricultural land uses. The project would rezone the site from an agriculture designation to residential, commercial, and open space designations. Therefore, development of the project site as proposed would not result in any conflicts with Williamson Act contracts or agricultural zoning designations and no impacts would result.*

According to the City of Sacramento General Plan 2025 Technical Background Report (2005), the project site is not identified as a Williamson Act parcel. However, the City of Sacramento identified adjacent parcels located to the north of the project site as Williamson Act parcels (City of Sacramento 2005). The project would change the zoning designation from agriculture to residential, commercial, and open space designations to allow for urban development on the project site. The project would not construct any land uses (e.g., residences, infrastructure, or Meister Way overpass) that would conflict with any existing agricultural contracts or proposed zoning designations. Therefore, **no impact** would occur.

No mitigation measures are required.

IMPACT 6.11-3

Conflict with Off-site Agricultural Operations. *The project site is located adjacent to agricultural operations to the north and development of the project could result in conflicts between adjacent agricultural activities and proposed residential land uses, which could lead to the abandonment of agricultural operations on lands to the north of the project site and could potentially result in the ultimate conversion of this land to non-agricultural land uses. This would be considered a significant impact.*

The project site is located adjacent to existing agricultural operations to the north and west. Agricultural lands to the west would be phased out as part of the approved Metro Air Park project while agricultural operations occurring to the north of the project site would continue into the foreseeable future. Agricultural operations to the north of the project site appear to be in fallow condition or used for grazing activities rather than growing and harvesting irrigated feed or food crops. Aerial spraying of pesticides in these fields is not anticipated to occur. However, use of agricultural lands could change, and the possibility of use of pesticides on these adjacent lands can not be ruled out.

The project would result in the construction of residential uses along the northern boundary of the project site placing them directly across Elkhorn Boulevard approximately 200 feet south of existing agricultural operations. Residential uses are considered a sensitive land use and would require adequate buffers to prevent conflicts with agricultural operations. Policies and regulations

in the City of Sacramento General Plan related to agriculture are aimed at retaining agricultural land uses from converting to urban development and to conserving agricultural land until required for urban growth.

The project would develop urban land uses to the southern edge of Elkhorn Boulevard. Development of these urban land uses along Elkhorn Boulevard would potentially create long-term conflicts with agricultural activities occurring to the north including impacts related to air quality and noise.

The project would develop in two phases with the first phase of development occurring in the northern half of the site starting at Elkhorn Boulevard and proceeding south to the proposed alignment of Meister Way and the second phase occurring in the southern portion of the project site proceeding to I-5. Because the intensity of agricultural activities to the north of the project site could change over time and residential land uses would be constructed in close proximity (i.e., 200 feet) to active agricultural areas, potential conflicts could occur. Over time, these conflicts could lead to the abandonment of agricultural operations north of the site and could potentially result in the ultimate conversion of this land to non-agricultural land uses. This impact is considered *significant*.

Mitigation Measure 6.11-3: (City of Sacramento)

The project applicant shall notify all prospective residents and tenants located within 500 feet of existing agricultural uses north of Elkhorn Boulevard of the types of existing agricultural operations that could occur within close proximity of their homes or businesses. Notification provided to residents and tenants shall include information on the types of land use conflicts that could occur (e.g., noise, dust) and the appropriate means by which to address these conflicts. The City shall approve the content of this notification and this notification shall be included in all residential deed and tenant agreements at the time of sale or lease.

Significance After Mitigation

Implementation of this mitigation measure would notify prospective residents of potential land use conflicts associated with agricultural activities that occur north of the project site; however, it would not remove or substantially reduce potential conflicts. Other than precluding development adjacent to agricultural lands, no other feasible mitigation is available to eliminate potential urban/agricultural land use conflicts. Further, because of the developing nature of the City and the fact that current plans for development to the north of the project site (e.g., North Natomas Joint Vision Plan) are under contemplation by the City, it is unknown whether lands to the north would remain in agricultural production indefinitely. It is reasonable to anticipate that these lands would likely convert to urban development within the next 10 to 20 years. As such, it would not be reasonable for the City to preclude development near these agricultural lands unless it knew that development would not occur. For these reasons, this impact would remain *significant and unavoidable*.