



Chapter 2

Community Character & Design

Introduction

The goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the Community Character and Design Element provide guidance on the form and character of new private development and public improvements in order to ensure the right sense of place and identity for Suisun City.

"Community character" represents how a community looks and feels to residents, workers, and visitors. Community character is greatly influenced by the pattern and fabric of the built environment. "Community design" refers to the principles that create the shape, form, and appearance of districts and neighborhoods. Community design principles and policies are intended to ensure that the community character reflects the vision and goals of residents and decision makers. Suisun City's community design can be viewed as a statement of the community's values and ideally should be a source of community pride and a positive impression for visitors.

Suisun City's character and design affects, and is affected by, issues addressed throughout this General Plan. Land use and community character are indelibly connected in both the built and natural environments (see the Land Use Element). The City's distinctive waterfront draws people from other communities to live and visit,

bringing in tax revenue and jobs and furthering the City's economic development goals (see the Economic Development Element). The approach to community design will, in part, determine the level of mobility and cost of transportation for the City's residents and employees (see the Transportation Element). The design principles provided in this Element are important not only to guide private development, but also planning for community facilities (Community Facilities Element). Community character is also shaped by natural vegetation, landscaping, and open spaces. Incorporating natural vegetation and open space into the built environment provides recreational and aesthetic benefits, preserves water quality, reduces air pollution, and preserves habitat and important cultural amenities (see the Open Space and Conservation Element).

Distinguishing Characteristics

Suisun City's most distinguishing visual features are located in the historic waterfront area. The small blocks and gridded street pattern make for the Downtown Waterfront Area a comfortable and attractive place to pedestrians. Buildings and building entrances are located near the front property lines and oriented to the pedestrian.



Suisun City's most distinguishing visual features are in the Downtown Waterfront Area.

Exhibit 2-1

Downtown Waterfront

The Suisun Marsh and other waterways also help to define the community's aesthetic environment. Nearby hills and mountains provide a beautiful visual backdrop for midrange and distant views available in Suisun City.



Exhibit 2-2

Suisun Marsh and Potrero Hills

Since the City's founding, the community has expanded beyond the Downtown Waterfront Area. Most of the developed areas outside of the Downtown Waterfront Area were built in the 1970s and early 1980s. Unlike the Downtown Waterfront Area, the design of more recently developed areas reflects the needs of motorists, with wider, curvilinear streets and buildings that are more oriented to parking lots and driveways.

The Union Pacific Railroad line serves as the northern boundary for much of Suisun City and largely defines Suisun City's urban interface with Fairfield. The railroad is a great asset for the City, but also a barrier to connectivity with Fairfield. Transit access to Bay Area and Sacramento area destinations via the Capitol Corridor will continue to enhance the local quality of life and economic competitiveness of Suisun City. Through its community design policies, the City can take greater advantage of this important community asset.

Another factor contributing to Suisun City's character is the City's historic and cultural role as transportation center at the interface of rail, water, and transportation routes. The City's historic core is linked to its role in transportation over a century ago. As with the waterfront, however, the historic design elements of the City are limited to the Downtown Waterfront Area, and there is little design relationship between the Downtown Waterfront Area and the remainder of the community.

Related General Plan Guiding Principles

Prior to initiating work on the 2035 General Plan, the City Council directed staff to incorporate a set of Guiding Principles into the Update. Several of these Guiding Principles are relevant to this Element, including the following.

Community Character

Suisun City will strive to enhance the City's authentic, local identity as a vibrant waterfront community.

- Preserve and restore historic resources and utilize design review to ensure compatibility with existing development.
- Focus higher density development and mixed-use projects in areas adjacent to the train station.
- Provide regional leadership by working cooperatively to improve the economy and the quality of life in Solano County.

Downtown

Suisun City will continue to develop the downtown as a vibrant, pedestrian-scaled commercial and entertainment center that reflects our community's unique waterfront character.

- Develop the downtown as the social and cultural heart of the community.
- Provide convenient linkages from the train station and other regional connectors to bring patrons to the downtown.
- Ensure safe and efficient walking, biking, driving, and parking in the downtown.
- Strategically develop the Priority Development Area to provide convenient, attractive housing, shopping, services, and employment in the downtown neighborhood.
- Foster transit-oriented development around the train station.

Neighborhood Vitality

Suisun City will ensure that neighborhoods maintain their character and vitality.

- Maintain complete, well-designed, and walkable neighborhoods, with active gathering places, nearby services, and multi-modal access to jobs, recreation, and other community and regional services.
- Create policies and programs to maintain the character and vitality of neighborhoods.



Goals, Objectives, Policies and Programs

Following are the City's goals, objectives, policies, and programs addressing community character and design.

Distinctive Design and Development

Thoughtful design helps to set a community apart from its neighbors. Good design can enhance the community's identity and represent a source of community pride.

The redevelopment of Suisun City's historic waterfront is one of the most important accomplishments in the community's history. The Downtown now hosts popular civic events and provides a unique, walkable commercial and entertainment district. Other neighborhoods feature primarily single-family residential subdivisions that were developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. There is a pronounced contrast between the small, pedestrian-oriented grid pattern of Downtown and the broad, curvilinear streets in most of the central and eastern portions of the City. The more recently developed areas of the City tend to have wider roads, garages that dominate the façade of homes, and little mixing of land uses.

However, the City has had recent developments that embody a more traditional design approach, with connected street patterns, inviting frontages that feature porches instead of garages, somewhat narrower streets that calm traffic, and more two-story than one-story homes that create more of an "outdoor room" aesthetic for the public street rights-of-way (Exhibit 2-3).



Exhibit 2-3 New Residential Development Incorporating Traditional Design

Goal CCD-1 Maintain and Strengthen the Character of Suisun City through Changes in the Built Environment.

Objective CCD-1 Enforce design policies and standards that ensure a unique sense of place in new developments so that the City's overall design character is improved between present and 2035.

Policy CCD-1.1 The City will review and condition new developments, as necessary, to ensure that development is consistent with the desired future character of the City. This review will take into consideration the size, location, orientation, and height of buildings, as well as proposed signs, fences, drainage, walls, landscaping, and lighting.

Policy CCD-1.2 The City will require the use of durable, high-quality building materials to reduce maintenance and replacement needs and ensure the aesthetic appeal of new developments.

Policy CCD-1.3 The architectural style, exterior materials, and other design features of accessory buildings, including garages, shall complement the primary structure.

Policy CCD-1.4 Large-scale retail projects proposed on sites of more than 20 acres in land area shall provide shops that are of a smaller scale compared to the site's anchor businesses, with separate entrances along the perimeter of the site.



Exhibit 2-4 Retail Development with Shops on the Site Perimeter

Policy CCD-1.5 New developments should locate and size proposed surface parking areas in a way that reduces the visual dominance of parking as viewed from the front property line. In general, street frontages should be composed of building fronts and complementary landscaping, with parking located to the side or rear of the site.

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- Policy CCD-1.6 Proposed buildings of more than 20,000 square feet in gross floor area shall use balconies, bay windows or other window treatments, pitched roofs, arcades, or other architectural features to provide visual interest.*
- Policy CCD-1.7 Residential developments should incorporate porches, stoops, active rooms, and operable windows oriented to the street.*
- Policy CCD-1.8 Multi-family housing should incorporate building forms and architectural features of adjacent single-family homes, as feasible.*
- Policy CCD-1.9 Retail developments shall provide building façade treatments and activities that generate pedestrian interest and comfort, such as windows, canopies, arcades, plazas, and/or outdoor seating areas.*



Picture windows, awnings, outdoor seating areas and other features create pedestrian interest and comfort.

Exhibit 2-5

Frontage Treatments

- Policy CCD-1.10 The City will encourage the use of public art within new development projects.*
- Policy CCD-1.11 The City will require that development projects outside the Downtown incorporate improvements that improve connectivity with the Downtown.*
- Policy CCD-1.12 New developments in the ~~Downtown~~-Waterfront District Specific Plan Area shall incorporate design elements that are complementary with the historic character of this area.*
- Policy CCD-1.13 The City will maintain and enhance a strong pedestrian orientation in the ~~Downtown~~-Waterfront- District Specific Plan Area through the design of buildings, streets, and sidewalks.*

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~~Policy CCD-1.14~~ ~~The City will not allow drive-thru features within the Downtown Waterfront Specific Plan Area or Priority Development Area.~~

Policy CCD-1.1~~4~~⁵ In the ~~Downtown~~ Waterfront ~~District~~ Specific Plan Area and Priority Development Area, the City will encourage buildings that are more vertical than horizontal in relationship to the width of adjacent streets.

Policy CCD-1.1~~5~~⁶ Walls and landscape buffers are not encouraged between residential and nonresidential uses unless there is no feasible alternative through site planning and design to address noise, vibration, light, glare, air pollution, and or other demonstrated physical compatibility issues between adjacent land uses.

Policy CCD-1.1~~6~~⁷ Trash bins, HVAC equipment, and other required mechanical equipment should be located in areas that are accessible for their intended use and screened from view along public rights-of-way.

Policy CCD-1.1~~7~~⁸ Colors and logos associated with a company shall not be a significant architectural element in any new development. Commercial signage should be restrained in size and height and shall not involve any more than one square foot of building signage for each linear foot of building frontage facing a public street.

Program 1-1 Revise Zoning Ordinance.

The City will revise the Zoning Ordinance, consistent with the policy direction included in the 2035 General Plan, to provide updated design guidance for new developments.

Program 1-2 Revise ~~Downtown~~ Waterfront ~~District~~ Specific Plan Design Guidelines.

The City will seek funding to amend the Downtown Waterfront Specific Plan, including an update to the design guidelines.

Program 1-3 Development Guidelines for Architecture and Site Planning.

The City will seek funding to update the Development Guidelines for Architecture and Site Planning to be consistent with the policy of the 2035 General Plan. Updated Design Guidelines could be for the entire City, with a chapter to address the Downtown Waterfront Specific Plan Area, or could be separate from the Downtown Guidelines.

Goal CCD-2 Improve Design Quality in Existing Neighborhoods and Business Districts.

Objective CCD-2 Enhance design and character in existing neighborhoods.

Policy CCD-2.1 The City will support projects in existing developed areas to add and enhance pedestrian connections, public art, natural drainages, shade trees and other landscaping, and make other improvements to the public realm, as needed, to improve the quality of design in existing neighborhoods and business districts.

Policy CCD-2.2 The City should upgrade older developed areas with the planting of shade trees and landscaping along roadways and in surface parking areas, installation of decorative



low walls and fences, street furniture, decorative lighting, and the screening of trash bins and HVAC equipment.

Policy CCD-2.3 *The City will support the construction of new pedestrian bridges, roadways, trails, as appropriate and as funding is available to increase connectivity between Downtown and other areas of Suisun City and between Suisun City and Fairfield. As new connections are created, they should add appropriate landscaping, drainage, and pedestrian and bicycle amenities.*

Program 2-1 Public Improvements to Enhance Existing Developed Areas.

The City will seek grant funding from regional, state, and federal sources, as available, to identify and make priority improvements that enhance the design environment in existing neighborhoods and business districts and help to leverage private investment.

Key Community Gateways

From the west, the first impression one has of Suisun City is shaped by the elevated views of the Downtown Waterfront Area. Along SR 12 from the east, the visual impression of the City is shaped by newer residential and commercial developments. The northern gateways into the Suisun City Planning Area are along Pennsylvania Avenue, Sunset Avenue, and Walters Road from Fairfield. East Tabor Avenue also provides a gateway point into the City's Planning Area. Suisun City has the opportunity to create distinctive design environments in these areas to welcome people and distinguish the City from its neighbors. Exhibit 2-6 illustrates the locations of Key Community Gateways.

Goal CCD-3 Increase the Visual Attractiveness of Key Community Gateways.

Objective CCD-3 **Provide a visual environment at important gateways that gives visitors an immediate positive impression of Suisun City.**

Policy CCD-3.1 *Key Community Gateways include SR 12 east of the City limits near the future Walters Road extension, Sunset Avenue at the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, Walters Road between Tabor Avenue and Prosperity Lane, and SR 12 between Ledgewood Creek and the overpass.*

Policy CCD-3.2 *Key Community Gateways should provide distinctive entrances to Suisun City that enhance the image of, and reflect the natural environment, history, culture, and identity of the community.*

Policy CCD-3.3 *Areas adjacent to, and visible from Key Community Gateways should provide an attractive streetscape environment; preserve healthy native vegetation and add new landscaping to enhance aesthetics; and frame views of waterways and surrounding hills and mountains, where possible.*

Policy CCD-3.4 *The City will support construction of attractive civic landmarks, public artwork, and other public improvements in areas near Key Community Gateways.*

- Policy CCD-3.5 New private developments shall provide attractive building façades and locate surface parking in a way that reduces the visual dominance in areas adjacent to, and visible from Key Community Gateways.*
- Policy CCD-3.6 The City will support the installation of attractive signage and lighting in Key Community Gateways that directs visitors to the Downtown, parks, schools, and other important civic areas.*

Program 3-1 Design Guidelines for Key Community Gateways.

The City will prepare and implement design guidelines for Key Community Gateways, consistent with General Plan policy. This will include landscaping requirements, building materials and orientation, lighting, signage, and other important physical elements of development. These guidelines should be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance or Citywide design guidelines.

Streetscapes

Like entryways and gateways, streetscapes contribute greatly to a visitor's visual impression of a city. Since streets are the most abundant of public spaces and provide the major connections between places in Suisun City, they help to define the City's sense of place. The layout and quality of the streetscape environment substantially affects the quality of interactions with a community. The Circulation Element provides guidance for the circulation network itself, but the Community Character and Design Element focuses on the improvement of the character of the City's streetscapes and contributing to the local quality of life. High-quality streetscapes will improve the community character of Suisun City and make travel through the City more pleasant and convenient for all residents, business owners, and visitors.

Goal CCD-4 Design Streetscapes to Create Attractive and Comfortable Spaces for People.

Objective CCD-4 Provide a comfortable visual environment along streetscapes throughout the community.

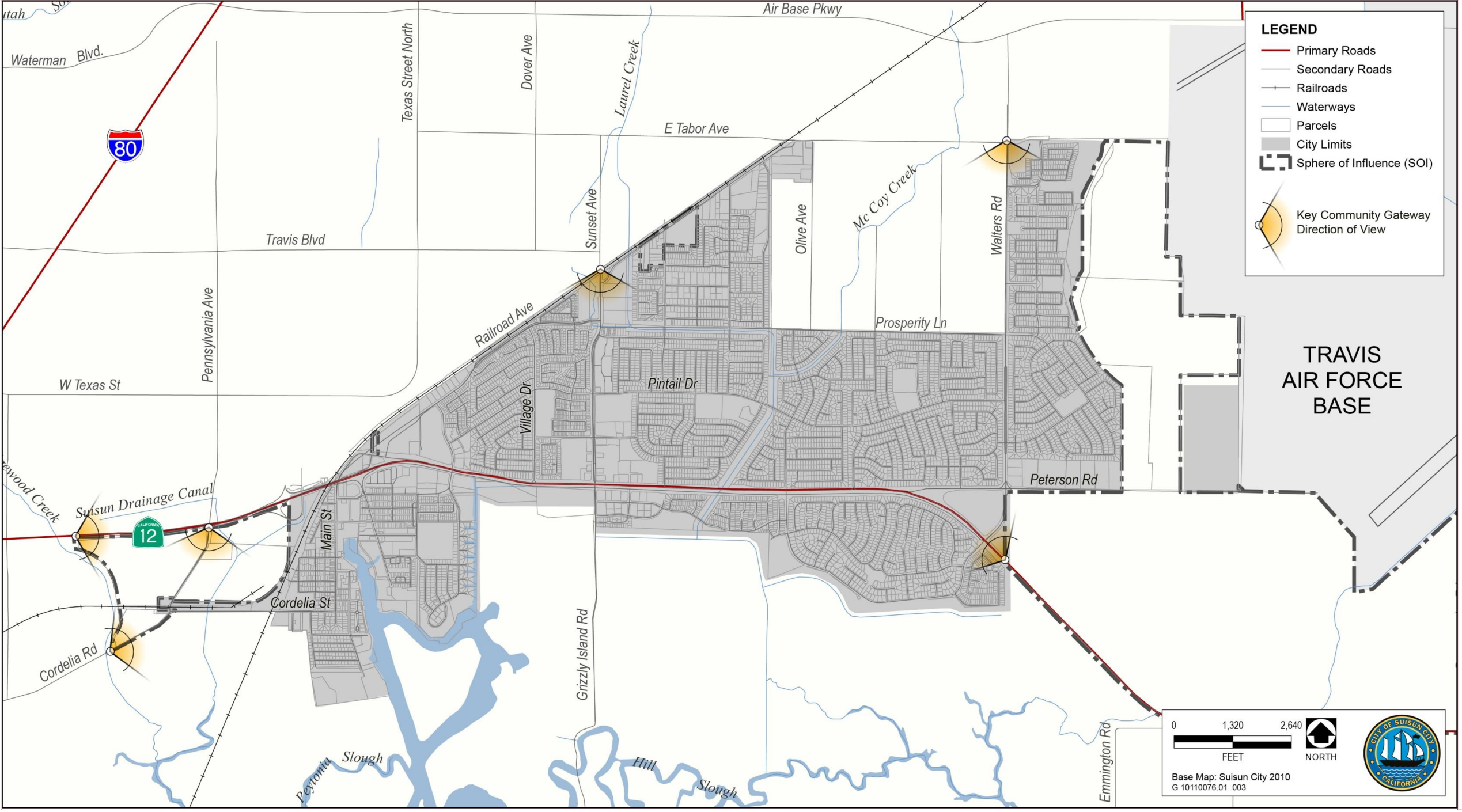
- Policy CCD-4.1 New streets shall provide comfortable travel areas for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers to facilitate multi-modal travel for people of all ages.*
- Policy CCD-4.2 New developments shall provide connecting streets with short blocks that create a pedestrian-scale environment.*
- Policy CCD-4.3 New developments shall provide direct access routes to buildings from sidewalks and parking areas for pedestrians and bicyclists.*
- Policy CCD-4.4 The City will require visually attractive streetscapes with street trees, planting strips, attractive transit shelters, benches, pedestrian-scale streetlights in appropriate locations, and landscaping along fences and low walls, if present.*
- Policy CCD-4.5 New developments shall provide for trees at an average frequency of one every 20 feet on center along City streets.*

C O M M U N I T Y C H A R A C T E R A N D D E S I G N



Policy CCD-4.6 Redevelopment projects should incorporate new trees into project design, as feasible.

Policy CCD-4.7 The City will add street trees in existing developed areas, as feasible, with the goal of a complete street tree canopy.



Commented [JK1]: How about a gateway coming from the south up the channel?

Source: AECOM 2011
Exhibit 2-6 **Key Community Gateways**

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Exhibit 2-7

Street Furniture in High Pedestrian Activity Area

- Policy CCD-4.8 New utilities shall be installed underground. Aboveground utilities along public rights-of-way should be undergrounded, as feasible.*
- Policy CCD-4.9 Benches, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, bus shelters, signage, and other improvements should be located along sidewalks and designed to enhance the visual environment and provide a welcoming place for pedestrians.*
- Policy CCD-4.10 The City will work with Caltrans to install aesthetic and functional improvements along the SR 12 corridor, including landscaping, trees, pedestrian and bicycle pathways, and noise attenuation improvements.*
- Policy CCD-4.11 The City will support efforts to reduce the visual impact of surface parking lots on the character of streetscapes.*

Program 4-1

Street Tree Planting Program in Redevelopment Areas

The City will identify funding to support planting street trees in the Downtown Waterfront Specific Plan Area and other existing developed

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- 1) **Northwest Downtown.** The Northwest Downtown Opportunity Area is located in the northwestern portion of the Downtown area. This Opportunity Area includes Suisun City's train station.
- 2) **Northeast Downtown.** The Northeast Downtown Opportunity Area is located north and northeast of Downtown. Much of the area is bordered by the railroad, and the area has easy access to SR 12.
- 3) **Downtown Marina.** The Downtown Marina area is located at the southern end of the Downtown area directly adjacent to the water on the eastern side of Suisun Slough.
- 4) **South Sunset Avenue.** This area is near the intersection of SR 12 and Sunset Avenue. Part is located south of SR 12 between existing residential developments, and part is located on an existing shopping center north of the highway.
- 5) **North Sunset Avenue.** The North Sunset Avenue Opportunity Area is located in the northern central portion of the City, east of Sunset Avenue and directly south of the railroad.

Development of these Opportunity Areas could involve new uses on vacant or underutilized properties, as well as rehabilitation and renovation of existing structures and properties. The City's intent is to promote compact, mixed-use development in these Opportunity Areas in order to improve the overall design character, provide additional revenue to the City, add jobs, and offer new housing opportunities. Development in the Opportunity Areas should use design approaches that create vibrant and attractive places to live and do business.

Goal CCD-5 Develop Opportunity Areas to Enhance the City's Character

Objective CCD-5 Improve the overall design character of each of the Opportunity Areas during General Plan buildout.

Policy CCD-5.1 The City will encourage – through entitlement streamlining, flexibility in development standards, fee structures, and other incentives – infill development of vacant or underutilized properties within Opportunity Areas.

Policy CCD-5.2 The City will encourage creative design approaches, where necessary, to allow for mixed-use development within Opportunity Areas.

Policy CCD-5.3 The City will encourage the reuse of buildings of historical or architectural value in Opportunity Areas.

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could be constructed adjacent to Sunset Avenue. New buildings should be placed close to the front property line throughout the South Sunset Avenue Opportunity Area, both north and south of SR 12.

Policy CCD-5.7

The City encourages attractive building façades constructed near the front property line in the North Sunset Avenue Opportunity Area in areas visible from this Key Community Gateway. Site planning and building design should reduce exposure to air pollutants and noise associated with the railroad and SR 12 for future residents.

Program 5-1

Facilitate Development of Opportunity Areas

The City will proactively coordinate with property owners to facilitate development of Opportunity Areas in a way that is consistent with the 2035 General Plan. As a part of this program, the City will investigate regional, state, and federal funding that may be available to make public realm improvements, increase infrastructure capacity, and rehabilitate and reuse of buildings of historical or architectural value.

Views and Visual Access

Suisun City's unique waterfront location and proximity to Suisun Marsh, the Vaca Mountains, Cement Hill, and the Coastal Range, provide for scenic views (see Exhibits 2-8 and 2-9). The City has the opportunity during buildout of the 2035 General Plan to preserve and enhance scenic views in the context of development and conservation efforts.

The City does not necessarily consider changes to the existing visual character through urban development to be an adverse change. In fact, the City's built environment, such as the historic architecture around the Downtown Waterfront Area, makes a very important and positive contribution to the community's visual character. However, new development can be designed with existing scenic views in mind and can even increase public access to important aesthetic resources.

Thoughtful site planning and design can provide residents with surveillance, territorial control, and community policing. The more people and "eyes on the street," the more that crime can be prevented through community design.

Goal CCD-6 Preserve and Enhance Scenic Views in Suisun City.

Objective CCD-6 Increase visual access to the Suisun Marsh, the Coastal Range, Cement Hill,

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Policy CCD-6.3 New developments should be designed, where feasible, to frame views of locally important scenic resources, by providing direct lines of sight along public rights-of-way and open space in areas where these features are prominently visible.



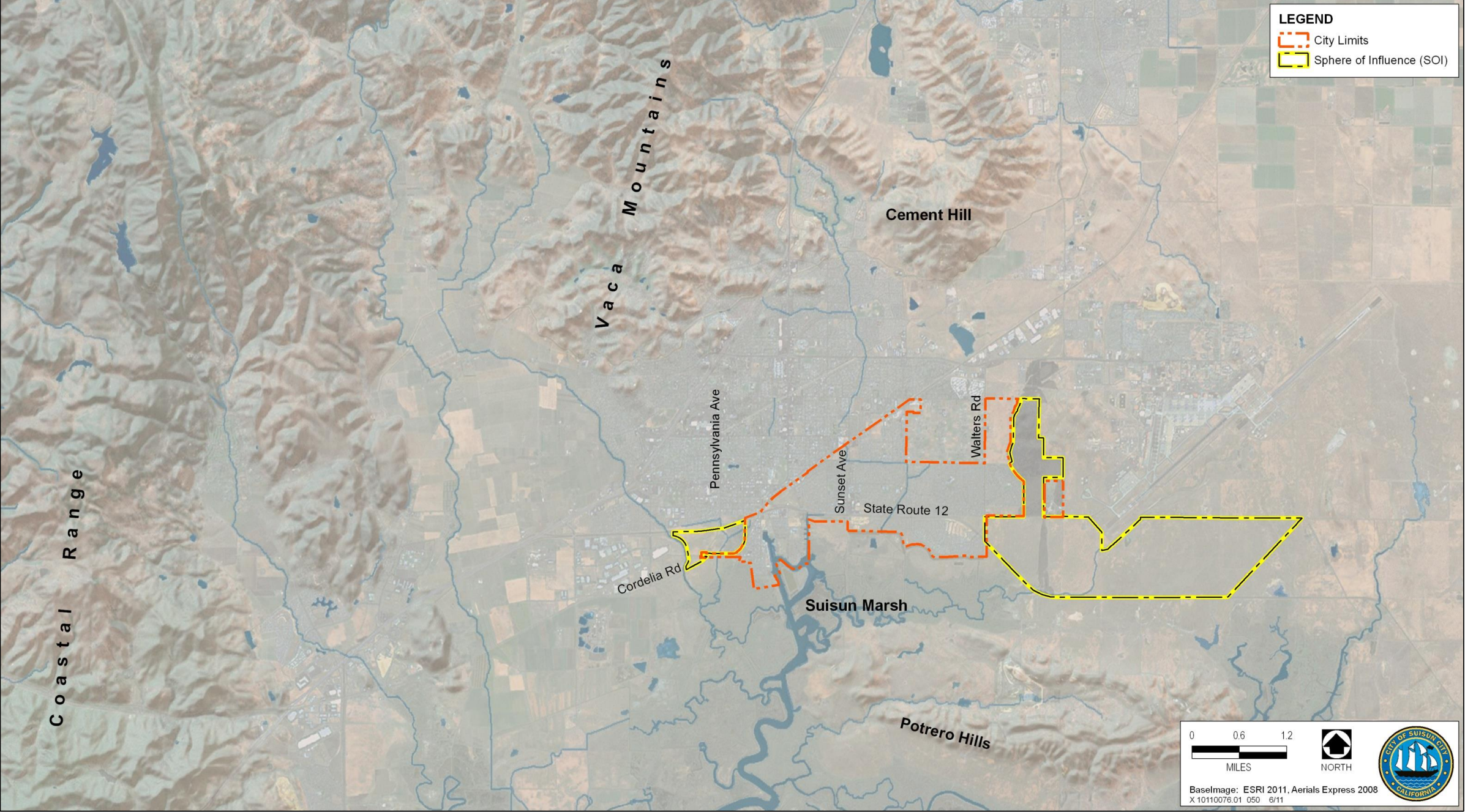
Exhibit 2-8

Suisun City's Unique and Scenic Waterfront

Policy CCD-6.4 The City will not consider urban development that is not consistent with the General Plan to represent a degradation of visual character for the purpose of environmental impact analysis.

Policy CCD-6.5 The City will preserve and enhance visual connections to Suisun Marsh, including the development of environmentally-sensitive recreational facilities, as funding is available.

Goal CCD-7 Promote casual surveillance of public and semi-public spaces.



Source: Suisun City 2011
Exhibit 2-9

Scenic Resources



Light and Glare

Nighttime lighting sources include security lighting on buildings, street lighting, lighting for parking areas, lighting for sports fields, vehicle headlights, and other sources, which can affect nearby properties directly and indirectly contribute to skyglow and light pollution. Lighting is needed to provide for security and allow mobility and activities at night. However, policy guidance is also needed to ensure that lighting used in new development is attractive, and that light and glare associated with existing and proposed development does not create safety or aesthetic problems.

Goal CCD-8 Avoid light spillage and adverse effects of glare.

Objective CCD-8 Incorporate design approaches, as necessary, to provide attractive lighting and ensure that new developments do not create significant effects related to light or glare.

Policy CCD-8.1 Low, pedestrian-scaled, ornamental lighting should be emphasized in new developments in order to avoid adverse effects on adjacent uses.

Policy CCD-8.2 New developments shall use attractive lighting that is complementary to the design of proposed structures.

Policy CCD-8.4 Light fixtures shall aim light sources downward and provide shielding to prevent glare and reflection.

Policy CCD-8.5 Permanent lighting cannot blink, flash, or be of unusually high intensity or brightness. Lighting standards shall avoid the use of harsh mercury vapor, low-pressure sodium, or fluorescent bulbs for lighting of public areas or for lighting within residential neighborhoods.

Policy CCD-8.6 New developments shall not include reflective surfaces that could cast glare toward pedestrians, bicyclists, or motorists. Bare metallic surfaces, such as pipes, vents, and light fixtures shall be painted to minimize reflectance.

Policy CCD-8.7 Sports lighting shall be located and designed to direct lighting to playfields and avoid light spillage outside of the property.

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