

[kqed.org](https://www.kqed.org)

# Suisun City Proposes Annexing Most of California Forever's New City

*Adhiti Bandlamudi*

9–12 minutes

---

Jun 9

Failed to save article

Please try again



Wind turbines in Solano County outside of Suisun City on May 13, 2025. Suisun City's recent proposal to annex a portion of California Forever's land is raising questions from residents as to whether they will have a say in whether the new city gets built. *(Beth LaBerge/KQED)*

For months, Suisun City officials have been considering whether to [annex](#)

[a piece of California Forever's land](#), where the company has [proposed building a new city](#) from farmland. Now, Suisun City staff are back with a plan for nearly the whole pie.

According to [city documents](#) released Friday, staff are recommending the city annex almost 23,000 acres of company-owned land, largely located where California Forever wants to build its walkable city. The move comes nearly a year after the company [pulled an initiative](#) seeking voter approval for the project from the November 2024 ballot.

The city's plan looks strikingly similar to what the [company proposed](#) last year, when it promised to bring thousands of new homes and jobs to Solano County. But the project faced backlash from county residents and local leaders, who called for more information and were skeptical of the company's [myriad](#) "guarantees," including for a [sports complex](#) and a [water park](#).

Last July, California Forever CEO Jan Sramek said he would bring the initiative back to voters in 2026 after completing an environmental impact report and ironing out a development agreement with the county. But now that Suisun City officials want to incorporate California Forever's massive proposed development into their city, it is unclear whether voters will get a say in what gets built in their county.

The Suisun City Council [is scheduled to vote](#) Tuesday on a reimbursement agreement with California Forever that would allow the city to continue exploring the proposal. California Forever declined to comment on that agreement.





*A sign says, 'Welcome to Suisun City' on Highway 12 in Suisun City on May 13, 2025. (Beth LaBerge/KQED)*

Sadie Wilson, director of planning and research at the Greenbelt Alliance and a member of the group Solano Together, said the opportunity for public engagement is an important one for a project of this size and questioned whether the annexation process would usurp voters' ability to weigh in.

"While we might see what's going on in the process from an advocacy or public standpoint, there aren't the same ways to actually have your voice heard," she said.

But Suisun City Manager Bret Prebula rejected that idea.

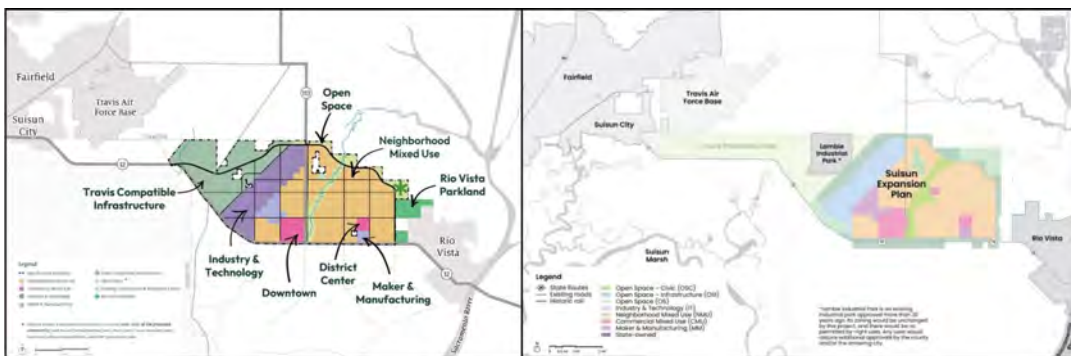
"Is this a trick that someone's trying to do backdoor things? The answer is no," he said. "Why is this beneficial? Because [California Forever gets] a governance and a culture from cities that is hard to do when you just do master-planned communities without it."

Prebula said the development could also benefit Suisun City, which has faced a structural budget deficit for years.

"Some don't want any expansion, but that's unrealistic in our state," he said. "We're gonna have this balance that happens between the need for commercial viability, jobs and housing stock expansion that will benefit the state, that will benefit the region, and it'll benefit the environment, too, because we're going to be able to keep people closer to their families [and] jobs here."

Of the 22,873 acres Suisun City wants to incorporate, about a quarter of the land would be preserved as a buffer zone between the new development and nearby Travis Air Force Base. Two-thirds of the

annexed land would be reserved for new neighborhoods, office and commercial buildings and open space, with another 1,410 acres for an industrial park.



*Suisun City's annexation plans (right) look very similar to what California Forever proposed (left) for its new city last year. City staff are considering annexing nearly 23,000 acres of company-owned land and setting aside two-thirds of it for new homes, office and commercial space and open space. (Courtesy of California Forever, City of Suisun City)*

With a [large share of county residents](#) currently commuting outside the county for work, Suisun City Mayor Alma Hernandez called the prospect of adding jobs and housing a “generational opportunity that will most likely never come again.”

She said the proposal before the council is just the first step in a lengthy public process to determine what will be best for both her city and Rio Vista, which neighbors Suisun City and is also exploring annexing some of the company's land. In April, [the two cities agreed to work together](#) as both consider expanding their respective boundaries.

“Our position at this time is really, this is a starting point,” she said. “We’re very clear about it for ourselves: How do you build a community and expand in the right way? That is our position.”

Rio Vista Mayor Edwin Okamura said he could not comment on his city's progress in those discussions or on Suisun City's plans because he and other officials were in the middle of negotiations themselves.





After the Suisun City Council approves the reimbursement agreement, it will enter into an [extensive process](#) which can take years — sometimes a decade — to complete. The city and developer will have to compile multiple reports detailing the financial burdens of annexing the land, what public services and infrastructure are needed to support it, and how the city will manage it. The proposal will have to be compliant with the California Environmental Quality Act and reviewed for possible environmental impacts.

Ultimately, the decision of whether Suisun City should annex that land will lie in the hands of the Solano Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), an independent body of elected and appointed officials from across the county.

Alex Schafran, a land use expert who has raised questions about California Forever's project, said the company pursuing its new city through annexation could be “a less bad way” of getting a new development approved than through a ballot initiative. He said new cities should be built through conversation and negotiation with multiple stakeholders, not a yes or no vote.

“Where this thing belongs is being negotiated and debated between agencies, public entities, private entities,” Schafran said. “We have a system that is designed to do governance, and now it is in that system, and that’s where it should be.”

Whether the proposal will get through the system is another matter entirely. As part of the annexation process, Suisun City will have to meet with county officials to hear what they think of the plan and decide how both municipalities will share the tax revenue generated there.



*The intersection of Highway 12 and Highway 113 in Solano County outside of Suisun City on May 13, 2025. (Beth LaBerge/KQED)*

County Administrator Bill Emlen did not immediately respond to KQED's request for comment, but he has previously said a city annexing large swaths of land in unincorporated Solano County would not align with the county's current general plan.

Suisun City Councilmember Princess Washington, a staunch critic of the company and its project, said the large scope of the annexation is why she has consistently voted against efforts to explore it. She wants the city to first focus on building within its existing borders before pursuing development outside of it.

Last week, California Forever [offered to purchase \\$1.5 million](#) worth of city-owned land in Suisun City's downtown area. If the city accepts that offer, it would help close its [budget shortfall of between \\$1.3 million and \\$1.8 million](#). The offer, not contingent on the annexation talks, also

included a \$55,000 grant to support city-sponsored entertainment events that were slated to be cancelled because of the deficit.

Washington said she welcomed those proposals because they are aligned with what she wants for her city, but remains skeptical about the annexation and whether it will solve the structural deficit.



“That’s my hesitation as well with the annexation — not just the sheer landmass, but the amount of time and whether or not it’ll pencil out because there are studies that show just because you grow out does not mean that you solve your structural deficits or you solve your fiscal problems,” she said. “We can want to grow, but do we actually need to?”

But she noted that the city had been in this position when it had the opportunity to annex land that later became home to the Jelly Belly Factory and a Budweiser brewery, before [Fairfield annexed](#) it.

“We could have had that factory and industry, and we would have been in a better position, at least on paper. So I understand the need to explore,” she said. “I’m curious to see how it happens. I mean, this is going to really be the greatest political exercise in California history.”

But Wilson said the same issues her organization had with California

Forever's original plan still remain. Developing on farmland has environmental impacts that cannot be avoided, she said.

"The environmental impacts of developing in this area near the delta resources, near the Jepson Prairie, I think those [concerns are] still there," she said. "Paving over our farmland and unincorporated areas is something we can never get back."

Prebula does not see it that way. He said whatever is ultimately built on the unincorporated land would have to be balanced between protecting the environment and allowing responsible growth. And that something has to be done about the state's dire housing shortage.

"We have not done well, and it's largely because I think we have been stuck on these archaic policies and ways of operating," he said. "We could be a way to show the state: Here's how you expand to an older city and make it lift up itself and the region at the same time."

To learn more about how we use your information, please read our [privacy policy](#).

✓ **Signed up.**