



County of Santa Cruz

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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SUSAN MAURIELLO, J.D., COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

April 9, 2015

AGENDA: April 21, 2015

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, California 95060

PARKS, RECREATION, AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION, AND OPEN SPACE PROJECT STATUS REPORT

Dear Members of the Board:

This report is in fulfillment of the Board's request for an update on this agenda regarding the Open Space Project authorized by the Board in 2014. The Open Space Project was approved by the Board of Supervisors to be undertaken in 2015, with the goal being for the Board to be able to make decisions near the end of the calendar year as to whether or not to pursue the establishment of an Open Space District at a future date.

As indicated in the Open Space Project – Status Report of February 24, 2015, the effort underway now has two basic components: 1) Research concerning use of existing state law for the establishment of an Open Space District; Collection of existing Conservation and Open Space elements of County and City (four) General Plans; Collection of Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities elements; Collection of existing Capital Improvement Plans of the County and City (four); Identification of resources that can assist in a thorough development of sufficient information for a Board of Supervisors' decision at a later date; and, 2) Constructing the framework for a series of meetings in supervisorial districts, cities, and appropriate special districts.

Existing State Law. In general, the California Public Resources Code (Sections 5500-5595) establishes the legal framework for Open Space Districts (OSD). OSD's can come into existence through one of two methods: 1) An act of the Legislature, amending the General Law of 1939; or, 2) Proceeding through the Local Agency Formation Commission pursuant to the Knox-Nisbet Act of 1963. In either event, a vote of the electorate of the proposed OSD is required in order for the OSD to come alive. A decision regarding which path to take is not likely to come before the Board until some time near the end of the calendar year.

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Conservation and Open Space Elements of General Plans. The OSD Project has assembled Conservation and Open Space Elements of the County's General Plan, and the Planning Department is reaching out to Santa Cruz, Capitola, Watsonville and Scotts Valley to provide their corresponding elements. In the County's Conservation and Open Space Element, it is stated: "The goals, objectives, policies and programs of this chapter recognize the need to balance conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources with their productive use and stewardship." This policy will be respected in the development of any future OSD, and will include the sentiments of the Board as expressed in the Working Lands resolution adopted by the Board in April 2015.

Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities Elements of General Plans. The OSD Project has assembled Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities Elements of the Santa Cruz County General Plan, and the Planning Department is providing the corresponding elements from the four cities in Santa Cruz County. The County's Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities element states in part: "The Parks and Recreation and Public Facilities Element is an optional element under State Planning law which combines numerous topics all related to providing Community facilities to support existing and future populations."

Capital Improvement Plan. The Board of Supervisors approved the Santa Cruz County Final Capital Improvement Program 2014-15 in December of 2014. That CIP is the combined word of the departments of Planning, Public Works, and Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services. The project is overseen by the County Administrative Office. The CIP is presented by Planning Area, and, thus, will serve as a key document for community meetings.

Additional Resources. In order to provide the Board of Supervisors with the most comprehensive data and information with which to make subsequent decisions, the OSD Project has assembled additional resources. Local vendors will be utilized to provide information concerning community needs for parks, recreation, agricultural conservation, and open space. They will also assist in assessing in a comprehensive manner, the capacity for increasing funding for high priority projects.

Community Meetings. Based on discussions with members of the Board of Supervisors, the Mayors of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley and Watsonville, and with the County Administrative Officer and the four City Managers, there seems to be a strong interest in holding community meetings to explore the notion of adding financial resources to local governments' efforts to provide parks, recreation, and open space. Further work will be done to identify times, dates and locations for such community meetings. At this time, the framework of community meetings on this topic would include the following:

Four Corners. Rather than hold community meetings that are purely aspirational in nature, local elected officials seems to be inclined towards meetings that use existing policy documents and actions for the framework. More specifically, using the relevant sections of the documents noted above, in addition to the Conservation Blueprint (Land Trust of Santa Cruz County) and Healthy Lands & Healthy Economies: Natures Value in Santa Cruz County (Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County), will help frame the discussion of parks, recreation, agricultural conservation, and open space.

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Notice of Community Meetings. In addition to legal meeting requirements, the community meetings would be noticed through local media outlets, social media, and limited advertising. Local elected officials will be encouraged to utilize any lists that they may have to increase turnout. Meetings would be held in each supervisorial district, the four cities, and, potentially, in each of the four existing autonomous park districts (Boulder Creek, Alba Road, La Selva Beach, and Opal Cliffs).

Record of Meetings. A variety of methods may be used to capture the general sentiments and specific issues expressed at the community meetings. Forms will be designed to allow individual participants to record issues and projects that are important to them. Extensive note-taking will be conducted. Together with other methods of capturing community wishes, these methods will be concentrated into a “living document” that will be available on a to-be-established link on the Santa Cruz County Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Cultural Services website.

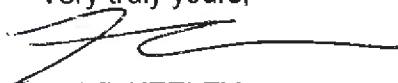
Timing of Meetings. Local elected officials, and especially members of the Board of Supervisors have expressed a desire to hold community meetings when the largest number of residents can attend. Thus, community meetings will be scheduled during week evenings, and when school is in session (in other words, not during summer school vacation). Assuming that the Mayors would feel similarly, it is likely that not more than a couple of meetings will take place before June, and most will be compressed into the September, October, November timeframe.

Based on conversations with Supervisors and Mayors, it seems that the Board of Supervisors may want to take two actions at this time. First, a strong sentiment has been expressed that top priority be given to focusing on funding capital improvements to existing public park lands, and agricultural conservation, and that lower priority be given to acquiring additional park, open space, and habitat lands. Second, there is a very strong sentiment among local elected officials that any new or expanded entity should not have eminent domain powers.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Board of Supervisors take the following action:

1. Accept and File this Status Report;
2. Direct the County Administrative Officer to continue overseeing the work of the Project Convener, with emphasis on conducting community meetings as set forth in this Status Report;
3. Rename the Open Space Project as follows: Parks, Recreation, Agricultural Conservation and Open Space Project; and,
4. Establish as policy that any entity that is formed as a result of the Parks, Recreation, Agricultural Conservation and Open Space Project, not have eminent domain powers.

Very truly yours,



FRED KEELEY
Project Convener



SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
County Administrative Officer