



## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 7/8/2025

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**To:** Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District  
**Department or Agency Name(s):** Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District  
**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Misti Arias, 707-565-7360; Stephanie Tavares, 707-565-7362  
**Vote Requirement:** Majority  
**Supervisory District(s):** Second

**Title:**

Helen Putnam Extension Matching Grant Project

**Recommended Action:**

Adopt a resolution of the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District:

- A. Approving a \$1,450,000 Community Spaces Matching Grant to Earth Island Institute for the Helen Putnam Regional Park Extension Project;
- B. Determining that the project is consistent with (1) the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 and (2) the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's Expenditure Plan;
- C. Authorizing the President of the Board of Directors to execute a Conservation Easement and a Recreation Conservation Covenant;
- D. Authorizing the General Manager to execute a Matching Grant Agreement with Earth Island Institute;
- E. Making findings as a responsible agency under the California Environmental Quality Act and directing the filing of a Notice of Determination;
- F. Consenting to the recordation of an irrevocable offer of dedication in favor of Ag + Open Space pursuant to Public Resources Code §5565.5;
- G. Authorizing the General Manager to make technical, non-substantive changes in the Conservation Easement, Recreation Conservation Covenant, Offer of Dedication, Matching Grant Agreement, and other closing documents and to execute any other documents necessary to complete this transaction, in consultation with County Counsel;
- H. Authorizing recordation of all instruments necessary to accomplish the transaction, and directing the General Manager, in consultation with County Counsel, to take all other actions necessary or appropriate to complete this transaction; and
- I. Dedicating the conservation easement to open space purposes pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5540.

**Executive Summary:**

During the 2018 and 2022 Community Spaces Matching Grant Program ("Community Spaces") cycles, the Board of Directors for the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District ("Ag + Open Space") accepted matching grant applications for the acquisition of land and development of an expansion to Helen Putnam Regional Park in Petaluma.

Staff recommend combining the two awards into a \$1,450,000 Matching Grant Agreement for the Helen Putnam Extension Project with Earth Island Institute, acting as fiscal sponsor for the community group known as the Kelly Creek Protection Project. The project, which includes the proposed Ag + Open Space grant and Earth Island Institute match funds of \$1,450,000, will enable development of a park and trail system as well as habitat restoration on 47.78 acres currently owned by Earth Island Institute. Following the development of park amenities, Earth Island Institute plans to transfer the property to Sonoma County Regional Parks as an expansion to Helen Putnam Regional Park.

The City of Petaluma is expected to issue final permits for park development and construction of the park improvements. The project is expected to be completed by December 2027. To protect Ag + Open Space's investment and as a condition of funding, Ag + Open Space will receive a conservation easement that will ensure that the conservation values of the Property will be preserved in perpetuity. Ag + Open Space will also receive a recreation covenant to ensure that the property remains open to the public in perpetuity.

Regional Parks has agreed to accept this property following the construction of park improvements and is working in tandem with the Kelly Creek Protection Project to complete improvements and to operate and maintain the park expansion.

**Discussion:**

Ag + Open Space is proposing to execute a \$1,450,000 Matching Grant Agreement with Earth Island Institute, acting as fiscal sponsor for the community group known as the Kelly Creek Protection Project, for development of a 47.78-acre park and connector trail adjacent to Helen Putnam Regional Park in Petaluma, which will be protected in perpetuity and made available for public recreational access via a conservation easement and recreation conservation covenant enforceable by Ag + Open Space.

In the 2018 Community Spaces cycle, the Board accepted a grant application for \$1 million from Earth Island Institute to fund the purchase of approximately 47 acres of the Scott Ranch property (the "Property") for transfer to Sonoma County Regional Parks as an expansion to Helen Putnam Regional Park. In the 2022 MGP grant cycle, the Board accepted an additional Community Spaces grant application for \$450,000 for habitat restoration and park and trail development on the Property. These applications are now combined into one park development grant due to the successful completion of the acquisition phase of the Project without Ag + Open Space funds.

Purchase of the Property, completed in August 2024, was enabled by an agreement between the former owner and developer, Davidon Homes, and the current owner, Earth Island Institute. The City's approval of the Scott Ranch development, including the park development, is conditioned upon the eventual transfer of the property to Sonoma County Regional Parks. Approximately 25.73 acres of the Property is dedicated to habitat protection under a US Fish and Wildlife Service conservation easement ("USFWS Easement"), as mitigation for the Scott Ranch development. As the conservation values of this area will be protected in perpetuity by the USFWS Easement, an Ag + Open Space conservation easement protecting the same land would not offer any additional public benefit. Thus, the Ag + Open Space Conservation Easement, Recreation Covenant, and associated Community Spaces grant funds will apply only to the 22.05-acre remainder portion of the Property (the "Ag + Open Space CE Area").

Ag + Open Space's grant will contribute \$1,450,000 towards improvements including habitat restoration, a 0.7-

mile trail connecting the Property to Helen Putnam Regional Park, and development of specified park features, including parking lots, a bathroom, trails, and related utilities. Consistent with established Ag + Open Space policy, Ag + Open Space's funds will not be used for work on the 25.73 acres subject to the USFWS Easement or to satisfy any mitigation requirements or other City conditions of approval for the development. The \$1,450,000 in matching funds to be provided by Earth Island Institute will cover costs associated with restoration of the entire 47.78-acre parcel and additional park development within the Ag + Open Space CE Area. The grant and matching funds will be utilized on improvements that are not required as a condition of the City's approval of the Scott Ranch development project.

### **Conservation Easement and Recreation Covenant**

Ag + Open Space will receive, as a condition of the Community Spaces grant, a conservation easement and recreation conservation covenant protecting the Ag + Open Space CE Area. Ag + Open Space's conservation easement will protect the natural resource, scenic, urban open space, and recreational and educational resources in the Ag + Open Space CE Area in perpetuity. Together, the USFWS Easement and Ag + Open Space's conservation easement will protect the entire 47.78-acre Property in perpetuity, consistent with the original intentions of the 2018 and 2022 Community Spaces applications.

To facilitate good title to Ag + Open Space's conservation easement, a deed restriction that was placed upon the Property by the City of Petaluma as a condition of approval for the development will be terminated and released by the City prior to recordation of Ag + Open Space's conservation easement.

The recreation covenant will ensure that the Ag + Open Space CE Area remains open to the public in perpetuity.

### **Project Match and Timeframe**

As required under the applicable Community Spaces Matching Grant Program Guidelines and consistent with the underlying grant applications, the grantee must provide a match of \$1,450,000, which will be used to complete permitting, design work, and trail and park construction in the Ag + Open Space CE Area and habitat restoration in both the USFWS Easement area and the Ag + Open Space CE Area. No more than \$725,000 (50% of the total Matching Funds) may be spent on property operations and maintenance costs and no more than \$362,500 (25% of the total Matching Funds) may be spent on project management expenses. These terms and others are described in the attached Matching Grant Agreement.

All grant and match funds must be expended no later than December 13, 2027, and the park must be opened to the public within 3 years of the recordation of the recreation covenant.

### **Vital Lands Initiative**

Conserving this Property meets multiple objectives described in the Vital Lands Initiative as follows:

- **Community Identity:** Protect open lands that surround and differentiate the County's urban areas and contribute to the unique scenic character of the County;
- **Healthy Communities:** Protect open space and publicly accessible lands in and near cities and communities and connect people with protected lands;

- Water: Protect natural lands and aquatic habitats that support sustainable aquatic ecosystems and water resources; and
- Wildlands: Protect natural lands and terrestrial habitats that support plants, wildlife, and biodiversity.

### **Conformance with Adopted Plans**

#### Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan

The grant is consistent with Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan, specifically regarding other open space projects, including urban open space and recreation projects within and near incorporated areas and other urbanized areas of the County.

#### City of Petaluma General Plan

On February 27, 2023, the City of Petaluma's City Council determined that the Helen Putnam Extension Project was consistent with the City's General Plan, as amended. Petaluma's 2025 General Plan now explicitly recognizes the unique character of Scott Ranch and calls for preserving it for park and open space purposes.

### **Fair Market Value Determination**

Ag + Open Space's conservation easement and recreation covenant are interests in real property being acquired by Ag + Open Space. Therefore, the Fiscal Oversight Commission was asked to determine that Ag + Open Space is not paying more or receiving less than fair market value for these interests. The Earth Island Institute is conveying the conservation easement and recreation covenant to Ag + Open Space as a condition to receiving Community Spaces Matching Grant funds for recreational development of the Property. Ag + Open Space is thus not incurring any expense for the acquisition of either the conservation easement or the recreation covenant. This item was heard by the Fiscal Oversight Commission at its June 5, 2025 meeting, where the Commission determined that since Ag + Open Space's grant does not include any payment for the conservation easement or the recreation covenant, Ag + Open Space is not paying more or receiving less than the fair market value for the acquisition of these interests.

### **2018 and 2022 Matching Grant Program Budgets**

On November 13, 2018, the Board of Directors accepted five projects totaling \$3,504,596 into the 2018 Matching Grant Program. On December 13, 2022, the Board of Directors accepted two projects totaling \$1,950,000 into the 2022 Matching Grant Program. The \$450,000 in funding for the 2022 grant is anticipated in the total and, together with the \$1 million 2018 grant, is budgeted for the fiscal year 2025-26 in the amount of \$1,450,000.

### **California Environmental Quality Act**

The proposed resolution authorizing execution of the Matching Grant Agreement, Conservation Easement and Recreation Covenant makes responsible agency findings pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), as required by CEQA Guidelines section 15096. The proposed actions by Ag + Open Space promote natural resource conservation, and no mitigation is required for any part of the project Ag + Open Space is proposing to carry out. However, Ag + Open Space is also required to make broader findings about the significant impacts of the larger project as a responsible agency relying on the City of Petaluma's environmental review. The proposed resolution makes the required findings, which are also described here.

On February 27, 2023, the City of Petaluma certified an Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") for the Scott

Ranch Project, which includes the subject Project - the development of 47.78 acres comprising an extension to Helen Putnam Regional Park. The Helen Putnam Park Extension component of the project analyzed in the City's EIR includes installation of multi-use trails north and south of Kelly Creek, a new trail parallel to D Street, restoration of the existing barn complex, installation of an outdoor amphitheater, group picnic area, playground, pedestrian bridges across Kelly Creek, two new public parking lots, restrooms, livestock fencing, and infiltration basins and drainage features. Additionally, the Helen Putnam Park Extension portion of the project includes restoration of Kelly Creek, tributaries, and drainage features, as well as enhancements to the stock pond on site. The City's EIR also considered the extension of a multi-use trail through the expansion property to the existing Helen Putnam Regional Park property.

Environmental analysis of the whole Scott Ranch Project resulted in a determination that the Project will have a significant, unavoidable effect on the environment. To approve the Project, the City adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program ("MMRP"). A detailed summary of the impacts that are significant and cannot be mitigated (significant and unavoidable) are presented in the attached Statement of Facts, which also includes the City's Statement of Overriding Considerations, which reflects the ultimate balancing of project objectives, goals and priorities, and community benefits offered by the project, as well as the environmental, legal, technical, social, and economic factors that were considered in approving the Project. Ag + Open Space must, as a responsible agency, make certain findings prior to approving the recommended grant to Earth Island Institute, and acceptance of the conservation easement and recreation covenant. No substantial changes are proposed to the Project and there are no substantial changes in circumstances or new information that would require revisions to the EIR or MMRP. Therefore, no further environmental review is required under CEQA.

The attached resolution finds that Ag + Open Space has, in its independent judgment, reviewed and considered the EIR prepared by the City of Petaluma, which is on file with the Clerk of the Board, and further finds, as to those potential impacts within Ag + Open Space's powers and authorities as a responsible agency, that the EIR contains a complete, objective, and accurate reporting of the Project's potential impacts and that mitigation measures have been adopted to substantially lessen the potentially significant effects of the Project. The resolution further finds that (1) a new subsequent or supplemental EIR is not authorized by CEQA Guidelines sections 15162 and 15163, as none of the triggers for further environmental review are met, (2) no alternatives or additional mitigation measures are required to address the direct or indirect environmental effects of the limited parts of the project that Ag + Open Space is deciding to fund or approve, and (3) notwithstanding the fact there are no significant impacts related to the part of the project that Ag + Open Space is carrying out, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15096(h), Ag + Open Space concurs with the findings in City Council Resolution 2023- 023 N.C.S. and with the statement of overriding considerations adopted by the City Council in Exhibit A to the City Council's Resolution.

The Board's adoption of the proposed resolution directs the General Manager to file with the County Clerk and the Office of Planning and Research a notice of determination pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21152.

**Strategic Plan:**  
N/A

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**Agenda Date:** 7/8/2025

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**Racial Equity:**

**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

The Board of Directors accepted Community Spaces applications associated with the Helen Putnam Extension Project on November 13, 2018, (Board Action No. 49) and December 13, 2022 (Board Action No. 7).

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY24-25 Adopted</b>	<b>FY25-26 Projected</b>	<b>FY26-27 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses		\$1,450,000	
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>		<b>\$1,450,000</b>	
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Measure F		\$1,450,000	
<b>Total Sources</b>		<b>\$1,450,000</b>	

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Ag + Open Space has adequate resources through Measure F funding in its budget for this project.

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

N/A

**Attachments:**

1. General Plan Location Map
2. Location Map
3. Site Map
4. Resolution of the Board of Directors for the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open

Space District

5. Matching Grant Agreement
6. Conservation Easement
7. Recreation Covenant
8. City of Petaluma's CEQA Findings Concerning Significant Impacts and Mitigation Measures and Statement of Overriding Considerations
9. Notice of Determination
10. Deed Restriction Termination & Release

**Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:**

1. Scott Ranch Environmental Impact Report