



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 2/25/2025

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: Olivia Fiori, 707-565-7349
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Fourth

Title:

Mark West Area Community Park Matching Grant Project with Sonoma Land Trust on behalf of the Mark West Area Community Fund

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District ("Ag + Open Space") to:

- A) Award \$1,169,500 in Matching Grant Program funding to the Sonoma Land Trust towards its acquisition of property on behalf of the Mark West Area Community Fund;
- B) Approve and authorize the General Manager to execute a matching grant agreement between Ag + Open Space and the Sonoma Land Trust together with the Mark West Area Community Fund;
- C) Authorize the President of the Board of Directors to execute a conservation easement, recreation covenant, and associated certificates of acceptance;
- D) Determine that the project is consistent with the County General Plan and Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan;
- E) Dedicate the conservation easement to open space purposes pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5540;
- F) Consent to the recordation of an irrevocable offer of dedication in favor of Ag + Open Space pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5565.5;
- G) Make certain determinations pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and direct the Filing of a Notice of Exemption;
- H) Authorize the General Manager to take all other actions necessary to complete this transaction, in consultation with County Counsel.

(Fourth District)

Executive Summary:

The Mark West Area Community Park is a Community Spaces Matching Grant Program ("MGP") project, which will provide a \$1,169,500 grant towards acquisition of a 1-acre property by the Sonoma Land Trust on behalf of the Mark West Area Community Fund, a non-profit organization ("MWACF"). The property is vacant land located at 4614 Old Redwood Highway in an unincorporated part of Sonoma County known as Larkfield ("Property"), which will be developed into a public park by MWACF. As a condition of funding through the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program, MWACF will acquire fee title from the Sonoma Land Trust ("SLT") and grant Ag + Open Space a conservation easement, recreation covenant, and offer to dedicate.

Discussion:

Background:

SLT, on behalf of MWACF, submitted an MGP application for the 2022, round 2 MGP cycle. The application was accepted by Ag + Open Space's Board of Directors on August 22, 2023. The grant funds will reimburse SLT for acquisition of the Property in the amount of \$1,169,500. SLT acquired the Property on January 31, 2024, on behalf of MWACF, and SLT will transfer the land to MWACF at closing. MWACF is a newly incorporated 501(c)3 non-profit that proposes to develop the Property as a public park. Preliminary plans for the new community park entail: a small parking area, playground, picnic areas, and gardens. MWACF is preparing plans for a use permit through Permit Sonoma to develop the land as a public park. The new park will serve as a place of respite as well as a gathering place for local residents and workers, and visitors to Sonoma County. No such public space exists in the Larkfield community at this time.

The 1-acre Property is currently vacant. Historically, the Property was a day-care center with a small parking area, building and playground. The Property burned in the 2017 Tubbs fire and is now vacant with a remnant parking area, flagpole and limited vegetation. Single family homes abut the Property to the east and south, and a commercial property most likely to be used as a restaurant abuts the Property to the North. Old Redwood Highway runs along the western frontage of the Property.

Conservation Values identified in the conservation easement include urban open space, scenic resources, and recreation and educational resources.

Acquisition of the Property has strong community support. Residents of the Mark West area came together and established MWACF to create and manage this new park property. In addition, the project is supported by Mark West Citizens Advisory Council, a group that advises Sonoma County on local planning and management decisions.

Project Structure

District staff have negotiated a conservation easement with MWACF that allows the entire parcel to be used for active public recreation. The conservation easement will protect the open space and scenic values while allowing for recreational and educational uses on the Property. The provisions of the recreation conservation covenant require the Property to remain open to the public for recreational and educational purposes in perpetuity. The public access requirements will take effect within three years of closing. The conservation easement will restrict structures and improvements to no more than 35% or 15,246 square feet of the Property. Allowed structures and improvements include improvements needed for recreational and educational use and enjoyment.

Matching Grant Agreement

Funding for this acquisition will be administered through a Matching Grant Agreement between Ag + Open Space, Sonoma Land Trust and the Mark West Area Community Fund. The Grant monies will reimburse the SLT for the acquisition costs to purchase the property. As the match, the grantee will contribute secured funds totaling \$630,500 from the following sources: Sonoma Land Trust (\$280,500), Mark West Springs Municipal Advisory Council (\$250,000), and District 4 Infrastructure Funds (\$100,000). The grant agreement also outlines the conditions for disbursement of funds including, execution of a conservation easement and recreation conservation covenant and offer to dedicate.

Vital Lands Initiative

Conserving this Property meets multiple objectives described in the Vital Lands Initiative (VLI):

- Protect open space and publicly accessible lands in and near cities and communities and connect people with protected lands.
- Pursue partnerships for future acquisitions that expand, create, or connect new parks and open space preserves and trails.
- Protect open lands that surround and differentiate the County's urban areas and contribute to the unique scenic character of the County.

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

The project furthers several goals and policies in Sonoma County's General Plan 2020, specifically in the Land Use, Open Space and Resource Conservation, and Water Resources

Elements as noted in, but not limited to, the following below:

- Preserve the visual identities of communities by maintaining open space areas between cities and communities. (Goal OSRC-1)
- Protect existing groundwater recharge areas (Objective WR-2.3)
- Promote a sustainable future where residents can enjoy a high quality of life for the long term, including a clean and beautiful environment and a balance of employment, housing, infrastructure, and services. (Goal LU-11)

Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan

This project is consistent with Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan, because it will offer opportunities for public recreation and access. Further, this project is consistent with the Expenditure Plan as it provides urban open space through the Matching Grant Program.

Ag + Open Space Fiscal Oversight Commission Approval

On December 5, 2024, the Fiscal Oversight Commission (FOC), in approving Resolution No. 2024-006, concluded (1) the appraisal submitted by the project applicant met the Ag + Open Space's standards, and (2) the acquisition of the Conservation Easement and Recreation Covenant as a condition of the Ag + Open Space's contribution towards MWACF's fee acquisition of the Property does not result in the Ag + Open Space paying more than the fair market value for the acquisition of such interests.

CEQA

The project, consisting of the provision of funding by Ag + Open Space towards the acquisition of fee title by Mark West Area Community Fund as well as Ag + Open Space's acquisition of a Conservation Easement and Recreation Covenant, is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Sections 21000 and following) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.28(a)(1)(F) and Cal. Code of Regs. Tit. 14 §§ 15316, 15317, and 15325 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, because the purpose of the acquisition is to provide for a park and to maintain the open space character of the area. The project is also exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act Cal. Code of Regs. Tit. 14 §§ 15303 and 15304, because development of the park is limited to minor alterations to

land and small structures. Immediately upon adoption of the Resolution, the General Manager is directed to file with the County Clerk, and the County Clerk is directed to post and to maintain the posting of a notice of exemption pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21152.

Prior Board Actions:

On August 22, 2023, this Board approved the recommendation from staff to accept the SLT’s Matching Grant Program application for the project described in this document.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 24-25 Adopted	FY 25-26 Projected	FY 26-27 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$1,169,500		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$1,169,500		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other	\$1,169,500		
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$1,169,500		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Ag + Open Space has adequate appropriations in its FY 24-25 budget for the \$1,169,500 contribution to the fee and conservation easement acquisition, which is funded by Sonoma County voter approved Measure F. Adequate appropriations exist in the FY 24-25 budget for escrow and closing costs, which are not included in the fiscal summary table.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. General Plan Map 2020
3. Location Map
4. Notice of Exemption
5. Conservation Easement
6. Exhibit B Project Structure Map
7. Certificate of Acceptance Conservation Easement
8. Recreation Conservation Covenant
9. Certificate of Acceptance Recreation Covenant
10. Irrevocable Offer of Dedication

Agenda Date: 2/25/2025

11. Matching Grant Agreement

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A