



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 9/23/2025

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: Misti Arias, General Manager 565-7360; Olivia Fiori, Acquisition Specialist, 707-565-7349
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisory District(s): Fifth District

Title:

Graton Town Square Matching Grant Project (Project No. 0660)

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 \$750,000 in Community Spaces Matching Grant Program funding to the Graton Community Services District toward its acquisition and improvement of property;
- B) Approve and authorize the General Manager to execute a matching grant agreement between Ag + Open Space and Graton Community Services District;
- C) Authorize the President of the Board of Directors to execute a Conservation Easement, Recreation Conservation Covenant, and associated Certificates of Acceptance;
- D) Determine that the project is consistent with the County General Plan 2020 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.

Executive Summary:

The Graton Town Square is a Community Spaces Matching Grant Program project. Ag + Open Space proposed to award a \$750,000 grant toward property improvements and the reimbursement of acquisition costs of the fee title of a .59-acre property by the Graton Community Services District, a California special district tasked with providing wastewater collection and treatment services to residents and businesses in Graton ("GCSD"). The property is vacant land located at 9155 Graton Road in the unincorporated community of Graton, California ("Property"). The Property will be developed as a public park and gathering space in downtown Graton. As a condition of funding through the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program ("Community Spaces"), GCSD will grant Ag + Open Space a Conservation Easement, Recreation Conservation Covenant, and an Irrevocable Offer of Dedication. GCSD will provide matching funds toward the park

planning and design and initial improvements to the Property.

Discussion:

GCSD acquired the Property in February 2024 and the project was accepted into the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program by the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors in December 2024 as an acquisition and improvement project with a grant from Ag + Open Space of up to \$750,000 and matching funds from GCSD of \$750,000. GCSD is proposing to hold the Property long-term and operate the land as a community park and gathering space. 86% of the proposed Community Spaces grant and matching funds will be used to reimburse GCSD for the eligible acquisition and 14% of the proposed Community Spaces funds will be used for the improvement costs. Preliminary plans for the new town square include West County Trail amenities, a terraced lawn and stage, a natural playground, food and herb garden, a market area for farmer's markets, pergolas and benches, and native pollinator gardens. GCSD is preparing plans for a use permit through Permit Sonoma to develop the land as a community park and gathering space. The Property offers a unique opportunity to permanently protect and enhance open space in downtown Graton, a community with increasing residential density and a need for accessible public green space. Located within walking distance of local businesses, residential neighborhoods, and community services, the Property will serve as a unique central hub for social interaction, recreation, and respite from the built environment. Its proximity to the West County Regional Trail and public transit ensures convenient access for residents, visitors, and workers, while fostering opportunities for connection between the community and open space.

The .59-acre Property is currently vacant. Historically, the Property was a gas station, which has since been decommissioned and remediated. Single family homes abut the Property to the south, and a commercial property abuts the eastern boundary. Graton Road runs along the northern frontage and Bowen Street runs along the western frontage of the Property. Additionally, the Property is on the same block as Graton Green, a previous Community Spaces project with Ag + Open Space which the GCSD has since assumed stewardship of and will operate in tandem with the Graton Town Square, doubling the amount of public open space in Graton.

Conservation values identified in the Conservation Easement include urban open space, recreation and educational resources, and scenic resources.

Acquisition of the Property has strong community support, as demonstrated through extensive public engagement, including town hall meetings, co-design workshops, and surveys. Nearly 200 residents (~10% of Graton's population) have participated in these events, contributing valuable input to the design and ensuring the project reflects the community's needs. Support is further demonstrated by direct donations from approximately 30 community members, letters of support from key stakeholders such as the Graton Day Labor Center and Sonoma Land Trust, and public workshops, volunteer days, and rallies engaging over 200 community members.

Project Structure:

Ag + Open Space staff have negotiated a Conservation Easement with GCSD that allows the entire parcel to be used for active public recreation. The Conservation Easement will allow recreational and educational uses on the Property and allow for GCSD to hold special events. The provisions of the Recreation Conservation Covenant require the Property to remain open to the public for recreational and educational purposes in perpetuity. While the project may open to the public sooner, the Community Spaces public access requirements will take effect within three years of closing. The Conservation Easement will restrict structures and improvements to square footage levels represented in their site design in their Community Spaces application. Allowed structures and improvements include improvements necessary for recreational and educational use and enjoyment.

Matching Grant Agreement:

Grant and matching funds for this project will be administered through a matching grant agreement between Ag + Open Space and the Graton Community Services District. The Ag + Open Space Community Spaces grant of \$750,000 will reimburse GCSD for some of the acquisition costs to purchase the Property and for eligible project administration costs. For the match, GCSD will contribute \$750,000 toward the Property acquisition; planning, design, environmental

compliance, and permitting; construction of phase 1 park improvements; and operations and maintenance. The GCSO match is provided through secured funds totaling \$315,993 from the following sources: Community Capital Campaign (\$7,393), Sonoma Land Trust (\$25,000), District 5 Sonoma County Tourism Impact Mitigation Fund Grant (\$30,000), and Sonoma County Community Infrastructure Grant (\$253,600). Additional match funds totaling \$440,000 are anticipated from the following sources: Community Capital Campaign (\$200,000), T-Mobile Hometown Grant (\$50,000), and Regional Community Foundations/Park Services (\$190,000). The matching grant agreement also outlines the condition for disbursement of funds, including execution of a Conservation Easement, Recreation Conservation Covenant, and an Irrevocable Offer of Dedication.

Vital Lands Initiative:

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

- 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 September 4, 2025, the Fiscal Oversight Commission, in approving Resolution No. 2025-008, 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 Conservation Covenant as a condition of the Ag + Open Space's contribution of grant funds towards GCSO's fee acquisition and improvement of the Property does not result in the Ag + Open Space paying more than the fair market value for the acquisition of such interests. The Fiscal Oversight Commission, appointed by the Board of Directors and composed of five members and an alternate, serves as an independent audit committee providing fiscal oversight of Ag + Open Space, including the review of acquisitions, conveyances, borrowing transactions, and the annual audit.

CEQA:

The project, consisting of the provision of funding by Ag + Open Space towards property improvements and the acquisition of fee title by Graton Community Services District as well as Ag + Open Space's acquisition of a Conservation Easement and Recreation Conservation 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 December 10, 2024, this Board approved the recommendation from staff to accept GCSD's Matching Grant Program application for the project described in this document.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 25-26 Adopted	FY 26-27 Projected	FY 27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$750,000		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$750,000		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other	\$750,000		
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$750,000		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Ag + Open Space has adequate appropriations in its FY25-26 budget for the \$750,000 contribution to improvements and fee and Conservation Easement acquisition, which is funded by Sonoma County voter approved Measure F. Adequate appropriations exist in the FY25-26 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. Site Map
4. Notice of Exemption
5. Conservation Easement
6. Exhibit B Project Structure Map
7. Certificate of Acceptance
8. Recreation Conservation Covenant
9. Certificate of Acceptance

Agenda Date: 9/23/2025

- 10. Irrevocable Offer of Dedication
- 11. Matching Grant Agreement

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

None