



## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 10/22/2019

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**To:** Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** William Keene, 565-7348

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisory District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Farm Bill Implementation/Grant Development Service Agreement

**Recommended Action:**

Authorize the General Manager of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to execute an agreement with 9b Group, Inc. for strategic legislative and grant seeking services for a total amount not-to-exceed \$150,000; with a term ending on October 31, 2021. This agreement will allow for continued representation during implementation of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 and assistance in preparing and submitting grant applications for Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District projects.

**Executive Summary:**

9B Group worked directly on behalf of the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's in obtaining the authorization of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, which was signed on December 20, 2018. With successful inclusion of the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's interests in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, Sonoma County is better positioned to serve and support its agriculture community. We now are requesting approval for a new contract with 9B Group that will cover the next phase, which is supporting the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's interests in the implementation of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 and identifying and pursuing grant opportunities related to the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 for easements and stewardship. 9B Group will assist in researching and applying for various Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 grants, and generally focus on better relations at the federal level, including Congress, conservation groups, federal agencies, and legislative committees during this implementation phase.

**Discussion:**

**Background**

For several years, the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) has worked with firms with land conservation and sustainability experience to establish a more active role in securing federal-level conservation funding and representation on key environmental and agricultural policy issues. The purpose of these partnerships has been, and continues to be 1) to ensure exposure of Ag + Open Space at the federal level, 2) to provide leadership and expertise on issues relative to Sonoma County, and 3) to develop relationships with Congressional and federal agencies, in order to position Ag + Open Space to secure opportunities for federal funding for its programs. Ag + Open Space does not have the capacity to conduct this work in-house, as it requires experienced representation at the federal level and regular contact with federal

agencies and legislative committees. Ag + Open Space's request to execute a new two-year agreement, with authority granted to the General Manager to extend for an additional year if deemed necessary, with the 9b Group to directly support these goals. The contract terms include a \$4,000 monthly retainer for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$150,000. 9B Group is the only federal lobbyist working on behalf of Ag + Open Space.

Ag + Open Space has not undergone a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process due to our continued desire to work with 9B Group for their unique experience and knowledge in the field. Due in part to 9B Group's work through a previous contract with Ag + Open Space, all of Ag + Open Space's objectives were met with the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill). Also due to 9B Group's work on our behalf, riparian easements have been included in the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Preserving natural resources and protecting riparian areas is a primary objective of the Ag + Open Space, and this inclusion of riparian easements will allow us to seek grant opportunities that will maximize our match to protect more acreage. 9B Group has specific land conservation and sustainability experience that makes them the most qualified firm for this work, including access to key players, knowledge of internal processes, and expertise in grants. Dave White, the principal, is the former National Resources Conservation Science (NRCS) Chief and his insight has been invaluable. 9B Group has already helped Ag + Open Space secure \$8.5 million dollars in grant funding. With this new contract and 9B Group's expertise, we are hoping to secure additional grant funding through the Farm Bill.

### **Farm Bill Implementation**

The Farm Bill, is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and represents the primary agricultural and food policy tool of the federal government. The Farm Bill is the single largest federal funding source for private land conservation and includes funding for conservation easements, forest and grassland restoration and management, wetland protections, soil conservation, and improved water quality programs. It has a significant impact on Ag + Open Space's priority objectives. The Farm Bill is updated and reauthorized approximately every five years.

Since the Farm Bill has passed, 9B Group's work will now focus on the USDA where the development of the Rules, Regulations, and implementing instructions will occur. This will include arranging and participating in meetings with USDA officials having oversight responsibility for conservation program rule development and implementation, as well as advocating for agricultural projects that benefit Sonoma County. Favorable policy at the federal agency level will be critical to ensure that Ag + Open Space will be able to maximize use of the programs. Ag + Open Space will benefit from 9b Group's guidance through implementation of the Farm Bill's Rules and Regulations, through a strengthened relationship with the USDA, specifically the Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, and the Chief and Leadership of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

9B Group will continue to represent Ag + Open Space's interests to USDA officials, House and Senate Agriculture Committee staff, NRCS leadership, and conservation groups.

**Grant Development**

Implementation of the Farm Bill will also include grant opportunities under the conservation title. The 9B Group will work with Ag + Open Space staff to identify and pursue grant opportunities for easements and stewardship on lands protected by Ag + Open Space, which now include over 117,000 acres in Sonoma County. Over the course of this contract, 9B Group will assist Ag + Open Space in preparing and submitting grant applications for Ag + Open Space projects. These will include grants for easements under various NRCS Programs, as well as a major grant for the RCPP.

**Prior Board Actions:**

August 14, 2018: Board Action #13. Authorize the General Manager to execute an Amendment to a July 31, 2017 Agreement with 9B Group, Inc. for legislative and strategic assistance regarding the reauthorization of the 2018 Farm Bill, extending the term one year and adding \$50,000 to the payment terms for a total amount not-to-exceed \$100,000.

January 29, 2019: Board Action #32. Approve the Sonoma County 2019-2020 State and Federal Legislative Platform to be used by County staff, legislative advocates, and the legislative delegation in efforts to seek policy support and acquire state and federal resources for County priorities.

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 19-20 Adopted</b>	<b>FY20-21 Projected</b>	<b>FY 21-22 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Adequate appropriations are existing in the approved FY 19-20 budget and will be incorporated into future years' budgets.

<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>

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

**Attachments:**

1. Agreement with 9B Group, Inc.

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