



Legislation Text

File #: 2019-1748, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Directors

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District

Staff Name and Phone Number: Karen Gaffney, 565-7344

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): All

Title:

2:00 P.M. - Sonoma County Ag + Open Space Vital Lands Initiative

Recommended Action:

Provide Board input and staff direction on the draft Vital Lands Initiative document.

Executive Summary:

The Sonoma County Ag + Open Space draft Vital Lands Initiative identifies goals, objectives, mapped priorities, strategies, tools, and recommended expenditures to guide the work of Ag + Open Space through 2031, and represents several years of robust community and partner engagement and input, substantial data collection, analysis, and expert advice. The purpose of this meeting is for staff to present the draft Vital Lands Initiative to the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors and to receive public comment.

Discussion:

Ag + Open Space Background

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) was formed by the visionary voters of Sonoma County in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006 with over 76% voter approval. The mission of Ag + Open Space is to permanently protect the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. To date, Ag + Open Space has protected over 118,000 acres of agricultural, recreational, natural resource and other open space lands, and has leveraged over \$109 million of local sales tax dollars with outside revenues.

Legislation and Policy Direction

Ag + Open Space work is directed by the Board of Directors, implementing the provisions of the voter-approved Measure F and accompanying expenditure plan. When the Board approved the 2014 Ag + Open Space Management Review, it directed Ag + Open Space to implement several key recommendations which have guided the Vital Lands Initiative planning process: a) the development of a comprehensive, integrated plan that encompassed all Ag + Open Space activities - including fiscal and administrative, planning, acquisition, and stewardship; b) more substantial engagement and information sharing with the community;

and c) regular performance reporting to demonstrate transparency and efficient use of tax-payer dollars.

To date, Ag + Open Space has been directed by numerous Board-adopted policy documents, including the 2006 Acquisition Plan - *Connecting Communities and the Land*, 2012 Fee Land Strategy, 2012 Work Plan, and 2009 Strategic plan. Since adoption of the 2006 Acquisition Plan, Ag + Open Space has led the development of foundational datasets through the Sonoma County Vegetation Mapping and LiDAR program, which provide detailed information about vegetation, land use, and hydrology in Sonoma County. Along with emerging technologies and research related to climate change, ecosystem services, and socio-economic trends, Ag + Open Space has incorporated these new data into Vital Lands Initiative to enhance support of and better inform land conservation strategies and actions.

Vital Lands Initiative Overview

The Vital Lands Initiative is a long-range comprehensive plan to guide and prioritize land conservation activities (including planning, acquisition, and ongoing stewardship) of Ag + Open Space through 2031. Building upon a foundation of 29 years of land conservation, the intended outcomes of the Vital Lands Initiative are to:

- Build upon Ag + Open Spaces achievements to expand and protect identified priority lands
- Engage with the community and our partners to identify land conservation challenges, priorities, and opportunities
- Bring several discrete policy documents into one comprehensive plan
- Update and refine the data and prioritization framework which guide future land acquisition and stewardship actions
- Enhance our communication with the public about Ag + Open Space land protection efforts and the positive impacts of this work for wildlife, water quality and supply, economic vitality, and human health and well-being

The Vital Lands Initiative includes the following information:

- Background and accomplishments of Ag + Open Space since 1990
- Five goals and associated objectives focused on agricultural lands, community identity, healthy communities, water, and wildlife
- Recommended expenditures for each goal area
- Criteria and processes for identifying conservation priorities
- Strategies and tools for implementing the vision through 2031
- Targets for leveraging public and private financial resources to support the Ag + Open Space mission, extending the reach of the quarter-cent sales tax that funds Ag + Open Space

Plan Development Process

The draft Vital Lands Initiative reflects previous Board direction and state legislation and policies, and represents several years of robust community engagement and input, substantial data collection, analysis, and expert input, and the development of goals, objectives, mapped priorities, strategies, and tools to guide the work of Ag + Open Space through 2031, when the current funding measure sunsets. Over 150 meetings were

held with participation by over 600 community members, tribal members, partners, technical advisors, local and state elected and agency officials, as well as individual meetings with Board, Advisory Committee and Fiscal Oversight Commission members. In addition to the community workshops hosted by Board members in each Supervisorial District, Ag + Open Space held four thematic workshops focused on water and wildlife, agriculture, greenbelts and community separators, and recreation. An Agricultural Technical Advisory Team was formed, and ten meetings were held at the Sonoma County Farm Bureau to receive input and guidance from the agricultural community. Significant new data sets were developed for the Vital Lands Initiative to map priority conservation areas, to evaluate conservation threats and trends, and to share information with the Board and the community. These datasets include countywide LiDAR and information related to vegetation, agricultural use, built infrastructure, wildlife habitat, streams, wetlands, hydrology, groundwater, wildlife corridors, and community health and economic vitality. Many of these datasets were developed in partnership with local entities such as Sonoma Water, with over \$3 million in funding from state and national partners such as NASA, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Coastal Conservancy, and the Moore and Bechtel foundations. The plan will be distributed digitally, and will include a brief printable summary document as well as an interactive web map for more detailed exploration of land conservation priorities and data.

Climate Change & Extreme Events - Informing the Vital Lands Initiative

In addition to informing Ag + Open Space land conservation priorities, several of the datasets collected as part of the Vital Lands Initiative planning process are foundational to Ag + Open Space and the County for climate change and extreme event planning - including vegetation management and disaster planning and response for floods and fires. Ag + Open Space has collected significant data and performed substantial analyses related to climate change, including carbon sequestration mapping in collaboration with NASA's Carbon Monitoring System Program and The Nature Conservancy, evaluations of different land conservation scenarios and their emissions and public health implications in collaboration with the Regional Climate Protection Authority, and stream corridor mapping in collaboration with the Coastal Conservancy and Bechtel Foundation. All of the above climate change datasets and analyses inform the draft Vital Lands Initiative. The fires of October 2017 occurred while the Vital Lands Initiative was being developed and - along with the entire County - Ag + Open Space pivoted to address this disaster. Ag + Open Space was directed by the Board to convene Sonoma County groups focused on working and natural lands, and to facilitate the development of strategies for long term resiliency and recovery for Board consideration. Over 60 organizations came together to form the Watershed Collaborative, and developed *Living in a Fire Adapted Landscape: Priorities for Resiliency*. On January 23, 2018, the Board accepted this document and Ag + Open Space began to implement the relevant objectives from the document related to land stewardship, data collection and analysis, and priorities for land conservation. In addition to providing foundational information for the natural resources elements of the Office of Recovery and Resiliency Recovery Plan, these findings and recommendations related to extreme event resiliency have informed and refined the draft Vital Lands Initiative, as have the data collected since October 2017 related to fires, floods and climate change. Ag + Open Space is participating in cross-agency partnerships related to the Kincadee Fire, including data collection, land management, and community outreach efforts. Relevant

information from these collaborations will inform the Vital Lands Initiative.

Recommended Funding Priorities - Vital Lands Initiative

The following table outlines the recommended funding priorities for each goal area included in the Vital Lands Initiative. The total amounts listed below include anticipated Ag + Open Space Measure F expenditures combined with low and high estimates for leveraged outside funding, which can include private and public agency grants, match from grant recipients for projects funded through the Matching Grant Program, and discounts from landowners at the time of acquisition. The Ag + Open Space Board is expected to approve annual work plans and detailed expenditures during the annual budgeting process.

Goal Area	Ag + Open Space Sales Tax	Estimated Leverage (Low)	Estimated Leverage (High)	Total Allocation (Leverage-Low)	Total Allocation (Leverage-High)
Agricultural Lands	\$50m	\$20m	\$40m	\$70m (24%)	\$90m (25%)
Community Identity	\$25m	\$2.5m	\$5m	27.5m (9%)	\$30m (8%)
Healthy Communities	\$96m	\$20m	\$40m	\$116m (39%)	\$136m (38%)
• Initial Public Access, Operation, and Maintenance	\$39m				
• Matching Grant Program	\$35m				
• New Acquisition Projects	\$22m				
Water	\$23m	\$7.5m	\$15m	\$30.5m (10%)	\$38m (11%)
Wildlands	\$20m	\$7.5m	\$15m	27.5m (9%)	\$35m (10%)
Opportunity Fund	\$20m	\$2.5m	\$5m	22.5m (8%)	\$25m (8%)
Estimated Funds Available	\$234m	\$60m	\$120m	\$294m	\$354m

Implementation of the Vital Lands Initiative

Upon Board adoption of the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open Space staff will develop implementation work plans for Board consideration as part of the annual budget process. Performance reporting on all goals and objectives will be provided to the Board and the community on an ongoing basis, via Ag + Open Space Board meetings, the Ag + Open Space website, social and traditional media, and community meetings.

Next Steps

Ag + Open Space is accepting written comments on the Vital Lands Initiative from the public through December 16, 2019. We will incorporate feedback from the community and the Board and bring the Vital

Lands Initiative back to the Board for approval by March 2020.

Prior Board Actions:

August 14, 2018 (Board Action #11): Authorize the General Manager to execute service agreements for environmental services, including Tukman Geospatial LLC (\$150,000) and Prunuske Catham, Inc. (\$200,000) for technical services related to the Vital Lands Initiative.

June 11, 2018 (Board Action #4): Authorize the General Manager to execute a second amendment to the agreement with The Regents of the University of California, Santa Barbara to continue mapping and prioritization of riparian areas for conservation and evaluation of watershed issues related to the fires.

January 23, 2018 (Board Action #27): Receive *Living in a Fire Adapted Landscape*

March 7, 2017 (Board Action #24): Initiate Vital Lands Initiative community outreach and input process.

July 19, 2016 (Board Action Item #1): Authorize the General Manager to execute service agreements with Creating Thinking, Inc. dba The Idea Cooperative (\$125,000) and Rose Roberts dba Farm Stewards (\$180,000) for community outreach and technical services related to the Vital Lands Initiative

May 24, 2016 (Board Action #59): Authorize the General Manager to execute service agreement with Steve Zuieback dba Synectic for technical services related to the Vital Lands Initiative

February 2, 2016 (Board Resolution 16-0040): Adopt Initial Public Access, Operation and Maintenance Policy

August 19, 2014 (Board Action #36): Receive Ag + Open Space Management Review

November 20, 2012 (Board Action #33): Adopt Fee Lands Strategy

March 27, 2012 (Board Action #33): Adopt Work Plan (2012-215)

February 24, 2009 (Board Resolution 09-0161): Adopt Strategic Plan (2009-2013)

June 6, 2006 (Board Resolution 06-0523): Adopt Acquisition Plan (*Connecting Communities and the Land*)

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 19-20 Adopted	FY20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Board adoption of the Vital Lands Initiative will provide Ag + Open Space direction for implementation plans. These plans will be developed and budgeted for during the regular County budget cycle.

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

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

No new staffing requests are anticipated for the Vital Lands Initiative.

Attachments:

1. Draft Vital Lands Initiative
2. Presentation

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