



TRI-CITY AND COUNTY COOPERATIVE PLANNING GROUP

Cities of Benicia, Fairfield, and Vallejo ÆCounty of Solano

GOVERNING BOARD/CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JOINT MEETING

MINUTES

February 5, 2007

1. Call Meeting to Order

Governing Board Members Present: Tony Pearsall, Jim Spering, Bill Whitney

Governing Board Members Absent: Harry Price

Managers' Group present: Jim Erickson, Benicia

Staff Present: Brian Miller, Bill Tuikka, Matt Walsh, Laura Karaboghosian, Perl Perlmutter

Citizens Advisory Committee Karlyn Lewis, Eva Laevastu, Mike Palmaffy, Kathy Hoffman

Others Present: Sue Wickham and Marilyn Farley Solano Land Trust); Randy Anderson, Land People; Dee Swanhuysen, Ridge Trail; Mel Jordan, Vallejo City Unified School District; Sammy Gonzales, Vallejo Public Works; Solano Larry Epner, County General Services; Jim Fiack, County Administrator's Office; Grey Williams, St. Johns Mine Road Landowner; Shane McAfee, GVRD.

2. Public Comment

At the request of Kathy Hoffman, everyone in the room introduced themselves

3.Minutes: Approval of Governing Board Minutes of December 12, 2006 and Approval of Citizens Advisory Board Minutes of November 15, 2006 (Action Item

As there was no quorum for the Citizens Advisory Committee, and no quorum of members present at the December 12 meeting was available, the Minutes were not formally adopted.

4. Sky Valley-Cordelia Hills Public Access Plan: Review and Provide Recommendations and Comments

The Land Trust's Consultant, Randy Anderson, provided an overview of the Draft Public Access Plan. His presentation addressed the limited revenue-producing opportunities on the property, the key environmental resources, including special status species, topographic constraints, and existing ranch roads and trails.

He provided the members with an overview of potential trail corridors and challenges for public access-particularly on Eastern Swett where topography and recently developed neighborhoods have closed off access points. The Orchards School will provide a road and trail to the edge of the Eastern Swett property, but the existing bridge has no access to the structure and has not been maintained. PG&E did not protect their access to their property. Following a discussion by several members of the CAC, the audience, and Mel Jordan regarding the need for fire access, Kathy Hoffman passed out a letter to the City of Vallejo suggesting options for such access.

Randy Anderson continued that the goal is to provide a hiking experience similar to Briones Regional Park in Contra Costa County, with roughly 30 miles of trails. King Ranch in particular has a network of existing roads, with an access point of Lopes Road shared with the City of Fairfield water tank. Some access points may be limited seasonally.

Mr. Anderson then suggested some priorities, with the first step being docent-led hikes getting people onto the land. He reiterated the importance of balancing preservation and public access.

Mike Palmaffy noted the importance of involving GVRD with this planning, which Randy Anderson acknowledged. Mike Palmaffy then suggested installing large solar panel installations on the property for revenue. Randy Anderson noted that the climate (fog during summer) and access issues made such installations less effective here.

Tony Pearsall asked about the parking at the Orchards staging area. Randy Anderson responded that the planned parking lot will allow for access to the Orchards open space, as well as the planned park and the school. He anticipates that most access from this point will be from Hiddenbrooke residents, as Blue Rock Springs Park and Lopes Road will provide more easily accessible staging areas for the general public. Tony Pearsall then asked about the planned staging area in Hiddenbrooke Phase III. Randy Anderson responded that this staging area would be constructed as part of the Hiddenbrooke project but would certainly provide some access to Solano Land Trust lands and the Bay Ridge Trail.

Bill Whitney then complimented Mr. Anderson for a job well done, asking him his opinion on the top three things that need to be accomplished. Randy Anderson replied that actually having a presence on the land in place is the first critical step. Once the public begins accessing open space, it's difficult to cut off this access. The ranchers have preserved many of the environmental and resource values of the land, and unregulated public access could easily damage these resources. The properties need good management with adequate rangers. The other top two priorities are infrastructure (and trails) and access, particularly for fire protection, into Eastern Swett. Kathy Hoffman reiterated the need for adequate open space funding. Mike Palmaffy noted that Lynch Canyon is a critical first step, and he sees this process as taking ten years. Jim Spering asked if there was a list of priorities for improvements. Randy Anderson replied that the plan does contain very specific priorities-and costs for improvements. However, the Land Trust needs to retain flexibility to respond to opportunities and problems. Both Fairfield and Vallejo have subdivisions near the open space properties, but access to the land has not always been maintained.

Jim Spering noted that the Ridge Trail appears to be a “high” priority. Randy Anderson agreed, explaining that the Ridge Trail Council has largely funded the project. Dee Swanhuysen confirmed this, suggesting that construction could begin this fall. Randy Anderson also noted that the Ridge Trail will be available through docent-led hikes. If rangers can be provided and agreement reached with GVRD, more open access may become possible. Jim Spering asked how maintenance would be funded. Dee Swanhuysen noted that increasing access to open space would lead to more public interest in and support for open space. The Ridge Trail Society is hoping that this project will encourage regional open space funding and management efforts. Sue Wickham noted that they still need about \$8,000 to complete the project.

Mike Palmaffy then noted that GVRD does have comments on the Public Access Plan. The GVRD Facilities Committee will be meeting soon to finalize the comments.

Bill Whitney asked Randy Anderson about the costs of managing open space. Randy Anderson responded that in his studies of other open space districts, the costs varied significantly, depending on services, programming, size, and type of land.

Grey Williams, a homeowner who abuts the Eastern Swett Ranch, then spoke. He likes having open space around his property, preferring it to more houses. However, there have been issues with illegal access-litter, kids partying, etc. He expressed concern about a proposed trail corridor adjacent to his property line. Randy Anderson noted that there were endangered species issues (burrowing owls) that had pushed the trail to this location. He also reiterated that there would be in the beginning only docent-led access. Dee Swanhuysen suggested that a good sign program could help reduce these impacts. There is funding in Proposition 84 for such projects. Bill Whitney asked if the trail corridor routes were “set in stone.” Randy Anderson responded negatively, but did note that the trail corridors were carefully laid out to reflect conditions in the field. Sue Wickham noted that the Ridge Trail corridor must be defined precisely enough for CEQA review. Moving the trail corridor might require crossing more wetlands, which will raise construction and maintenance costs. Marilyn Farley stated that dedicated funding must be found for maintenance. Mike Palmaffy asked for clarification as to who is responsible for police calls here. Sue Wickham responded that Vallejo Swett is within the City of Vallejo. Dee Swanhuysen suggested, again, the need for on-site management, even a resident manager/campground host.

Bill Whitney suggested that the Governing Board provide a formal recommendation. Jim Spering responded that several other agencies have yet to comment and that he is still “catching up.” Maybe the formal recommendation could occur after the document is finalized. Marilyn Farley noted that her board must act by the end of February in order to meet the submittal deadline of March to the Coastal Conservancy. The Land Trust does not need a formal action by the Governing Board, and if there are major remaining issues, the Plan can always be amended later. Tony Pearsall asked for clarification as to the comment period. Marilyn Farley responded that the deadline for submittal to the Coastal Conservancy is February 27. Sue Wickham noted that the Coastal Conservancy won’t pay the Land Trust if it misses the deadline. They would like a recommendation from the Governing Board, but it is not necessary. Bill Whitney suggested that the Cooperative Planning Group review the document once it is finalized; Sue Wickham suggested that any significant changes could be incorporated into an amended document at that time.

5. Orchards School:

a. Update by Mel Jordan, VCUSD

b. Analysis of Conformance by Perl Perlmutter

Mel Jordan, Vallejo City Unified School District, updated the Governing Board on the planning for the new elementary school at Hiddenbrooke. He distributed the site plan, project schedule, and budget. He noted that the mitigation plan has been submitted to the Department of Fish and Game. The Division of State Architects will review the building design, with the City of Vallejo involved in reviewing landscaping. GVRD is involved in the design of the park.

Sam Gonzales asked for clarification about who will be maintaining the road. Mel Jordan responded that this will be maintained by the School District. In response to a question about park open hours, Mr. Jordan noted the park would be open full time, and the park would be completed along with the school project (on the same general schedule).

Kathy Hoffman questioned the discrepancy in acreage between the plans and the conservation easement. Shane McAfee noted that the total acreage of the school and park together is less than that permitted by the easement. Perl Perlmutter concurred, but noted the individual components are limited by the easement as well. Mel Jordan suggested that the play fields could be included as part of the "park" and that 11 acres are not actually being impacted by the buildings. Shane McAfee concurred, noting that the play fields will also be used by park users. Mike Palmaffy asked if the JPA can indeed amend the 10 acre limit. Kathy Hoffman stated that she felt this could be done if all three agencies (the Land Trust, the City, and the Cooperative Planning Group) took action.

Perl Perlmutter reviewed his memorandum outlining the issues. He provided a brief background and discussed the relationship between the development agreement, the MOU, and the Conservation Easement. The latter controls. He then reviewed Bob Berman's questions about the ability of the agencies to change the requirements of the Conservation Easement-which they can.

Mike Palmaffy asked for confirmation that the 11.21 acres in question include the slopes adjacent to the school site. Mel Jordan affirmed this, noting that the 11.21 acres includes the entire "footprint" touched by the school project subject to environmental mitigation. Perl Perlmutter noted that in order to process this amendment, the School District must provide a written request to the three-easement holding agencies. Shane McAfee suggested that the School District redefine the boundaries of the park and school sites, to allow the school site to fall below the 10-acre limit. Marilyn Farley asked if the play fields were to be fenced. Mel Jordan was not certain, but he noted that the road does serve as a natural boundary. Marilyn Farley asked if the play fields would be open for use after hours. Mel Jordan confirmed the open, joint-use status of the play fields. Bill Whitney asked for confirmation that the road would be open. Mel Jordan responded that the road would indeed be open. Mike Palmaffy and Shane McAfee suggested that the easiest solution would be to simply redraw the boundary between the school and the park. Mel Jordan also suggested that the definition of "usable" acreage would mean the site actually meets the standards.

Sue Wickham then explained that Solano Land Trust Staff had reviewed the mitigation plan for the school project. She is concerned that the 11 acres on site shown as mitigation are "double dipping," as the acreage is already preserved through a conservation easement. She is concerned that the plan does not meet Nationwide Permit rules, particularly as this property is core recovery habitat for the Red Legged Frog. She urged better protection of the creek corridors and buffer zones. Bill Whitney suggested there be no action tonight. Mike Palmaffy has suggested some options for resolving the issues. Mel Jordan needs to consult with Marilyn Farley and Sue Wickham to resolve the frog issues. Kathy Hoffman requested a legal opinion regarding the double-dipping issue.

6. Discussion of Role of Cooperative Planning Group in Promoting Regional Open Space

Bill Whitney reiterated his support for Lynch Canyon serving as a “test” for open space management and access. Kathy Hoffman agreed, but stated her concern about what happens next. She noted that we should not wait three years, but take action now.

Jim Spering noted his concern that there are multiple ideas floating out there, but currently no broad support. There needs to be a clearer plan with more precise definitions and goals. People like himself don’t really know what is going on. It was noted that there have been studies, some quite specific. Jim Spering asked a summary of the issues. Kathy Hoffman suggested staff could provide a brief but comprehensive overview for Mr. Spering.

Mike Palmaffy noted that the idea of a regional park district has been before the Board of Supervisors. The current Board needs to decide if and what it wants to do, but there are other management structures possible.

Bill Whitney noted that John Silva’s vision was to use the Board of Supervisors as the regional agency, but that funding could not come only from the County’s General Fund.

Jim Spering noted that open space issues cannot be considered in isolation. Local populations are more concerned about transportation and traffic congestion issues. He is more concerned about managing what we already have than in acquiring more.

Jim Erickson noted that the issue of staff support for the Cooperative Planning Group has been raised. This cannot be addressed until the respective member agencies decide to provide more direction as to staff support. If the Governing Board wants more active facilitation, then staff will need to be assigned by the respective bodies.

Marilyn Farley noted that we need to take care of what we have. She doubts that there is countywide support for a regional open space agency. Focusing on the southern part of the county may be better.

Eva Laevastu requested periodic updates on Lynch Canyon.

7. Spring Tour: Set a Date and Format for 2007 Spring Event (Discussion and Action Item)

Brian Miller explained that the County plans to open Lynch Canyon on May 11. A “long weekend” of events may be appropriate. Staff was directed to work with County staff to organize this event.

8 Adjourn

The Board adjourned at 8:25 p.m.