

APPROVED MINUTES

747 Mendocino Avenue – Suite 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95401
January 25, 2024 | 5:00 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jan McFarland, Ladi Asgill, Steve Rabinowitch*, Thembi Borrás, Bill Smith, Wendy Eliot, Michelle Whitman, Josh Proctor

*AB2449 Attendance

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kristina Tierney, Paul Martin, Kevin McDonnell, John Shribbs, Mark Stapp, Don McEnhill, Dayna Ghirardelli, Angel Lopez

STAFF PRESENT:

Misti Arias, General Manager; Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager; Jennifer Kuszmar, Acquisition Manager; Michelle Nozzari, Administrative Aide.

Call to Order

Chair Thembi Borrás called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

Public Comment

Chair Borrás opened public comment for items not on the agenda. Chair Borrás also increased the time for members of the public to speak to 3 minutes per person/item.

- Duane Dewitt, a member of the public and a respiratory therapist, representing the Roseland Creek Area, passed around a t-shirt with a quote that stated, “Trees are Life.” Mr. Dewitt spoke about his concern regarding new developments popping up in the Roseland Area. He spoke about the District’s role in protecting 19 acres along Roseland Creek (what he calls the “Roseland Neighbor Woods”). He spoke about building community support for an Earth Day Celebration in April, including efforts of the Pomo Park and Preserve Partnership which is seeking to create a park and nature preserve with community support.
- Susan Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network based in Petaluma, and Madrone Audubon Society, a countywide nonprofit organization protecting and preserving birds’ wildlife habitat, provided comment. Ms. Kirks expressed her gratitude to hear Duane Dewitt speak. Ms. Kirks spoke about how many individuals who work for grassroots non-profits volunteer efforts are dedicated to long term goal of conservation. Her own nonprofits have existed for around 60 years and 25 years. She hopes to again address with the District on



the Paula Lane Conservation Easement. Ms. Kirks supported the increase in time for general public comment to 3 minutes.

- Chair Borrás read a disclaimer message regarding zero tolerance for public disruptions and disrespectful behavior.

AB2449

Per AB 2449 Member Steven Rabinowitsh attended this meeting remotely due to contagious illness. Chair Borrás took role call and confirmed that quorum was physically present.

Approval of Minutes from October 26, 2023

Attachment A

ACTION ITEM

Chair Borrás opened this item for comment from the Committee Members.

- Vice Chair Eliot noticed an error in her attendance and Member Ladi Asgill's attendance.

Chair Borrás opened the item for public comment.

- Duane Dewitt provided clarification to his comment regarding concern of a conflict of interest with Sonoma Water. The Advisory Clerk noted that per counsel she was instructed that it was appropriate to summarize public comments and the specific comment was referred to management to be addressed.

Chair Borrás called for a vote on the October 26, 2023, minutes with revisions. The meeting minutes were approved by the majority and Vice Chair Wendy Eliot abstained.

General Manager's Report

Misti Arias, General Manager

General Manager Arias noted that the Advisory Clerk did provide notes of components to include in the report related to questions received, including Mr. Dewitt's question.

- She noted that she would hold off on providing response about the Water Agency until the next meeting when Mr. Dewitt maybe present for the General Manager's Report, if not she may reach out to him.
- General Manager Arias also noted that another question regarding the Petrified Forest was resolved. There has been interest from the community to see this property acquired and protected. Both General Manager Arias and Acquisition Manager Jennifer Kuszmar attended a tour with Supervisor Gorin's team. The real estate agent representing the buyers is aware that if there is a potential buyer, Ag + Open Space would be interested in helping to protect the property, but the agency will not pursue acquisition without an interested individual or entity who is willing to own and operate the property.

Upcoming Board Items

- On February 6, 2024 Southeast Santa Rosa Greenway will be going before the Board. Ag + Open Space has been working closely with the City to get all pieces together to get this project ready for the transition from Caltrans to City of Santa Rosa ownership.



- On March 5, 2024 Matching Grant Program Guideline and Application will be going to the Board.
- On March 12, 2024 the Farmland for All Buy, Protect, Sell Pilot Program will also be going before the board.
- The Board authorized a fourth cycle of Vegetation Management Program Grants through PG&E settlement funds. This cycle will be announced in the next couple of weeks. This funding cycle will be different from previous rounds of funding as \$1 million will be allocated to regular applications and \$1 million will be for applications identified by our partner organizations that will be focused on high priority, high impact projects.
- On December 12, 2023 three acquisition projects went before the board and were approved. These acquisitions included 1) Mark West Wikiup Open Space Preserve, 2) the acquisition of McCormick Ranch which is an addition to Hood Mountain Regional Park, 3) Hood Mountain Salt Creek Addition (Weeks Ranch).
- Recent closings include La Franchi Laguna which is adjacent to Denner Ranch. These two acquisitions are significant to the Laguna de Santa Rosa and are historically the confluence of Mark West Creek. These may hopefully one day be the site of a restoration project led by Sonoma Water and the Laguna Foundation.
- Ag + Open Space is also participating in McCormick Ranch's transition of ownership from Sonoma Land Trust to Regional Parks. This should be closing by the end of January.
- In February the Stewardship Team will present to the Advisory Committee.
- If a member of the public is interested in protecting their land or a property that is of public interest, they can complete an application on the Open Space website. The primary contact for inquiries is Simon Apostol, Acquisition Assistant. A link to the application can be found here: <https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/protect-your-land/conserving-your-land/>
- Ag + Open Space cannot pursue a project that does not have a willing seller.

Chair Borrás opened this item to comments.

2023 Year In Review

Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager

This presentation showcased projects that have closed in 2023 or closed in early 2024.

Chair Borrás opened this item for public comment.

- Member Bill Smith congratulated the District Staff and the Advisory Committee on all of its achievements and work. He noted that in his 40 years of living in the county, the Open Space District has done so much to protect and enhance the county landscape.
- Vice Chair Eliot also expressed her congratulations on the closure of so many acquisition projects and also noted the great leadership of the General Manager.
- Member Michelle Whitman noted that the District appears to have cleared a log jam and asked what cleared this backlog of projects.
- General Manager Arias indicated that the adoption of the Vital Lands Initiative was critical to accomplishing this work as the agency shifted to implementation. It takes a lot of energy and focus to complete these projects. The other significant factor was an increase in staffing and shift in roles to support the Acquisition Team.



- Member Ladi Asgill asked if this meant that there was more work on the backend of these projects now that the acquisitions have closed?
- General Manager Arias noted that most projects that closed were projects where the agency's role is stewarding and monitoring, rather than owning and operating. Ag + Open Space owns over 300 conservation easements and monitors these properties on an 18-month cycle; this translates to 6 properties a week. Ag + Open Space has streamlined remote monitoring and adjusted staff structure to deal with needs on a continuous basis.

Chair Borrás opened this item for public comment.

- Susan Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network and Madrone Audubon Society. Ms. Kirks commented that one area that needs more attention is species protection, understanding habitat needs, and wildlife corridors. She also spoke about a need to invite and collaborate with smaller, less funded organizations that have species conservation expertise. She noted that the Paula Lane Nature Preserve has been devastated, as the habitat for the American Badger has been impacted and stated the terms of the Conservation Easement have been violated. Habitat destructions by the City of Petaluma has resulted in the placement of the protected species from the property. The Paula Lane Action Network hopes facilitate a transfer of property title from the City of Petaluma to a qualified entity. Ms. Kirks also acknowledged the accomplishments of the District under General Manager Arias' leadership, with Jennifer Kuszmar in the Acquisition Program Manager role.

Advisory Committee Administration

- a) Advisory Committee Rules of Procedures & Brown Act
Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager
- b) Hybrid Meeting AB 2449 Review
Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager
Aldo Mercado, County Counsel

Chair Borrás opened this item for comments.

- A question was asked as to why a member would need to disclose whether there were individuals over/under 18 years old present. Counsel pointed out this is related to undue influence concerns.
 - Counsel clarified that if a member participating through AB2449 and their remote location is posted in the agenda, a vote does not need to take place as the public is aware of their remote attendance. He noted that if Just Cause is invoked, the chair should identify the general reason, but not go into detail beyond the category provided in the legislation.
 - There were no public comments.
- c) Ad Hoc Subcommittee Assignments

Chair Borrás took a roll call vote to approve constituency of the subcommittee assignments of the Agricultural Ad Hoc Subcommittee, Endowment Subcommittee, and Matching Grant Program Revision Subcommittee. All members approved the constituency of the subcommittees. Members in



favor: Jan McFarland, Steve Rabinowitch*, Thembi Borrás, Ladi Asgill, Bill Smith, Michelle Whitman, Josh Proctor, Wendy Eliot

Chair Borrás took a roll call vote to approve the dissolution of the subcommittee assignments of the Acquisition Ad Hoc and Matching Grant Program Application Evaluation Subcommittee. All members approved the dissolution. Members in favor: Jan McFarland, Steve Rabinowitch*, Thembi Borrás, Ladi Asgill, Bill Smith, Michelle Whitman, Josh Proctor, Wendy Eliot

- The chair asked staff to clarify why Matching Grant Evaluation Subcommittee and Acquisition Subcommittee were being dissolved.
- General Manager Arias noted that Ad Hoc subcommittees were formed on as needed basis and that the work of the Matching Grant Evaluation Subcommittee was complete. For the Acquisition Subcommittee, it was originally created to address how the agency was changing the selection criteria based on the Vital Lands Initiative, which was then addressed by the full committee. Mrs. Kuszmar commented that dissolution of this subcommittee was needed because the work around why was formed had concluded and shifted. This subcommittee may be reformed at some point in the future when the Buy, Protect, Sell Program launches. She thanked anyone who participated in this subcommittee.
- Vice Chair Eliot asked about the status of the Endowment Subcommittee. General Manager Arias stated that the Stewardship Update went to before the board, but the timeline for legislation related to the investment policy has shifted. Subcommittee will be called upon to meet get feedback on the legislation.

Chair Borrás open this item for public comment:

- Susan Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network and Madrone Audubon Society, noted a procedural mistake.

d) Committee Calendar & Roster

Chair Borrás opened this item to the Committee Members and Staff for comment.

- Member Whitman noted that there was an error; Don McEnhill represents the Environment.
- General Manager Arias noted that Jesus Guzman has notified the District that he cannot continue serve on the Advisory Committee due to other obligations.
- Member Whitman noted that the Advisory Committee might consider only meeting when there are action items to vote on.
- No comments from the public.

e) Election of Committee Officers

- Chair Borrás is willing to give others the opportunity to Chair the Committee. If no one else is willing currently, Chair Borrás is willing continue to be the Chair.
- Vice Chair Eliot is stepping down to allow others become Vice Chair.
- Chair Pro Tem Rabin Steve Rabinowitch will not continue in the role and invites others join.

Due to low attendance, this item was continued to the February 22, 2024 meeting.

Projects in Negotiations

- No comments



Announcements from Advisory Committee Members

Member Whitman announced that an elk was sighted near Joy Road in Occidental.

Adjournment

Chair Borrás adjourned the meeting at 6:36 pm.

Next Meeting: February 22, 2024

This meeting will be in person with an option for members of the public to join via zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Nozzari
Advisory Committee Clerk

