



**AG + OPEN SPACE**  
SONOMA COUNTY

SONOMA COUNTY OPEN SPACE DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**APPROVED MINUTES**

**747 Mendocino Avenue – Suite 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95401**  
**September 28, 2023, | 5:00 pm**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Paul Martin	Ladi Asgill	Steve Rabinowitsh	Thembi Borrás
Bill Smith	Wendy Eliot	Mark Stapp	John Shribbs
Kevin McDonnell	Don McEnhill	Dayna Ghirardelli	Josh Proctor

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Jan McFarland    Kristina Tierney    Jesús Guzmán    Angel Lopez    Michelle Whitman

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Misti Arias, General Manager; Lisa Pheatt, County Counsel; Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager; Pamela Swan, Grants Coordinator; Sara Ortiz, Administrative Aide; Michelle Nozzari, Administrative Aide.

**Call to Order**

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

**Public Comment**

No comment.

**Approval of Minutes from August 24, 2023**

Chair Borrás asked for any comments or revisions to the August 24, 2023, minutes. Wendy Eliot noted that she did not attend the meeting and was not listed as absent. Chair Borrás took roll call. A vote took place to approve the minutes with this correction. Wendy Eliot abstained from the voting; the minutes were approved with the corrections.

**General Manager's Report**

**Upcoming Board Items**

10/24    MGP Program Guideline & Process – Review new draft guidelines/app process.  
11/7    Spring Hill Ranch CE Acquisition  
          Environmental Services Contracts

Fourth Round of Grant Funding to be Awarded 2024 and Position Allocation  
12/12 Mark West Wikiup OSP Fee Title Purchase and CE Acquisition  
MGP Program Guideline & Process – Adoption of new draft guidelines/app process  
Land Management Services Contracts

The General Manager welcomed new Acquisition Assistant, Simon Apostol. Mr. Apostol has previous experience as a Natural Area Manager at the Columbia Land Trust in Vancouver, WA where he led several conservation, management, and restoration projects including acting as a lead for the Kwoneesum Dam removal project. Mr. Apostol also has extensive experience as an ecologist and has GIS expertise that will benefit the District.

Stewardship Endowment Update: Ag + Open Space received direction from the Board of Supervisors to work with Auditor Controller Treasurer Tax collector (ACTTC) to develop an Ag + Open Space endowment account, to lobby for legislative change to amend the way the district is able to invest funds, and to create an investment strategy for this endowment. Members of the Advisory Committee attended the meeting and gave public comment.

In September, Ag + Open Space closed on the purchase of a conservation easement over the 209-acre Soda Springs Ranch Open Space Preserve property in Cloverdale. The City of Cloverdale will convey a conservation easement and recreation conservation covenant to Ag + Open Space and will manage the property for natural resource protection and recreation.

The Gillis Ranch Preserve is set to close early next month. It is a 140-acre property adjacent to the Nahmens conservation easement (site of the Duckworth Family farm) and Cunningham Marsh.

The Fiscal Oversight Commission has recently approved the LaFranchi Laguna, Spring Hill, and Armstrong Redwoods - Ayers projects. These projects will be moving forward to the Board of Directors.

Ag + Open Space has initiated a new project, Russian River Redwoods (previously Silver Estates – a nearly 400-acre property that was slated for timber harvest. Save the Redwoods League is in contract to purchase the property by the end of September. Ag + Open Space is partnering with the League and the County to conserve this property and transfer it to a County entity with an estimated closing timeframe of late 2024.

## Subcommittee Appointments and Report Outs

### Report Outs

- Acquisition Subcommittee – Subcommittee has not met.
- Agricultural Subcommittee – Subcommittee has not met but plans to meet in late October or early November.
- Endowment Subcommittee – Has met three times. Chair Borrás attended Stewardship Update to the Board on September 19, 2023. She provided public comment and expressed support for the districted recommended actions to develop a fund, create a funding strategy, and work with consultants to change investment legislation.



- Matching Grant APPLICATION EVALUATION Subcommittee – has met and reviewed applications. The Committee’s work has concluded for the year.
- Matching Grant REVISION Subcommittee – The subcommittee met to review recommended changes to the Matching Grant and is in support of the recommendations.

#### Subcommittee Appointments to Vacant Positions

Chair Borrás went over subcommittee vacancies and took a vote to appoint interested members to each subcommittee. The following members were appointed by unanimous vote.

- John Shribbs was appointed to the Acquisition Subcommittee vacancy.
- Ladi Asgill and Danya Ghirardelli were appointed to the Agricultural Subcommittee vacancies.
- Kevin McDonnell was appointed to the Endowment Subcommittee vacancy.
- Matching Grant REVISION Subcommittee: No vacancy.
- John Shribbs was appointed to the Matching Grant Application Evaluation Subcommittee vacancy. The Community Resources Manager noted that the work of this subcommittee concluded.

#### Matching Grant Program Revisions

Amy Ricard, Community Resources Program Manager, and Pamela Swan, Grants Coordinator, presented recommended revisions to the Matching Grant Program. A discussion took place and Advisory Committee members provided insight and additional recommendations. Chair Borrás opened discussion for public comment.

George Horwedel echoed support for matching grant revisions to include a transparency process including providing information about the amount of funds spent for each project to date annually.

Susan Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network and Madrone Audubon Society, emphasized importance of empathy for community in this process. The Matching Grant process can feel like an unfriendly process for those who are first time applicants. It is important to prioritize equity. She advocated for no minimum threshold.

#### Projects in Negotiation

The Advisory Committee members reviewed the Projects in Negotiation Spreadsheet. Member Paul Martin noted that some of the abbreviations were confusing.

#### Announcements

- Member Mark Stapp announced that he and Mayor Rogers will be at Spring Lake Middle School giving a presentation on the Southeast Santa Rosa Greenway.
- Member Kevin McDonnell announced that the City of Petaluma is opening an access way to Steamer Landing to the D street community.



- Member John Shribbs announced the City of Petaluma received a Federal Infrastructure Resiliency Act grant from CalFire for \$1,000,000 to plant trees in parks and neighborhoods. This grant is disbursed as \$200,000 a year for five years.

From the Public

- George Horwedel, a concerned member of the public, advocated for the protection and purchase of Petrified Forest by the Open Space District which is now for sale. He also asked that District should work with School Districts. He noted it would be a shame to lose this natural wonder for future generations.
- Susan Kirks announced that the local Coastal Plan will be going before the board at the end of the year.

**Adjournment**

Chair Borrás adjourned the meeting at 7:00pm

**Next Meeting: October 26, 2023**

This meeting will be in person with an option for members of the public to join via zoom. The meeting place is: 747 Mendocino Ave, Ste 100, Large Conference Room, Santa Rosa

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Nozzari  
*Advisory Committee Clerk*

