



Board Agenda Item 53

DATE: October 31, 2017

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBMITTED BY: Steven E. White, Director
Department of Public Works and Planning

SUBJECT: Resolution Supporting Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement on approximately 642 acres of land owned by Scott and Charlyse Raven

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider a request from the Sequoia Riverlands Trust and adopt a Resolution supporting the purchase of an Agricultural Conservation Easement on approximately 642 acres of land owned by Scott and Charlyse Raven by utilizing a grant from the State Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservancy Program.

This item was continued from the October 17, 2017 Board meeting to today's hearing in order for the applicant to provide more information regarding their organization.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

The Board may choose not to adopt the Resolution, which may affect approval of the grant by the California Department of Conservation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The preparation of this report and staff work associated with this request is a Net County Cost that is funded by appropriations in the Department of Public Works and Planning Org 4360 budget. The approximate cost to process this request is \$1,300.

The County is not contributing to the purchase of the conservation easement on the subject property or assuming responsibility for monitoring or enforcing the terms of the Conservation Easement Agreements.

DISCUSSION:

Sequoia Riverlands Trust has submitted a letter (see Attachment A) requesting that the Board adopt a Resolution in support of purchasing an Agricultural Conservation Easement on an approximately 642-acre parcel of agricultural land owned by Scott and Charlyse Raven (see Attachment B).

In order to adopt a Resolution of Support, the Board must determine that the proposal meets the eligibility criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Section 10251. Staff's evaluation of the proposal against the eligibility criteria is discussed below:

A) *The parcel proposed for conservation is expected to continue to be used for, and is large enough to sustain, commercial agricultural production. The land is also in an area that*

possesses the necessary market, infrastructure, and agricultural support services, and the surrounding parcel sizes and land uses will support long-term commercial agricultural production.

The subject property is located south of East Elkhorn Avenue between Fowler Avenue and State Route (SR) 43 and has historically been utilized as an almond orchard. The property is approximately 642 acres, which is large enough to sustain a commercial agriculture operation. Staff believes the application meets Criterion A.

B) The applicable city or county has a general plan that demonstrates a long-term commitment to agricultural land conservation. This commitment shall be reflected in the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures of the plan, as they relate to the area of the county or city where the easement acquisition is proposed.

Criterion B requires that the Board make the finding that the County's General Plan contains goals and policies that seek to promote the long-term commitment to agricultural land conservation, and that the proposal is consistent with the County's General Plan.

The subject property is designated for Agricultural uses in the General Plan and is zoned AE-20 (Exclusive Agriculture, 20-acre minimum parcel size).

The Fresno County General Plan contains policies that seek preserving areas designated for agricultural use. The following Goals and Policies are identified in support of Criterion B:

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| <i>Goal LU-A</i> | <i>To promote the long-term conservation of productive and potentially- productive agricultural lands and to accommodate agricultural-support services and agriculturally-related activities that support the viability of agriculture and further the County's economic development goals.</i> |
| <i>Policy LU-A.1</i> | <i>The County shall maintain agriculturally-designated areas for agriculture use and shall direct urban growth away from valuable agricultural lands to cities, unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for such development where public facilities and infrastructure are available.</i> |
| <i>Policy LU-A.16</i> | <i>The County should consider the use of agricultural land preservation programs that improve the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches, thereby ensuring long-term conservation of viable agricultural operations. Examples of programs to be considered should include: land trusts; conservation easements; dedication incentives; new and continued Williamson Act contracts; Farmland Security Act contracts; the California Farmland Conservancy Program Fund; agricultural education programs; zoning regulations; agricultural mitigation fee program; urban growth boundaries; transfer of development rights; purchase of development rights; and agricultural buffer policies.</i> |

Staff believes that placing the subject property under a conservation easement would restrict the use of the subject parcel to farming, which is consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan for preservation of agricultural land.

C) Without conservation, the land proposed for protection is likely to be converted to nonagricultural use in the foreseeable future.

The 642-acre property consists of five parcels. Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs) 056-030-42s, 43s, 53s, 54s and 62s, are located south of East Elkhorn Avenue between the Fowler Avenue and State Route (SR) 43. The subject parcels are located approximately five miles west of the city limits of the Cities of Selma and Kingsburg and are outside of the Sphere of Influence of both Cities.

The subject property is within the AE-20 (Exclusive Agriculture, 20-acre minimum parcel size) Zone District. The 642-acre property could potentially be divided up into 20-acre ranchettes and could be developed with one single-family residence by right. A second residence may be permitted on each 20-acre parcel by a Director's Review and Approval (DRA) process. Consequently, at least 64 single-family residences could be built upon the 642-acre properties to provide housing for those who may work in Selma or Kingsburg. Placing the subject parcels under conservation easement will preserve it for farming for perpetuity.

Based on the above discussion, staff believes the proposed conservation easement may preclude potential breakup of the subject parcels into 20-acre parcels with multiple residences, which would substantially reduce the agricultural sustainability of the subject property. Staff believes the proposal meets this criterion.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the above discussion, staff believes the proposal meets all of the eligibility criteria listed in the Public Resources Code 10251 and recommends the Board adopt the Resolution of Support for the purchase of an Agricultural Conservation Easement on approximately 642 acres owned by Scott and Charlyse Raven by utilizing a grant from the State Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservancy Program.

NOTICING:

The Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program Application requires that the Applicant provide written notice to adjacent landowners prior to adoption of the Resolution of Support by the Board. As a result, the applicant sent 22 individual notices to adjacent property owners.

REFERENCE MATERIAL:

BAI #65, October 17, 2017

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AND/OR ON FILE:

Attachments A - B
On file with Clerk - Resolution

CAO ANALYST:

John Hays