

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: ERIN MORRIS, SENIOR PLANNER
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST GREENWAY EXISTING CONDITIONS,
OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONSTRAINTS REPORT AND
PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT, REZONING, AND
ASSOCIATED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

AGENDA ACTION: ADOPT RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the City Manager's Office that the Council:

- Accept the report titled "Southeast Greenway Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints," and;
- By resolution, initiate a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning of the approximately 57 acre site comprised of undeveloped Highway 12 right of way between Farmers Lane and Spring Lake Regional Park in southeast Santa Rosa.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report titled "Southeast Greenway Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints" was prepared by Community Development staff to provide background information about existing conditions and plans affecting the 57 acre site. Preparation of the report was a component of the July 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between Caltrans, Sonoma Land Trust, and the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership—the Partnership is comprised of City of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma County Water Agency, Southeast Greenway Campaign, and Landpaths.

A key issue identified in the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report is that the 57 acre site does not currently have a General Plan designation. If the Council adopts the resolution initiating a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning of the site, staff will prepare and issue a Request for Proposal, interview responsive consultants, and bring a contract for planning and environmental consultant support for the project to the Council by January 2016.

BACKGROUND

On October 18, 2011, the Santa Rosa City Council adopted Resolution No. 27995 which included Council Goal #4, Strategic Objective #4: “Acknowledge Southeast Greenway community planning projects.” The Southeast Greenway Campaign is a community group established to develop an urban greenway on approximately 57 acres of land acquired for State highway purposes over a twenty year period spanning the 1950s to the 1970s. The land is owned by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

On April 16, 2013, the Council adopted Resolution No. 28266 reaffirming Council Goal #4, Strategic Objective #3: “Support Efforts of Southeast Greenway Campaign by Monitoring and Providing Information.”

On June 17, 2014, the City of Santa Rosa joined the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership by signing a Mutual Letter of Intent. The Partnership consists of the following partners:

- City of Santa Rosa
- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Southeast Greenway Campaign
- Landpaths

As outlined in the Mutual Letter of Intent, the initial vision is that the highway land between Summerfield Road and Spring Lake Regional Park would be transferred to the Sonoma County Water Agency and operated/maintained by Sonoma County Regional Parks. The remaining land would be transferred to the City of Santa Rosa and would be operated and maintained by City of Santa Rosa’s Recreation and Parks Department with support from community members and nonprofits.

In late 2014, the Sonoma Land Trust joined the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership and is contributing expertise and effort toward facilitating the future transfer of the Caltrans land to public ownership.

On August 20, 2014, the California Transportation Commission adopted a resolution to rescind the freeway adoption due to lack of operational need, local support, and funding. This means that the land may be transferred or sold.

On July 7, 2015, the Council adopted Resolution No. 28666 approving a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Caltrans, Sonoma Land Trust, and the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership. The MOU documents how the Partnership, Sonoma Land Trust, and Caltrans will collaborate and work together toward development of an agreement that will transfer the highway land to public ownership.

The MOU states that the City of Santa Rosa would develop an Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints report to document existing conditions on the property

and opportunities and constraints resulting from existing adopted plans. This report is attached.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

Previous Council actions are detailed in the Background section above.

ANALYSIS

Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report

The attached report includes extensive information about the 57 acre site, including existing land uses surrounding and on the site, an initial biological assessment, an inventory of existing access points that would be useful for future public access, site topography, and surrounding General Plan and zoning. This information will serve as a baseline for future planning efforts.

The report summarizes information about three major subareas:

West (Farmers Lane to Wanda Way/Camden Court): This area totals approximately 18.3 acres. This area includes five acres of land adjacent to Farmers Lane and Hoen Avenue Frontage Road.

Central (Wanda Way/Camden Court to Summerfield Road): This area totals approximately 22.6 acres.

East (Summerfield Road to Spring Lake Regional Park): This area totals approximately 16.3 acres.

After inventorying conditions in each subarea, the report includes lists of opportunities, which are existing conditions that are generally positive for accomplishing a variety of community-serving objectives, and constraints, which are existing conditions that may present challenges or issues that would need to be resolved through a community planning process.

A key constraint identified in the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report is that the 57 acre site does not currently have a General Plan designation. The site originally consisted of 65 parcels that were acquired beginning in the late 1950s through the early 1970s by the State of California Transportation Department for future development as an extension of Highway 12. In 1957, the California Highway Commission declared Highway 12 as a freeway between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa, adopted a new alignment for the freeway to extend to the east parallel to Hoen Avenue, through undeveloped land that later became Spring Lake Regional Park, and reconnecting with existing Highway 12 at Melita Road. In the late 1950s, freeway agreements for the future use of the land were executed with the City of Santa Rosa.

The 1984 General Plan land use diagram for the City of Santa Rosa depicted the future freeway alignment along the right of way, through Spring Lake Regional Park, and onto Highway 12 east of Melita Road. After completing several studies, the City removed the depiction of the freeway from the land use diagram and showed the land as undesignated with adoption of a revised General Plan in 1991.

Since 1991, two City plans have identified future uses/activities within the site. The City of Santa Rosa's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan calls for a Class 1 bicycle path connecting from Hoen Avenue to Spring Lake Regional Park; a Class 1 bicycle path consists of a path providing a completely separate right of way for the exclusive use of bicycles and pedestrians. The Citywide Creek Master Plan depicts the planned bicycle and pedestrian path and envisions enhancement and restoration of the three creeks that traverse the site: Matanzas, Sierra Park, and Spring.

The site has other constraints in addition to the lack of General Plan land use designation. The site is unusually shaped and the public streets that bisect the site such as Hoen Avenue, Franquette Avenue, and Yulupa Avenue are part of the property and would need to be subdivided from the site. While most of the site is 200 to 300 feet wide, there is an area of the site east of Summerfield Road where the width of the site tapers to approximately 70 feet. Extensive public improvements would be required to improve circulation around and through the site, including street crossings to facilitate a successful Class 1 bicycle path.

There are numerous opportunities as well. Most of the site has excellent potential public access from surrounding public streets and creek trails. The site is wide enough to accommodate the planned Class 1 bicycle path that would connect Hoen Avenue to Spring Lake Regional Park. This segment would ultimately connect Spring Lake Regional Park to downtown Santa Rosa where cyclists and pedestrians could connect with the Santa Rosa creek trail, Joe Rodota trail, and to western Sonoma County. The site is close to numerous schools and shopping centers and could provide alternative paths for school children.

Southeast Greenway Community Partnership

The Southeast Greenway Community Partnership, comprised of the City of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County Water Agency, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Southeast Greenway Campaign, Landpaths, and the Sonoma Land Trust, is a significant asset. As outlined in the July 7, 2015 MOU, the shared goal of these six entities is to acquire all or most of the 57 acres to create a Class 1 bicycle path and linear park. This desire was the impetus for the formation of the Southeast Greenway Campaign in 2008. The Southeast Greenway Campaign is a not for profit community group that has been instrumental in creating an initial vision for use of the land, beginning fundraising for acquisition of the land, launching the Partnership, and coordinating with Caltrans to help develop a positive working relationship.

Sonoma County Water Agency would like to acquire the land east of Summerfield Road for use and maintenance by Sonoma County Regional Parks; the Agency is interesting in exploring construction of an underground water pipeline that would begin at Spring Lake Regional Park, travel through the subject site, and continue further toward the Kawana Springs area. This use would be in addition to the partially underground Spring Creek bypass which currently traverses the site from Summerfield Road to Franquette Avenue.

The MOU envisions that the City of Santa Rosa would acquire land between Vallejo Street and Summerfield Road for use as a Class 1 bicycle path and linear park. Landpaths has expressed interest in helping program and maintain the space. Santa Rosa Water has expressed interest in potential emergency groundwater supply wells and groundwater recharge areas. Restoration and enhancement of the three creeks within the study area is another City goal.

The Sonoma Land Trust joined the Partnership to lend its expertise in land acquisition, expressing interest in helping acquire a significant urban open space that would provide broad community benefits. The Trust's analysis of potential funding sources has led the Partnership to understand that it would be difficult to fundraise to acquire the land while the site's land remains undesignated.

While Caltrans is not part of the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership, they have been a significant partner to the group's efforts. Caltrans staff have met with members of the Partnership on numerous occasions. In July 2015, Caltrans signed the MOU agreeing to allow the Partnership time to appraise the land, in collaboration with Caltrans, to determine fair market value. Recently, the Partnership met with Caltrans to discuss the possibility of moving forward with the General Plan Amendment process to provide land use designations for the land so that the appraisal and fundraising can proceed more effectively.

The City Council received a letter from Caltrans dated September 3, 2015 conditionally supporting consideration of a variety of land uses through a General Plan Amendment. The letter is attached.

General Plan Amendment and Rezoning

Based on the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report, and working with the Southeast Greenway Community Partnership since June 2014, staff recommends that the Council initiate a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning for the 57 acre site. The proposed General Plan Amendment would establish land use designations for the entire site and the rezoning would ensure that the zoning classifications are consistent with the General Plan. This process would be part of a collaborative community planning process for future use of the land. While the General Plan Amendment and Rezoning are the technical mechanisms, it is envisioned that the process will be more comprehensive than a typical General Plan Amendment and will involve significant public engagement.

General Plan Land Use Designations

Staff's initial vision for the General Plan Amendment is that the majority of the site would be designated Parks and Recreation to facilitate public acquisition and future development of a linear park and Class 1 bicycle path connecting Hoen Avenue to Spring Lake Regional Park. This land use would be compatible with other potential land uses identified in the Memorandum of Understanding including restored and protected open space and natural habitat, an underground water pipeline, and groundwater development and recharge.

Other land use designations would be considered in some locations on the site, such as:

- Retail and Business Services at the northeast corner of Hoen Avenue and Farmers Lane to facilitate retail development along Farmers Lane.
- Higher density residential to facilitate future construction of affordable housing. This is due to the overall size and location of the site and the community need for affordable housing.
- Public/Institutional near Montgomery High School for possible education-related uses.
- Other land uses which emerge through an extensive community engagement process that will involve significant public input.

Staff recommends that the Council confirm this initial approach, recognizing that the land uses ultimately proposed will evolve through the planning process, and that the final decision will be made by the City Council after extensive community engagement and at formal public hearings.

Concept Plan

Staff envisions development of a Concept Plan for the site that would illustrate proposed land uses in a conceptual way to help the public and Council understand how the site might be developed in the future, including site and area circulation. This work will be an important part of the General Plan Amendment and Rezoning process because it will help identify potential issues to be resolved.

Public Engagement and Project Schedule

The process is envisioned to include significant community engagement. If the Council adopts the resolution initiating a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning of the site, staff will prepare and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a consultant to coordinate community engagement, develop a concept plan, prepare a General Plan Amendment, Rezoning, and Environmental Impact Report.

The RFP is anticipated to request an innovative strategy that will ensure that surrounding property owners, renters, schools, businesses, churches, neighborhood groups, and citywide groups are actively involved in the planning process. Staff would

review proposals, interview responsive consultants, and bring a contract to the Council no later than January 2016.

The General Plan Amendment, Rezoning, and associated environmental review is expected to be a year-long process. If the project commences in January/February 2016, it is expected to be completed by December 2016/January 2017.

FISCAL IMPACT

The General Plan Amendment and Rezoning is estimated to cost between \$250,000 and \$300,000. There is \$319,000 available in the Community Development Department's budget appropriated for this work.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Preparation of the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints report is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA section 15262 because it consists of a planning study for possible future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded.

Should the Council initiate a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning, environmental review would be accomplished concurrent with project review. Staff anticipates preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Initiation of a General Plan Amendment does not require a formal public hearing; conclusion of the process will involve public hearings by the Planning Commission and City Council before a final decision is made.

Because the project is expected to involve broad, citywide community engagement, in addition to mailing a courtesy notice to property owners within 500 feet, notices were also emailed and mailed to various community groups and neighborhood associations. The courtesy notice states that the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report is available to the public, and that the Council will consider initiating a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning for the property.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Location Map

Attachment 2 – Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints Report

Attachment 3 – Resolution No. 28666 - Memorandum of Understanding, July 7, 2015

Attachment 4 – Mutual Letter of Intent, June 17, 2014

Attachment 5 – Letter from California Department of Transportation, September 3, 2015

Attachment 6 – Public Correspondence

Resolution

CONTACT

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