



Department: Administration
Cost Center: 1005
For Agenda of: 4/21/2026
Placement: Consent
Estimated Time: N/A

FROM: Greg Hermann, Deputy City Manager
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SUBJECT: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND GRANT AGREEMENT FOR RIGHETTI FISCALINI RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT WITH THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve a Community Partnership Agreement with The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County; and
2. Approve a Grant Agreement for the Righetti Fiscalini Ranch conservation easement project; and
3. Authorize the City Manager to sign the Community Partnership Agreement and the Grant Agreement in a final form satisfactory to the City Attorney.

POLICY CONTEXT

The City Council set forth a policy for Community Partnerships by Resolution No. 8862 (1998 Series) on October 20, 1998 (Attachment A), with the stated goal to “encourage partnerships with non-profit organizations for the mutual benefit of both the City and the organizations.” Further, the policy also:

...directs the City to form community partnerships only with entities that can demonstrate good organization and stability. Non-profits should have a board of directors, and, if funding is involved, must be qualified under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. To assure both parties in the partnership understand their responsibilities and any financial arrangements, the policy requires that a formal agreement be drawn up. If significant funding or significant in-kind support is involved, the agreement will be approved by the City Council.

There are numerous policies and programs included in the Conservation and Open Space Element (2006) of the City's General Plan related to open space protection. Most pertinent to this project are Program 8.7.1 (J) and (L) and Policy 9.1.1 (A):

8.7.1 Protect open space resources.

The City will take the following actions to protect open space, and will encourage individuals, organizations, and other agencies to take the same actions within their

areas of responsibility and jurisdiction:

J. Improve interagency cooperation for open space acquisition, greenbelt, creeks, wetlands, and wildlife habitat protection in open space areas by coordinating with other government agencies and organizations having interest or expertise in resource protection.

L. Establish mutually respectful, long-term relationships with landowners, and conservation organizations such as land trusts, and local environmental organizations.

9.1.1 (A): Preserve natural and agricultural landscapes.

The City will implement the following policies and will encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do likewise:

A. Natural and agricultural landscapes that the City has not designated for urban use shall be maintained in their current patterns of use.

The City Council adopted the City of San Luis Obispo 2015 Open Space Maintenance Plan that includes the Technical Appendix: *Integrated Vegetation Management Plan for Open Space Lands of the City of San Luis Obispo*. This document outlines the City's approach for invasive species treatment using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) protocols as promulgated by the University of California. This approach is also established in policy in the Conservation and Open Space Element (2006):

7.6.1 Environmental toxins

The City will avoid the use of synthetic organic chemicals unless there is no practical alternative, and support use of integrated pest management techniques. When the use of a synthetic organic chemical cannot be avoided, the material shall be selective (its effect limited to the target species so far as possible), and it shall be applied selectively.

DISCUSSION

Background and Community Partnership Agreement

The City of San Luis Obispo enjoys a long-standing public-private partnership with The Land Conservancy of San Obispo County (LCSLO) in furtherance of land conservation efforts within the City's Greenbelt. Over the course of this nearly thirty-year relationship, the City has partnered on numerous planning and land protection efforts, including the Stenner Springs Natural Reserve, Maino Open Space, and Bowden Ranch Open Space acquisitions, as well as the Guidetti Ranch, Stenner Ranch, Brughelli Ranch, and O'Connor Ranch conservation easements, together with numerous other successful projects including land restoration and land management activities. In summary, the partnership provides capacity building, fundraising, technical expertise, and relationships that are of significant benefit to the City.

The purposes of the Community Partnership Agreement are two-fold. The first is to formally

document the partnership and recognize the mutual benefits and accomplishments of both the City and LCSLO over the course of over 30 years of working together. The second purpose is to ensure that the required elements of a community partnership, per the 1998 policy, are in place given the size and complexity of the projects and the associated need for clear roles and responsibilities and strong governance; fiscal responsibility and oversight; liability, indemnity and insurance; and, appropriate contractual agreements and purchasing authorities on a project-by-project basis.

Current Funding Requests

LCSLO has reached an agreement to purchase a conservation easement interest in the Righetti Fiscalini Ranch, located in the northeast portion of the City's Greenbelt. On March 30, 2026, the City received a letter from LCSLO requesting consideration of funding in the amount of \$65,000 towards the purchase of the conservation easement interest. LCSLO has secured a primary grant from the State of California Department of Conservation's Sustainable Agriculture Land Conservation Program, as well as other private donations, and would have all of the necessary funding to complete the transaction should Council approve the request. The appraised value for the subject conservation easement is \$2,390,000. As stated in LCSLO's letter, the property description and articulation of conservation values are as follows:

The Righetti Fiscalini Ranch is a prominent part of the southern San Luis Obispo Greenbelt and is visible from many City vantage points and open space areas. Two seasonal streams converge on the ranch which ultimately feed into San Luis Obispo Creek. Wildlife including black bears and various raptor species are frequently observed on the property. The ranch's current agricultural uses include approximately 91 acres of avocado orchard and 55 acres of vineyard.

The proposed conservation easement will permanently protect these scenic, environmental, and agricultural conservation values by restricting development to one potential future single residence within a defined building envelope. Additional restrictions will prohibit future subdivision, intensive non-agricultural land uses, activities that lead to soil erosion, unnecessary removal of native vegetation, and other perpetual land use restrictions. These restrictions will ensure the conservation values of the Righetti Fiscalini Ranch are protected in perpetuity.

See Attachment B, Draft Grant Agreement, and Attachment C, LCSLO Funding Request Letter.

The City has also solicited a proposal from LCSLO for invasive species treatments at a suite of City open space properties, including Bishop Peak, Irish Hills, Stenner Springs and South Hills Natural Reserves, as well as Miozzi Open Space. The priority species identified for treatment are yellow-star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), wooly distaff thistle (*Carthamus lanatus*), jubata grass (*Cortaderia jubata*), and stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*). These species carry a ranking of "high" or "alert" from the California Invasive Species Council, meaning that they have the capability to impact ecosystem processes, impact other plant communities, and impact genetic integrity, as well as possessing high

rates of spread with no management, innate reproductive potential, and potential of human-caused or natural long-distance dispersal, among other risk-based evaluative parameters.

Over the years, the City has sought LCSLO's services due to their intimate knowledge of City open space locations and habitats, decades of invasive species-specific experience, and specialized licensing and credentials (e.g. pest control applicator's license, qualified applicator license). As the City moves towards increased management actions attendant to reducing wildland fire risk, it is anticipated that invasive species treatments will play an important role. This is because some of the priority species are highly flammable in and of themselves (pampas grass) while others have the capability of converting grassland systems to the point where livestock grazing as a fuel reduction management strategy is much less viable because species such as yellow star thistle and distaff thistle are unpalatable to livestock grazing animals. The current scope of work and budget provided by LCSLO following coordination with City staff is \$43,155.

Previous Council Direction

City Council's most recent notable action related to land protection within the San Luis Obispo Greenbelt is the adoption of the Major City Goal (MCG) for Open Space, Climate Action, and Resilience included with the 2025-27 Financial Plan, including these goals:

- 4 – Protect, sustain and advance open space and natural and historic resources**
 - a.** Pursue priority land conservation opportunities to expand the Greenbelt, identify funding opportunities and resources, and engage with priority landowners on an annual basis

- 2 – Implement disaster mitigation efforts to reduce risks from flood and fires**
 - b.** Treat at least 25 acres of vegetative fuels in high wildfire risk areas of City creeks and Open Space

Public Engagement

The Major City Goal strategy to protect and maintain open space is reflective of extensive public engagement during the 2025-27 Financial Plan process, including the Community Forum, Goal Setting Workshop, numerous survey and public input opportunities, Strategic Budget Direction, and the final adoption of the Financial Plan itself. Any member of the public may put forward either written or verbal comments to the City Council pertaining to this agenda item.

CONCURRENCE

The Community Development Department concurs with the recommended action due to the role of the proposed Conservation Easement in service of implementing the Land Use Element (2014) of the City's General Plan.

The City's Ranger Service and the Fire Department's Emergency Management personnel support the treatment of invasive species within City open space to reduce the risk of wildland fires.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The recommended action to provide grant funding for the purchase of a conservation easement is not considered a Project under the California Environmental Quality Act. Further, the acquisition of a conservation easement is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it involves "acquisition of lands for fish and wildlife conservation purposes including (a) preservation of fish and wildlife habitat..." (CEQA Guidelines § 15313), and because it involves the "acceptance of ... easement interests in order to maintain the open space character of the area" (CEQA Guidelines§ 15317).

The City also recently completed registration with the State of California pursuant to the Governor’s executive order and its CEQA Suspension process for projects that reduce the risk of wildfire (Secretarial Suspension Authorization, Project ID: 3c76408c-c831-40e7-85e6-8283a118f7b9, “City of San Luis Obispo Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Project”). This approval specifically covers invasive species treatment actions in the locations identified under the proposed scope of work. Project activities will need to comply with the [Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan \(EPP\)](#) following submittal of a Notice of Commencement specifying the date and location where activities will actually take place.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted: Yes

Budget Year: 2025-26

Funding Identified: Yes

Fiscal Analysis:

Righetti Fiscalini Ranch Conservation Easement – In-Lieu Funds

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
General Fund				
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other: Avila Ranch In-Lieu Open Space Funds	\$603,500	\$65,000	\$538,500	N/A
Total	\$603,500	\$65,000	\$538,500	N/A

Invasive Species Treatments - Open Space Maintenance CIP

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
General Fund	\$213,221	\$43,155	\$170,066	N/A
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other:				
Total	\$213,221	\$43,155	\$170,066	N/A

As part of the Development Agreement and conditions of approval for the Avila Ranch project, the City collected a total of \$603,500 as an in-lieu payment to offset open space impacts and conversion of agricultural soils that occurred at the project site. The Avila Ranch project will dedicate agricultural open space land on-site, and the in-lieu funds represent the off-site requirement that could not be completed within the project boundary. The funds should be spent within the San Luis Obispo Greenbelt and should be used for conservation projects with an agriculture nexus. Per the draft Grant Agreement, the City's funds would be sent directly to escrow with instruction to be used if, and only if, the escrow officer has all other funds on hand and is in position to record the Deed of Conservation Easement. Because LCSLO is responsible for easement administration and annual monitoring, the annual ongoing cost to the City is negligible.

The Open Space Maintenance CIP is used for a broad variety of activities outlined in the City of San Luis Obispo 2015 Open Space Maintenance Plan, including invasive species treatment activities. A total of \$213,221 is currently available to support the funding request of \$43,155. Ongoing costs are difficult to determine; in some cases, a single treatment may be effective while in other cases a treatment area may need multiple visits based on the management objective (e.g. eradication, perimeter control) and variable field conditions in the future based on timing and amount of seasonal rainfall. In any case, follow-up treatments would be the subject to a future scope of work and funding availability. This funding request would be enabled through the City's standard purchase requisition and purchase order process.

ALTERNATIVES

Council may request changes to either the draft Community Partnership Agreement or the draft Grant Agreement. Council could also elect to fund only the conservation easement or only the invasive species treatment work described herein, or fund either of the projects at a lesser amount. Council could choose not to approve any of the recommended actions. Should Council direct an alternative that requires staff to return at a later time, a "date certain" should be identified that works with LCSLO's acquisition schedule and timing for the conservation easement project.

ATTACHMENTS

- A - Community Partnership and Foundation Policy and Resolution No. 8862 (1998 Series)
- B - Draft Community Partnership Agreement
- C - Draft Grant Agreement
- D - LCSLO Funding Request Letter - Righetti Fiscalini Ranch Conservation Easement