

Conserving Coyote Valley Agriculture Feasibility Study Phase Two

Meeting Notes, Advisory Committee Meeting #2

Friday April 20, 2012, 9 am – 11 am
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

PARTICIPANTS

Advisory Committee: Amy Hutzler, Program Manager, Bay Program of the CA Coastal Conservancy; Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Kevin O'Day, Agricultural Commissioner, Santa Clara County; Laurel Prevetti, Deputy Director of Planning Services, City of San Jose; Troy Rahmig, Conservation Biologist, ICF International; Paul Ringgold, Vice President, Stewardship, Peninsula Open Space Trust; Rebecca Tolentino, Senior Planner, City of Morgan Hill; Jennifer Williams, Executive Director, Santa Clara County Farm Bureau; Sarah Young, Senior Project Manager, Santa Clara Valley Water District

Observers: Matt Freeman, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Sam Hamilton, Coyote Valley Research Park; Jake Keller, Coyote Valley Research Park; Brad Spears, Building Industries Association (BIA); Tim Steele, The Sobrato Organization

Project Team: Sibella Kraus, SAGE; Amie MacPhee, Cultivate; Matt Kowta, BAE Urban Economics; Stephen Hammond, Wallace Roberts & Todd; Carrie Kao, Cultivate.

NOTES

Welcome and Introductions

The team welcomed Committee Members and Observers, who were encouraged to participate in the meeting.

Discussion about Revisions to Vision and Goals Statement

Meeting participants requested the following additional revisions to the revised Vision and Goals Statement:

- The word 'permanently' in the Vision Statement is inconsistent with the City of San Jose's General Plan, which designates North Coyote Valley as an employment center and Mid Coyote Valley as a reserve for potential development after 2040.
- The goal to ensure livelihoods is not possible. Consider changing the word 'ensures' to 'supports'.
- Goal #3 should be revised to cover all conservation plans in play. Suggest change to say: *'Conserve and enhance ecological function and habitat value consistent with local general plans and other regional conservation efforts'* (instead of ... *and with the habitat conservation plan*)

Discussion about Case Studies

- More research is needed into the concept of 'term conservation easements' and relevant case studies. A starting point may be to look at how term-based tools are applied in conservation planning to stabilize a population of endangered species and at NRCS term easement programs, such as the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program.

- King County, with rich agricultural resources next to a large urban center, seems like a particularly relevant case study
- Add a case study of NRCS projects that help to reduce the cost of agricultural practices. Examples: Willamette Valley – increasing irrigation efficiency; Pajaro Valley – reducing water use using advanced infrastructure shared by farmers.
- The situation in Coyote Valley is unlike that in many of the case studies, in that the farmers are not the land-owners at least in the North and Mid areas of the Valley. Are there case studies that would look at this condition?

Discussion about Challenges, Opportunities, Tools and Implementation Strategies

General Comments

- There is general appreciation for the recognition of the differences between North, Mid and South Coyote Valley areas, and a desire to have this expressed prominently in all Study documents.
- ‘Champions’ – city, agency, landowner, farmer, and philanthropic – will be needed for successful implementation of effective strategies.
- Additional tools to be investigated include: Conservation Innovation grants; affirmative agriculture easements; and funding from the National Flood Insurance Program.
- More research is needed into the option of vineyards being a viable, long-term agricultural use in the Valley.
- One common theme seems that there is a land trust component and mitigation structure. For this area, there can be additional economic generator, given the open space resource values.
- From an economic stand point, how can interim use or tools raise the value in agricultural investment for the long-term?
- The Study needs to address all water supply issues. The shallow ground water vulnerable to contamination. The protection of water quality is critical for this area.
- What are the possibilities for development providing some of the funding for the agricultural protection and enhancement? At this point, the City of San Jose has set the rules for development and there are no current mitigation fees required of the developers.
- Will Study scope include a transition to higher value crops as part of the strategy?
- What is the bare minimum to sustain agriculture in the region, not just in CV? What is the critical mass to keep agriculture viable in the region?
- Maybe there’s a co-branding idea of farming done in concert with habitat conservation (e.g. ‘salmon-safe’, ‘predator-friendly’, etc.)
- It is important to emphasize the contribution of agricultural and rural areas to the quality of life in the region.

Comments about the Greenbelt Section

Based on feedback, the revised Objectives statement is now:

Greenbelt Objective: *to anchor a valley-wide framework for a vital agricultural resource area by maximizing the viability of agriculture as a major, permanent land use within a mosaic of residential and other lands uses and habitat enhancements*

- The City of San Jose and the City of Morgan Hill are strongly supportive of the Study’s efforts to investigate tools and strategies for enhancing agriculture in South Coyote Valley; and for making the Greenbelt a special place and acclaimed model.
- City of Morgan Hill is trying to develop its own agriculture conservation opportunities. Greenbelt area could be an opportunity for MH and San Jose to work together to establish a larger regional ag area.
- Change “Soil remediation may be required where restricted materials have been applied...” to “Soil remediation may be required in small areas where pesticides were stored...”
- Add as an opportunity “Establishing a flood plain area around Fisher Creek.”

Comments about the Mid-Valley Section

Based on feedback, the revised Objective statement is now:

Mid Valley Objective: *to support a valley-wide framework for a vital agricultural resource area by supporting the viability of agriculture as a major, defining and integral land use and by enhancing agricultural and habitat resource values*

- Where have ‘term conservation easements’ been applied elsewhere? It’s a new concept and unfamiliar to land trusts. Understand the value of a placeholder and mechanism to bolster ag value. What would be the returns on investments in the Mid Valley?
- In conservation planning, when you can’t get something in perpetuity, have used tools that are term-based with the goal of stabilizing a population of endangered species. For example, management for burrowing owls in North San Jose for lands owned by a public agency or a private owner who is interested in some way. Similar to a Williamson Act concept. HCP will attract money from both public and private agencies.
- NRCS has term easement programs (such as the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program); these are usually tied to an associated long-term management plan
- A tool for Mid CV could be cluster development which would preserve ag while allowing for homebuilders to build.

Comments about the North Valley Section

Based on feedback, the revised Objectives statement is now:

North Valley Objective: *to support a valley-wide framework for a vital agricultural resource area by protecting agricultural and habitat resource values and by maximizing the synergy between development goals and agricultural resource area goals*

- North Coyote Valley landowners have a lot of money invested in infrastructure and entitlements. They are ready and eager to respond to market demand for construction of new job-creating facilities, so do not see a future for agriculture in North Coyote Valley.
- Landowners often sign 1 year leases that include a 30-day termination clause, so that development opportunities are not jeopardized by longer leases.