

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment

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From: Meredith Hendricks <mhendricks@sblandtrust.org>
Sent: Monday, August 25, 2025 3:01 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Comment Letter: File No. 25-00751 – Open Space Element Update Scoping
CommentsDear Clerk of the Board,
Attachments: FINAL Open Space Element Scoping Letter (08-25-2025).pdf

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Dear Clerk of the Board,

Attached please find a comment letter from the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County regarding agenda item 25-00751, Open Space Element Update Scoping.

Thank you,
Meredith

Meredith Hendricks (she/her)

Executive Director

805.966.4520





The Land Trust

For Santa Barbara County

OUR MISSION

THE LAND TRUST FOR
SANTA BARBARA
COUNTY CONSERVES
NATURAL RESOURCES,
AGRICULTURAL LAND
AND OPEN SPACES FOR
THE BENEFIT OF
PRESENT AND FUTURE
GENERATIONS.

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Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

RE: File No. 25-00751 – Open Space Element Update Scoping Comments

Dear Chair Capps and Members of the Board,

Thank you for considering these comments from the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (“Land Trust”) on the scoping of the Open Space Element Update (the “OSE”). The OSE is an important opportunity for the County to thoughtfully plan for recreation, climate resilience, biodiversity, and habitat connectivity across Santa Barbara County.

The Land Trust is a community-based organization that has served the county by conserving over 58,000 acres of natural resources, agricultural land, and open spaces over the past 40 years. The Land Trust is committed to supporting the County in developing an effective and collaborative OSE.

The OSE update can serve as a framework for unifying the open space needs of multiple planning efforts. As noted in the staff report, many County policy efforts including the Recreation Master Plan, Climate Adaptation Plan, and the Environmental Justice Element have open space components that should be connected to the OSE. Using the OSE to create specific policies and programs that integrate the goals of these policy efforts would help create a unified planning effort for open space in the county.

We support the County taking a more comprehensive approach to this update, the High Option in the staff report, ideally through integration of the Open Space and Conservation Elements. While we understand that launching the full High Option may not be feasible immediately due to resource constraints, we encourage the County to set this as a longer-term intention. Clear policy direction now can help establish the groundwork for more in-depth environmental analysis and land use decision-making during the upcoming Cycle 7 Housing Element process, among other holistic planning opportunities.

Simultaneously, the pace and scale of open space conservation efforts are increasing throughout California, driven partly by the state’s Pathways to 30x30 and Outdoors for All strategies. The California legislature has codified some habitat connectivity goals in AB 1889 the “Room to Roam Act” which will require the County to update the Conservation Element to address habitat connectivity and wildlife barriers. CalTrans and regional planning agencies face similar requirements under AB 2344 the Safe Roads and Wildlife Protection Act and AB 902 the Connected Communities Act. The OSE should include policies and

programs to lay the groundwork to align these planning efforts for the preservation and management of existing open space in the county while addressing the needs and opportunities for additional open space.

Based on our experience and ongoing work, we offer the following initial priorities for consideration. This list is not exhaustive, but reflects key themes we believe will strengthen the OSE:

- **Protect** high-value open space lands, including ecological, agricultural, scenic, and cultural resources, through updated mapping, clear criteria, and collaborative partnerships.
- **Expand** regional trail connectivity and equitable public access, coordinated with cities, State Parks, the Coastal Conservancy, and the U.S. Forest Service.
- **Ensure** long-term stewardship of conserved lands by prioritizing funding for open space management and stewardship.
- **Grow** and properly fund the County's existing regional park system, including criteria and feasibility for future land transfers. The Land Trust may serve as an intermediary for acquiring or accepting lands suitable for new, well-planned public parks.

We recognize that this is a long-term effort, and we appreciate the County's willingness to listen and partner throughout. The Land Trust is willing to share resources, collaborate with staff, and help move key pieces forward in ways that are aligned with both community goals and County capacity.

We appreciate the many opportunities we've had to partner with the County on protecting and caring for open space - and we look forward to building on that work together in the years ahead.

Sincerely,



Meredith Hendricks
Executive Director
Land Trust for Santa Barbara County