

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
BOARD AGENDA LETTER**



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Agenda Number:
Prepared on: 6/23/05
Department Name: BoS
Department No.: 011
Agenda Date: 7/12/05
Placement: Administrative
Estimate Time:
Continued Item: NO
If Yes, date from:

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Susan Rose, Second District Supervisor
Salud Carbajal, First District Supervisor

STAFF CONTACT: Alissa Hummer, 2nd District Executive Assistant (x2191)
Jeremy Tittle, 1st District Executive Assistant (x2186)

SUBJECT: Open Space Conservation District Feasibility Study

Recommendation(s):

That the Board of Supervisors:

Approve and authorize the Chair to execute a letter authorizing the Trust for Public Land to proceed with a Feasibility Study, **at no cost to the county**, to evaluate open space financing mechanisms and to provide a series of recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and interested parties on the advisability of pursuing an Open Space District in all or part of the County.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan: The recommendations are primarily aligned with Goal No. 5: a high quality of life for all residents.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

Over the years, there has been a great deal of support expressed county-wide for increased efforts to preserve open space and make improvements to the open space lands already in public ownership. Surveys published in 2002 and 2005 have found significant public support for the formation of an Open Space Conservation District, but support for funding such a district through a sales tax increase, has fallen short of the 2/3 majority necessary (the one funding option explored in these surveys).

There are a number of other potential funding mechanisms and configurations which could make an Open Space Conservation District a reality for all or part of the County. To help the county better assess the potential success of various funding mechanisms, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) – which has helped to preserve large tracts of land in this county – has offered to conduct a feasibility study to identify the range of legal funding mechanisms that are available to Santa Barbara County.

TPL has conducted a number of these feasibility studies for jurisdictions all over the country, and in addition to serving as a valuable information gathering function at no cost to the community, they form an objective, fact-based foundation for political and community leaders to make informed decisions about whether or not to launch an initiative and where to focus their efforts.

Given the substantial investment of time and resources required for a successful conservation finance initiative, preliminary research is essential to determine the feasibility of such an effort. Feasibility research provides a stand-alone, fact-based reference document that can be used to evaluate all available financing mechanisms from an objective vantage point. Further, because the report establishes a common understanding about public finance mechanisms vis-à-vis parks and open space, it provides an excellent starting point for consensus building and decision-making regarding polling and program development.

Using grant funding, TPL is able to provide this valuable research service at no cost. Utilizing the county's own statistics and budgetary information, supplemented by state statutory sources and other information, TPL's feasibility research reports identify the most viable local funding options for long-term land conservation in a jurisdiction and provide an analysis of which local options and funding levels are economically prudent and likely to be publicly acceptable.

A typical feasibility report will cover the following topics:

Jurisdiction Overview:

- Land use patterns and development
- Demographics and housing
- Economy
- Government
- Parks and open space resources

Fiscal Portrait:

- Budget
- Bonded indebtedness, debt ceilings, bond rating
- Taxable assessed valuation for the county

County Conservation Finance Options

- Constitutional and statutory provisions:
 - may include property tax, parcel tax, general obligation bonds, districts as financing mechanisms, and special districts; and
 - identification of current tax limits.

Political Issues/Election Analysis

- Voter turnout and election results for other recent fiscal questions, such as bond issues or tax increases, at the county or state level.

Mandates and Service Levels: This is not a mandated program.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts: Since TPL is funded by private grants for this work, there is no cost to the county.

Special Instructions:

Concurrence: County Executive Office
County Counsel

July 12, 2005

Elva Yanez
Trust for Public Land
3250 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2003
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Dear Ms. Yanez,

By this letter, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors officially requests technical advice and assistance from your organization in connection with our efforts to explore a program to finance land conservation and a potentially related ballot measure. As part of your advice and assistance, we understand you will help with research, and develop strategies and recommendations at no cost to the county.

We are interested not only in the factual information that you can provide to us, but also your organization's opinions and recommendations on public funding measures available to us.

This request will also cover any subsequent advice you offer or presentations you submit for the use of Santa Barbara County on related matters.

Thank you for your organization's willingness to contribute to fact-based information gathering regarding open space preservation in Santa Barbara County.

Sincerely,

Susan J. Rose
Chair, Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors