



SOLANO OPEN SPACE

JOINT GOVERNING BOARD/ CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 14, 2011

1. Roll Call

Governing Board Members: Councilperson Campbell

Citizen's Advisory Committee: Bob Berman, Teri Booth, Gene Doherty, Harry Englebright, Karlyn Lewis, Elizabeth Moses, Alice Plutchok, Dan Smith, and Bob Webb

Staff Present: Brian Miller, City of Fairfield; Bill Tuikka, City of Vallejo; Lisa Porras, City of Benicia, Matt Walsh, Solano County

Others Present: Sue Wickham, Solano Land Trust; Dan Sykes county Parks Director; Bill Emlin, County Resource Management Director

2. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved.

3. Introductions

Chair Smith welcomed the Governing Board, CAC, staff and interested parties to the meeting. Members of the Governing Board and the CAC introduced themselves.

4. Public Comment

Gene Doherty informed the group about a volunteer work day sponsored by the State Parks Foundation planned for 9:00 a.m. on April 16 in Benicia. The Foundation's Earth Day celebration will focus on the botanical gardens. PG&E, Starbucks, and the Foundation will be bringing over 200 people to the work day. PG&E has donated plants for the garden. Bob Berman will be leading a hike after the meeting.

Teri Booth asked for an update on filling the Vallejo vacancy on the Citizens Advisory Committee. Bill Tuikka responded that the City Clerk is the lead on the recruitment process.

5. Approval of Minutes of December 10, 2010

Dan Smith had previously submitted to staff corrections and revisions to the minutes. Staff will email the revised version to the committee and board. As there was no Governing Board quorum, this item was continued.

6. Update on Solano Land Trust Activities

Sue Wickham reminded the group that the Solano Land Trust is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2011. They are offering \$25 memberships for new members.

April 23 is the third annual Kite festival. Sue Wickham described this event as attracting families and youth who would not normally visit an open space area.

April also sees the annual Rush Ranch Open House on the 30th of the month. As always, the event will feature horses, cattle and sheep demonstrations, carriage rides, and demonstration of crafts.

June 4th is the 4th annual Lynch Canyon Trail Run and Community Hike, offering a free 2.5-mile hike along with half marathon and 10K trail runs.

Sue Wickham also noted that Jepson Prairie is now open. Local volunteers will lead wildflower hikes weekly from now until mid-May. Wildflower hikes at the King-Swett Ranches are the first Saturday in April and May.

Tom Campbell requested an update on the George Miller earmark of funds for the acquisition of the Signature properties in Sky Valley. Sue Wickham responded that the County approved an application for funding and that environmental review is currently underway. The Land Trust and the City of Benicia are working to get a conservation easement and trail easement on the property.

7. Report by Regional Park Subcommittee

a. Report on Solano Open Space Presentations

Dan Smith reported on the presentations made before the four governing bodies of the member agencies.

b. Status of Lynch Canyon Signs

Harry Englebright reported that Sue Wickham has completed revised designs and submitted them to Jim Syar for his review. The next step is acquiring a CALTRANS encroachment permit.

c. Status of Open Space Brochure

Harry Englebright reported that the brochure design is almost completed, with some challenge related to replicating the cover photograph. Hopefully the design will be available by next month.

d. Website Report

Karlyn Lewis distributed handouts summarizing website usage. In general, there has been a slow and steady increase in website visits. One issue is that other open space groups have not approached her or used the website to post their events and activities. She has herself been actively seeking out such events for inclusion on the calendar.

e. Lynch Canyon: Discussion of Public Access Options and Issues

Bob Berman stated that he had contacted Muir Land Trust for insight on how they operate their properties, which consist of approximately 1,500 acres of ranches in the Martinez area. He noted they have an active volunteer program overseen by one "stewardship" person. They have had few problems to date. He also spoke with Perry Norris at the Truckee/Donner Land Trust, which have now opened their properties sunrise to sunset. They rely upon stewardship volunteers.

Bob Berman expanded upon his support for a permit system similar to the Sonoma County "Land Paths" system. Volunteer patrols supplement any public agency review. Teri Booth noted that there is a horseback volunteer patrol program in Marin County.

In response to a query from the committee, Dan Sykes responded that staff is proposing a continuation of the current limited hours.

Tom Campbell asked for clarification as to what exactly the CAC wants the Board to do. Bob Berman requested a resolution from the Board addressing this issue. He feels things are "stuck" right now and something needs to get the discussion going.

Dan Sykes noted that Lynch Canyon does have significant local access right now. He agreed with Bob (and Gene) that volunteers can do a lot, but that the current structure, including volunteer support, is oriented to organized events and special occasions.

Tom Campbell expressed concern about liability issues associated with open, unpatrolled access. Harry Englebright noted that landowners are protected somewhat by State law from liability for recreational users.

Bob Berman again expressed his frustration. He suggested a task force. Brian Miller responded that the Land Trust, being the property owner, should take the lead role in initiating the discussions.

Bob Berman noted that the lands were purchased with public money. He asked if the Land Trust would support a permit system.

Sue Wickham responded by noting that the Land Trust and PG&E are currently preparing a management plan for their properties. Public access would follow and this is a very slow process that still needs a CEQA document and access easements from the City of Vallejo. She would love to have Lynch Canyon open on more days. But, even the pass systems have staff persons who monitor and administer the passes. She noted that there are serious capital improvements, including major trail repairs, maintenance, and management issues that must be addressed - beyond what a typical volunteer program can really address.

Gene Doherty noted that the State Parks Foundation has been trying to facilitate access to potentially closed parks via the Land Path program. He feels that the Solano Land Trust should be supporting this type of program ...and emphasizing attracting more volunteers.

Sue Wickham responded, noted that the Land Trust does undertake continuous efforts to recruit volunteers. She agreed with Dan Sykes regarding the focus on special events and organized activities, expressing concern about volunteers monitoring open public access. Trail volunteers patrolling will take a lot of volunteers.

She also expressed concern about the demand for open access. How many people would actually be served by weekday hours? Their experience is that there is very limited demand during the weekdays. Docent led events and tours have occasionally been successful on weekdays, and the Solano Land Trust does work, already, with groups who are interested in doing a weekday event.

In response to a question from the floor, Sue Wickham stated that if the County partnership and funding end, public access will be reduced to docent-led special events. Lynch Canyon does not (yet) have the cadre of organized, active volunteers that could support open public access. She suggested the Cooperative Planning Group join the Land Trust in encouraging more volunteers and group participation.

Tom Campbell responded that the Citizens Group needs to clearly define exactly what types of access they want.

Dan Sykes noted that the Land Trust is not primarily a parks or public access agency. They have other priorities. Gene Doherty responded that his goal is more public access. Too much land is now off-limits to the public.

In conclusion, the CAC directed staff to contact Nicole Byrd, Solano Land Trust Executive Director, and request the Land Trust appoint a representative or subcommittee to work with the Cooperative Planning Group to explore these options. Dan Sykes will invite his Board Members to participate as well.

8. Future Agenda Items/Closing Remarks

The Regional Park Subcommittee will meet before June to discuss their recommendations on improving public access. The next meeting will continue the discussion of options for improving public access to area open space properties.

Brian Miller also suggested the group begin discussing the Fall Event.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

The next meeting (Joint Governing Board/Citizens Advisory Committee) is scheduled for Monday, June 13, 2011 at **7:15 p.m.**