



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-15-48
Meeting 15-07
March 25, 2015

AGENDA ITEM 8

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Informational Presentation on San Mateo County's Agricultural Workforce Housing Initiative

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Receive an informational presentation by San Mateo County Supervisor, Don Horsley on the San Mateo County Agricultural Workforce Housing Initiative.
2. Refer the County's Farmworker Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program to the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affairs Committee to consider the District's potential inclusion in the Pilot Program and forward a recommendation to the full Board.

SUMMARY

As part of Agricultural Workforce Housing Initiative, San Mateo County Supervisor Don Horsley's office and the Department of Housing have created the Farmworker Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program (Pilot Program) to facilitate the rehabilitation/repair of farm labor housing and the replacement of dilapidated mobile home units. Supervisor Horsley's office is interested in potentially partnering with the District as a public agency landowner on the San Mateo coast to improve farm labor housing located on open space preserves. The partnership would include funding from the County in the form of a no-interest forgivable loan. In turn, the District would agree to use the housing for low income agricultural workers and to hold rental payments at an agreed upon level for the duration of the loan. In addition to the District, Supervisor Horsley's office has approached Peninsula Open Space Trust and two coastal farmers are also participating in the Pilot Program. At its completion, the County will assess the Pilot Program to determine the feasibility of establishing a permanent program.

DISCUSSION

Availability of farm/ranch labor housing is essential to the long term viability of San Mateo County agricultural operations. The condition of much of the available farm/ranch housing is considered substandard by the County. This type of housing was originally built for seasonal, single male farm/ranch workers. Today's agricultural workforce is far less transient. The coast's growing season is extended due to nurseries that grow year-round and specialty crops, leading to year-round occupancy of available housing. Many farm/ranch workers are now bringing their families with them to establish residency, which increases use and general overcrowding of

facilities. Both of these new trends in occupancy have accelerated the overall physical decline of the County farm/ranch labor housing stock. Without significant leadership and an influx of funding, this situation will likely deteriorate and may prompt regulatory agencies to shut down housing for health and safety reasons, further reducing the housing stock and impacting the viability of local agricultural uses.

In response to this key County-wide issue, Supervisor Horsley's office has developed the Agricultural Workforce Housing Initiative, which includes a two-pronged approach to address farm/ranch worker housing. The first component of this Initiative is an Agricultural Workforce Needs Assessment (Assessment) that is primarily focused on new housing. The second component is the Farmworker Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program (Pilot Program) that focuses on the rehabilitation/repair of existing housing. The overall goal of the Initiative is to expand housing opportunities for agricultural workers as well as preserve existing housing through replacement and/or rehabilitation of current substandard housing. Funding for this program will be provided by the County Department of Housing - Affordable Housing Fund and County Measure A funds. These funds will generally be provided to housing stock owners in the form of a no-interest forgivable loan. In turn, the owner would pledge to use the housing for low-income agricultural workers and hold rental payments at an agreed level for the duration of the loan. The commitments of the loan would be monitored by the County. The non-profit, Rebuilding Together, is assisting with the rehabilitation/repair of housing where needed under this Pilot Program.

As the District is a public agency landholder on the San Mateo coast, Supervisor Horsley's office approached the District to possibly partner in improving farm labor housing located on Coastside open space preserves. Toward this same effort, Supervisor Horsley is also working with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and two private farmers. In May of 2014, District staff, Supervisor Don Horsley, and Sarah Rosendahl toured the McDonald House near the Red Barn (La Honda Creek), the ranch worker house at Sears Ranch Road (La Honda Creek) and the in-law unit at October Farm (Purisima Creek) as representative examples of possible farm/ranch worker housing. The McDonald House was considered too dilapidated for rehabilitation whereas the October Farm in-law unit may qualify in the future. The ranch worker housing at Sears Ranch Road met many of the requirements for the County's Pilot Program and may be worthy of Board consideration. The purpose of the informational presentation is to brief the Board on a potential partnership opportunity and potential inclusion in the County's Pilot Program.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact is anticipated from receiving this informational presentation.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item may be referred by the Board to the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affairs Committee for review and recommendation.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA REVIEW

No compliance is required as this action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, the General Manager will direct staff to work with the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affairs Committee to evaluate the District's inclusion in the County's Farmworker Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program.

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