



**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

*The Board of Directors conducted this meeting in accordance with
California Government Code section 54953.*

DRAFT MINUTES

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA
REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

President Kishimoto called the special meeting of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to order at 5:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Jed Cyr, Craig Gleason, Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, Yoriko Kishimoto, Margaret MacNiven, and Curt Riffle

Members Absent: Karen Holman

Staff Present: General Counsel Hilary Stevenson, Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager Brian Malone, Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services Stefan Jaskulak, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Loana Lumina-Hsu, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Shaylynn Nelson, Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington, Land and Facilities Manager Brandon Stewart, Rangeland Ecologist Lewis Reed, Conservation Grazing Program Manager Matthew Shapero

Director Kersteen-Tucker provided opening remarks introducing the Agricultural Policy, the work and outreach performed by staff for the past several years and thanking the local and agricultural community and coastal partners.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion: Director Cyr moved, and Director MacNiven seconded the motion to adopt the agenda.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 6-0-0 (Director Holman absent.)

Assistant General Manager Brian Malone provided background on the 2004 Coastal annexation and expanded District Coastal mission, explained the Board Ad Hoc Committee, and development of the Agricultural Policy including public outreach and engagement workshops.

BOARD BUSINESS

1. Proposed New Agricultural Policy (R-23-129)

Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington provided the staff presentation on the proposed Agricultural Policy provided the staff presentation on background and timeline of the agriculture policy development process, partner and stakeholder engagement, policy elements and implementation. Mr. Lenington explained the policy framework and guiding policy documents, including the District's Coastal Mission Statement and the Resource Management Policies. He provided background on the District Growth on the Coastside beginning in 2004.

Rangeland Ecologist Lewis Reed continued the staff presentation with explaining the stakeholder outreach and engagement process and the development of the Agricultural Policy. Outreach and engagement with the local coastal groups included board, peer agency, and producer workshops; surveys in English and Spanish; stakeholder review of the framework and the draft policy; consultations with San Mateo Farm Bureau; and peer agency review of the draft policy. Producer workshop topics covered supporting environmentally sensitive agricultural practices, intensive agricultural lands (row crops), and housing and agricultural lease structures.

Land and Facilities Manager Brandon Stewart and Mr. Reed introduced and explained the agricultural policy elements, thirteen policies, and implementation actions.

Director Kersteen-Tucker spoke on the history of the development of the agricultural policy and how to expand partnership with the local community. The policy incorporates local community feedback, viable agricultural use, partnership developments, infrastructure assistance, longer leases, and affordable agricultural workforce housing. Director Kersteen-Tucker stated the policy is adaptable to changes in science, climate changes, social environment changes, and including the local area of ranching and farming next to Silicon Valley.

Director MacNiven spoke on the policy emphasizing how inclusive the policy is wanting to maintain the agricultural heritage of the area; incorporations of the core of the District mission to preserve and protect; and stated the District recognizes the diversity of the area, are proud of the it and want to maintain the diversity. Director MacNiven stated the policy is a living document and can be revisited in the future.

Director Riffle spoke on the staff's efforts since 2013 to develop the Agricultural Policy, which is clear, implementable, and adaptable. He acknowledged the need for further learning from the local community and noted the policy is adaptable and can change as agriculture changes.

Director MacNiven inquired about the frequency of review of the Agricultural Policy and if a timeline was included in the policy.

Mr. Malone explained there was discussion with the ad hoc committee and ultimately it was decided not to incorporate a specific date or timeline but instead include a statement in the policy that it is a living document which it can be amended as needed.

Public comment opened at 5:50 p.m.

Director of Land Stewardship Daniel Olstein from Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) explained the role of POST in supporting the coastal community and agriculture. Mr. Olstein spoke in support of the Agricultural Policy which provides to the District the clarity and guidance to do work and investment, and partner with local farmlands. He expressed excitement for the opportunities to partner and protect farmlands with conservation easement, infrastructure on District lands and also on the local farms. Additionally, he stated that the policy supports diversity and looks forward to partnering with local communities and farmlands.

BJ Burns expressed his confusion on the discussion of row crops as he was under the impression the District allows grazing and not row crops, and not be involved in leases. Additionally, Mr. Burns asked the District to control brush on lands for grazing operations and how many thousand acres are grazed compared to how many acres were grazed in the past. Mr. Burns stated ranchers need water and grass and without brushing, there is less grass. He suggested having test plots of acres to spray, get public involved to see if there's anything in ground that hurts the land, and look for alternative. Lastly, he stated seeing row crops need help for water and land, and land sitting idles as there are no markets and farmers are leaving and quitting, stating farmers need help to save agriculture.

Kerry Burke commented that the policy is too wordy and requested a clearer document with a checklist for implementation. She also noted that the Coastal Service Plan should be added as the local community does not have it readily available. Additionally, she stated a preference that the Agriculture Policy should lead with agriculture rather than leading with resource protection. Ms. Burke stated the community is watching the District's acquisition of Cloverdale, how it effects water users of the Lake Lucerne communities, and for the District to gain the trust of agricultural community is dependent on how the District resolves the Lake Lucerne issue. Additionally, the community is wanting limited access development and will watch how the District's will subdivide and develop on agricultural lands with areas for the public to enjoy.

Erik Markegard thanked staff and spoke in support of the Agricultural Policy.

Peter Marchi spoke about his concern of public access and the watershed, stating food safety compliance requires that the water is not contaminated. He opposes public access and prefers no limited access, as water can be easily be contaminated which serve the row crop farmers.

Public comment closed at 6:01 p.m.

Mr. Malone stated there were conversations with Farm Bureau about row crops and how the Agricultural Policy can actively support row crops, preserve and protect lands for ecological rangelands, sustainable ranching. The policy allows the Board to choose to fund projects through partnerships that preserve row crops for the future on the San Mateo coast. The District has learned management of brush encroachment on the Coast including the speed of brush encroachment. It is a priority for the District, will do work on test plots, and work with ranchers on the most effective means for brush management.

Mr. Malone reported that the Coastal Service Plan is incorporated within the Agricultural Policy. Additionally, the District currently oversees two areas in grazing lands with public access and is working with tenants on future plans including regional trails, while being sensitive to the

environment and agriculture. An element of concern that was included in the Agricultural Policy is the issues farmers raised are all elements of the plan including no food contamination, and closing down public access for spraying. The District is working on lot line adjustments cooperatively with farmers for subdivision to divide upland ranchlands and intensive row crops working with farmweers and owners of the land. If there is an operator whose operation depends on both elements, we would not break those apart elements apart.

Mr. Stewart spoke on the brush management stating the District is meeting with ranching tenants to review vegetation management areas for the next year, which allows the District to complete bio-surveys and evaluate projects most beneficial to tenants. Conservation Grazing Program Manager Matthew Shapero will work closely with all tenants to identify projects most beneficial to their operations, so the District can implement workplans this fall. Additionally, staff is engaging in more conversations with tenants to discuss infrastructure improvements projects include improving water delivery systems and the routing of the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail.

Director Gleason asked for clarification on the methodology for brush control projects.

Mr. Stewart explained the District is exploring options for the brush management such as physical and chemical to ensure the chosen option is implementable, affordable, and durable so the brush does not return.

Mr. Reed explained the research on brush management and room for improvement. Policy AG-10 is specifically about the need to prioritize research which includes how the District can do better brush management.

Director Kersteen-Tucker inquired about the timing for reviewing the policy to assess its effectiveness for the community, the land, and the users.

Mr. Lenington stated that the threshold to review the policy would be when staff believes the best approach to issues, is constrained by the policy.

Director Kersteen-Tucker inquired about the metrics used for assessing rangeland health, the District's measurements, and the District's criteria for evaluating rangeland health.

Mr. Lenington stated staff does have metrics, but that level of detail is not placed in the policy, and as the science changes, the metrics will change.

Director Kersteen-Tucker asked how the District will incorporate the knowledge of the local agricultural community.

Mr. Lenington stated the development of policies are a vehicle to have conversations with the community and build relationships, and it is important to continue to have and deepen the relationships with the local community.

Director Gleason asked how conservation and environmental stakeholders provided input.

Mr. Reed stated the District met with the Conservation Council which included representation from various environmental and staff leveraged existing networks to broaden the outreach.

Director Gleason asked about the public access input through the process.

Mr. Malone explained there was not directed public outreach for the Agricultural Policy. The District receives lots of input on providing public access, policies providing public access, and will discuss with local community and agricultural partners to look at public access on the parcels. Staff tried to balance the needs of the local agricultural community and public access.

Director Gleason stated getting both groups of local agricultural community and those wanting more public access into the public forum to provide point of view would foster greater understanding of opposing views.

Mr. Malone explained how similar discussions have occurred in the past and expect to have similar conversations again in the future with tenants and the public.

Director Gleason asked if the District should have a position on the methodologies for an animals' full life cycle, for example feed lot finishing or grass finishing or is it left to rancher.

Mr. Reed explained District's priority is developing rangeland management plan that is site specific including full inventory and resource management priorities, and flexibility of working with different operators with laying out the goals and land resources.

Public comment opened at 6:29 p.m.

John Miller spoke on California State growth to build houses, while there is no infrastructure to support growth. He stated expectation of water rates changes and spoke on concern of housing growth and purchase of the agricultural land.

Public comment closed at 6:31 p.m.

President Kishimoto spoke in support of the science-based research, measurements and results, and indicators of what is happening to the soil.

Mr. Lenington explained there are partners the District works with that are already doing work on soil measurements and soil health, how it can be improved through Agricultural practices, and how staff is looking to them as leaders of the field of study. The Science Symposium is an avenue to share District knowledge and information, and to receive others knowledge and research.

President Kishimoto asked about a goal for the development of metrics.

Mr. Lenington explained monitoring program is just starting with early detection and rapid response for weeds; a water quality monitoring program where staff samples creeks and ponds including looking for harmful bacteria; and the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network discussions of measures for ecological health overtime which is expensive. The Science Advisory Panel recommendation was to hire post-docs to use existing data from partners in region and analyze and set schedule to signal ecological health. Mr. Lenington stated it is also a regional project, not just District, and emphasized wanting to work with partners.

President Kishimoto shared she looks forward to the policy continuing to evolve and combining the science and wisdom of the grassroots, those working on the ground, and the Native Americans who have managed the land for generations.

Director Gleason remarked education is discussed a few times throughout the policy in public relations and outreach, stating the docent naturalists program can provide that education.

Director Gleason asked if the agriculture will be part of the docent-led program.

Mr. Malone explained the District does trainings with docents naturalists for new preserves and areas. Staff will continue interpretive work such as signs for visitors can read to get the value that the ccows bring to the land.

Director Kersteen-Tucker stated staff will work on education about agriculture throughout the District, emphasizing the importance of educating the kids on the importance of agriculture and where the food comes from.

Motion: Director Kersteen-Tucker moved, and Director MacNiven seconded the motion to adopt a new Agricultural Policy to complement existing policies and replace the Agricultural Use Statements (1978) to guide agricultural conservation partnerships and land management actions.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 6-0-0 (Director Holman absent)

ADJOURNMENT

President Kishimoto adjourned the special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District at 6:42 p.m.

Loana Lumina-Hsu
Deputy District Clerk