



Legislation Text

File #: PC 17-027, Version: 1

Public hearing to consider General Plan Amendment No. G-15-01 amending the General Plan designation from Rural Residential to Agriculture; Rezoning Petition No. Z-15-01 to rezone the property from Rural Residential (RR-2.5) to Exclusive Agriculture (A-20) on approximately 1,226 acres of the Rockville Trails Preserve for the Solano Land Trust; and consider Policy Plan Overlay No. 15-01 for the entire 1494+acre project; and Recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project. (Project Planner: Karen Avery)

Published Notice Required? Yes X No
Public Hearing Required? Yes X No

RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Resource Management recommends that the Planning Commission:

1. Conduct a Public Hearing to consider General Plan Amendment No. G-15-01 amending the General Plan designation from Rural Residential to Agriculture; Rezoning Petition No. Z-15-01 to rezone the property from Rural Residential (RR-2.5) to Exclusive Agriculture (A-20) on approximately 1,226 acres of the Rockville Trails Preserve for the Solano Land Trust; and consider Policy Plan Overlay No. 15-01 for the entire 1494+acre project, and;
2. Recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project; and
3. Recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt the General Plan Amendment No. G-15-01, Rezoning Petition No. Z-15-01 and Policy Plan Overlay PP-15-01.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Solano Land Trust acquired this property with the intention of establishing a 1494+acre public open space area. The current entitlements on the property include a Rural Residential/Agricultural subdivision of up to 370 residential lots ranging in size from 1 acre to 20 acre parcels (Rockville Trails Estates). The Solano Land Trust is requesting a General Plan Amendment to amend the General Plan designation from Rural Residential to Agriculture; a Rezoning Petition to amend the existing zoning designation from Rural Residential (RR-2.5) to Exclusive Agriculture (A20); and a Policy Plan Overlay to designate the land uses allowed on the Rockville Trails Preserve property.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a draft Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared and circulated for public review and comment (Attachment B). The environmental impacts identified which may be mitigated to less than significant impacts are Biological Resources and Cultural Resources. Several adjacent property owners submitted comments expressing concerns about slope stability, location of public trails to property boundaries, and questions regarding service roads on the eastern project boundaries. These

comment letters and the County's response to these comments are attached as Attachment C.

PROPERTY INFORMATION:

A. Applicant/Owner:

Solano Land Trust
700 Main Street, Suite 110
Suisun, CA 94585

B. General Plan Land Use Designation/Zoning:

Existing and Proposed Parcels, Acreage, and Zoning

APN	Total acres in parcel	Acreage of existing RR 2.5 zoning	Acreage of existing A-20 zoning	Acreage of new A- 20 zoning
0153-060-060	262.41	262.41	0	262.41
0153-060-070	67.59	67.59	0	67.59
0153-080-100	13.80	0	13.80	0
0153-080-110	341.45	341.45	0	341.45
0153-080-120	197.38	122	75.38	122
0153-080-130	612.07	432.57	179.5	432.57
TOTAL	1494.70	1226.02	268.68	1226.02

C. Existing Use: Cattle Grazing

D. Adjacent Zoning and Uses:

North: Exclusive Agriculture "A-40" and Watershed - Ranches
South: Rockville Hills Regional Park (City of Fairfield) - Public Park/Rural Residential
East: Exclusive Agriculture "A-20" - Farms/residences
West: Residential Traditional Community "RTC" - single family residences

ANALYSIS:

A. Environmental Setting

The project is located within unincorporated Solano County. The Solano Land Trust (SLT) owns a 1,500-acre property in western Solano County, California, near the City of Fairfield, known as Rockville Trails Preserve. The Project site is an area of open, grassy hills, and a valley interspersed with oak woodlands, and is located between Rockville and Suisun Valley Roads. Annual grasses, blue and live oak and native shrubs make up the predominant ground cover. The property is currently used for cattle grazing.

The Project site is flanked on the west by Green Valley and Suisun Valley to the east. A housing development and the Green Valley Country Club lie just outside the southwest property line. Rockville Hills Regional Park

(City of Fairfield) is located directly across Rockville Road, less than ¼ miles south of the project's southern extent. Rural residential lots and larger agricultural parcels are located to the east and north.

The Project site has steep rolling hillsides capped by a series of volcanic plateaus bound by near vertical cliffs. The topography ranges from about 160 feet above mean sea level (amsl) along the southern boundary to plateaus at 700 to 757 feet amsl. All drainages at the Project site support ephemeral streams.

B. Project Description

Site History:

In the 1975 *West Central Solano County General Plan*, the 1200-acre portion of the Project site was designated "Very Low Density Residential with a Planned Unit Development". The housing density for most of that area was set at 0.5 du/ac (dwelling unit per acre). The 1980 Solano County General Plan re-designated the 1200 acres as Rural Residential. In 2008, the Board of Supervisors recognized the existing rural residential land use designation and approved a general plan amendment to allow an onsite community wastewater treatment facility. At the same time, the Board also approved rezoning of a portion of the property from Exclusive Agricultural (A-20) with a Planned Unit Development designation (PUD) to Rural Residential (RR2.5) and Exclusive Agricultural (A-20), with a Policy Plan Overlay (PPO). The Board also approved a major subdivision application (Rockville Trails Estates) which proposed to subdivide the entire 1500-acre property into 370 residential lots which ranged in size from 1 acre to 20 acres. Along with these approvals, the Board certified an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project.

Existing Property Use

The current use of the property is livestock grazing. The property has no dwellings. The only structures on the property are high voltage Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) transmission towers within a north-south easement. A partially paved road provides access for Solano Irrigation District (SID) to their reservoir, which is adjacent to but not on the property. Approximately 14.45 miles of natural surface ranch road exist on the property. Two water wells also exist on the property. The existing livestock operation has 10.3 miles of boundary fencing, a corral, three vehicle access gates, three water troughs, one water storage tank, and three stock ponds. There are also 26 neighbor gates along the project fence line in various stages of repair. There is a PG&E transmission easement running through the property.

Proposed Project:

The applicant, the Solano Land Trust (SLT) is proposing to create a public open space area consistent with protection of resources and maintenance of agriculture. SLT is proposing amendments to the site's General Plan and Zoning designations, as well as site improvements to provide for public access on the property which includes a staging area for 75 parking spaces, restrooms, and other facilities to accommodate public access.

General Plan Amendment

The current General Plan designation is Rural Residential and Agricultural. The applicant is requesting a

General Plan Amendment to change the designation from Rural Residential to Agricultural so that the entire project area has an Agricultural General Plan designation.

Rezoning and Policy Plan Overlay

The applicant is requesting a rezoning of the property from Rural Residential (RR-2.5), Agricultural (A-20), with a Policy Plan Overlay (PP) to Agricultural (A-20) with a Policy Plan Overlay. The rezoning would remove the Rural Residential (RR- 2.5) zoning so that the entire property is proposed to be zoned Exclusive Agriculture (A-20) with a Policy Plan Overlay. The Policy Plan Overlay outlines the development standards and general open space standards within the Preserve. These uses include grazing, agricultural education, stable and equestrian activities and public trails. (Attachment H)

Proposed Use Types and Intensities

Proposed uses of the Project site include public open space and agriculture (grazing). Public open space use includes public recreation for low intensity uses, education, and open space resource preservation and conservation. These uses are consistent (allowed by right) with the proposed Agriculture land use designation (A-20) per the Solano County Zoning Regulations, (Chapter 28 of the Solano County Code). The property would still be used for grazing by livestock which is also an “allowed use” in the A-20 district. The Policy Plan Overlay describes the uses specifically allowed on the property which excludes other “by-right” uses within the A-20 zone.

Proposed low-impact public recreation uses on the Project site would include multi-use trails, parking lots, and picnic and bathroom facilities including ADA facilities and a low mobility trail. The applicant anticipates that the number of visitors would be limited by available parking, which per A-20 zoning is capped at 75 spaces. Using an average of 2.5 people per vehicle, approximately 187 people could access the property using the parking lot at any one time. The applicant also anticipates that hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians may access the property as walk-in users. The number of walk-in users at any one time is estimated to be about 20 people.

The applicant anticipates that users would come to the property throughout the day with the highest use during the dry season and cooler times of the day. SLT anticipates that the average user would spend about four hours on the property.

SLT anticipates that school groups may come to the property for educational tours. The proposed parking lot will accommodate two buses and SLT anticipates approximately 120 students could visit once or twice a week during the school year. The students would hike throughout the property and would be led by teachers, staff, and docents.

During the year, docents are expected to lead small, organized groups of hikers, naturalists, mountain bicyclists and equestrians throughout the property. SLT may lead small groups of people for work days where people would work to maintain trails and public access facilities and perform restoration work or engage in citizen science or educational activities.

Hours of Operation

It is anticipated that after completion of the initial parking lot, staging facilities and trail construction, SLT would open the property to the public during weekends from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or dawn to dusk, depending upon staffing, funding, and time of year. Activities outside these weekend hours would be by staff-only, docent-led or

authorized researchers and volunteers.

Proposed Site Improvements

SLT proposes to construct site improvements to facilitate recreational and educational uses on the property. The site improvements would create public access for use by low impact recreational users such as hikers, mountain bicyclist, and equestrians. The project includes a trail plan, which delineates a portion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail (BART) and supports emergency and service vehicle access. The project also proposes associated public facilities necessary to support access including a staging area with parking lots, bathrooms, trash receptacles and signage as well as trailside facilities such as benches and picnic tables. The proposed improvements include upgrades to existing and construction of new infrastructure features. Disabled access and access for persons with low mobility are also part of the improvements.

Access Gates

The Project will use existing access gates from Rockville Road including the East Gate, Corral Gate, West Gate, and proposes to construct a new Staging Area Gate. The uses and access for each gate are summarized below:

Existing East Gate

The East Gate is located off Rockville Road. It would be used for service, docent tours, emergency and easement access only. This gate is not anticipated to be used for public access. The East Gate entrance has an existing paved portion from Rockville Road to the gate and natural surface beyond the gate. The road into the Project site, beyond the gate, will remain a natural and partially gravel surface road with minor maintenance improvements for erosion control and access.

Existing Corral Gate

The Corral Gate is located off Rockville Road and is connected to the existing corrals. It would be used for livestock operations, service, and emergency access. The entrance has existing pavement adjacent in the Rockville Road and is natural surface beyond the gate. Minor additional paving to improve access and drainage and a replacement gate are proposed for this access gate area.

Existing West Gate

The West Gate is located off Rockville Road. This entrance is gravel and will be used for service access by Solano Irrigation District (SID) and emergency and SLT docent access. There is a small existing parking area adjacent to the gate for parking. No changes are anticipated to the right of way or road to the gate and small parking area except routine maintenance.

Proposed New Staging Area Gate

The new Staging Area Gate would be located off Rockville Road approximately 180 feet east of the existing Corral Gate. This would be a lockable gate and would be the main designated gate for public access and the entrance to the proposed staging area.

Staging Area Facilities

The “staging area” is where visitors would assemble to commence their recreational or educational pursuits on the site. The staging area will include parking areas, fencing, gates, benches and picnic tables, bathrooms, signage and information kiosks, livestock facilities, and a hut for service personnel.

Public Parking Lots

The staging area would include public parking lots (0.6 acres total) for up to 75 vehicles, including horse trailers in two lots: “lower” and “upper”. The staging area is within an existing oak woodland and up to 62 trees, of various sizes, will be removed and up to 39 trees trimmed.

The “lower” parking lot is located within 300 feet of the entrance gate off Rockville Road. It is designed in two loops with up to 50 cars parking along the outer portions of the loop and up to six (6) possible bus or horse trailer parking in two locations along the inner loops. The “lower” parking lot construction would include cut and fill with engineered base and gravel surface. The “lower” lot design includes one ADA compliant parking space and bathroom facility, which would have concrete or impermeable surfaces as required for up to 25 cars, including ADA compliant space.

The “upper” parking lot is located 220 feet from the eastern edge of the “lower” parking lot. It is designed as a large rectangular lot with cut-outs to aide parking and preservation of blue oak trees. This larger lot will be able to accommodate horse trailers and buses and is within 100 feet of the trail system including the low mobility trail. The “upper” parking lot would be constructed with cut and fill, gravel base and gravel surface.

The parking lots would be used occasionally by the livestock operator to deliver/remove cattle; the lots would be closed to the public during that use.

Staging Area Signage

Several roadside signs that will identify the Preserve and gate entrance would be placed along Rockville Road prior to the entrance. There would be one entrance sign at the main gate and an informational sign on or near the Staging Area Gate with hours of operation and fees.

Parking and visitor information signage would be provided within the staging area. These signs would include an entrance sign and donor sign. A kiosk or information board would be located adjacent to the parking and picnic area with a large trail map and other visitor pertinent information. A trail brochure dispenser would be attached to, or near the information board structure.

Staging Area Lighting

No lighting currently exists at the site and SLT does not anticipate lighting as part of the project. If, in the future, electricity is available at the site, it is possible that security lighting may be provided. Solar-powered lighting may be used when the docent hut is erected.

Staging Area Equestrian Facilities

One or more hitch rails or posts would be located near the horse-trailer parking area. A horse-watering trough would be located near the staging area and horse-trailer parking area if stock water becomes available in the future. There are no plans to provide potable or stock water to this area of the Project site at the current time.

Roads and Trails

Implementation of the public open space area includes the conversion of 5.64 miles of existing ranch roads for public trail use. The repair of 1.48 miles of existing trails, construction of, or rerouting of, 2.08 miles of wide-trails, 0.35 miles of track, and 0.84 miles of low mobility trail for the purpose of low impact public recreation. There will be a total of 10.39 miles of trails open to the public out of a total of 18.32 miles. A buffer of 150 feet from the property line for new public trails is part of the Planned Policy Overlay (Attachment H).

The public would have access to all public trails for non-motorized recreation with the exception that equestrian and/or mountain bicycling access would be restricted from Harmonia Hill and possible other trails as designated in the future. Bicycles and horses may also be restricted from single tracks if sufficient pull-outs and sight lines do not exist. Seasonal conditions may also limit use, such as with extremely wet weather for roads and trails or high fire danger days closing the facility.

Service trucks would be excluded from many track and wide trails due to width restrictions. Some roads have no public access and are designated for service and emergency access only.

Road and Trail Design Standards

There are three types of roads and trails that would be constructed or upgraded in the interior of the site - track, wide-trail and road. The road designs for the staging area may differ depending on final design recommendations by the Fire District and County Public Works Engineering staff.

Road design standards apply to interior roads used by emergency and service trucks as well as non-vehicular recreation users. Some roads would be maintained to accommodate 4WD fire and service trucks used by the livestock operator, easement holders or SLT and its designated contractors. Public motorized vehicles would not be allowed on any roads outside the staging area except under special permission by SLT staff.

Trails would be built, upgraded and maintained to either Wide-Trail or Track design standards. The wide-trail design standards would normally be used for all trails available for use by all trail users and ATV service vehicles. The track standard applies to trails where expected low use, topography, sensitive habitat, easements, or other restrictions limit trail width or exceed maximum grade standards. Tracks may not accommodate all visitors without pull-outs. Some tracks may be limited to hikers only.

Trailside Public Access Facilities

Trailside Benches

Simple backless concrete benches that a small tractor could lift into place or wooden benches anchored to the ground are proposed along the trails.

Horse Hitches or pole

Hitches or poles would be placed at several trailside picnic table locations; either a vertical post with a ring or a commercially purchased product.

Picnic Tables and Benches

Picnic benches would be concrete or wood. Heavy duty, concrete or expanded metal tables may be used trailside. Wooden picnic tables can be used in locations not as accessible to cattle or in the future concrete/steel tables may be added.

Water Troughs

Water troughs for non-potable water would be provided at locations for use by cattle and horses near trails.

Educational, Interpretive Signs and Kiosks

Interpretive panels would be placed throughout the site. Directional signs and boundary signage would be installed at various places along the trails and property boundaries. ADA accessible signage will be used as required.

Habitat Protection Area Signs

Habitat protection signs would be placed at regular intervals around the edges of sensitive resource areas that are closed to public access. Depending on the topography, signs would be 100' to 200' apart so that one is always visible.

Construction Activities

Staging Area Construction

The staging area, which includes the new staging area gate, access road and parking lots, and the facilities, would be constructed in approximate order:

- Tree removal, tree trimming, and brush clearing
- Entrance construction including culverts, paving, cattle guard if needed, and gates
- Parking lot and access road grading
- Parking lot and access road smoothing
- Base rock import and spreading
- Finish rock import and spreading
- Bathroom installation including concrete or asphalt spaces
- Fencing and gate installation
- Signage installation
- Pay station installation

The new entrance from Rockville Road would be constructed first to allow construction access to the site. Approximately 4,000 cubic yards of material would be graded for the access road and parking area. Grading would be balanced on site.

Equipment to be used for these activities includes D-9 bulldozers, back hoes, rock roller, rock haulers 20-30 ton, skip loader, bobcat and hand equipment. It is anticipated that construction of the staging area would take about 7 weeks.

Construction activities will take place between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m. on Saturday.

It is anticipated that once a year, the staging area parking lots and access road would be re-graded to improve the road surface and correct any drainage issues or ruts and gravel may be added to the surface as needed. It is anticipated that annual maintenance with larger equipment would take not more than two days.

Road and Trail Repair and Construction

Road and trail repair and construction would take place in phases and in segments throughout the year. Road and trail repair will use wheeled skip loaders, bobcats, and occasional grading machines designed for trails. Hand held tools and labor would be used where possible. Additional fill such as base and finish rock will be

added to the natural surface roads and trails for grade control and drainage.

Construction Phasing

SLT proposes to gradually develop the site facilities and allow access on the Project site in phases. Initially, only docent-led access would be allowed on existing ranch roads. Upon completion of Phase 1 construction, SLT would allow open public access, likely on weekends. Docent led access would continue to be provided when the Preserve is closed. The construction phasing will be dependent on SLT funding, staffing and volunteer efforts. The proposed phasing is SLT's first estimate of how the Project may be developed. Use levels are anticipated to increase along with the expanded hiking trails and facilities as future phases are completed.

As trails and facilities are constructed, appropriate informational signage, benches, etc. also would be installed. The current construction plan does not include additional structures that may be added to the site in the future. The structures would be used by docents for education or storage. The square footage of these structures will be limited in the A-20 zoning district at a total and combined 400 square feet.

Phase 1 Facilities

Phase 1 facilities would include the staging area with parking for a minimum of 25 cars and six horse trailers in the first lot constructed, ADA parking, signage, bathroom and picnic area. The staging area facilities are described in detail above. In Phase 1 it is anticipated that the central roads and trails will be repaired or constructed.

Phase 2 Facilities

Trails would be constructed on the western side of the site in Phase 2. Many of these would be new wide trail segments. Phase 2 trails may include trails E, F, G, H, J, and K. (see Attachment H Exhibit A). The final 1.5 miles of the BART would be constructed in Phase 2. Extending the staging area to full build-out may occur in Phase 2 if usage and funding allow.

Phase 3 Facilities

Phase 3 would include the last phase of trail construction of eastern area trails C and D. If the full build-out of the staging area was not completed in Phase 2, it may be completed as a part of Phase 3.

Additional Letter

On May 24, 2017, the Department received a letter from the Green Valley Landowners Association in support of the Rockville Trails Preserve Project (Attachment I).

General Plan Amendment:

The Department recommends that the Planning Commission recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the General Plan Amendment request as proposed. The proposed General Plan Amendment reduces the development of the property from residential uses to passive agricultural uses. Opening the Preserve to the public for outdoor recreation such as hiking and biking is of benefit to the community.

Recommended Findings for Rezoning/Policy Plan Overlay:

The Department recommends the Planning Commission make the following findings in recommending the approval of the proposed zone change to the Board of Supervisors:

1. The proposed zone change is in conformity with the Solano County General Plan with respect to land use, population densities and distribution, traffic circulation and other aspects of the General Plan considered by the Board of Supervisors to be permanent.

As discussed above, the proposed zone change from Rural Residential (RR-2.5) to Exclusive Agriculture (A-20) would conform to the proposed General Plan designations of Agriculture. The Policy Plan Overlay further restricts the uses allowed on the property which complies with the General Plan.

2. The area of land proposed for rezoning is contiguous to other properties that are currently zoned Commercial.

The property within the Project site is adjacent to properties zoned Agricultural-20 (A-20).

3. The project has been reviewed and processed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the County CEQA Guidelines.

A Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared, published and circulated for review in accordance with CEQA.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A** - Draft Resolution
- B** - Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration
- C** - Comment Letters and Response to Comments
- D** - General Plan Map - Existing
- E** - General Plan Map - Proposed
- F** - Zoning Map - Existing
- G** - Zoning Map - Proposed
- H** - Policy Plan Overlay with Exhibit A
- I** - Letter from Green Valley Landowner's Association