



Legislation Text

File #: 20-145, **Version:** 1

Receive an update and provide direction to staff on next steps for the plan and strategy for formation of a Dependent Regional Park and Open Space District to be placed on the November 2020 ballot; and Provide direction to staff to proceed with public outreach, a community survey and to bring back a status update and final recommendations to the Board in late May or early June

Published Notice Required? Yes ☐ No ☒
Public Hearing Required? Yes ☐ No ☒

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Resource Management recommends that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive an update and provide direction to staff on next steps for the plan and strategy for formation of a Dependent Regional Park and Open Space District to be placed on the November 2020 ballot; and
2. Provide direction to staff to proceed with public outreach, a community survey and to bring back a status update and final recommendations to the Board in late May or early June.

SUMMARY:

On November 19, 2019, the Board accepted an Initial Draft Administrative and Financing Plan (Plan) as a baseline for further discussion and outreach towards formation of a Dependent Regional Park and Open Space District (District) in Solano County. Minutes from that meeting are attached. Staff and the Board were clear that the Plan would be subject to further change and evolution as input is received on the nature and scope of the proposed District. The Board provided direction to continue to move forward with the District formation process but there was not a consensus to move forward on an accompanying revenue measure. The Board directed staff to continue to work with community partners on this effort with the potential that the formation measure be placed on the November 2020 ballot. Whether such action is ultimately taken by the Board will be the progress and feedback received in conjunction with public outreach over the next few months. A final decision must be made by late June of this year.

During the November 19 discussion, the Board also asked that staff return with a strategy and plan for moving this process forward. This report has been prepared in response to that direction and summarizes steps being taken to move the process forward.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The costs for preparing this report are covered by the FY2019/20 Resource Management General Fund budget including \$100,000 for surveys/studies necessary to further the District formation process.

DISCUSSION:

Significant work has already been conducted over the past few years regarding the prospect of forming a new District. A telephone survey and stakeholder interviews conducted in 2016 indicated support in the community for formation of a District with varying levels of support for an accompanying revenue measure. The County's

efforts to pass special legislation (SB-365 sponsored by Senator Dodd) to allow for formation of a Dependent District included significant outreach to all cities in the County. Support letters or resolutions were obtained from most of the cities and no opposition was received. The cities support was specific to the special legislation and there was acknowledgement that further dialogue with the cities would be necessary before the details of a formation measure was placed on the ballot.

The Board's action on November 19, 2019 to accept the Initial Draft of the Administrative and Financing Plan (Plan) provides a baseline for further outreach with the public and various groups interested in the potential District and formation process. The Plan was prepared pursuant to provisions in SB 365 requiring a financing and feasibility study in conjunction with the formation documents presented to the voters.

The Plan included an analysis of a baseline scenario in which the Dependent District would be formed utilizing existing County Park staff to provide services to the newly formed District under a contract between the entities. Revenues currently supporting the County's Parks program would be utilized to cover the costs of these services. The Plan also includes two additional scenarios for funding from revenue measures of \$10 or \$19 respectively and articulates anticipated potential increases in Ranger services, public access and capital improvement projects that might be achievable at these funding levels. A key finding was that that District formation was feasible even if only under the baseline scenario with no supplemental revenue measure. It is acknowledged in the Plan that the initial service capabilities of the new district would be more limited under this scenario but does provide a springboard for evolution of a District.

Based on the Board direction of November 19, staff has been focusing on the baseline scenario moving forward towards a November 2020 ballot measure for formation of the District with any supplemental funding measure likely brought forward at some future date. Staff is exploring other funding opportunities through grants and other partnerships that would allow the District to further its primary purpose which is to expand public access to the plethora of open spaces and trail system opportunities in Solano County. As this process continues the Board is not precluded from revisiting the funding measure question for November 2020 but it is recognized as reflected in the November 19 discussion that there are multiple priorities under consideration including funding for rural fire prevention. Pragmatically, additional time and outreach to the public would likely be needed for any funding measure requiring a 2/3 vote for passage. The timeframe for public outreach on a District formation measure placed on the November 2020 is more realistic as it has the lower majority vote passage threshold.

It is expected that there will be multiple efforts moving forward. County staff and the Regional Park Committee will focus on working with a consultant team on a public survey and public information regarding formation of a Dependent District and what that means to the community. Staff is currently engaged in discussions with potential firms to provide these services and it is expected that one will be under contract by March 1. The public survey would augment the information gathered in the 2016 survey and should provide useful trend information on the level of community support for a regional district. We are also discussing with the consultant the merits and effectiveness of gathering information on other issues such as public perception and level of support for rural fire prevention as part of the survey questions. We hope to have results of the survey available well in advance of any final Board deliberation regarding placement of a formation measure on the November 2020 ballot. The proposed sequence would bring the results of the survey and public outreach feedback to a Board meeting in late May or early June and depending on direction, a follow up meeting in late June for consideration of formal actions to place a measure on the November 2020 ballot.

In addition to working with the consultant team on a public survey and outreach, staff is proposing to work with the Board Regional Parks Committee to conduct further outreach with the cities building upon dialogue started during the SB 365 process. Staff has already had some exploratory discussions with the City of Vallejo regarding the Mare Island preserve and has met with a City Council subcommittee with the City of Suisun City. Outreach with the cities will intensify in the next three months. Feedback from these efforts will be important to the Boards assessment of feasibility for the November 2020 election and will be part of the report back to the

Board in late May or early June.

Staff has also been in contact with individuals and groups and that are interested in advocating for formation of a District. This is clearly separate from the County efforts. Solano Land Trust is one of the groups that is interested in the development of a citizen-based committee. It is expected that these groups will also be involved in community meetings. A larger role for community groups in terms of the process going forward was acknowledged by the Board as part of their actions on November 19. Ultimately, the Board decision to place the measure on the ballot will be at the Board's discretion.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could direct staff to not pursue placement of a District formation measure on the November 2020 ballot or in the future. Such action is not recommended at this time as significant resources have been allocated to evaluating district formation over the past few years and the next steps in community outreach could provide the Board with necessary information to determine whether or not to proceed with a ballot measure.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The County Counsel's office has been consulted in preparation of this report. At various times, the Solano Land Trust, the County's Parks and Recreation Commission and Solano Open Space have provided input on the District formation process.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION