

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Update for the Santa Barbara Ranch Project

Meeting Date: August 6, 2008
Staff Report Date: July 28, 2008
Case Nos.: 03DVP-00000-00041
Environmental Document: Environmental Impact Report

Supervisorial District: Third
Staff: Dianne Black, Development Services Director
Tom Figg, Project Manager
Phone #: 377-9116



REQUEST

Request by County staff that the Agricultural Advisory Committee receive an update on the Santa Barbara Ranch Project as a supplement to previous briefings provided on August 10, 2006, April 2, 2008 and July 2, 2008.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION AND PROCEDURES

Staff recommends that the Agricultural Advisory Committee take the following actions:

1. Receive supplemental information on the proposed Agricultural Conservation Easement; and
2. Adopt the findings set forth in Section 4.0.

3.0 BACKGROUND

At earlier meetings of the Agricultural Advisory Committee (“AAC”), County staff provided informational briefings on the Santa Barbara Ranch Project. At its last meeting on July 2nd, the Committee sought additional time to digest the information it had received and for individual members to conduct site visits for those wishing to do so. In the intervening time, the County Planning Commission has narrowed its project choices to what is referred to as Alternative 1B

(“Alt 1B”). As the Committee will recall, Alt 1B is a recent proposal by the applicant that addresses feedback received in connection with the public process over the past three years. Specifically, Alt 1B includes a revised lot configuration on the north side of Hwy 101 which results in the relocation of fourteen (14) lots into the further reaches of the project site, outside of the public view corridor. In the end, the Commission considered the comparative attributes of the four possible development configurations and concluded that Alt 1B is distinguished by the: (i) preservation of agricultural and open space through conservation easements; (ii) protection of sensitive environmental features through resource management; (iii) provision of coastal access and related public amenities; and (iv) reduction of overall development potential. These conclusion are borne out by the comparative statistics in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Comparative Summary	Grid Development			MOU Project		
	Coastal	Inland	Total	Coastal	Inland	Total
Total Area (Acres)	352	133	485	352	133	485
Land Use (Acres)						
Ag Land Preserved	0	0	0	133	4	137
Open Space Preserved	0	0	0	162	26	188
Coastal Access & Trails	0	0	0	8	0	8
Lots						
Existing Official Map	203	16	219	203	16	219
New Residential	109	16	125	38	16	54
Net Reduction	94	0	94	165	0	165

TABLE 1: Comparative Summary	Alternative 1			Alternative 1B		
	Coastal	Inland	Total	Coastal	Inland	Total
Total Area (Acres)	628	2,621	3,249	628	2,621	3,249
Land Use (Acres)						
Ag Land Preserved	271	2,358	2,629	316	2,371	2,687
Open Space Preserved	212	160	372	212	160	372
Coastal Access & Trails	8	1	10	8	1	10
Lots						
Existing Official Map	217	18	235	217	18	235
New Residential	33	39	72	22	49	71
Net Reduction	184	(21)	163	195	(31)	164

NOTES:
 1. Acreage figures are approximate.
 2. Grid Development is based on estimates derived from the FEIR and pertains to Santa Barbara Ranch only.

A key consideration in the Planning Commission’s selection of Alt 1B is a proposed conservation easement exchange under the authority of Government Code Section 51256 et.seq. Under this statute, the applicant/landowner proposes to cancel WA Contract #77AP14 and simultaneously: (i) place the undeveloped balance of Dos Pueblos Ranch (“DPR”) north of Hwy 101 that is presently under contract (“WA Remainder”) into a permanent Agricultural Conservation Easement (“ACE”), along with additional non-contract acres within Santa Barbara Ranch (“SBR”) that are currently unprotected, thereby bringing the total to 2,687 acres of agricultural

acreage protected *in perpetuity* (“WA-ACE Easement Exchange”); and (ii) place the WA Remainder in a new contract (“New WA Contract”). The proposed ACE land would result in a net gain of 126 acres under Alt 1B preserved for agricultural use as compared to the present acreage under Williamson Act contract. In the previous staff report to AAC, three sets of draft easement documents were distributed: two involve the California Rangeland Trust (one each for DPR and SBR) and one involving the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County. Under these easements, the Rangeland Trust would oversee 1,668 acres of productive agriculture and grazing land, while the County Land Trust would oversee 1,020 acres of sensitive wildlife and vegetative habitat.

The WA and ACE both provide for preservation of agricultural land through use restrictions and preferable taxation practices. They differ in three primary respects: (i) WA contracts are voluntary with 10-year automatically renewable terms compared to ACE which encumbers land with covenants for protection of farmland for a minimum of 25 years (but the applicant is proposing to apply the ACE in perpetuity); (ii) WA contracts are administered under the County’s Uniform Rules while ACE covenants are held by an independent third party trustee for monitoring and enforcement purposes; and (iii) allowable uses of farmland under WA are stipulated in the County’s Uniform Rules while use restrictions under ACE are tailored for each property in consultation with California Department of Conservation. A more complete comparison of WA provisions with those of ACE was provided to AAC at its last meeting. Since then, the ACE documents have been updated to incorporate all of the protections requested by the Agricultural Preserve Advisory Committee (“APAC”). These revised documents have been posted on the Santa Barbara Ranch Project webpage and have been highlighted (in gray) to denote APAC’s requirements.

4.0 FINDINGS

To assist the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in their respective deliberations of the Santa Barbara Ranch Project, it would be helpful if AAC would communicate its opinions on the matter. Specifically, staff believes that Alt 1B provides a means for resolving a long-standing dispute over the appropriate development of 85% of the lots encompassed by Official Map, while balancing resource and agricultural values that might otherwise be compromised were the legal lots developed incrementally over time. Achieving this outcome takes into consideration the unique property configuration that resulted from the Official Map as well as site-specific environmental and policy constraints that apply to the area. Although Alt 1B entails a density and scale of development that is considerably different than what exists today, it also allows for continued agricultural operations in perpetuity; allows for preservation and restoration of sensitive habitats; and improves recreational and coastal access opportunities for County residents. Should the Committee concur, staff would recommend that the following findings be adopted:

1. Alt 1B would result in a net increase in both the quantity and quality of land protected for agricultural purposes.

2. The WA-ACE Easement Exchange proposed under Alt 1B would extend the duration of Williamson Act protections at Dos Pueblos Ranch from 10 years to perpetuity.

3. Allowed uses and prohibitions under the ACE are comparable to those restrictions that apply to WA Contracts, with additional measures recommended by APAC.

4. The ACE Agreements provide for third party trustee oversight unlike WA Contracts that do not have independent monitoring or land management provisions.

5. All owners within the ACE would be required to financial support (through a cooperative or equivalent mechanism) essential farm infrastructure and employ best management practices with regard to all agricultural operations.

Conclusion: Alt 1B is part of a global solution of planning issues resulting from the underlying conflict between agricultural land use designations and the density of the legal lots already present at Naples. Absent the protections afforded under Alt 1B and consequent development of the Naples town site would likely contribute to non-renewal of the existing Williamson Act Contract at Dos Pueblos Ranch and create a far more detrimental effect on agricultural than what is proposed.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. ACE Agreements (Posted on Santa Barbara Ranch Webpage - <http://sbcountyplanning.org/projects/03DVP-00041/index.cfm>)

RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

1. **APAC Staff Report and Findings, April 6, 2007** ([http://sbcountyplanning.org/PDF/projects/03DVP-00041/Oct2006_Ag_Resource/APAC%20Staff%20Report%20\(Fully%20Updated%20for%20APAC%20meeting%20of%2004-6-07\).pdf](http://sbcountyplanning.org/PDF/projects/03DVP-00041/Oct2006_Ag_Resource/APAC%20Staff%20Report%20(Fully%20Updated%20for%20APAC%20meeting%20of%2004-6-07).pdf))
2. **Final EIR for Santa Barbara Ranch** (<http://sbcountyplanning.org/projects/03DVP-00041/index.cfm>)