

Subject: GVPAC Meeting Minutes for May 5, 2009

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Hello Everyone,

Reminder: The GVPAC Workshop will be held on July 11, 2009 at the Vieja Valley School, 434 Nogal Drive in Goleta. While the workshop is an all-day event, you can stop by anytime during the day. *If you can attend only one GVPAC meeting, this is the one to attend.*

The following summarizes the general issues discussed during the last GVPAC meeting.

Meeting Notes for May 5, 2009:

1. Next Meeting:
 - a. *Date:* May 20, 2009
 - b. *Time:* 6:00 pm
 - c. *Location:* Planning Commission Hearing Room
 - d. *Agenda:* Cumulative Projects and Areas of Interest
 - i. Cumulative Long Range Projects in Region
 - ii. Existing 1993 Goleta Community Plan Key Sites
 - iii. Areas of Interest for Goleta Community Plan Update

2. Main Overview: The primary purpose of this meeting was to learn about the Community Development Super Element of the 1993 Goleta Community Plan (GCP), and in particular Agricultural Land Use.
 - i. *Agricultural Land Use:* Agricultural use includes not only actual farming of the land for various purposes, but also livestock farming, wineries, and managing/storing of agricultural products.
 - Agricultural land use is governed by the Agricultural Element (1991) of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the Community Plan and the Williamson Act.
 - The purpose of the Agricultural Element is to promote agriculture as a viable industry. This is accomplished by protecting agricultural land from adverse (non-agricultural) influences/uses while also ensuring that conversions do not negatively impact remaining operations.
 - The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (aka the Williamson Act) is a voluntary program that reduces property taxes in exchange for restricting the use of land to agriculture, open space, or recreational uses by enrolling properties in Farmland Security Zone contracts with the County. The State compensates the County for lost property tax revenue. There are 3000 acres of Williamson Act parcels in the Eastern Goleta Valley.
 - Agricultural land is designated as A-I or A-II (Ag-1 or Ag-2), where type I refers to prime agricultural land and is determined (most)by the soil quality.
 - Chapter 3 of the County Code also protects agricultural land. The Right to Farm Ordinance dictates that changes surrounding agricultural land cannot classify it as a nuisance. For example if homes are built near a previously existing agricultural operation, the sounds, odor, smoke, dust, fumes, etc... that emanate from the property cannot be used as an excuse to shut down the operation. There is no official buffer zone/setback between residential and agricultural land, but there is a case-by-case review of such setbacks.

- The 1993 GCP also addresses agricultural land use by setting goals to preserve agricultural lands while protecting it from urban encroachment. It differentiates between urban and mountainous agriculture with water conservation being a major concern. It states that urban agriculture shall be preserved unless the land is no longer appropriate for agriculture or there is an overriding public need for conversion.
- ii. *Agricultural Land-Use Planning*: The 1993 GCP recommended several planning tools for agriculture land use including the agricultural protection program, planned development, and transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights and open space easements, as well as land trusts.
- There are only four urban agricultural zones remaining in urban Eastern Goleta Valley: South Patterson, the Christmas Tree Farm (development ongoing), MTD (no longer farmed), and the San Marcos/Hollister Avenue lots. The mountainous regions include rural agricultural zones.
 - Agricultural Protection Program: Started in 2005, it provides technical expertise in identifying development impacts and assisting with policy development and project reviews.
 - Projects on or adjacent to agricultural land are reviewed and can result in coastal development permits, comprehensive plan amendments, conditional use permits, development plans, lot line adjustments, rezones, and tentative parcel maps and tract maps. Case-by-case mitigation measures can include fencing, screening, setbacks, changes in building orientations and relocation of buildings, as well as other measures.
 - Rural and urban agriculture have different limitations. Rural agriculture allows for more general uses while urban agriculture is more limited due to its proximity to residential areas and can include truck farms (rotational crops), row crops, orchards, and greenhouses. Potential issues arise due to increasing land values, availability of water, conflicts with sprawl, hazards, chemicals, theft, noise, conditional-use permits (for schools, churches, etc...) and environmentally sensitive habitat overlays.
 - It is important to consider urban and rural agriculture as a part of a regional planning process. We need to consider required infrastructure, access, designations, regulations, wastewater, irrigation, recreation and trails, economics, runoff and storm water.
- iii. *Agricultural Land-Use Trends*: The 2007 Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) Regional Growth Forecast and the California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) provide some data for past and present trends.
- Santa Barbara County gained 4,587 urbanized acres, and 12,445 irrigated acres between 1990 and 2004, primarily due to vineyards with much of the land previously being used for grazing.
 - Agricultural revenue in 2008 was \$1.14 billion, up 3% from 2007. Strawberries grossed over \$309 million.
 - There are currently 6,690 agriculturally designated acres, with 1,767,621 square feet of buildings/structures and 113 homes on those acres. At full build-out an additional 72 new homes could be built. 1,123 of these acres are considered urban agriculture.
 - Several local farmers attended the meeting and provided the committee a great deal of information through public comment. Their views are summarized under public comment.
3. GVPAC Discussion: The GVPAC discussion was driven primarily by comments made by local farmers on the difficulty of maintaining and running agricultural operations in Eastern Goleta Valley. The committee struggled with coming up with ideas that would help the remaining farmers in our area. The lack of land, the cost of regulations, and the cost of real estate appears to be the major obstacles in maintaining agricultural land, as well as the lack of labor. It is apparent that there is a huge incentive for some property owners to stop operations so as not to be penalized when they want to have their property rezoned. Land swaps, land trusts, micro parcels, and gorilla farming for new and upcoming farmers were some ideas that were discussed.
4. Public Comment:
- a. *Shelly Cobb*: Ms. Cobb was concerned that the GVPAC meetings aren't being sufficiently publicized. She supports preserving agricultural land and believes that the Eastern Goleta Valley is already at its maximum

capacity as demonstrated by increased traffic especially along the Hollister/Modoc to State Street/Hwy 154 corridor. She believes that area in particular is already overdeveloped and expressed concern over the possibility of a new hotel being built there.

- b. *Ann Crosby*: Ms. Crosby noted that the recent Santa Ynez Community Plan did not change agricultural zoning and could be considered as a good model for the Eastern Goleta Valley Community Plan update. She questioned the need or the desire to remodel the Turnpike Shopping Center and whether the form-based code is an appropriate planning tool for EGV. She suggested down-zoning as a possible alternative whereby the minimum parcel size is increased which can lead to reductions in waste water, solid waste and negative impacts of development. She questioned the concept of the viability of agriculture and attributed it primarily to the availability of water and highlighted the importance of food security in maintaining agricultural land.
- c. *Wendy Kaysing (by Estelle Foster)*: Ms. Kaysing submitted a letter. I have not had a chance to read the letter which apparently expresses concerns over water capacity and other issues.
- d. *Patti Close*: Ms. Close expressed concerned over emergency preparedness and noted increased traffic and its negative impact on potential evacuations. She suggested that the GVPAC hosts a presentation by the Office of Emergency Services. [The GVPAC did hear a presentation from the Fire Department as well as the Sherriff's Department which discussed some of emergency preparedness issues.] She expressed support for small pockets of high density development for affordable housing surrounded by open space and lower density housing. Expressed concern that zone districts may not consider neighborhood compatibility and circulation issues. She does not support large high-density developments such as those found in Isla Vista and believes that the recession and the outflow of residents from California minimizes the need for additional development. Ms. Close would like to eliminate the statement "provide affordable housing to all Goleta residents" from the current plan. She stressed that Eastern Goleta Valley is suburban, and should remain that way. She would like to preserve agriculture for food security.
- e. *Estelle Foster*: Ms. Foster expressed concerns over lack of publication of the GVPAC meetings. She would like meeting notices sent to all South Coast residents.
- f. *Mary Whalen*: Ms. Whalen also expressed concerns over lack of publication of the GVPAC meetings and would like public comment opportunities during County presentations. She mentioned the San Marcos Growers' previously proposed plans to build 1200 units on their property. She questioned whether land owners would stop agricultural operations if a rezone was not a possibility.
- g. *Jack Ruskey*: Mr. Ruskey has a 40 acre organic farm in Zone 1. He mentioned that there need to be good and compelling reasons to change the policies found in the 1993 plan. His property served as a buffer against the Gap Fire. He pointed out that there is a connection between urban and rural agriculture: as the amount of agriculturally zoned land declines, the services available to the remaining farmers also declines making it harder to maintain a viable agricultural operation.
- h. *Suzanne Elledge*: Ms. Elledge represents Ron Caird, the owner of approximately 100 acres in the South Patterson agricultural block. Mr. Caird would like to rezone two parcels (3.5 acres + 5 acres) to be consistent with adjacent parcels (P/I: Professional/Institutional and Residential 7-R-1 or DR-3). They would provide for new housing and light industrial opportunities. She pointed out that much of the agricultural land in Eastern Goleta Valley is open space because of the high cost of running 'pocket' agricultural operations in this area, including, but not limited to the cost of water, lack of labor, and the cost of housing.
- i. *Bert Bertrando*: Mr. Bertrando suggested that implementing conservation easements could be a potential tool used in preserving open space and agricultural land.
- j. *John Givens*: Mr. Givens is the owner of John Givens Farms located in the South Patterson agricultural block, as well as other locations. Mr. Givens detailed the difficulties in farming in Eastern Goleta Valley. He noted the lack of infrastructure (such as tractor stores, etc...) in the South Coast and the high cost of farming. In his view the "cat is out of the bag" and there are very few viable agricultural properties remaining in our planning area. He mentioned that while the climate is better, he is moving his operations up north to Santa Maria and Buellton due to a variety of reasons (labor, water, and cost). He would like some latitude in the zoning of agricultural land. Mr. Givens pointed out that some land in EGV is no longer operational because the owners are hoping to develop it, thus taking away valuable and viable agricultural

land from use even without rezoning. The owners feel that they will be penalized for continuing agricultural operations. The remaining land is not as productive. Some of his property is in a flood zone. Mr. Given's sells about 20% of his produce at the local farmers' market.

- k. *Ron Caird*: Mr. Caird farms 100 acres of land in the South Patterson agricultural block as well as 400 acres in Santa Maria. He stated that farming in EGV is hard, and is getting harder. Affordable housing, availability of labor, lighter regulations and large parcels make it much easier to farm in Santa Maria. While high intensity agriculture (greenhouses) is possible, it is expensive: a land-use permit to construct greenhouses would have cost \$1.5 million and \$35/sq. ft. to build. He would not have a return on his investment for 35 years. He mentioned that rezoning a portion of his land would help alleviate the financial stress on the rest of his operations. Mr. Caird noted that agricultural labor is just that: agricultural labor, they don't do anything else so during down seasons they move elsewhere. He also stated that he is competing internationally against others with much lower costs. While his operations do sell locally, much of his product is shipped out of the County. His Santa Maria operations have access to wells that can provide 1000 gallons a minute, far more than wells found in Goleta Valley.
- l. *Stan Giorgi*: Mr. Giorgi is a 4th generation farmer on about 130 acres in Goleta including a 47 acre lemon orchard near Hollister Avenue and Ward Drive. He agreed that the cost of farming on the South Coast is very high. He also noted that the local community cannot consume the quantity of lemons that he produces so he is forced to sell outside of our area. He mentioned that high land costs prevent new farmers from coming into the area.

For additional information, the official minutes, and the meeting audio, please see the county website:

<http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/goleta/gvpac.php>

Once again let me know if you do not wish to receive these e-mails, and feel free to forward them to others.

Thank you!

-Kenan (Kenan.Ezal@cox.net)

Note: I am fully responsible for any errors you may find in the above—no one else.

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