

**TO:** Open Space Board of Trustees

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**SUBJECT:** Study Session: Agricultural Resource Management Plan

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## **I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study session is for the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) and staff to discuss aspects of staff's analysis on the following "Tier One" topics of the Agricultural Resources Management Plan:

- Increase diversified organic vegetable farming on OSMP land.
- Evaluate the suitability/feasibility of other alternative agricultural uses.
- Develop a policy surrounding structures such as greenhouses and their appropriateness on OSMP lands.

## **II. QUESTIONS FOR THE BOARD**

Does the OSBT have questions or comments about the analysis or preliminary recommendations regarding:

- 1) Diversified vegetable farming?
- 2) Alternative agricultural uses?
- 3) Agricultural structures including greenhouses?

## **III. BACKGROUND**

The Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Agricultural Resources Management Plan (Agricultural Plan) is a component of the Agriculture and Local Foods Initiative identified by City Council as part of their 2014-2015 goals and is intended to address the major contributions of OSMP to this initiative. The Agricultural Plan is also intended to address the relevant strategies identified in the Open Space and Mountain Parks Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan (approved by the OSBT in 2009, accepted by City Council in 2010). The goal of the Agricultural Plan is **to ensure the long-term sustainability of agricultural operations and the ecological health of OSMP lands while fostering connections among community members and local agriculture.**

Last July the OSBT and staff discussed the scope, framework and planning approach of the Agricultural Plan. Among the items discussed were the significant plan components. Based upon the board discussion and staff identification of the plan components that develop new policies, staff identified three "Tier One" topics. Staff has included the analyses for these topics in Attachments A-C.

## IV. ISSUES

### **Diversified Vegetable Production**

Growing interest from the community in the availability and diversity of locally grown food has been reflected in the work plan priorities of the City Council which identifies a desire to support a greater diversity of local foods. In response, OSMP staff analyzed the current (2015) OSMP land system to identify the best opportunities for diversified vegetable farming (**Attachment A**).

The first phase of the analysis focused on identifying OSMP properties which have suitable soils, adequate water availability and the necessary infrastructure (for the purposes of the analysis, defined as outbuildings and a residence), or the “essential agricultural characteristics” to support diversified vegetable farming. Twenty-four properties met the criteria (described in more detail in Attachment A) and were classified as candidates for further analysis. These 24 properties represent the maximum extent of where diversified vegetable farming could potentially expand to on OSMP. However, there are natural resource values associated with these properties and tradeoffs for conversion.

The second phase of the analysis is focused on evaluating the compatibility of the candidate properties with management area designations, pre-established resource management goals and other resources including sensitive species. Since all of the candidate sites will require infrastructure improvements before they could be used for vegetable farming, staff also estimated the conversion and maintenance costs for each of the candidate sites.

Currently, the analysis only goes so far as identifying the natural resource values,<sup>1</sup> visitor infrastructure and management area designations for each of the candidate sites. A determination including more detailed analysis on the compatibility for each site has not yet been undertaken; there are currently no recommendations. However, staff anticipates it is likely that less than half of the properties will ultimately be recommended for conversion. In addition to including more detailed analysis on the compatibility of each site, the final recommendations will also include final cost estimates, prioritizations, and recommendations for phasing the improvements/conversion of properties.

### **Alternative Agricultural Uses**

For the purpose of the analysis, *alternative agricultural* is defined as activities and enterprises that are related to but not required for agricultural production and provide opportunities for producers to diversify their income and/or market their produce. Examples of alternative agricultural include farm stands, farm events, and “agratainment” (harvest festivals, petting zoos, “u-pick” operations, corn mazes, etc.). City policy has not allowed alternative agricultural uses on OSMP lands, and there has been no significant demand among lessees for them.<sup>2</sup>

Staff recognizes that alternative agricultural activities have the potential to improve the economic viability of agricultural operations and provide OSMP visitors opportunities to

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<sup>1</sup> The Bobolink Management Areas are the exception and have not yet been identified/chosen. OSMP staff will be incorporating new data from the hayfield monitoring to determine which fields may provide the best opportunity to meet Bobolink conservation objectives. Due to the interrelatedness of the two plan components a determination on specific fields to be managed for bobolinks will be made in conjunction with the recommendations on the diversified vegetable analysis.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of horse livery operations at Boulder Valley Ranch which ceased operation over twenty years ago, there have been no other alternative agricultural operations in the history of the OSMP agricultural program.

connect with the land and agricultural heritage of the Boulder Valley. However, like other activities proposed for open space lands, staff wished to ensure that prior to recommending any alternative agricultural activities, they were consistent with policy guidance and the other purposes of OSMP. In response to the wide range of activities with significant differences among them, staff chose to assess the activities by category and adapted a pre-existing framework to consider which, if any, forms of alternative agriculture would be most appropriate for OSMP. The following table lists the categories and criteria used for this analysis.

Category	Criterion
Relationship to setting	Dependence on an agricultural setting and/or OSMP lands
	Ability to increase peoples' appreciation of agriculture or understanding of Open Space purposes.
Compatibility with resource protection	Compatibility with the preservation of agricultural resources
Compatibility with existing facilities and services	Compatibility with a low level of existing facilities and services (e.g. parking, minimal maintenance, enforcement, monitoring, etc.)
	Compatibility with providing a safe recreational experience
Compatibility with other activities	Compatibility with other recreational activities/other visitor's experiences

Activities in the categories of *agratainment*, *farm events*, *community gardens*, *food forests*, *farm stands/stores* and *demonstration farms/farm camps* were evaluated against these criteria. When issues or considerations emerged, staff responded by developing mitigating strategies to improve the compatibility of the activity. In all cases the assessments only considered the alternative activities as accessory uses and occurring as part of operations where agricultural production remained the primary purpose of the operation.

Staff concluded that the following alternative agricultural activities were most compatible with the evaluation criteria:

- ⌘ U-pick Operations
- ⌘ Farm to Table Dinners
- ⌘ Farm Stands/Stores
- ⌘ Demonstration Farms/Farm Camps (but not as part of the existing agricultural lease program)

**Attachment B** contains the full analysis for all activities. Staff recommends an incremental phasing in of alternative activities to give lease managers and others affected an opportunity to gain experience and adapt to the changes.

### **Agricultural Structures**

The necessity of structures for agricultural production predates the current and increasing interest in local foods. In fact the City Charter (Section 176) anticipated the need for improvements to support agricultural operations in 1986 when it was amended to include the following (emphasis added):

Open space land may not be improved after acquisition unless such improvements are necessary to protect or maintain the land or to provide for passive recreational, ***open agricultural***, or wildlife habitat use of the land.

There are a number of structures that have been in use on OSMP for decades in support of livestock and hay production operations such as barns, corrals, loafing sheds, livestock shelters and storage sheds. In most instances these structures predate OSMP's ownership of a ranch, and have demonstrated their necessity. No changes are being recommended for these structures.

The growing interest in local diversified vegetable production has resulted in an increased interest in structures like greenhouses and hoopouses that can extend the growing season increasing yields and, potentially, profits. Therefore these structures are the focus of staff's analysis. The focus on hoopouses and greenhouses resulted in the development of a framework that could be used to consider other replacement or new structures as well as unanticipated future structures (**Attachment C**).

Staff considers hoopouses to be a structure consistent with charter language and policy guidance. While there may be future designs for greenhouses that make them more cost effective and energy efficient, current technology is not available to address these criteria, and staff is not recommending including greenhouses as structures for construction on OSMP lands.

**Attachment C** provides the full analysis and recommendations for agricultural structures on OSMP.

## **V. NEXT STEPS**

Staff will revise the Tier One topics based on OSBT feedback from this study session. Those changes, along with the remaining plan components will be included in a draft plan presented to the Open Space Board of Trustees later in 2015.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Analysis of Diversified Vegetable Production
- B. Analysis of Alternative Agricultural
- C. Analysis of Agricultural Structures