December 05, 2017

Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO AUTHORIZE PRESIDENT TO EXECUTE AGREEMENT GRANTING THE MARIN AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST $1,332,650 IN MEASURE A FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM FUNDS FOR PURCHASING AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT OVER THE FURLONG RANCH

Dear Board Members:

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Authorize President to execute the agreement.
2. Authorize an increase of $1,332,650 in Measure A expenditure appropriations within the Farmland Preservation subprogram (6402) through use of prior year Measure A Fund Balance (2560).

SUMMARY:

Marin County Parks has received an application from the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) requesting $1,332,650 in Measure A Farmland Preservation Program funds to purchase an agricultural conservation easement over the 609-acre Furlong Ranch just outside of Point Reyes Station. The ranch has been operated by the Furlong family since 1956. The subject property (Assessor Parcels 119-010-32 and 119-010-07) is used for commercial agriculture and includes cattle and sheep grazing. Located approximately 2.5 miles north of Point Reyes Station, the ranch would join a large swath of seven MALT-protected ranches stretching from Marshall almost to Point Reyes Station.

The appraised fair market value of the easement is $2,619,000. MALT’s grant request represents fifty percent of the total purchase price plus fifty percent of administrative costs associated with acquisition of the easement. MALT will be contributing the remaining $1,332,650 from its own funds for purchase of the easement.

Ranch properties in West Marin face a very high risk of conversion to exclusive residential development, which increases building density, road construction and other activities that threaten agriculture and natural resource values. The Furlong Ranch is owned by two trusts that were established to provide money to pay for the living expenses of the family’s matriarch, who resides in an assisted living home. If the trust cannot sell an easement to MALT, the trustees will have to sell all or part of the ranch to pay for her continued care. The property just northwest of the Furlong
Ranch is now owned by a wealthy family who took it out of active agricultural use. That family owns an estate on the opposite side of Tomales Bay and has made several offers to the Furlongs to purchase their ranch. Once sold for non-agricultural use, properties like the Furlong Ranch will likely never be available to an agricultural buyer again. Permanently preserving this ranch for agricultural uses will help to maintain the critical mass of farms necessary to sustain the required agricultural infrastructure to keep farming and ranching a viable component of the county’s economy, and secure a MALT-protected agricultural corridor along the east shore of Tomales Bay.

Staff considers grant applications for funding from the Measure A Farmland Preservation Program on a first-come, first-served basis, and evaluates the merits of proposals based on criteria contained in the Marin County Agricultural Land Conservation Program. The creation of this program was authorized by your board on January 31, 2012. Additionally, as approved by Marin voters in 2012, twenty percent of Measure A funds are mandated to be used for the purchase of conservation easements to protect natural resources.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There will be no increase to General Fund Net County Cost as a result of your Board’s actions, as the purchase is fully funded by through Measure A funds. If approved, expenditure appropriations within Measure A, Fund 2560, Farmland Preservation Grant Program, will be increased by $1,332,650 and fully offset by a reduction in prior year fund balance (2560-320525).

REVIEWED BY:

[ ] Dept. of Finance [X] N/A
[X] County Counsel [ ] N/A
[ ] Human Resources [X] N/A

Senior Open Space Planner Craig Richardson the principal author of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Chamberlain
Assistant Director

Munis Budget Amendment Nbr. 8