

Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published March 17th, 2010

Council Unanimously Approves Unique Open Space Deal

By Cathy Tyson



Photo by Photo Hutch for teh Muir Heritage land

In an unprecedented collaboration, the City of Lafayette, the City of Walnut Creek, the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) and key player the Muir Heritage Land Trust (MHLT) put together an agreement to purchase over 22 acres of open space east of Acalanes High School.

A sales price of \$1,305,500 was agreed upon - the cities of Lafayette and Walnut Creek along with the EBRPD will chip in 30% of the price - \$391,650. The final 10%, \$130,550 will be paid by the MHLT. They will also be responsible for closing costs, title and escrow fees and most importantly ongoing stewardship of the property.

The timing could not have been better. Measure WW, approved by voters in 2008, provided funding for cities in Contra Costa and Alameda counties that can only be spent on acquiring and improving regional parks, trails and recreation facilities. Lafayette received \$1,082, 501; half of that amount is slated for open space acquisition, according to Jennifer Russell, Director of Lafayette Parks, Trails and Recreation Department.

The City of Walnut Creek also received its share of WW funds and was willing to spend some of the money outside of their city limits.

"It reflects the remarkable maturity, regional leadership and a commitment to community caretaking," said City Manager Steven Falk in a statement.

The Haji family was a willing seller, and with the help of MHLT Executive Director Linus Eukel, along with the Lafayette Open Space Committee and the City Council, it all came together.

"Sometimes achieving an acceptable outcome for a complicated project such as this can be elusive, as it was for years in this case," said Eukel. "The Land Trust is uniquely positioned and able to bring willing partners together to find solutions. This acquisition will benefit the wider community, even those who enjoy the profound beauty of the Acalanes Ridge as a faraway vista. By reaching out to create new partnerships, and by fulfilling its capacity as a land trust, MHLT helped provide the leadership needed to affect a solution that was unachievable for more than a decade."

The City of Lafayette has been interested in the parcel for many years. "The MHLT will own the property in fee and will transfer a conservation easement to Lafayette, Walnut Creek and the East Bay Regional Park District," said Falk.

City Council members unanimously approved the funding agreement. After giving thanks to the EBRPD and the City of Walnut Creek, Council Member Carl Anduri said, "This is what makes it worthwhile to be on the Council. We're very fortunate to have this happen."

There was a palpable feeling of enthusiasm at the March 8th City Council meeting. "Yes, please!" said Eliot Hudson. "Thank you to the MHLT, they have been absolutely phenomenal. I have a deep respect and gratitude for what they've done. It's truly a marvelous piece of property."

"The next step is fundraising," said Eukel. "The campaign's goal is to raise the \$427,600.00 needed to purchase Acalanes Ridge, provide funds to steward the acquired property in perpetuity and support the organization's work. So many people have worked so long to preserve the natural beauty of this land. We're expecting the same community support we've seen for so many years."

He continued, "This is the opportunity so many have hoped for-to at last protect this open space as a home for wildlife and a refuge for people from the stresses in our busy lives."

Donations to the Muir Heritage Land Trust to support the Acalanes Ridge purchase and the Keep It Wild Campaign can be made online at www.muirheritagelandtrust.org, or can be sent to: Muir Heritage Land Trust, P.O. Box 2452, Martinez, CA 94553. For more information, call the office at (925) 228-5460 or e-mail info@muirheritagelandtrust.org

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright (C) Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA