



Contra
Costa
County

To: Board of Supervisors

From: John Kopchik, Director, Conservation & Development Department

Date: September 22, 2020

Subject: County File #GP20-0002 Cecchini Ranch General Plan Amendment

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. AUTHORIZE initiation of a General Plan Amendment (GPA) process, County File #GP20-0002, to evaluate a proposal to change the General Plan land use designation for one parcel located at 17000 Highway 4 in the Discovery Bay area, identified as Assessor's Parcel Number 004-500-005, from Delta Recreation and Resources (DR) to Single-Family Residential-Medium Density (SM), Light Industry (LI), Parks and Recreation (PR), Commercial Recreation (CR), and Public and Semi-Public (PS), or successor land use designations thereof.
2. DIRECT staff to work with the applicant to suggest and consider project modifications necessary to comply with County policies, standards, and objectives related to housing production, transportation, economic development, jobs/housing balance, provision of public services, and environmental protection.
3. ACKNOWLEDGE that granting this authorization does not imply any sort of endorsement for the application to amend the General Plan, but only that the matter is appropriate for consideration.

☒ APPROVE

☐ OTHER

☒ RECOMMENDATION OF CNTY

☐ RECOMMENDATION OF BOARD

ADMINISTRATOR

COMMITTEE

Action of Board On: **09/22/2020** ☒ APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED ☐ OTHER

Clerks Notes:

VOTE OF SUPERVISORS

AYE: John Gioia, District I Supervisor

Candace Andersen, District II
Supervisor

Diane Burgis, District III Supervisor

Karen Mitchoff, District IV
Supervisor

Federal D. Glover, District V
Supervisor

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of an action taken and entered on the minutes of the Board of Supervisors on the date shown.

ATTESTED: September 22, 2020

David Twa, County Administrator and Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

By: June McHuen, Deputy

Contact: Daniel Barrios, (925)
674-7788

cc:

FISCAL IMPACT:

None. The project applicant will pay fees to cover the cost of processing the GPA, if authorized.

BACKGROUND:

On May 18, 2020, the Department of Conservation and Development received application materials (Attachment A) from Mr. Tim Saunders (applicant), representing the Henghou Group, owner of the Cecchini Ranch Property. As explained in the application materials, Cecchini Ranch is divided into two distinct areas: the southern approximately 545-acre parcel is the subject of this General Plan Amendment Feasibility Study; the northern 577+/- acres was placed into an agricultural conservation easement in October of 2017 and is currently being farmed under a lease arrangement. Immediately west of the site is the Discovery Bay community. Old River runs along the eastern property line and is the border with San Joaquin County. Numerous large, active farms are located to the south, along with the Town of Discovery Bay's wastewater treatment facility, Contra Costa Water District's Old River Pumping Plant, and a marine service and supply business. Attachment B includes General Plan and zoning maps of the area and Attachment C is an aerial photo of the site and its surroundings.

The project involves development of a 2,000-unit active adult community primarily intended for empty nesters, adults whose children have moved out of the house and would like to downsize from homes that are typically too large, dated, and no longer fit their needs. This project seeks to provide an opportunity for this demographic to sell their more central Bay Area home to younger families while remaining close enough to visit their children and grandchildren. According to the applicant, there are only nine active adult new home communities in Northern California, and only three of those are in the nine-county Bay Area. In addition to the residential units, the project includes a 40-acre reservation for commercial/light industrial flex uses, a 30-acre sports field that would double as a detention basin, a 21-acre community park with a community center, a 7-acre boat and RV storage area, a 1.5-acre fire station site, 8 acres of protected wetlands, and land for various other uses such as pocket parks, lakes, and trails.

Some project elements would be welcome additions to the Discovery Bay community (e.g., fire station, sports field/detention basin, community park). Staff recognizes, however, that several significant issues must be adequately addressed prior to any project approval:

- It is unclear whether sufficient water, sewer, and drainage capacity exists to serve the project.
- The project involves conversion of agricultural land to urban uses. The subject property has historically and is currently utilized for agricultural production and is designated as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance by the California Department of Conservation.
- With the northern Cecchini Ranch parcel being under an agricultural conservation easement, there is potential for conflict between agricultural activities on that parcel and residential uses on the southern parcel.
- There is potential for significant impacts to biological resources (i.e., protected species and their habitat), water resources, and other sensitive environmental receptors.
- The project's targeted demographic requires services that do not exist in the area. The nearest medical facilities are located in Brentwood, and no regular public transit or paratransit services extend to Discovery Bay. This is problematic for a population that is expected to age in place and may not always maintain the ability to drive to their destinations.
- Being adjacent to Old River and protected by levees, impacts related to projected sea level rise in

combination with 100-year storm events are a concern.

- Most trips to and from this project would be in personal vehicles and are expected to be medium- to long-distance because Discovery Bay currently offers few job opportunities and lacks many services and amenities. This would result in high vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and correspondingly high greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Staff notes that the project's age restrictions may somewhat mitigate VMT and GHG impacts because a smaller percentage of residents would be expected to commute regularly, but impacts are expected to be significant, nonetheless.
- Despite reserving 40 acres for commercial/light industrial uses, the project could exacerbate the jobs-housing imbalance in East County.

County and Town of Discovery Bay (TODB) staff met virtually in August to discuss this application and daylight community concerns. TODB staff's main concerns relate to traffic and impacts to public services. With the addition of 2,000 residential units, there is potential for significant new traffic impacts along Highway 4, which is already impacted by traffic from Discovery Bay and surrounding communities such as Stockton, Brentwood, and Oakley. There is an associated concern regarding the capacity to enforce traffic laws with the proposed influx of vehicles. The project would also place additional load on law enforcement, fire protection, medical service, and code enforcement resources. Potential reductions in the capacity of these resources is of concern. Staff notes that these areas of concern would be reviewed and addressed through the application process. Because the project requires discretionary approval, its potential impacts would be evaluated pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

It is natural for a project this large to evolve as it moves through the planning process, and to continue evolving even after approval. If approved, this project will take years, possibly decades, to build out. Any authorization to move forward with the proposed GPA should be done with the understanding that the plan will require modification in response to the community's long-term aspirations, changing environmental conditions, changing market conditions, new statutory requirements, new technologies, and other external forces. The acreage dedicated to the various uses detailed in the project description, and the location of those uses, will likely change. It is also possible that new project components will be introduced. At this early stage in the process the Board is considering a concept more than an actual land use plan.

The proposed project has many issues to resolve. However, the subject site *is* within the Urban Limit Line and adjacent to urban uses in Discovery Bay. The proposed housing type is needed in the Bay Area, and at least 15 percent of the units would be "affordable." Other project components, such as the job-generating uses, new fire station, and new recreational opportunities would benefit Discovery Bay and the greater East County area. All General Plan amendments require a finding that the amendment is in the public interest. It is not clear to staff at this time that the current proposal will be able to meet that standard. Further study is warranted to determine if the standard can be met, but staff feel confident significant project changes are likely also necessary and is seeking Board authorization to work with the applicant to pursue these changes. As such, staff recommends Board authorization to proceed with the GPA. Staff emphasizes that authorization to proceed does not imply the Board's ultimate endorsement of the application to amend the General Plan, but only that this matter is appropriate for further

consideration.

Staff notes that the Envision Contra Costa 2040 General Plan Update may modify or eliminate one or more of the proposed General Plan land use designations. Should that occur while the subject GPA is in process, the application will proceed with whichever successor land use designations are appropriate for the proposed density and uses.

Finally, should the applicant fail to pursue the project within one year of the authorization to proceed with the GPA, the application will be administratively closed.

CONSEQUENCE OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

If the Board does not authorize initiation of the GPA process, then an application to amend the General Plan cannot be filed and the subject parcel will retain its current land use designation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Project Description

Attachment B - General Plan and Zoning Maps

Attachment C - Aerial Photo