



S O N O M A C O U N T Y

**AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION
AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

February 2, 2015

David Goodison
Planning Director
City of Sonoma
No. 1 The Plaza
Sonoma, CA 95476

Subject: Montini Open Space Preserve Conservation Easement, District Response to City of Sonoma's Request for Approval for an Amended Management Plan Allowing Leashed Dogs on Trail

Dear Mr. Goodison:

This letter is in response to a permitted use request the City of Sonoma ("City") submitted to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District ("District") on December 17, 2014, requesting District approval for an amendment to the Montini Open Space Preserve Management Plan ("Amendment"), which the City adopted on July 21, 2014. The Amendment proposes the allowance of leashed dogs on trail, with measures proposed to avoid potential impacts to natural resources.

As you know, the District holds a Conservation Easement over the Montini Open Space Preserve ("Preserve"), which requires that all recreational uses be conducted in a manner compatible with the protection of wildlife habitat and native plant communities, as well as public enjoyment of natural features, in perpetuity. In order for the District to approve the Amendment, it must find that dogs will not impair or interfere with these values.

In a Biological Resources Evaluation of the Effects of Dogs, dated May 2014, the City's consultant, Prunuske Chatham, Inc. ("PCI"), identified significant potential impacts to the values protected by the Easement, stating: "Overall, introduction of dogs to the Preserve would be likely to have widespread and long-lasting effects on natural resources, although it is possible that such effects could be reduced if effective controls are implemented that minimize off-leash/off-trail use, the incidence of dog waste, and other undesirable behaviors."

In order to reduce the potential impacts identified by PCI, the City proposes that dogs must be on-leash, be restricted to trails, and that owners must clean up dog waste, and that these rules be enforced by volunteers coordinated by Sonoma Ecology Center ("SEC") under its 3-year Work Plan funded by the District. The City further proposes to install signage and low rock walls or split-rail fences in key locations to protect sensitive areas, in consultation with District staff. SEC would also conduct regular trail maintenance and stewardship activities along the trail, as already provided in the Work Plan. In the event that the State of California closes the western access, the City proposes to design and implement an alternative western access within 5 years, as required by the District's Recreation Covenant, and to close the trail south of the 9-acre pasture overlook to reduce the likelihood of users bringing dogs onto the State Park.

As I explained to you in our meeting of January 13, 2015, District staff is not satisfied that the City has demonstrated that the allowance of dogs on the Preserve will not impact the resources protected by the Easement, so we cannot approve the Amendment at this time. The following bullets itemize and describe the District's reasoning behind its decision:

- The City has not demonstrated that it has sufficient enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure substantial user compliance of dog rules. The City has not provided information on frequency of patrols and strategies for citation, including penalties for initial and repeated offenses, and adaptive management should substantial compliance not be readily achieved. Further, the City has not demonstrated capacity for continued enforcement beyond the 3-year period of the District-funded Work Plan with SEC, and has not demonstrated that enforcement of dog rules will not hinder the other land management tasks already identified in the Work Plan.
- The City has not demonstrated that PCI, or another ecological expert of similar repute, is satisfied that the proposed measures are sufficient to fully preserve and protect wildlife habitat, native plant communities, and public enjoyment of the Preserve's natural features in perpetuity, as required by the Easement.
- The City has not demonstrated that if the State closes the western access, then dogs would not be allowed on the Preserve until an alternative western access is activated. Based on how the Amendment is written, it appears that there may be a period of up to five years when dogs would be allowed on the Preserve while there is no western access. Such event would diminish public accessibility to the Preserve.
- The City has not demonstrated that if the State closes the western access and the City proceeds with an alternative western access and decommissions the trail south of the 9-acre pasture overlook, then the City shall restore the decommissioned trail on the Preserve to natural conditions at the City's expense.

We welcome further discussions and remain open to considering a revised amended Management Plan that addresses the concerns raised above. Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact Sheri Emerson or me at the District office.

Sincerely,



William J. Keene
General Manager

c: Sheri Emerson, Stewardship Program Manager
Misti Arias, Acquisition Program Manager
Elizabeth Coleman, Deputy County Counsel