



Memorandum

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Mayor Sam Liccardo
Vice Mayor Chappie Jones
Councilmember Sergio Jimenez
Councilmember Raul Peralez
Councilmember Pam Foley

SUBJECT: COYOTE VALLEY

DATE: November 1, 2019

Approved

Date 11/1/19

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the staff recommendation with the following additional direction:

1. Appoint the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (the Authority) to lead an inclusive and visionary master planning process for North Coyote Valley that focuses on the properties protected through the partnership between the City of San José, the Authority, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). The planning effort should:
 - a. Establish an executive committee comprised of representatives from the Authority, the City, and POST to engage partners, community stakeholders, and importantly the broader public in the planning process.
 - b. Adopt a comprehensive vision and establish goals that include, but are not limited to:
 1. Wildlife connectivity, habitat conservation and restoration;
 2. Floodplain restoration;
 3. Climate resilience;
 4. Low impact, nature-based public access.
 - c. Consider the larger context of North Coyote Valley and the surrounding mountain ranges and open spaces to plan for wildlife connectivity and wildlife crossing infrastructure, opportunities to restore and reconnect creeks and floodplains, connections to nearby parks and regional trails, nearby agricultural operations, and opportunities for unique visitor amenities.
 - d. Aim to create a unique natural area that will be a major destination in San José, the entire San Francisco Bay Area, and the Nation.

2. Direct staff to pursue public funding – including all regional, state, and federal opportunities – to support both the master planning process and conservation improvements. Additionally, staff should support the pursuit of private partnership opportunities that the Authority and POST will collectively pursue.
3. Direct staff to collaborate with the Authority and POST to implement a short term activation plan that provides controlled public access to the acquired properties – while the planning process is underway – such as docent-led tours and nature walks.

BACKGROUND

We are close to realizing our common vision for Coyote Valley, and we applaud the Herculean effort it has taken to get here. A long list of individuals and organizations deserve recognition for their hard work, collaboration, and persistence over the past four years. We also stand on the shoulders of others who have pushed for preservation in decades past.

We now have the opportunity to consider the largest municipal investment in natural infrastructure in California's history: 937 acres of irreplaceable open space. With Coyote Valley's preservation, we achieve important gains in resilience for our entire region— a substantial buffer against threats of wildfire, drought, and flood. We secure critical habitat for more than 200 species of birds and local wildlife, and we provide them a safe place of passage through our sprawling urban landscape. We ensure a supply of clean water by protecting Santa Clara Valley's largest freshwater wetland, creeks, and groundwater basin, and we prevent the degradation of water quality that inevitably comes with development atop a shallow aquifer. We provide green space for generations of children to enjoy and experience nature. Finally, we double down on our commitment to smart growth — focusing jobs, housing, and transit together – to halt the growth in greenhouse gas emissions, consistent with our Climate Smart San José goals. But we didn't always see it this way.

Coyote Valley has captured the imagination of San Joseans for generations, but also has sat within the crosshairs of development proposals— for everything from Apple's world headquarters, to campuses for Tandem, Cisco, and Xilinx, to tens of thousands of units of housing. Only recently did we start to embrace a more future-focused vision for Coyote Valley – one that views nature and green infrastructure as our allies in the face of climate change. Our residents got it quickly, though—when we presented this vision to voters through Measure T, it passed with 71 percent of the vote.

To bring this new vision for Coyote Valley to fruition, we must embark on a thoughtful master planning process that includes the City, our partners, community stakeholders, and the public. Given their expertise in managing and restoring natural lands, the Open Space Authority should lead the planning effort to guide the executive team, stakeholders, and core technical and strategic teams towards long-term future use and management of the preserve consistent with Measure T, the Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage vision, and the Conservation Easement. In addition to engaging those who have invested themselves deeply in this effort, we should also cast a wide net to include others whose voices should be heard.

In keeping with the will of the voters, the plan for Coyote Valley should focus on a comprehensive vision and set of goals that embrace nature and green infrastructure. We can maximize the benefits of Coyote Valley for both people and wildlife by restoring ecosystems, creeks, and floodplains, building wildlife crossing infrastructure, and providing carefully-planned trails that are sensitive to nature for residents and visitors to enjoy. We must also prioritize equity and inclusivity as we plan for a Coyote Valley treasured and enjoyed by our entire community. Considering the planning process may take two to three years, we should work with our partners to provide residents with guided access to the properties in the interim.

The success of the planning and restoration processes hinges on our ability to access public and private funding. The Open Space Authority should consult with POST and the City to develop creative financing solutions to secure near-term funding for the planning process, as well as funding sources to pay for priority site improvements and recommendations that emerge from the final plan. City staff should pursue public dollars to support planning and restoration efforts, such as those that are made available through the Habitat Conservation Plan, budget delegation requests, and Assemblymember Ash Kalra's AB 948.

Gratitude and Generational Gifts

First and foremost, we thank the San Jose voters, who, when presented with the choice—in the words of Mayor Tom McEnery—always “choose the future.” They validated the need for a new vision for Coyote Valley with the passage of Measure T last year, providing up to \$50 million for the City's investment in that vision.

We express immense gratitude to Andrea Mackenzie and Walter Moore, the respective leaders of the Open Space Authority, and POST, who came to Mayor Liccardo's office four years ago armed with an ambition to secure Coyote Valley for future generations. Getting a deal done required much hard work—and land owners with an enlightened view of their self-interest—namely, Diane Brandenburg and John Sobrato. It also demanded collaborative and creative perseverance of their lead negotiators, Bill Baron, the late Eric Brandenburg, and Tim Steele. We thank City staff, especially Nanci Klein and Danielle Kenealy for steering the City through a unique and extremely complex land purchase negotiation and transaction.

Of course, we thank the many advocates—the Sierra Club, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Committee for Green Foothills, Greenbelt Alliance, California Native Plant Society, Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, Mothers Out Front, and many more—who fought for and helped us to see the environmental and generational benefits of preserving the valley. We thank them for their support of Measure T, and for never losing sight of their longstanding ambition to preserve this small slice of creation for future generations.

With this agreement, we offer an invaluable gift to our children and future generations. As the Great Law of the Iroquois urges, “*Make every decision mindful of how it will impact the next seven generations.*” Our preservation of Coyote Valley makes good on our collective obligation of stewardship for our—and more importantly, their—planet.