



AGENDA ITEM
CITY COUNCIL MEETING DATE – AUGUST 17, 2021
CONSENT CALENDAR

TO : City Council

FROM : City Manager

SUBJECT : **ESTABLISHMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF THE NORTHWESTERN STUDY AREA SUBCOMMITTEE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On February 27, 2021, the City Council conducted a goal-setting workshop to identify work priorities and to ensure approval of City work programs. During this workshop, Council identified a priority to consider initiatives to develop undeveloped properties in the City of Benicia. One such property is the undeveloped land in the northwest portion of the City. There are approximately 500 + acres generally bounded by 2nd Street to the south, Lake Herman Road to the north, the intersection of Lake Herman Road and the I-680 on the east, and just west of Reservoir Road to the west. This property, which City staff has informally named the “Northwestern Study Area”, has a General Plan Land Use Designation of Limited Industrial and a small portion of General Commercial. The zoning classifications for the property are also the same classifications, Limited Industrial (IL) and General Commercial (CG).

In order to guide the initiation of a community discussion and outreach, it is recommended that Council establish the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee, an ad-hoc City Council subcommittee consisting of two (2) Councilmembers to help City staff and consultants facilitate discussions about considering potential future land uses of this undeveloped land. The ad-hoc subcommittee will be of limited duration.

RECOMMENDATION:

Move to adopt the resolution (Attachment 1) establishing the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee as an ad-hoc City Council subcommittee, and appointing Mayor Steve Young and Council Member Trevor Macenski to the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee.

BUDGET INFORMATION:

There are not any foreseen budgetary implications with the formation of an ad-hoc subcommittee. The process of facilitating community outreach will involve the use of consulting firms however, depending on the scope of outreach as decided by the ad-hoc subcommittee. Any future expenses associated with direction from the ad-hoc subcommittee would be in accordance with consultant selection processes as determined by City staff.

BACKGROUND:

The City has been contacted by the property owner of the vacant land, the Seeno Family, expressing a willingness to work collaboratively with the City to examine the future use of the land. Specifically, they have asked for the City to lead an objective planning process to explore the prospects of any level of development of the land. They have owned the land since the late 1970's and would like to know if it is possible for the City to begin contemplating the future use of the land. There have been past efforts however, and a few of those planning processes and community initiatives are discussed below.

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

During two specific application processes, the City of Benicia has considered land use proposals for the development of the vacant land in the Northwest portion of the City. One such application, known as the "Benicia Business Park", which was in process from about 2005-2010, involved a proposal to build 34.6 acres of commercial space and 150 acres of industrial space, along with roadway infrastructure and open space areas. Another conceptual proposal, known as the "Northern Gateway Development Concept", was filed in 2015 and sought a General Plan amendment to allow for a mix of uses including residential, industrial, commercial/retail, and open space. These proposals never advanced beyond a conceptual level.

Also, during the time that the "Benicia Business Park" application was being considered, a community lead planning process was initiated, known as the "Green Gateway Business Community". This effort encouraged a City-sponsored Specific Plan, a campus-style business community with zoning and urban design concepts and a focus on sustainable practices for energy use, water conservation and use, and with an emphasis on low or zero emission vehicle usage, ride share, and other progressive transportation demand management strategies. The overall plan envisioned approximately 100 acres of research and design (R&D), limited industrial centered around cleantech and "green-collar jobs, and satellite education centers. Also, 15 acres were identified for commercial hotel, retail, and office; 400 acres for open space; and no residential uses. This proposal never advanced beyond a conceptual level.

Since none of these land use proposals over the last 16 years have progressed, and there is not a Specific Plan prepared for the future use of the land, aside from the General Plan and zoning designations of Limited Industrial and a General Plan policy that any plan to develop more than 40 acres requires a Specific Plan (Policy 2.3.1), the question of whether the land should be considered for development has surfaced again. Specifically, as the COVID-19 pandemic has created a level of uncertainty for cities throughout California, Benicia is working on several policy level projects (Water and Wastewater Master Plan, Housing and Safety Element Updates, COVID response, City Budget, and Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan) that are contemplating Benicia's future in terms of economics, infrastructure, circulation, housing, and open space. Therefore, it is reasonable to initiate a community dialogue to consider the future use of this vacant land and that discussion is of community wide importance.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Of paramount importance to any important land use decision is the genuine involvement of the community at-large. While oftentimes is difficult to achieve full consensus, it is nonetheless of vital importance for any public process to have robust outreach facilitated in an equitable

manner, that there is full public transparency, and that all voices that choose to participate are heard. Furthermore, through a professional and meaningful community outreach process, it is anticipated that a framework for future decision could be established. For this reason, it is recommended that a Council ad-hoc subcommittee be established, called the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee. The subcommittee’s assistance to City staff will help ensure that the public is thoroughly involved in all steps of any planning process and will ensure the remainder of the Council is informed through updates during Council meetings.

NEXT STEPS:

If Council establishes the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee and appoints two (2) members, the next step would be to establish times and dates for the initial meetings.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS:

Council could choose not to move forward with the establishment of the Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee and/or could choose not to approve the appointment of the two Council Members to the subcommittee.

General Plan	GOAL 2.3: Ensure orderly and sensitive site planning and design for large undeveloped areas of the City, consistent with the land use designations and other policies in this General Plan.
	GOAL 2.5: Facilitate and encourage new uses and development which provide substantial and sustainable fiscal and economic benefits to the City and the community while maintaining health, safety, and quality of life.
	Policy 2.3.1: Require a Master Plan for new industrial and business park developments on properties under common or single-ownership which aggregate to more than 40 acres.

Priority Based Budgeting	Strategic City Result Impacted by this Agenda Item
	The City Council and community identified six (6) key “Results” that establish the key goals for which the City of Benicia aspires to achieve with our programs and services. Agenda Items often influence multiple Results, the primary Result impacted by this Agenda Item is (please check one):
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protect Community Health & Safety <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maintain & Enhance A High Quality of Life <input type="checkbox"/> Preserve & Enhance Infrastructure <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strengthen Economic & Fiscal Conditions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protect & Enhance the Environment <input type="checkbox"/> High Performing Government
	City Programs Impacted by This Agenda Item (Top 3):
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boards and Commissions 2. Special Projects Coordination

CEQA Analysis	The City’s decision to create an ad-hoc subcommittee and appoint members would be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). Under CEQA Guidelines section 15061, when it can be seen with certainty that an action does not have the potential to result in an environmental impact, the action is not subject to CEQA.
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ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution – Establishment and Appointment of Northwestern Study Area Subcommittee

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