

TO: HONORABLE CHAIRMAN AND PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: RON WHISENAND, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: PURPLE BELT PROGRAM

DATE: JULY 28, 2009

Needs: For the Planning Commission to consider and recommend approval of the Purple Belt Program and the associated Negative Declaration to the City Council.

Facts:

1. The City of Paso Robles recognizes the importance of the agricultural industry to the local economy, as well as the benefits to the City's tourism industry, as evidenced in the City's 2003 General Plan and the 2006 Economic Strategy.
2. The General Plan includes numerous policies directing the City to develop an agricultural preservation program known as a "Purple Belt". The Economic Strategy also references the importance of the agricultural economy and rural sense of place agriculture provides to the community.
3. The City also supports maintaining the rural agrarian landscape and distinct separations between Paso Robles and neighboring communities, and respects the desire of farmers interested in continuing their way of life and livelihood.
4. Preparation of the Purple Belt Program was initiated a few years ago, with the assistance of the consultant firm Economic Planning Systems. It was deferred for completion while the City moved forward on several other planning and development projects.
5. The City Council Ad Hoc Committee and the Purple Belt Stakeholders Committee recently reviewed the plan and provided feedback. Both entities support the Program.
6. Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an environmental review was prepared for this project. No significant environmental impacts were identified as a result of the Purple Belt Program. A Draft Negative Declaration has been prepared for consideration. (Attachment 3)

**Analysis
and**

Conclusions: The Purple Belt Program is intended to accomplish several objectives. These include: support of the region's agricultural economy; provide tools to assist property owners to continue agricultural operations on their property; maintain the rural, agrarian landscape; and create an ultimate urban growth boundary.

The Program is based on specific principles, in particular that participation by landowners in any land conservation program would be on a strictly voluntary basis. The City intends to collaborate with the County and other stakeholders to develop an outreach and education program on potential funding sources and opportunities to help property owners continue use of their property in agricultural production.

The Purple Belt is similar to a "green belt" program by offering financial incentives to property owners to preserve land, however, the Purple Belt is uniquely distinct from

typical green belt systems in that green belts usually pursue property acquisition for open space preservation and public access. While there may be properties suitable in the Purple Belt for acquisition for open space purposes, that is not the primary focus of the Purple Belt Program. The Purple Belt is aimed at agricultural conservation, with no or limited public access, and only if that would be acceptable to an individual property owner.

The Purple Belt includes identification of priority areas based on a set of criteria. The intent is that properties that meet more of the criteria listed would more likely be suitable to pursue for conservation. Priority areas are identified as: pink = high priority; green = moderate priority; and blue = low priority. These areas are illustrative in nature and do not represent firm boundary lines. The intent of identifying these areas is to provide guidance on where to focus conservation efforts. The priority criteria for properties include: active agricultural operations; size; contiguous to other agriculturally productive property; susceptibility to development; visibility from major roads and highways; and aesthetic value.

The program provides numerous implementation tools to pursue such as grants, tax credit programs (e.g. Farm Bill), development based programs (ag clusters, TDCs, ag mitigation), and tax-based funding through special districts and tax revenue programs.

The City and program partners such as the County recognize that the Purple Belt program will be implemented over time as resources to pursue programs becomes available. There are specific tasks required to be performed to ensure success of the program, including outreach and education to assist agriculturalists about programs available to them, as well as fundraising to seek financial opportunities, and administration of the overall program. City staff anticipates starting out slowly with a phased program and pursuing the easiest resources and activities first.

As mentioned above, the Purple Belt Program implements several policies in the General Plan that specifically direct the City to pursue this program. The program is also consistent with several aspects of the City's Economic Strategy, and the Gateway Design Standards. Additionally, the program is consistent with the County's draft Conservation & Open Space Element, Agricultural Element, and the County's adopted Strategic Growth Principles. Finally, the program supports and is consistent with the regional Community 2050 Blueprint Plan, and recent State legislation.

An environmental analysis was prepared for the Purple Belt Program. No environmental impacts were identified, and therefore a Negative Declaration has been prepared in accordance with CEQA.

Options: After opening the public hearing and taking public testimony, the Planning Commission is requested to take one of the actions listed below:

- a. By separate motions: 1) recommend approval of the Negative Declaration; and 2) recommend approval of the Purple Belt Program to the City Council.
- b. Amend, modify, or reject the above-listed action.
- c. Request additional information and analysis.

Staff Report Prepared By: Susan DeCarli, AICP

Attachments:

1. Draft Purple Belt Plan
2. Study Areas
3. Initial Study and Negative Declaration
4. Resolution to Recommend Approval of the Negative Declaration
5. Resolution to Recommend Approval of the Purple Belt Program
6. Newspaper Notice