DATE: June 1, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

FROM: Patrick Carter, Senior Management Analyst, City Manager’s Office

SUBJECT: Approval of a Resolution in Support of the Petaluma River Park Foundation’s Sonoma County Agricultural Preserve and Open Space District Matching Grant Application

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Council Approve a Resolution in Support of the Petaluma River Park Foundation’s Sonoma County Agricultural Preserve and Open Space District Matching Grant Application.

BACKGROUND

The McNear Peninsula is located in downtown Petaluma, along the Petaluma River. The western edge of the peninsula, Steamer Landing Park, is owned by the City and accessed through Copeland Street, east of the Petaluma Transit Mall. The peninsula east of Steamer Landing Park is a privately owned, undeveloped open space. The parcel is within the Central Petaluma Specific Plan and designated in that plan as Civic Space (Public Park), which limits the private development potential of the parcel.

The City has been in discussions with the owners of the McNear Peninsula for years, with an interest to purchase the remainder of the peninsula for use as parkland. In 2018, the City applied for and was awarded a $750,000 grant from the Sonoma County Agricultural Preserve and Open Space District (SCAP OSD) to purchase approximately 20 acres of the peninsula. However, since the award of the grant, the City has been unable to negotiate the sellers of the parcel to an amount the City and SCAP OSD are legally able to pay.

Subsequently, a non-profit organization named the Petaluma River Park Foundation has formed and has been accepting donations to purchase, develop, and operate a public-accessible park on the 20-acre parcel adjacent to the Steamer Landing Park on the McNear Peninsula. According to conversations with Petaluma River Park staff and information from their website, activities on this parcel would include master planning, restoration, trail building, establishing park amenity infrastructure, installation of art features, and development of education programs.

DISCUSSION
The Petaluma River Park Foundation has requested support from the City Council for their application to the SCAPOSD matching grant application program. Petaluma River Park Foundation’s proposed use for the property is a public park, which aligns with the City’s planning intent. There is currently no agreement with the Petaluma River Park Foundation for City ownership of the parcel or for any City operations on that site. As the Petaluma River Park Foundation does not currently own the parcel, issues of access, utilities, and permitting are to be determined, and their staff has been communicating with City staff regularly to work through potential issues.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This item was included on the agenda for the June 1, 2020 City Council meeting, in accordance with public noticing requirements.

CLIMATE ACTION

While a letter of support alone would not have a significant climate action impact, the establishment of a new park on the McNear Peninsula, combined with proposed restoration activities would likely result in long-term positive climate impacts. The McNear Peninsula is predominantly undeveloped open space. Restoration projects are planned and underway on the City-owned Steamer Landing Park, and the Petaluma River Park Foundation staff have communicated in-person and on their website plans to perform further restoration projects on their parcel once acquired. Riverbank stabilization projects have the potential to reduce erosion and sediment entering the Petaluma River, and habitat restoration has the potential for positive impacts on animal and plant species.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

There would be no financial impacts to the City as a result of issuance of a letter of support to the Petaluma River Park Foundation. The resolution supporting the River Park Foundation’s application includes no financial commitment from the City of Petaluma.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PETALUMA IN SUPPORT OF THE RIVER PARK FOUNDATION GRANT APPLICATION TO THE SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL PORTION OF MCNEAR PENINSULA

WHEREAS, in accordance with the voter-approved Expenditure plan, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) has established a competitive Matching Grant Program (the Program) for projects that provide open space, community recreation, or public access opportunities within and near incorporated areas and other urbanized areas of Sonoma County; and

WHEREAS, the District released Guidelines and Application Materials for the 2020 round of funding in January 2020; and

WHEREAS, in 1996, the City concluded the purchase of the northern portion of the McNear Peninsula, approximately 10 acres, with funding assistance from the District, and in 2005 undertook the first phase of the project that is now Steamer Landing Park completing an initial set of improvements to the property including a parking lot, trails, interpretive displays, landscaping and overlook; and

WHEREAS, subsequent to the property acquisition and initial improvement project, the historic livery stable was relocated to the property with the goal of renovating the structure and turning it into an educational center focused on the City’s rich agricultural past and river history; and

WHEREAS, the Petaluma River Park Foundation has entered into contract with the current owners of the central portion of the McNear Peninsula to acquire 20 acres of the McNear Peninsula with the express intention of restoring the land and converting it to a public park that will be aligned with the goals of City’s Petaluma River Access and Enhancement Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Project, in its conceptual form, is consistent with the City’s General Plan and River Plan and existing plans for the Project Site and meets the criteria for the District's Matching Grant Program as a recreation development project and will provide the community with increased access to the Petaluma River for free recreational opportunities and educational and arts programming.

NOW, THEREFORE, based upon the above-referenced recitals, the Council hereby declares its support for the River Park Foundation’s application to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preserve and Open Space District’s 2020 Matching Grant program.