



## **AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

May 7, 2007

**TO:** Eugene Planning Commission

**FROM:** Eugene Planning and Development Department

**ITEM TITLE:** South Ridgeline Habitat Study (SRHS) - Results of Community Meetings, Additional Citizen Engagement, and Discussion of Habitat Conservation Goals

**ACTION REQUESTED:** (1) Review results of six community meetings, (2) review and approve additional citizen engagement process, and (3) discuss conservation goals and provide guidance to staff for proposed additional phase of citizen engagement.

**BRIEFING STATEMENT:** Following the November 14, 2006 public workshop on the draft SRHS Inventory and Assessment, staff re-evaluated the planned process for integrating community interests into a staff recommendation to the Planning Commission. In previous discussion with the Planning Commission, and in public workshops, staff had made a distinction between the ecological values represented in the draft Inventory and Assessment Report, and values held by area residents and owners, and indicated that a process would be needed to integrate community values with the ecological values. Following on that distinction, and based on citizen comments at the November 2006 and prior workshops, staff concluded that additional opportunities for citizen input should be created to better integrate community values into the staff recommendation before it went to the Planning Commission. Staff worked with professional facilitator Sue Dicile to design and conduct six community engagement meetings to present information about the SRHS, and to gather input on community members' views about conservation of additional habitat within the 2700-acre SRHS study area. The facilitator has compiled the results from those meetings in an attached report (see Attachment 1). Ms. Dicile's report summarizes the responses to five key questions posed at the meetings:

1. Do you support any additional conservation of habitat on undeveloped land in the Study area?
2. What are the most important interests and/or concerns that contribute to your view of habitat conservation in the Study area?
3. If additional habitat IS conserved in the Study area, what costs of conservation would be most, and least, acceptable?
4. Which approaches to conservation in the Study area could you support?
5. Which conservation measure, or mix of measures, would work best?

Based upon the input received at the six community meetings, and on consultation with Ms. Dicile, staff is recommending an additional phase of citizen engagement prior to providing the Planning Commission with a staff recommendation. This process will begin with the May 7, 2007 Planning Commission meeting, for which staff proposes the following agenda:

1. Staff will provide a brief review of the community meeting process.

2. Staff will provide an explanation of the proposed additional citizen engagement process of convening a representative Task Group as described below.
3. Staff will ask the Planning Commission to approve the Task Group concept.
4. Staff will present a brief overview of the SRHS and summarize key questions and trade-offs associated with choices about conservation of additional habitat in the study area. This will be the same presentation that was provided at each of the community meetings.
5. Staff will present a re-cap of the comments received at the community meetings.
6. Ms. Dicile will facilitate a discussion of the Planning Commission, leading to guidance from the Planning Commission to staff for the SRHS Task Group described below.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **Results from Community Meetings**

The six facilitated community meetings to gather input about possible outcomes for the SRHS were held between March 7, 2007 and April 26, 2007. Meetings were held in each of these neighborhood areas: Laurel Hill Valley/Fairmount, Southeast, Crest Drive, and Churchill. One meeting for general interested parties was held at the Eugene Library, and a final meeting for business and development interests was held at the Red Lion Inn. A total of 87 individuals participated in the six meetings. Formal input during facilitated meetings is summarized in Sue Dicile's summary report (Attachment 1) and a summary table (Attachment 2). Findings include strong community support for conservation of additional valuable habitats in the South Ridgeline area, coupled with concerns about impacts of conservation measures on property owners. Additional general comments written by participants on meeting feedback forms are summarized in the attached memo from Jason Dedrick (Attachment 3). Of the 81 comments received on the feedback forms, many expressed support for additional conservation of habitat in the South Ridgeline area, and many others made suggestions for how the planning process might be best conducted.

At each meeting, staff asked participants to rate various aspects of the meetings. Responses included:

- 74% rated the staff presentation as very good or excellent
- 80% rated the meeting facilitation as very good or excellent
- 72% rated opportunities to comment and ask questions as very good or excellent
- 66% rated their overall satisfaction with the meeting as very good or excellent

### **Proposed SRHS Task Group**

Staff recommends an additional phase of public involvement prior to staff submitting a recommendation to the Planning Commission. Together with facilitator Sue Dicile, staff has designed an additional citizen engagement process to involve representatives of key interest areas in a series of facilitated meetings. The reasoning behind recommending this additional citizen engagement includes the following:

- A very high level of controversy was generated by discussions about protecting upland habitats along the South Ridgeline in the Goal 5 process from 2002 to 2003, and many of the property owner concerns about habitat conservation in the ridgeline area remain.
- Three of the important habitat types in the study area (upland prairie/grassland, oak woodland and oak savanna) cannot be adequately conserved through regulation. Since these habitats must be actively managed to address invading conifers that would shade out other important plants, the land owners must be educated and motivated to undertake that management. Generally speaking, coercive regulations provide a disincentive for owners to actively manage their land for habitat value. Staff believes that a staff proposal strongly based on community values and input will more likely lead to landowners willing to actively manage their land for habitat values.
- While the six community meetings were effective at bringing out the range of interests and values regarding additional habitat conservation in the study area, these meetings did not require participants to

attempt to balance the various interests and concerns. A task group representing the range of interests related to this study would be able to do just that.

The first step will be to have Sue Dicile guide the Planning Commission through a discussion at the May 7, 2007 meeting. The goal of this discussion would be to review the results of the public workshops and establish broad parameters or goals for additional habitat conservation in the SRHS area. Those parameters would be used as the beginning point of discussion for the Task Group (see below). Staff believes that in order for the Task Group to be able to successfully complete their task, they will need this guidance from the Planning Commission. The guidance would be preliminary, since the Planning Commission would not have held a public hearing yet. The remaining key steps in this process would be:

1. Staff would recruit 9 or 11 members for a limited duration Task Group, with individuals representing a range of interests regarding the SRHS: environmental interests (2 positions), development interests (2 positions), landowner interests (2 positions), recreation/tourism interests (1 position), and citizens at large (2-4 positions). (See, Attachment 4, memo from Sue Dicile on proposed Task Group composition.) Participants would be expected to think broadly about the issues, and not simply advocate a narrow position, in order to develop a mutually acceptable proposal.
2. Staff would convene the Task Group, which would be facilitated by Sue Dicile, for 5-8 meetings to develop criteria for identifying sites for protection by: (1) acquisition, (2) education and/or financial incentive measures, and (3) (if supported by the group) regulation.
3. Staff would develop maps and descriptions representing the results of applying the proposed criteria.
4. Staff would hold a public workshop where all affected owners, interested parties and community members would be invited to review the proposed criteria and maps and submit comments.
5. Staff would compile public comments, and incorporate them into a recommendation to the Planning Commission.
6. Planning Commission would hold a public hearing on the community-based staff recommendation. As in any public hearing process, the Planning Commission would have the option of revising the proposal in its recommendation to the City Council based on public testimony and on its own deliberations.

The funding for SRHS previously allocated by the City Council will cover the expenses of the Task Group process, which is expected to take 6-8 weeks to complete. Staff believes that this additional time spent will be worthwhile in facilitating a staff recommendation with acceptance from a broad range of interests in the community.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Public Involvement Public Workshops Summary Report, Sue Dicile, April 2007
2. South Ridgeline Study Public Workshops: All Results Compiled, Sue Dicile, April 30, 2007
3. Summary of Community Meeting Comments, Jason Dedrick, April 2007
4. Memo regarding South Ridgeline Habitat Study Task Group Composition, Sue Dicile, April 2007

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Contact Neil Björklund, Senior Planner, City of Eugene Planning Division, 682-5507, [neil.h.bjorklund@ci.eugene.or.us](mailto:neil.h.bjorklund@ci.eugene.or.us), or Jason Dedrick, Associate Planner, City of Eugene Planning Division, 682-5451, [Jason.dedrick@ci.eugene.or.us](mailto:Jason.dedrick@ci.eugene.or.us).