Group raises $4.3M for Putnam Park

KCNP misses $11M goal to buy 58 acres for Helen Putnam extension; scaled-down housing plan to proceed

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An environmental group raised more than $4 million by a Dec. 1 deadline, enough to purchase 44 acres of west Petaluma land for an extension of Helen Putnam Regional Park. But the Kelly Creek Protection Project fell short of an ambitious $11 million fundraising goal to secure all 58 acres of land owned by Davidson Homes, paving the way for a 28-home project to move forward.

At a Saturday event at the iconic Scott Ranch KCNP director Greg Colvin announced the nonprofit raised a total of $4.3 million thanks to hundreds of donors since its purchase-and-sale agreement with Davidson Homes, a Walnut Creek-based developer, was announced in June.

Last month, the organization was also awarded $1 million in matching grant funds from Sonoma County’s Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to help extend Helen Putnam Park to the corner of Windsor and D streets, which represents the overarching goal of KCNP.

“People are enthusiastic about the park development,” Colvin said. “At least among those who gave, they were quite happy that we had secured the 44 acres — the heart of the ranch. Their motivation, the extent they were able to give, was to extend the park.”

Approximately $330,000 came from more than 200 individual donors, Colvin said. The nonprofit received an initial $3 million injection thanks to its support from the Earth Island Institute, a conservation group that sponsors protection efforts by

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Davidon

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Provisioning organizational infrastructure and financial backing.

The first goal for KCPP was to raise $4.1 million by Sept. 1 in order to acquire 44 of the most sensitive acres on the property, encompassing the Scott Ranch barns and Kelly Creek, home to the threatened California red-legged frog.

The nonprofit successfully hit the mark thanks to a bridge loan from a private donor. But with the grant funds from the Ag and Open Space District announced in November, Colvin said the escrow payment was made on time and debt-free.

If KCPP had raised an additional $8.9 million by Dec. 1, Davidon would have sold the entire 56-acre property. Since that didn’t materialize, the nonprofit will now back the developer’s longstanding mission to build as many as 28 homes on the remaining 14 acres of the property.

Colvin said the $230,000 leftover will be used to for park maintenance and constructing a parking lot near Scott Ranch. Sonoma Land Trust currently has $1 million earmarked for converting the ranch to public use.

“The intent of giving the opportunity for the community to purchase the entire property was something we wanted to do if indeed there was a desire to have no homes built there,” said Steve Abb, Davidon vice president of land acquisition and development. “I think there was a strong effort by Kelly Creek to raise the money. Unfortunately it fell short. In raising the funds, it’s still a great alternative and should be celebrated as a win-win for the community.”

About 75 percent of the homes will be single-story, low-density residences ranging from approximately 2,600-3,600 square feet, Abb said. They will be low-impact in terms of visibility, maximizing the natural buffers of the landscape.

Abb did not have price estimates readily available. Environmental advocates have been battling the development since it was first proposed in 2004. Over the years, city officials have widely criticized multiple proposals put forward, reducing the number of homes from as many as 93.

Davidon eventually amended its proposal with alternative projects ranging from 28 homes to 47. In March 2017, the planning commission pushed the project forward to the city council where its environmental impact report was deemed inadequate later that year, triggering a recirculation of the entire process.

The project will now be tested in another round of public hearings, which are expected in 2019. Davidon will need to get its revised draft EIR approved and finalized before the council can weigh in again.

Since the purchase-and-sale agreement was announced in June, Petalumans for Responsible Planning, an organization on the frontlines of the battle, has been critical of the deal. The local nonprofit has remained steadfast to its commitment championing the “road to zero” development on the property.

“I do expect that Petalumans for Responsible Planning and the city council, planning commissioners will do a good job of looking at environmental impacts that need to be addressed,” Colvin said. “That sort of public testing is exactly what is needed before a final decision is made.”

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