

FREMONT BULLETIN

Friends of Coyote Hills push no-growth measure

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by Wes Bowers

Friends of the Coyote Hills and Fremont, the open space preservation group, hopes voters will show at the polls Nov. 7 to keep development out of Patterson Ranch.

In just two months, the group was able to collect more than 13,000 signatures and write its own ballot initiative to preserve open space on a 520-acre parcel off Ardenwood Boulevard.

The measure, named the Protect Coyote Hills Natural Area Initiative, is endorsed by Ohlone Audubon Society and Alameda Creek Alliance.

The initiative aims to re-designate the land to agricultural, making the minimum new parcel size 80 acres.

There are eight existing parcels. Under the new zoning, one new parcel would be created for a maximum of nine parcels.

"The initiative basically keeps things the way they are," Dan Ondrasek, a Friends of the Coyote Hills member said, during a media tour of the area Friday. "Farming is very vital to the area, and we have to stop all this conversion or we're going to lose the ability to feed ourselves."

Other provisions of the initiative include:

All new buildings on a parcel must be contained within a two-acre development site, except for agricultural or security buildings that require placement elsewhere on the parcel.

Cumulative floor area of all buildings on a parcel cannot exceed 1 percent of the parcel area, or 20,000 square feet, whichever is less.

To protect scenic views, building height is limited to 30 feet, and solid walls or fences at parcel boundaries are limited to 44 inches. Buildings must also be built in the least visible location from local roads and parks.

Permitted uses are limited to:

One single-family residence per parcel, dwelling units for persons employed on the parcel or on a ranch or farm that includes the parcel, and secondary units to the extent required by law.

Agriculture, grazing, horticulture, floriculture and arboriculture, but not including commercial feedlots, vineyards or Christmas tree farms.

Small-scale rearing, custodianship, training and care of animals.

Commercial uses including outdoor, non-motorized recreation, nature observation, study or enjoyment; overnight accommodations like low-density campgrounds; home occupations or offices; packaging, processing, storage or sale of produce grown in the area; special, occasional short-term events related to agriculture, animals or recreation provided they do no lasting environmental harm.

Non-profit uses that serve the area residents or whenever similar for-profit uses would be allowed.

City and other governmental facilities limited to meeting the needs of uses permitted in the area.

Also, no development would be permitted in the wetlands area of the property, specifically in a riparian corridor 150 feet from the banks of streambeds, or where there is riparian vegetation.

Under the initiative, development is also not permitted that would impair a habitat or migratory corridor for species.

The initiative also provides incentives to dedicate the land into public ownership.

If property owners donate the land to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Coyote Hills Regional Park or City of Fremont, bonuses are provided that would allow limited additional residential development on the least sensitive, far eastern side of the area closest to existing development.

If all bonuses were used and 425 acres were dedicated to public agencies, a small subdivision of 75 to 120 units could be built on approximately 25 acres. Building sizes would be limited.

The move to create the initiative started in February. However, Ondrasek said the fight to keep development off the land has been ongoing since the group's creation in the 1990s.

Ondrasek said it was in 2005 that Richard Frisbee, a developer representing the Patterson family, presented Fremont residents with an updated idea to build homes on the Patterson property.

At a November 2005 community meeting, Frisbee and the Patterson family presented a plan to build a total of 1,200 single-family dwelling units of various sizes on 3,800 acres of land, along with a community park, church, shopping center and a new elementary school.

The remaining 200 acres of the Patterson family's land would be used as open space and dedicated to East Bay Regional Park District or City of Fremont.

Since that time, the Friends of the Coyote Hills have worked the streets of Fremont gathering enough signatures to either make the city adopt an ordinance or place an initiative on the ballot to stop development in the Patterson Ranch area.

Frisbee presented a revised plan for the land at a May 23 Fremont City Council meeting. Frisbee's plan included 276 housing units, consisting of 33 single-family units and 243 multi-family units.

Still included in the plans were common open space totaling 20,000 square feet, as well as a 1,500-square-foot community building.

Plans for a new school to serve kindergarten to sixth-graders were also part of the project.

Even with the Patterson family's bid to donate 20,000 square feet of land to open space, Ondrasek said that wasn't acceptable.

"It's a token donation," he said. "They can't build on the space they're donating because it's mostly wetlands anyway."

What the group does find acceptable, Ondrasek said, was to approve a 100-home density transfer, as long as the homes are not visible from Ardenwood Boulevard or Paseo Padre Parkway.

Additionally, Ondrasek said the rest of the property could be dedicated to the public.

He added if the Patterson development was approved, it would endanger several hundred different wildlife species as well as eliminate the view of the hills that border western Fremont.

Elaine Szeto, another member of the Friends of the Coyote Hills, pointed out that the development will create additional traffic along Ardenwood Boulevard.

She also noted the development has no municipal transportation outlet.

"The whole nature of the park would be changed if you could hear car doors slamming, engines, and children playing," she said.

Szeto added that the land was not only for Fremont residents, but the entire Bay Area region.

"I find that people come from great distances to this area just because it's quiet and peaceful," she said.