



# City of San Antonio

## Agenda Memorandum

**File Number:**16-4015

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**Agenda Item Number:** 12.

**Agenda Date:** 8/4/2016

**In Control:** City Council A Session

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**DEPARTMENT:** Parks and Recreation

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Xavier Urrutia

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:** City Wide

### **SUBJECT:**

Edwards Aquifer Protection Program - Conservation Easement Acquisition for Laurel Canyon Ranch

### **SUMMARY:**

This ordinance authorizes payment in the amount of \$967,273.98 to Texas Heritage Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement, due diligence and closing costs on an approximate 549-acre tract of land known as the Laurel Canyon Ranch located in Medina County, Texas for the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program, a Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue funded Project as approved by voters in November 2010. This ordinance also authorizes the execution of necessary documents to accomplish said acquisition.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The purpose of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program is to obtain property rights by fee simple purchase, conservation easements or donations of land over the sensitive zones of the Edwards Aquifer. This program was initiated in May 2000 when voters approved Proposition 3, a 1/8-cent sales tax venue up to \$45 million for the acquisition of lands over the Edwards Aquifer for parks and watershed protection. Proposition 3 ran from 2000 through 2005 and was limited to Bexar County.

The Proposition 1 program is an extension of the initial voter-approved Edwards Aquifer protection endeavor and was extended by voters in 2010 and renewed again in 2015. Due to a change in the state legislation the scope was narrowed to watershed protection and activities expanded outside of Bexar County.

The proposed purchase of a conservation easement on the Laurel Canyon Ranch is located over the Recharge

and Contributing Zones in Medina County. This property initially was identified through use of the Scientific Evaluation Team's GIS Spatial Model and subsequent site visits identified previously undocumented faults, limestone exposures, and other favorable recharge features on the property. The Laurel Canyon Ranch is located entirely within the San Geronimo Creek watershed which is an important recharge contributor to the Edwards Aquifer. Approximately one and a half miles of the San Geronimo Creek runs through the center of the ranch, and the property significantly contributes to surface water runoff quality and quantity due to the current undeveloped state of the property. The Edwards Aquifer Authority issued a geological assessment of the site confirming that preservation of the Laurel Canyon Ranch would provide both high water quality and quantity benefits for the City of San Antonio.

## **ISSUE:**

This ordinance authorizes payment in the amount of \$967,273.98 to Texas Heritage Title Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement including due diligence and closing costs on a 549-acre tract of land known as the Laurel Canyon Ranch located in Medina County, Texas. The Conservation Advisory Board has reviewed and recommended the acquisition of this conservation easement. Acquisition of this property is consistent with policy for implementation of the Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue Project as approved by voters in November 2010. Inclusion of the Laurel Canyon Ranch would increase the total of protected lands under the City's aquifer protection program by approximately 549 acres.

## **ALTERNATIVES:**

An alternative would be to defer acquisition until a later date subject to the property owner's willingness to sell real estate interests and future market conditions. Additionally, other properties could be targeted for acquisition foregoing this conservation easement and losing the high water quality and quantity benefits and the opportunity to add to the acreage of land already under protection in the San Geronimo Creek watershed.

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

This acquisition is a one-time expenditure in the amount of \$967,273.98. Funds for the acquisition of this conservation easement have been appropriated through Proposition 1 of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Sales Tax fund included in the FY 2016-2021 Adopted Annual Capital Budget.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the acquisition of a conservation easement on this 549-acre tract of land known as the Laurel Canyon Ranch for a total of \$967,273.98 under the Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue Project.

The Contracts Disclosure Form required by the Ethics ordinance is attached.