



Cotati City Council Agenda Staff Report

Item type: REGULAR AGENDA (ACTION)
To: City Council
Subject: **2025 VERONDA-FALLETTI RANCH WORKPLANS AND LICENSE AGREEMENT WITH PHOENIX FARM CONCEPTS**
Date: December 10, 2024
Written by: Damien O'Bid, City Manager

Recommendation

It is recommended that the City Council: 1. Approve by motion the 2025 work plans for the Veronda Falletti Ranch (Ranch), 2. Authorize the City Manager to execute a 3-year license agreement with Fern Homestead to operate the livestock, horticulture, compost and other related programs, substantially in the form attached. 3. Authorize the City Manager to amend the license agreement with Sandy Loam to synchronize the term dates, and other minor edits, and 4. Authorize the City Manager to execute an agreement substantially in the form attached with Point Blue Conservation Science for the installation of pollinators and trees along the east and south perimeters of the Ranch.

Background

The Veronda Falletti Ranch (Ranch) is a City owned ranch that is intended to serve as a venue for a wide variety of agricultural-based education and events.

The City received notice that Farmster was winding down operations, effective July 31, 2024. As a result of the compressed timeline, the City began a search for an interim licensee until a full request for proposals could be conducted. On July 9, 2024, the City Council selected Fern Homestead as the interim operator and approved the corresponding workplan for the remainder of the 2024 calendar year.

Currently, the Ranch is operated by two licensees. Beginning in late July 2024, Fern Homestead (dba Phoenix Farm Concepts) assumed operations from Farmster as an interim operator and Sandy Loam continued as the second licensed operator. Phoenix Farm Concepts manages the city-owned livestock, compost program, and horticulture program for all ages. Sandy Loam manages the Ranch common areas, conducts a variety of all-age community workshops and open

farm events, as well as programs with a focus on youth education.

Due to the limited duration of the Phoenix Farm Concepts interim license agreement (ending January 2025), on October 10, 2024, the City posted on the City website and distributed a request for proposals (RFP) to interested parties. The City also sent the RFP to the Open Space District to distribute through their channels. The RFP closed on November 11, 2024 and received one proposal from Phoenix Farm Concepts. Based on the proposal, as well as direct work experience with them as the interim operator, they are very well qualified to perform the requested work.

Analysis/Discussion

Proposed 2025 Works Plans

Phoenix Farm Concepts and Sandy Loam work closely together and with the City to design and run community programming. The workplans outlined below are the product of past experience with community interest, greater integration between the licensees and City input on priorities.

Phoenix Farm Concepts (Phoenix)

As described in the attached workplan, the primary elements are:

- Free Compost Program. Operate this program in partnership with Zero Waste Sonoma for the community
- Free Farmer Picnics. This once-a-month program would operate as a drop-in time to ask Farmer Tomi questions about animal keeping, horticulture, and other ranch related topics.
- Free Food Forest Tours. The "food forest" section of the Ranch will be open to the public most Fridays.
- Volunteer Program. Phoenix will host volunteer days to assist with the garden and livestock care.
- Fall Festival. Partnering with Sandy Loam and the City to run the annual Fall Festival. This is a continuation and continued growth of the fall festival days on the Ranch, including a variety of activities, games and crafts around a fall theme.
- Youth Farm Club. This program is in partnership with Sandy Loam for children 8-12. This new program is intended to expose children ages 8-12 to animal husbandry and horticulture.
- Grazing school. This program will run a grazing school with a local expert to provide instruction on livestock care, e-fencing, etc.
- Sheep shearing demonstration and related topics
- Compost workshop and related topics

Additionally, there is related social media content creation and engagement, as described in the workplan.

In the initial 6-month term, Farmer Tomi has had the opportunity to conduct a full assessment of the livestock and horticulture operations. Based on this, Farmer Tomi plans to begin a rotational

grazing program in 2025 with a mobile hay feeder for the public to interact with the animals. The workplan also includes expanding the garden area grow more food crops to support programming. Pumpkins will still also be grown for the Fall Festival, but will be a smaller portion of the overall garden space.

Large Animal Mangement

To make the rotational animal grazing successful, Farmer Tomi has recommended that the two large animals (the cows) be re-homed. As described in the workplan, "The size and quality of the pasture is not suited to the keeping of cows. By removing the pressure applied by the cows, we can begin rehabilitating the soil and vegetation quality on the property. Additionally, cows and goats/sheep need different types of electric fencing and pasture shelters." If the City Council authorizes the workplan, it will include re-homing the cows at a vetted non-profit animal sanctuary in Oregon (Tikkun Olam Farm Sanctuary).

Sandy Loam

As described in the attached workplan, the primary elements are:

- Coordinating the installation of a pollinator hedgerow along the front and side of the property, planned and installed 100% through a grant. See description under Point Blue Conservation Science for additional details, below.
- Early Release Enrichment Program. This is an existing after-school program, which is planned to be integrated with livestock education.
- Paint it Bright Farm & Nature Camps. These are TK-Grade 5 farm-based art camps.
- Chicken Keeping Field Trip Program. This is a continuation of the walking field trips for local preschools. This year, we plan to expand it to other schools as a paid field trip.
- Youth Farm Club. In partnership with Phoenix, as described above and in both workplans.
- Open Ranch Days. This is a continuation of the wildly popular open ranch days during the summer months.
- Fall Festival. This is a continuation and continued growth of the fall festival days on the Ranch, including a variety of activities, games and crafts around a fall theme.
- A variety of Workshops, including:
 - Indro to Gardening Tools
 - Flower Harvesting & Bouquet Making
 - Farm to Table
 - Bulb plants
 - Cookie decorating & Cocoa
 - Teatime crafting

Additionally, Sandy Loam is required by the license agreement to be the lead operator for overall property maintenance and management. Sandy Loam also provides related social media content creation and engagement.

Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue) Landscaping Project

Point Blue has received funding from the California Wildlife Conservation Board ("WCB") for

the Building Wildlife-Friendly Resilience and Equity in California's Working Landscapes Project for wildlife habitat restoration projects on approximately 40,000 acres throughout California. Through Sandy Loam, Point Blue designed a wildlife friendly landscape design for the east and south perimeters of the Ranch. If authorized by the City Council, Point Blue would install and initially maintain the landscaping indicated in the attachments (maintenance through 12/31/2026). After this initial work period, the City would maintain the landscaping and would be required to make reasonable efforts to not damage or destroy the landscaping through the term of the agreement (2038). Among the planned plantings include new Valley Oak trees in the corral area at the corner of El Rancho and East School Street and a variety of native shrubs and pollinators.

Summary

In addition to the workplans and landscaping project, the City will need to extend the license agreement with Tomi Henry to implement the workplan. Staff suggest a 3 year term and an amendment to the Sandy Loam license agreement so that they have the same term dates (1/1/2028). Sandy Loam's license agreement currently expires in 2026.

Financial Considerations

The proposed Phoenix Concepts 2025 work plan has a cost of \$80,990, which is similar to the budget authorized for Farmster in 2024. The proposed Sandy Loam 2025 work plan has a cost of \$126,445, which is similar to the workplan cost last year. The total programming and maintenance costs for the Ranch in 2025 is slightly reduced to \$207,435, compared to 2024. Based on revenue in 2024 to date, offsetting revenue is expected to be approximately \$20-25k, with a net total annual General Fund contract cost of approximately \$187,000-182,000. City staff time is estimated at an additional \$25,000, based on 2024 actuals to date.

Cost control and revenue generation, while simultaneously ensuring accessibility of community programs, continues to be a significant focus at the Ranch in 2025. Regardless, all expenditures go towards the matching grant requirements. At this time, expenditures towards the matching grant are approximately \$2.3 million.

Environmental Issues

Where it can be determined with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA review. This general rule can be applied to activities which could be subject to the CEQA process, but which logic dictates should not be subject to CEQA review. Therefore, based on the information provided above, the proposed resolution is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 14.03.021 of the CEQA Guidelines in that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant impact on the environment.