

Environmental Oversight Committee

March 5, 2008
Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Chair Patricia Bates, OCTA Board of Directors
Vice-Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck, Measure M Support Groups
Stephanie Hall, US Army Corps of Engineers
Merlin L. "Bud" Henry Jr., Taxpayers Oversight Committee
Judy McKeehan, SWCA Environmental Consultants
Dan Silver, Endangered Habitats League
Jonathan Snyder, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Erinn Wilson, CA Department of Fish & Game
Sylvia Vega, Caltrans
Adam Probolsky, Probolsky Research
Debbie Townsend, California Wildlife Conservation Board

Committee Members Absent:

Cathy Green, OCTA Board of Directors

Orange County Transportation Authority Staff Present:

Monte Ward
Ellen Burton
Jim Sterling
Marissa Espino
Dan Phu
Ryan Maloney

Members of the Public

Claire Schlotterbeck

1. Welcome

Chair Bates welcomed the committee members and called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Chair Bates noted that the meeting might be shorter due to a time conflict with another meeting.

2. Minutes

Chair Bates provided corrections to several small errors in the February minutes, and asked the committee for any further corrections. Without any further comments, the minutes were approved with corrections.

3. Presentation Items

Tim Neely, Director of the County of Orange's Planning and Development Services, provided an overview of available open space in Orange County. Tim also discussed

several pending opportunities for land acquisition, as well as discussing the key elements of an environmental acquisition program.

Melanie Schlotterbeck asked if certain properties were literally entitled to development, or if additional Environmental Impact Report processes were required. Tim said that these properties were guided through The Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan. In response to a question from Melanie, Tim identified several potential acquisitions that could provide key environmental benefits.

Adam Probolsky asked about the status of the remaining portion of Saddleback Meadows. Tim said that a recent lawsuit would re-examine possible development, but these changes were not yet reflected on presentation maps.

In response to a question from Judy McKeehan, Tim discussed the impacts of a canyon as an environmental chokepoint for native species.

Monte Ward, Director of Special Projects, commented that one of the committee's goals was to move from theoretical to specific goals and overarching concepts. Since Measure M funds cannot be used to supplant the obligations of developers, the committee needs to review strategic properties for future projects and existing habitats for how they can be enhanced. Monte asked if Tim could discuss timing issues for these opportunities, and mention how to proceed without running into restrictions. Tim commented that all the items he had discussed had occurred in the last year, and that landowners were motivated to making acquisitions happen sooner. Tim said that it would likely be at least a year before decisions were made. Tim provided an update on the timing for several regional opportunities.

Monte mentioned that two years is the optimum timing for this committee for acquisitions. Tim commented that two years was an appropriate window, but also commented that much of the information presented was not yet official. Tim offered to provide the committee with information about regional vegetation, parcel boundaries, elevation, and impacted species, as well as GIS support to help evaluate property acquisitions. Monte commented that Jim Sterling would be assisting the committee with GIS, but additional help from the County of Orange would be helpful.

Dan Silver asked what the committee priorities were, in respect to the timing issue. Since money will be available in two to three years, and many of these opportunities are sooner, have Wildlife Conservation Board ever considered purchasing land and then being reimbursed by Renewed Measure M funds? Debbie Townsend responded that there were restrictions on the value of lands turned over to other agencies, but it may be possible. In response to questions about the county paying for acquisitions, Tim said that the county focus has been to look for other sources of funding. Tim discussed the benefits of a recent TCA-sponsored study that followed the Laguna Beach fires.

Claire Schlotterbeck asked if the committee would be emphasizing setting aside public funding for restoration of lands. Tim responded, no, that previous restorations had created several public park areas.

In response to a question from Melanie, Tim confirmed that some of the proposed Foothill-Trabuco developments would require modifying the Foothill Trabuco Specific Plan. The county is considering updating the Specific Plan with a view towards fire safety and improved open space connectivity.

Chair Bates thanked Tim for his presentation and for volunteering his help with this process.

4. Public Information

Monte asked the committee if there was interest in creating a handout and web materials for public information purposes. Chair Bates said the committee should have an opportunity to review the materials, and Melanie said the committee should consult with groups represented on the committee. Monte said that they would work with the committee's revisions, and would provide an update with more precise timelines.

Chair Bates asked if there was a timeline for when projects would be presented to the OCTA Board for approval. Monte responded that the committee can develop its own timeline, but information on the website should be provided as soon as possible. Chair Bates set an April 2nd deadline for comments due to Marissa Espino.

Melanie asked if the ad hoc committees could contribute more exact dates for the timeline and information to be provided on the website, as well as addressing the master agreement.

Monte commented he would like to schedule the first Master Agreement Working Group meeting in early April due to his availability. The Impact and Mitigation meeting was confirmed for March 25 at OCTA Headquarters.

5. Public Comments:

Claire Schlotterbeck commented about the limited parcels remaining in Yorba Linda.

6. Next Meeting – April 2, 2008

No committee comments.

7. Committee Member Reports

No committee comments.

8. Adjournment

The committee meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.