

Siskiyou Land Conservancy

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Humboldt County Planning Commission GPU Comments — Open Space Policy Alternatives

Good evening, my name is Greg King, I am president and executive director of Siskiyou Land Conservancy, a non-profit land trust based in Arcata and serving the five northwestern California counties of Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, Trinity and Siskiyou.

Siskiyou Land Conservancy supports conservation easement programs that protect natural resource and open space assets. We support creation of conservation easement programs that PERMANENTLY protect open space lands in exchange for economic benefits such as tax reductions (Alternative B version of CO-P3). In rare cases where development of open space lands is permitted, **permanent** easements should be required.

As we all know, in our society everyone has the *right* to own property. And, if zoning allows and publicly owned resources — such as air and water quality, wildlife, public infrastructure and aesthetics — can be protected, most landowners can enjoy the *privilege* of developing their property. Dedication of open space should be a required mitigation measure for most significant development proposals, in much the same way as developers are required to provide sewage hookups, sidewalks and traffic mitigation. It should be part of the deal. If we don't require this soon Humboldt County stands to lose much of the rural character that groups such as Humboldt CPR seek to protect.

Siskiyou Land Conservancy supports Alternative A of the Open Space Element Policy CO-P1xx to acquire open space lands and conservation easements and create a Humboldt County Open Space District. I have lived in Humboldt County for most of the past twenty-five years, but I was born and raised in Sonoma County, whose population has more than quadrupled since I was a kid there. In 1990 local citizens voted to create the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. Everyone, whether a resident of Sonoma County or visitor from New York, pays a quarter-cent sales tax that goes into a fund to protect ag lands and open space. Most open space districts also garner funding from other sources as well, such as state and federal grants. In Sonoma County the result has been protection of more than 83,000 acres of open space and agricultural land. At the same time, as anyone who has traveled the Highway 101 corridor over the past 20 years can attest, developers have done quite well in Sonoma County. Sonoma County ranchers, farmers and timberland owners have also greatly benefited from the Open Space District.

We urge Humboldt County to include an Open Space District element in the General Plan Update. It is time for Humboldt County to positively address development pressures by establishing an Open Space District. A Humboldt County resident who spends thirty thousand taxable dollars a year — which is much higher than the county's per-capita income of \$17,000 — would end up contributing about \$6 a month to protect agricultural lands and open space. At the same time, requiring developers to permanently set aside open space and agricultural lands in return for the right to build is the most logical, and the most fair approach to development pressures in Humboldt County.